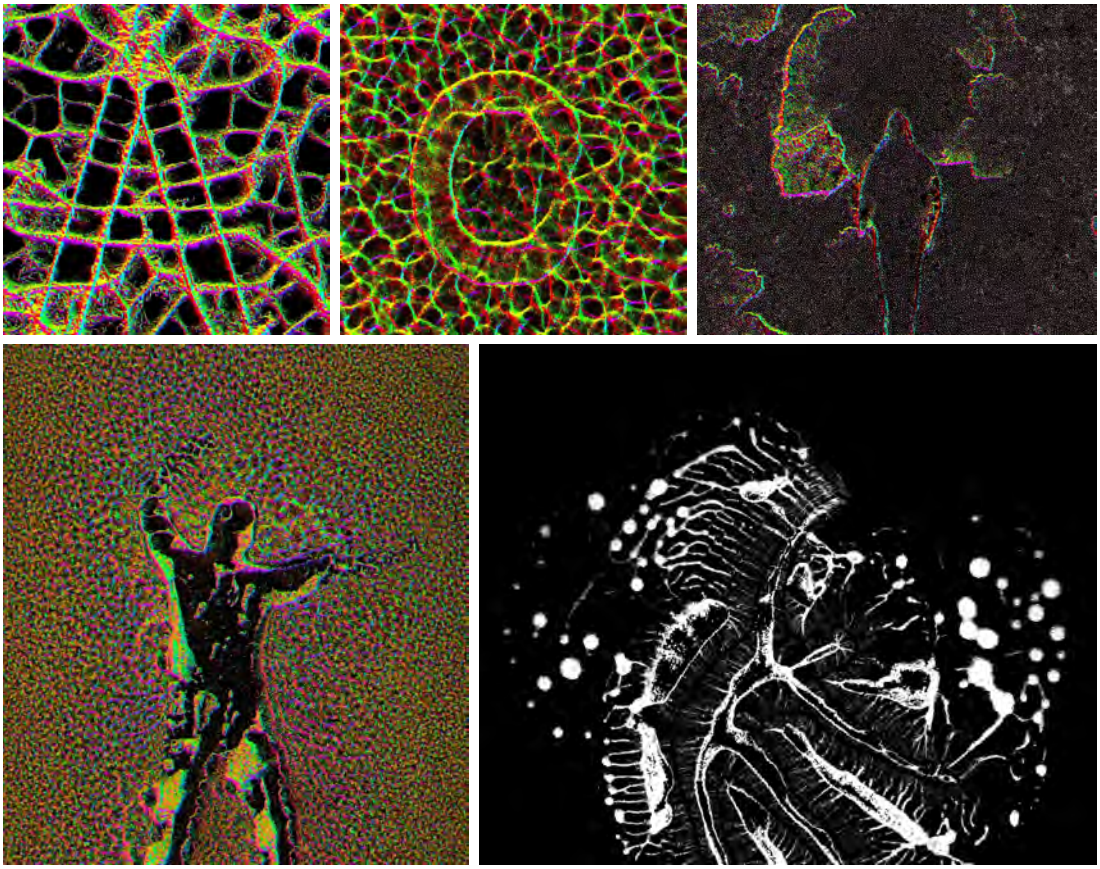
Daily Sketches in 2025

zach lieberman Follow 11 min read · Jan 7, 2026

