

April Pictures

by
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April Pictures takes its title from the opening line of T.S. Eliot's epic poem, *The Wasteland*. The poem explores the struggle between the fragmented past and the uncertain future. These images are studies based on a phrase from the early line: "Mixing memory with desire." They are an illustrative homage to the fuzzy and ever-mutable nature of nostalgic memory, tinged with the longing for familiarity and place. These photographs occupy the interposition between reminiscent dream and solemn yearning.









Like Eliot's intentional obfuscation—shaped in no small part by Ezra Pound's famously aggressive red-pen editing—*The Waste Land* resists a single, linear interpretation. These images also leave room for the narration to be interpreted by the viewer's own experience. They are not quite abstract, but also not realistic. Does it matter that it is an image of a cinema, or a Chinese restaurant, or a passing field, or the urban sprawl — or can the image portray the feeling of a place based on a vague suggestion combined with the viewer's own memories? Do the discernible, tangible details help for the reading? Perhaps to some they are clarifying, and may even force the question "wait, where is this?" but that is not really the point — it is not, as W.H. Auden put it, "the important failure."









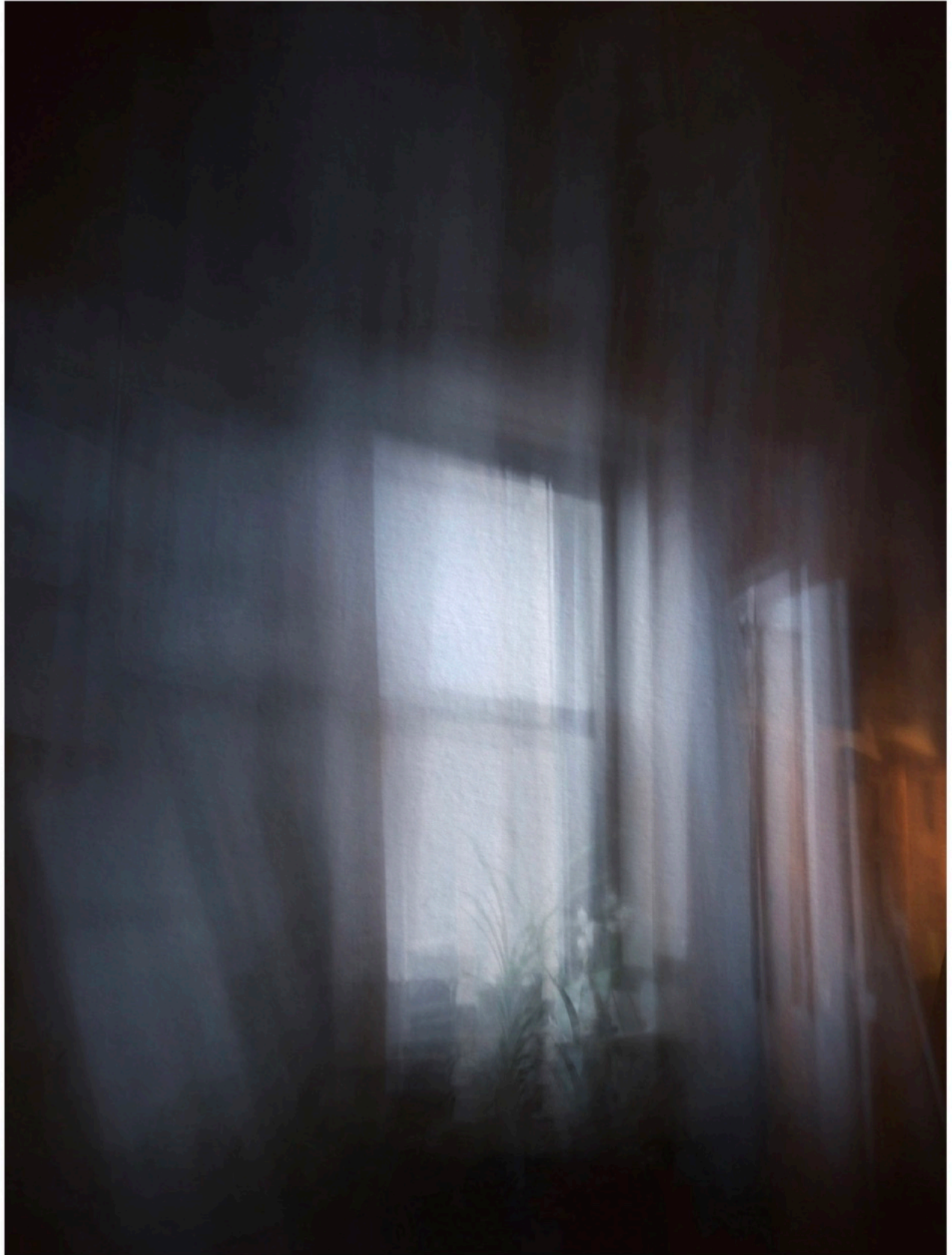


In *The Wasteland*, the wonder of the writing is analogous to an illusionist's magic — it is simultaneous direction and misdirection. While Eliot employs certain words, omissions, references, allusions, and ellipsis, the understanding and informing of the conceptual narrative come from within the reader themselves. To crudely paraphrase Eliot's incisive essay on poetry, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*: in order to understand the artwork, one must have a comprehension of what has preceded it. In this case, that is the viewer's own personal history, and the same intent is present in these pictures. The obscured and yet familiar images attempt to draw from the well of the viewer's own experience and inclinations as opposed to affecting them with an impression.

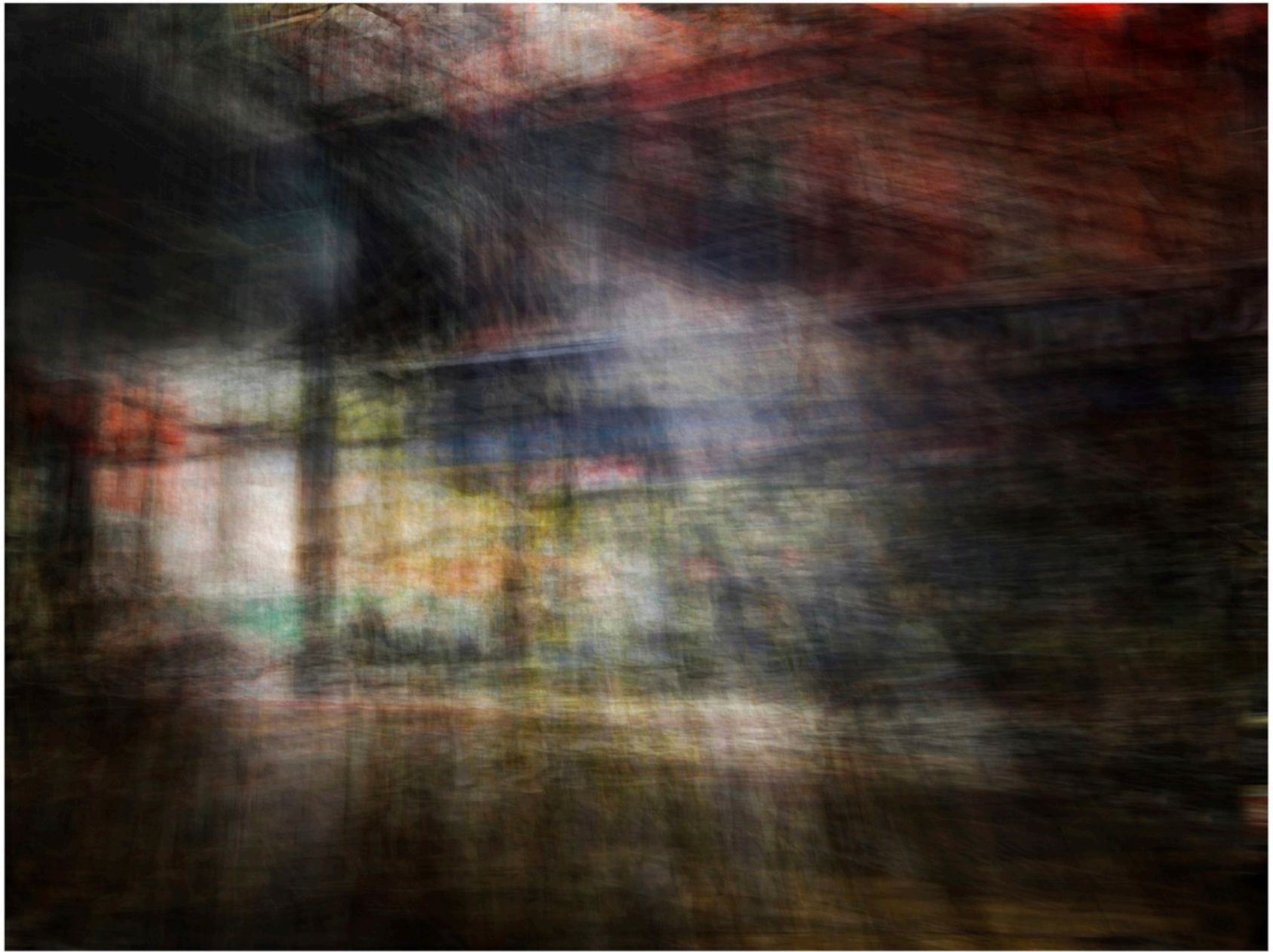




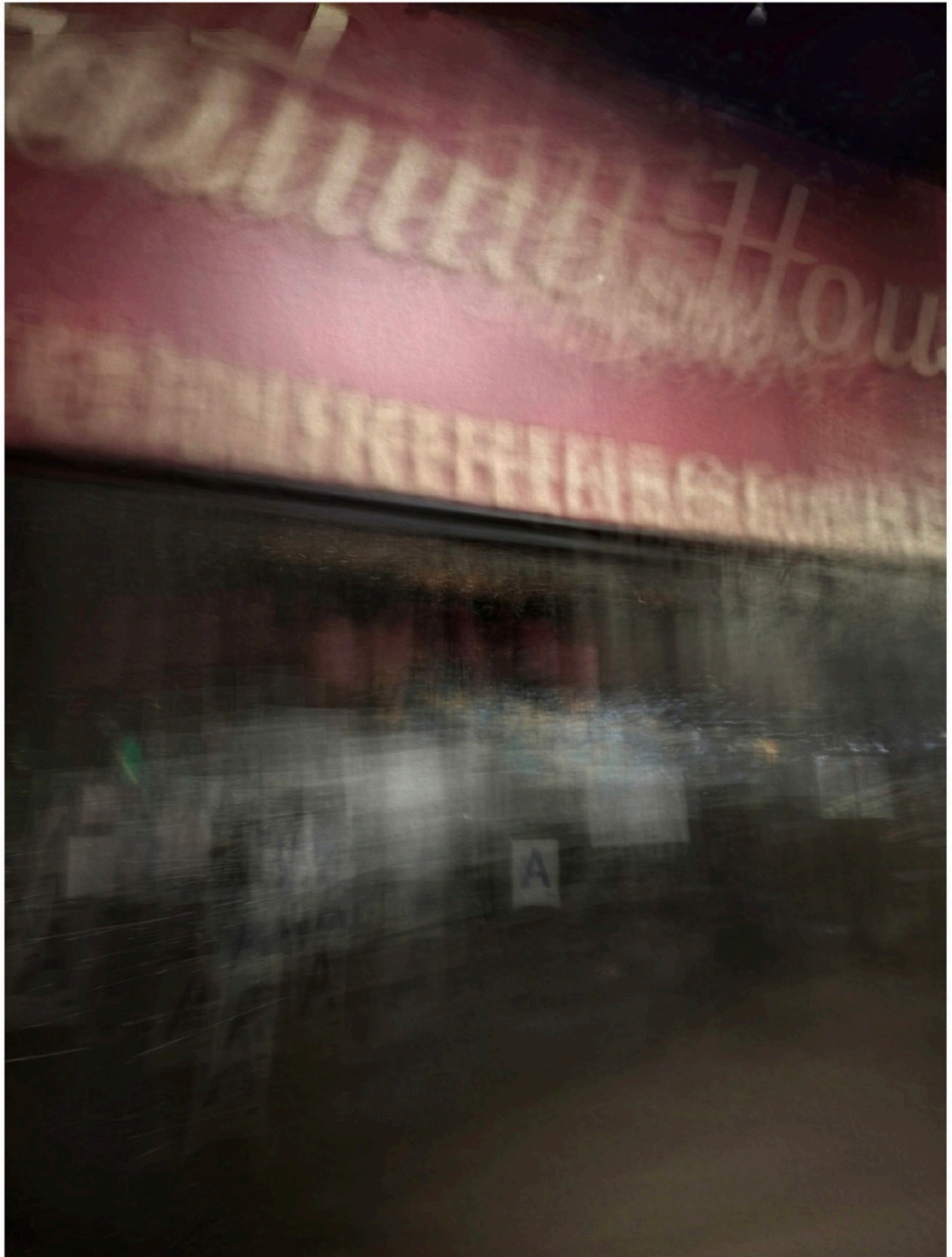
















At first glance, the long exposures hold a visual acuity that may in fact, evoke Impressionist paintings. Conceptually, however, it is the exact opposite mechanism at play. Impressionism, coarsely put, was a reaction to the emerging realistic painting techniques and new photographic technologies of the time. The new method was originally derided as an obfuscating style—“mere impressions”—by critics who believed these artists were attempting to “impress” their own sense of the natural world and their sentiments onto the viewer.

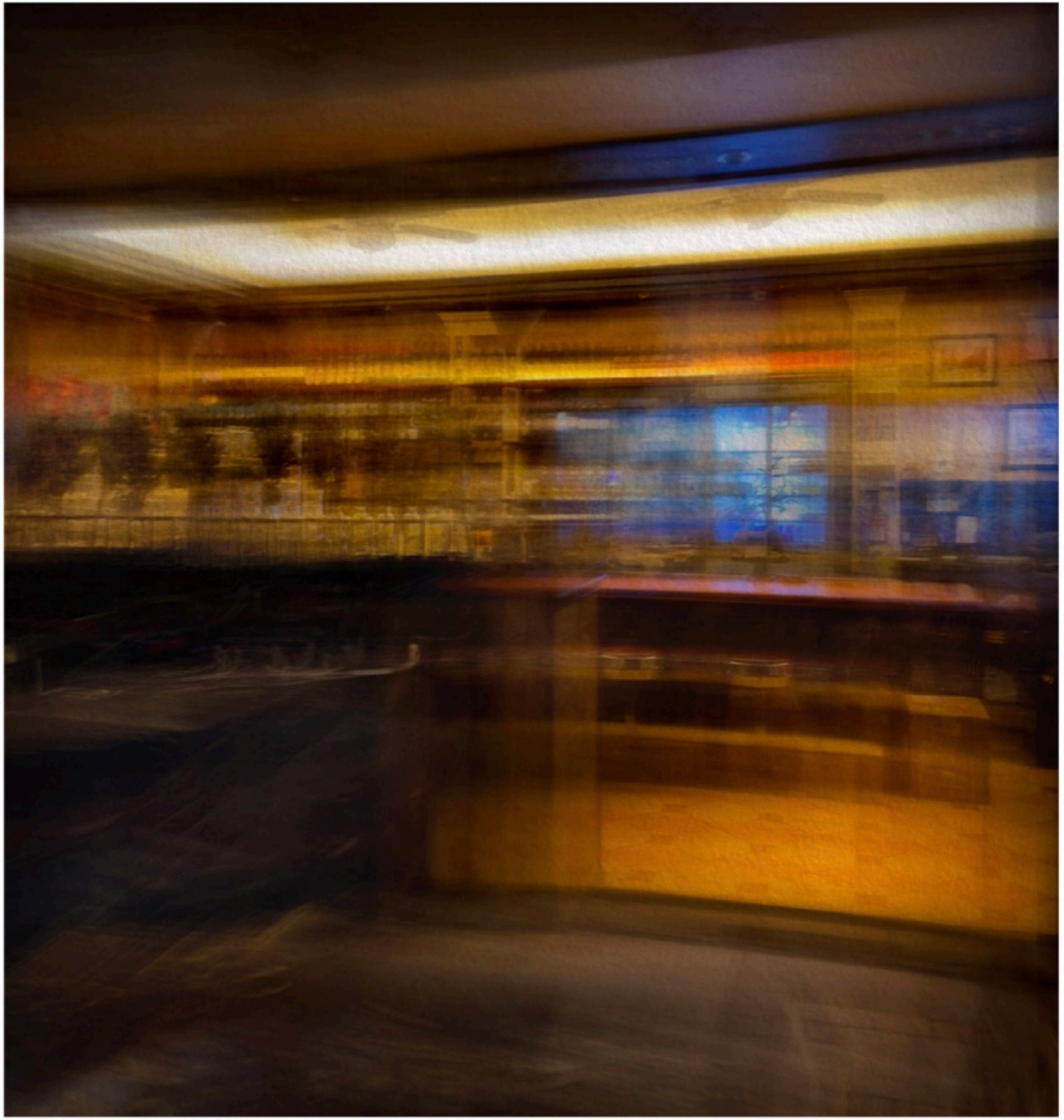
In contrast, April Pictures rely on viewer interpretation to complete them. The pictures are not focused on conceptual impressions of when or where the photograph was taken. They may have elements that signal at ideas: urbanism, pastoral settings, structures, etc. — but they are much more dependent on the viewer’s unique experiences to plug the gaps of what is missing. Instead of the elucidation of Impressionism, these images are much more ambiguous — this is 'interpretationism' — pictures whose meanings emerge only through the memories and aspirations supplied by the viewer. They require the viewer’s exertion of informed associations.

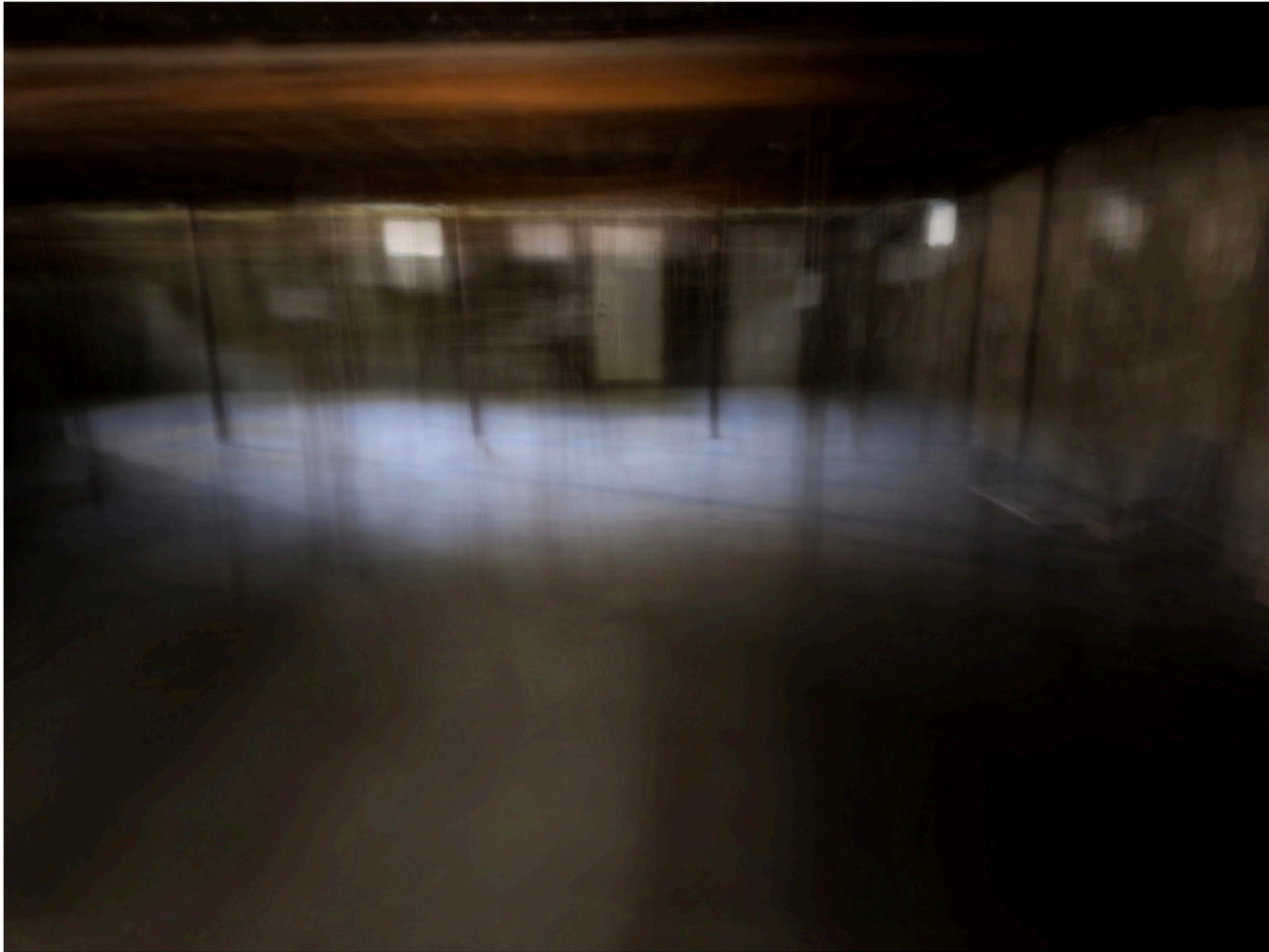
They are designed as cinematic Rorschach tests.









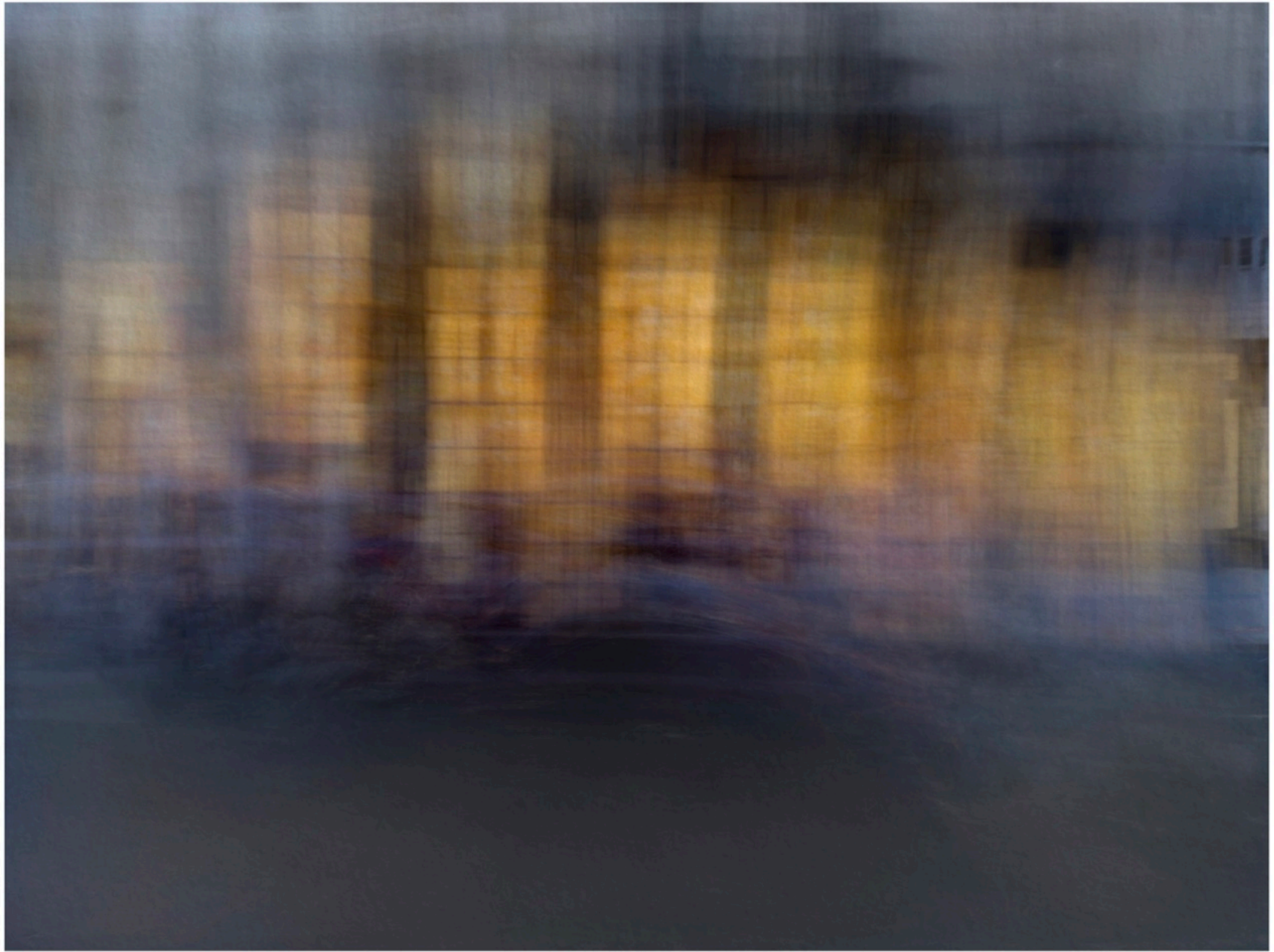






















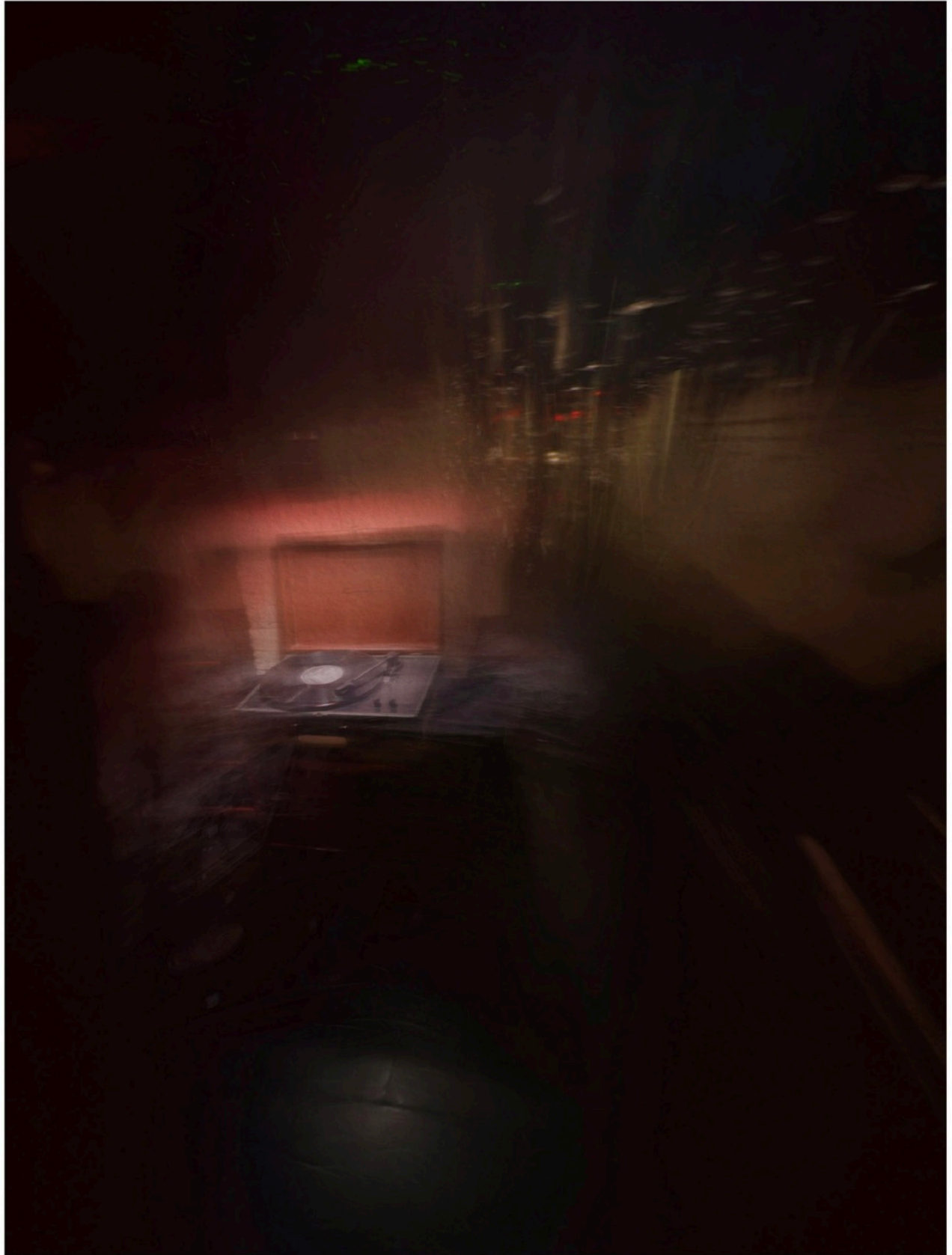


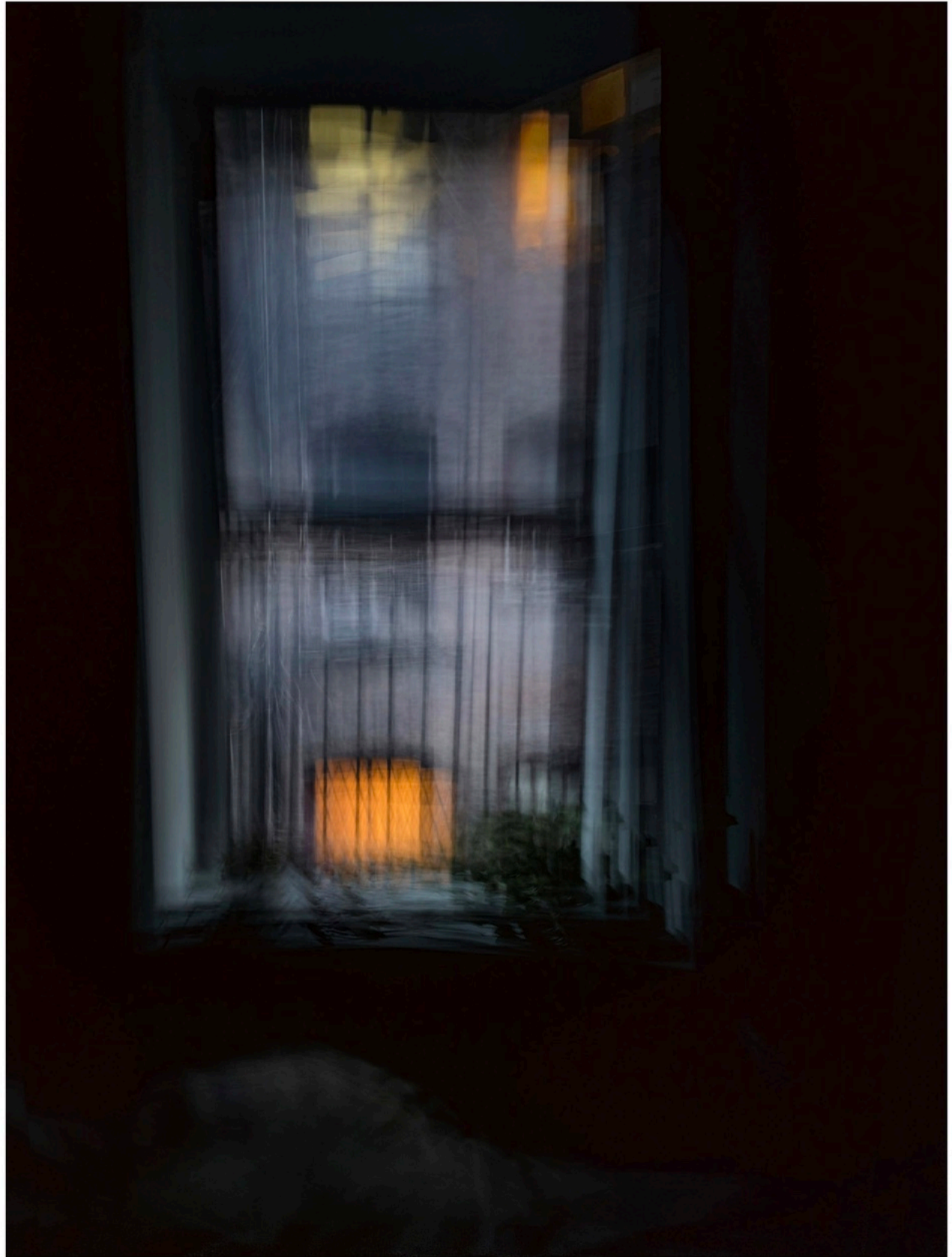


Perhaps more pointedly, these images are, in fact, photographs. They have been created to capture the essence of moment and memory, in the way we actually remember and understand time — fluid and ever moving — absolutely antithetical to Henri Cartier-Brasson's 'decisive moment' where time is frozen into a single frame. Just as a memory is changed every time it is pulled up from the hippocampus and examined through the amygdala, these images strive to oscillate between a past nostalgia and an unclear future, and it is the presence of the viewer that gives them temporal context.



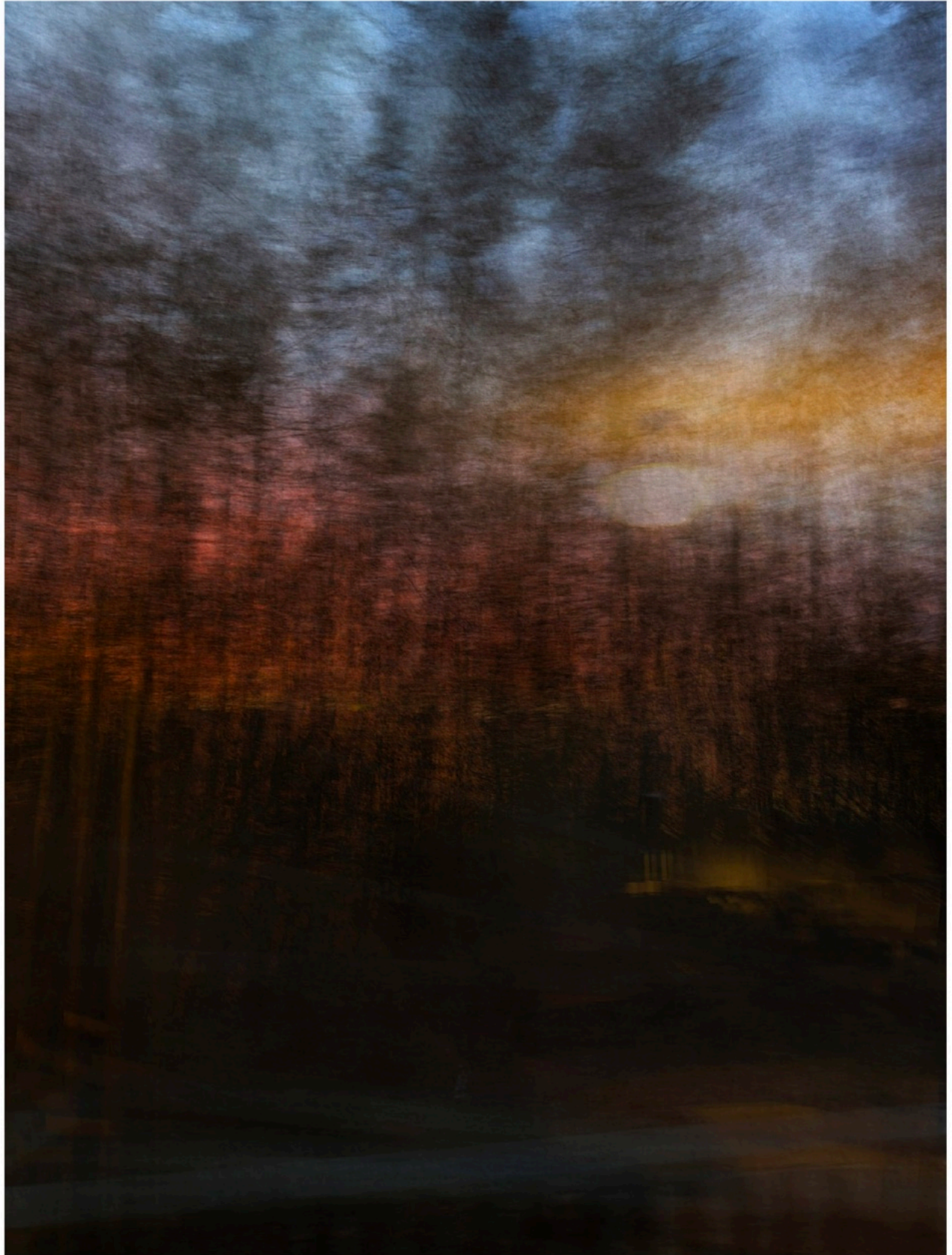








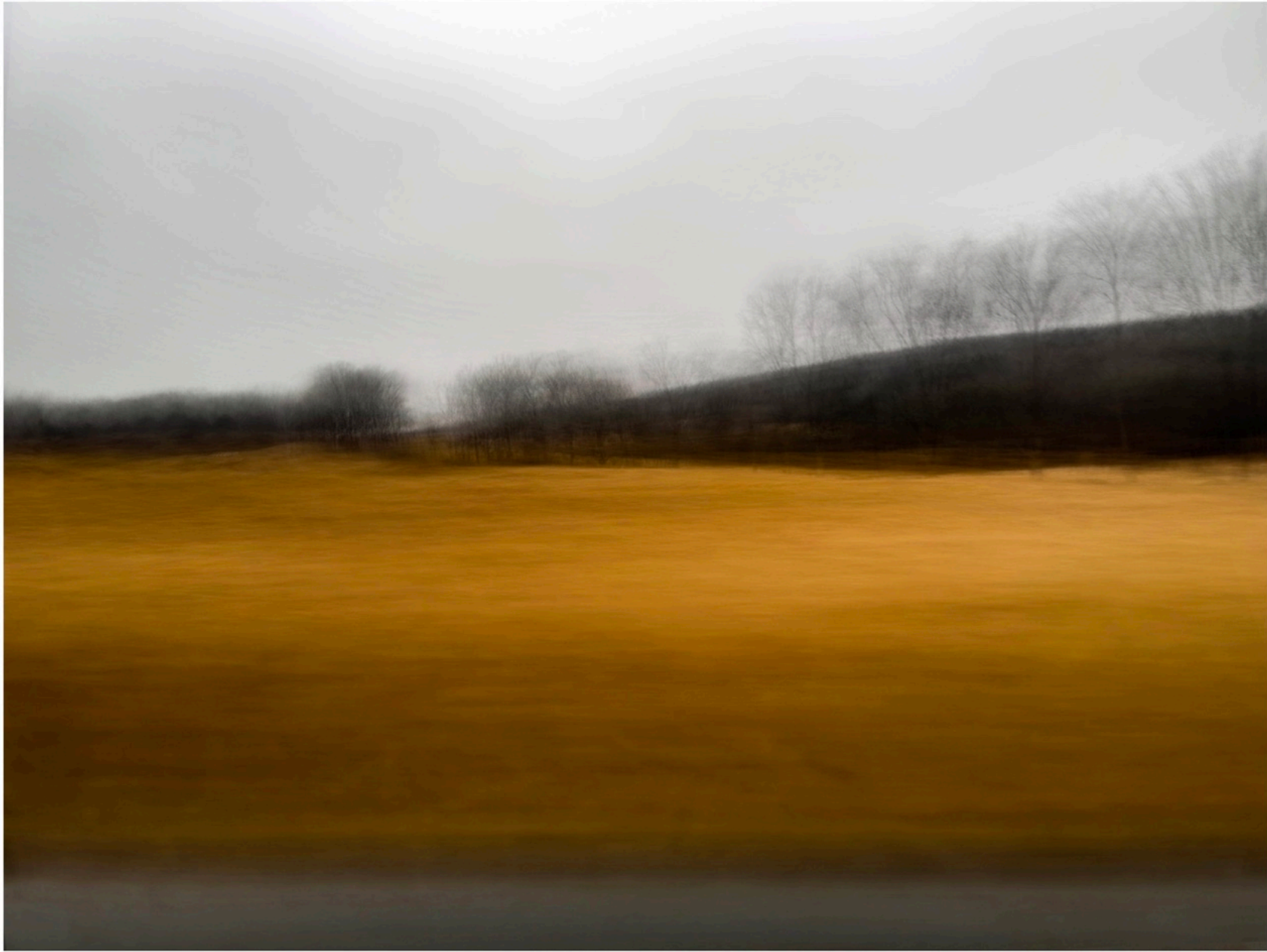














Again, as in *The Wasteland*, these images are broken down into a few main sections. Some fit into the category of "Unreal City," containing the bustling action of a colorful, busy and yet empty metropolis. Activity abounds, buildings are built, but they are illegible and uninhabited. Bridges seem to lead to nowhere. Even the most identifiable spots of time — a cafe's set table, a turntable in a dark club, or a view out the window from bed are all lacking any true signs of life.

Other images in a grouping called "Chasing Sunset" attempt to evoke a foreboding and transient feeling of sun on one's face as one moves through an unidentifiable and often haunting pastoral landscape. The elements of nature, of numinous light, of lush, green life are there and passing by, but the photographs never seem to focus on any single element, but instead are muddled and awash in blurry fields of color.

Finally, the section "Comes and Goes" (a reference to another of Eliot's poems) strives to present the crowded solitude of present gatherings. These pictures are filled with people and movement yet are quieted by the unfocused ability to share the space with anyone identifiable. They speak to the quiet corner of a party or the loud silence of sitting alone amongst people on the train.

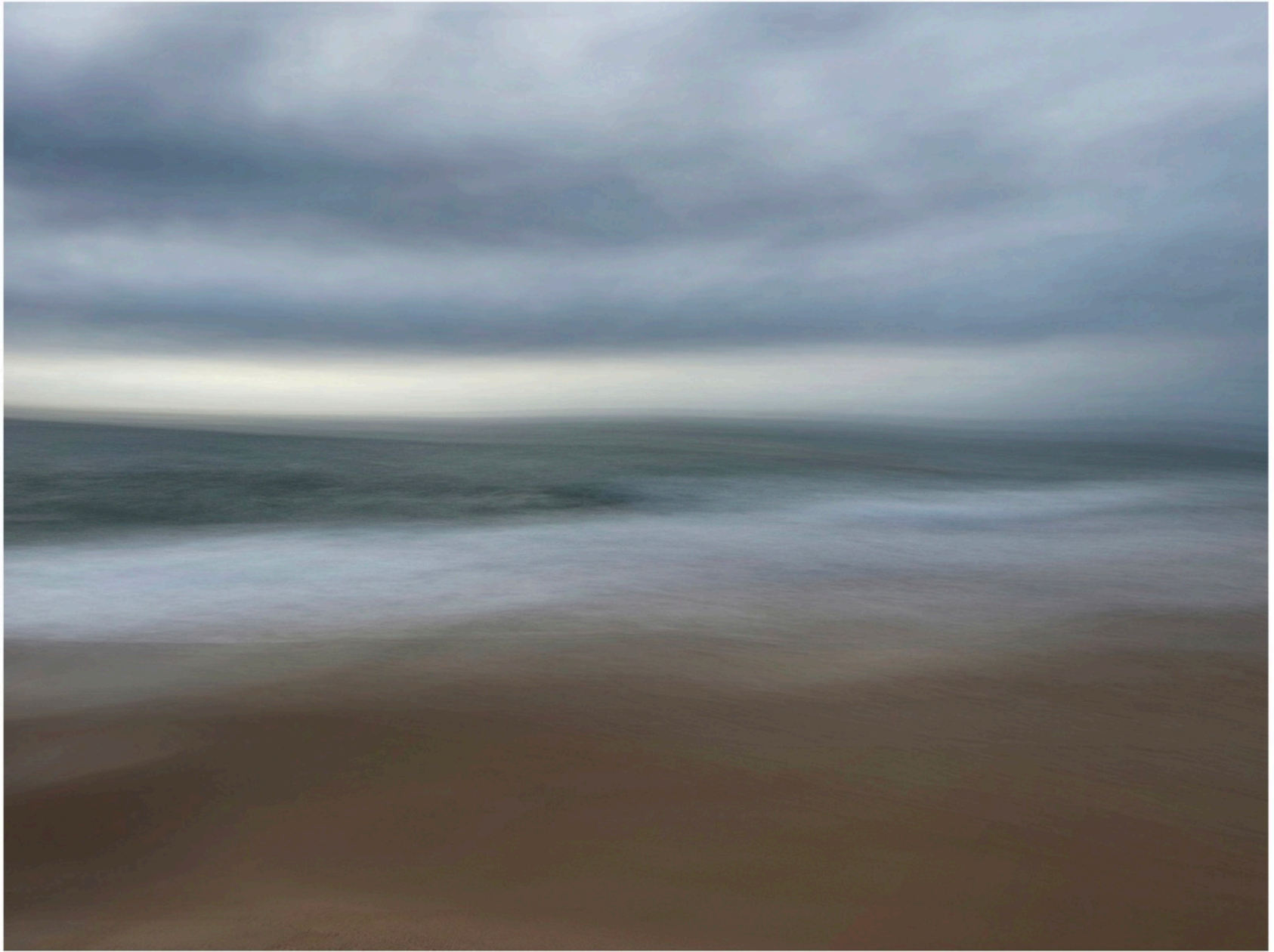










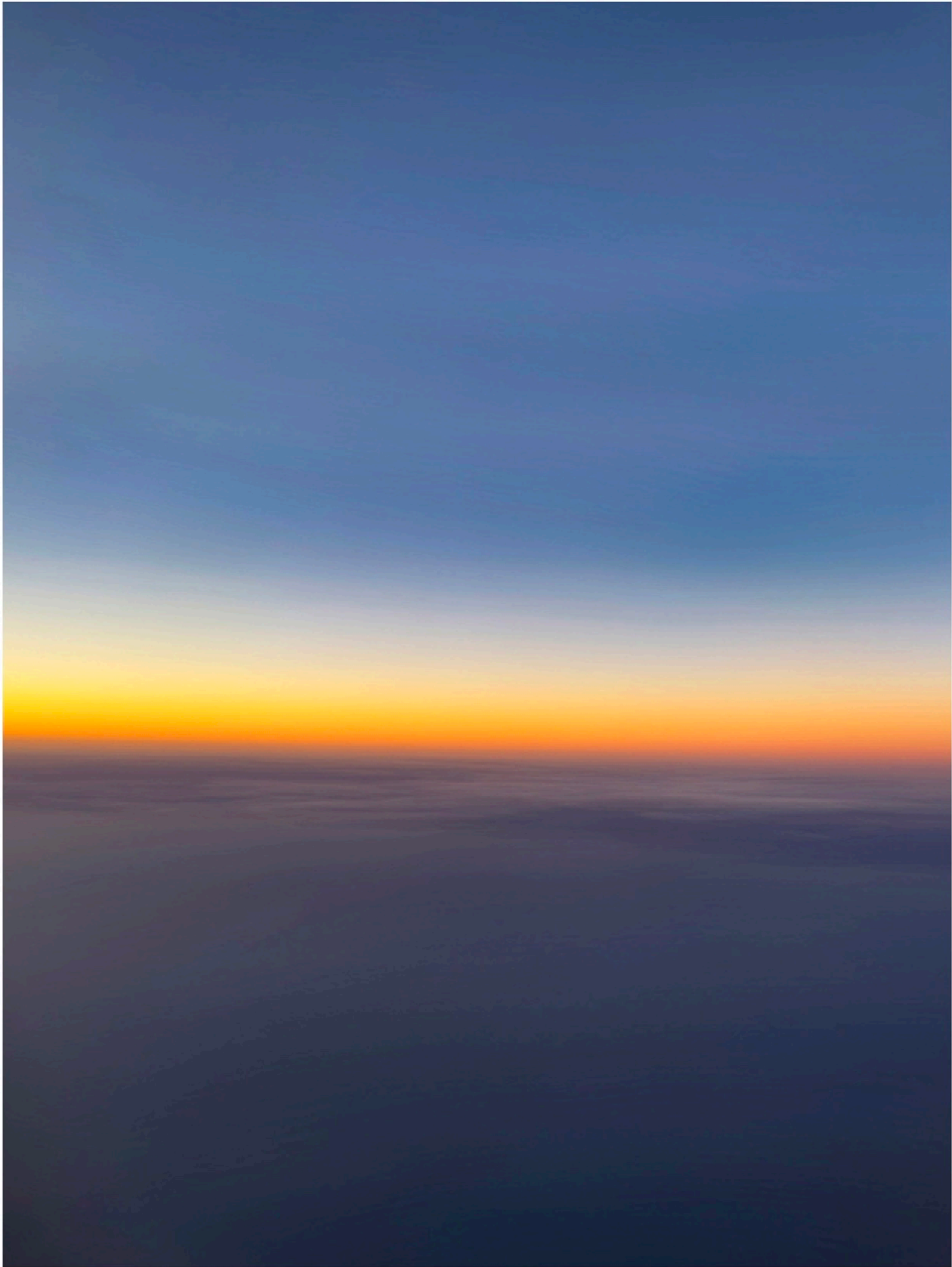






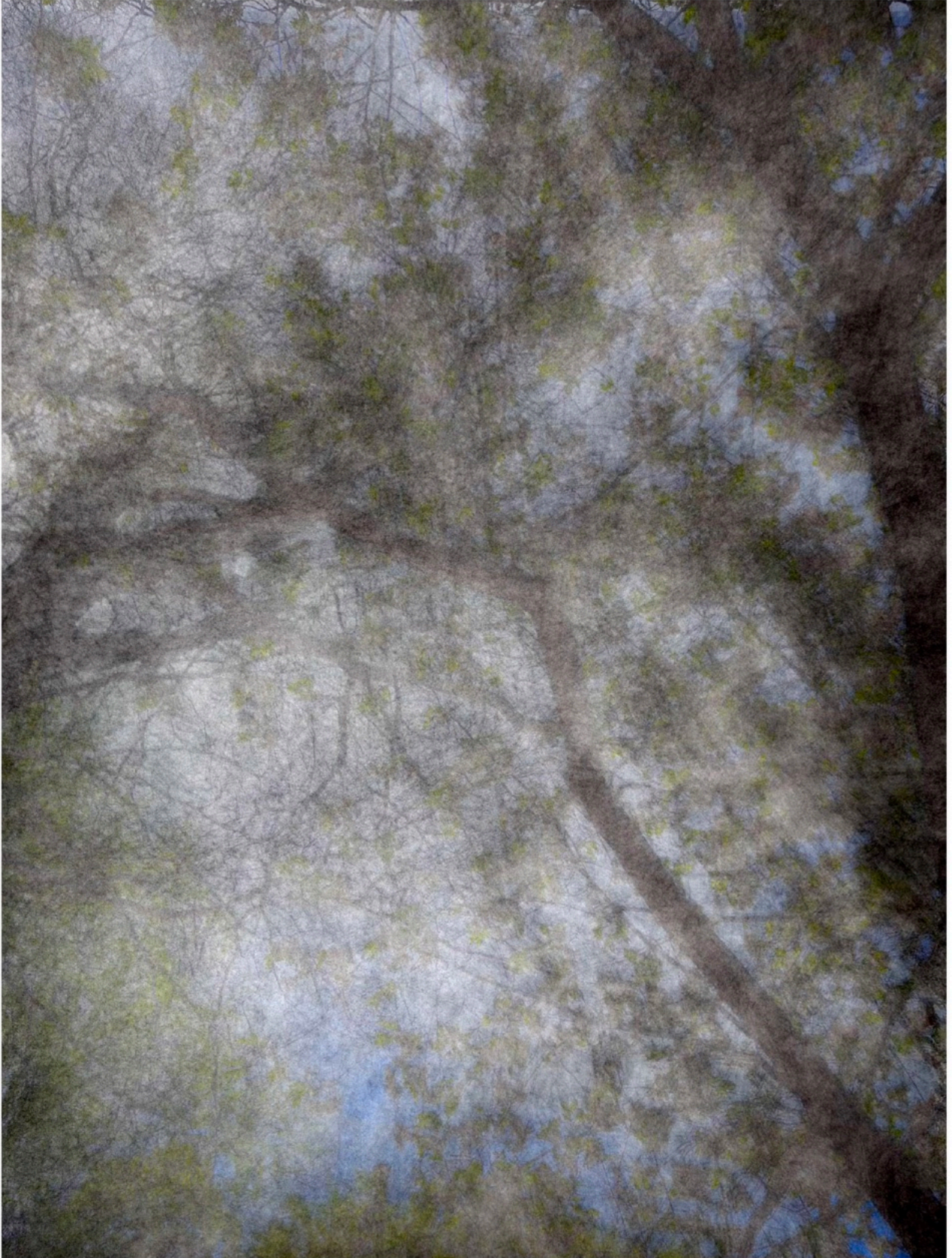


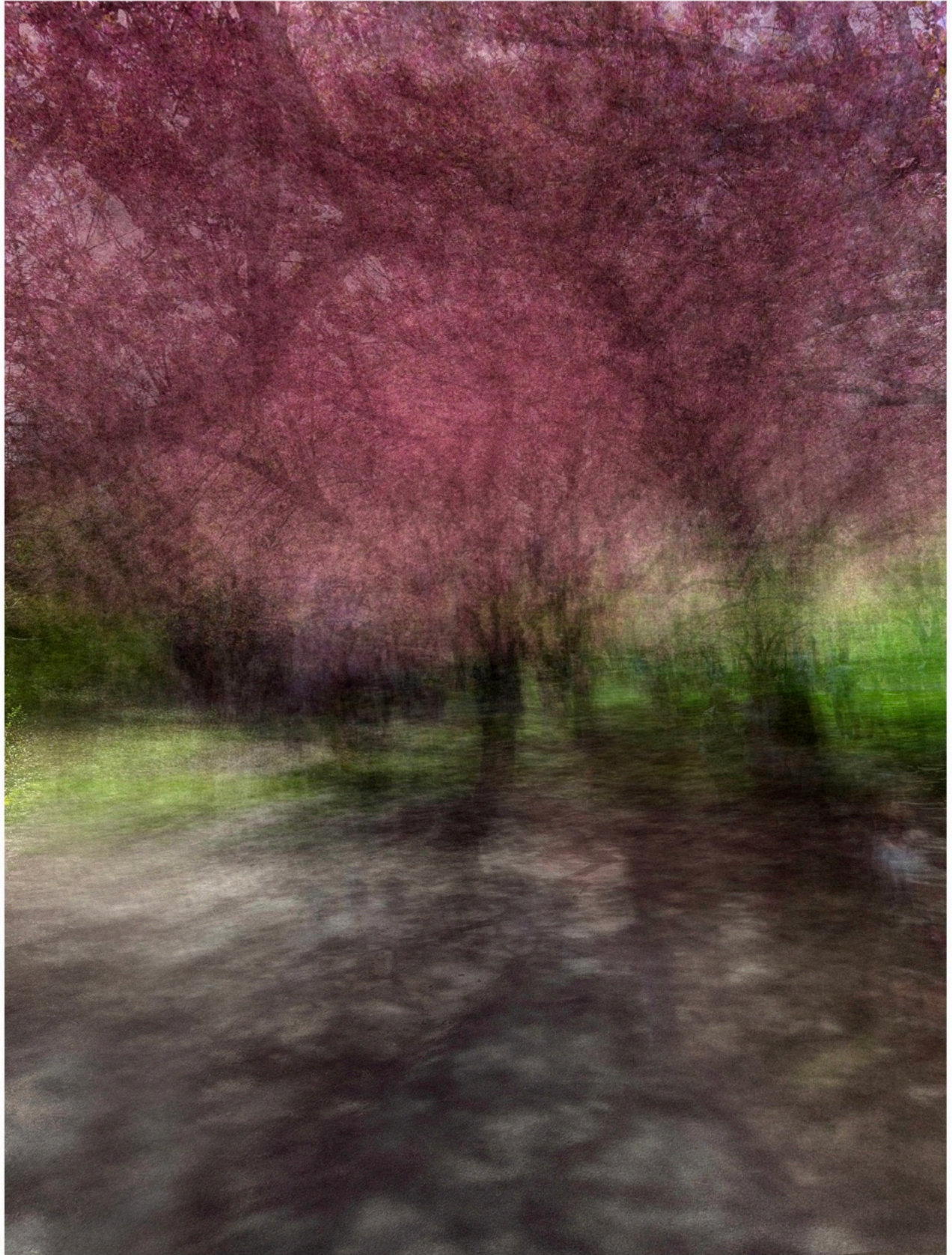










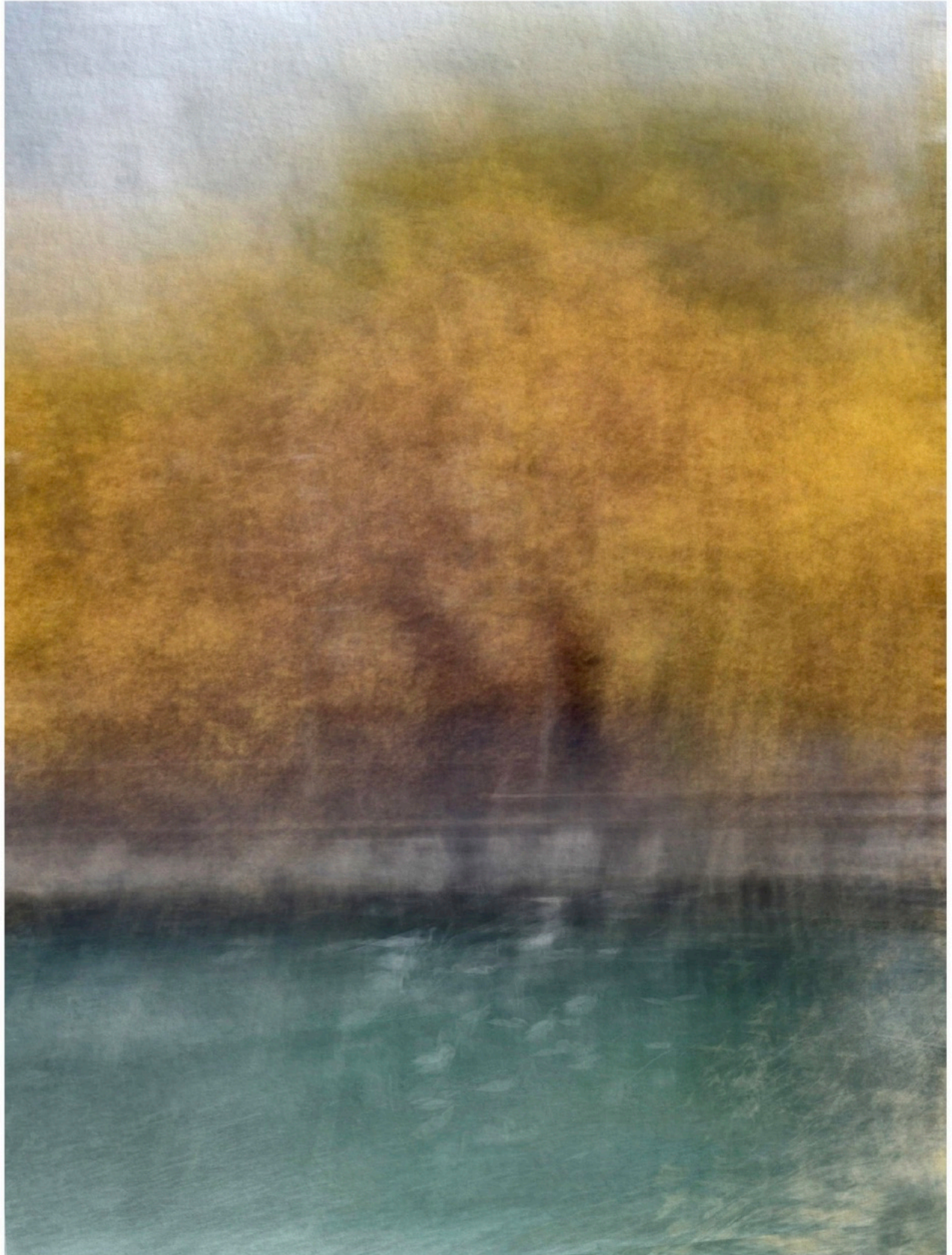


In the final section of *The Wasteland*, we can choose to read that Eliot is pointing toward a new hope — after a heap of broken images, he is presenting the prolepsis of a cleansing and restoration of life-water to replenish the barren landscape and irrigate the decay. We hear the thunder. We see the flash of lightning. We know the arid plain is truly behind us. We have taken the fragments — the broken pieces from our past — and used them to literally shore up against ultimate ruin. The entire poem is not just about mixing memory with desire, but rather advocates for using our memories to invigorate and spur our desires.

With these images, I too am hopeful that they rely heavily on our own memories, and hopefully create a yearning that is new and inspired.























Afterthought

As AI and automation infiltrates the creative fields, there is a looming sea-change on the horizon. Much like industrialization in Eliot's time, we find ourselves in a new world fragmented by transformation and automation. It has never been more important to make pictures and create things that don't just LOOK good and human, but rely on our collective memory and cumulative cultural interpretations — If these photographs function as a Rorschach test, they may also resemble a kind of Turing test. The images only succeed if the viewer looks at them, projects their own memories into them and instinctively responds to the feeling it evokes. Their meaning exists only when someone looks at them and quietly clicks “*I am human.*”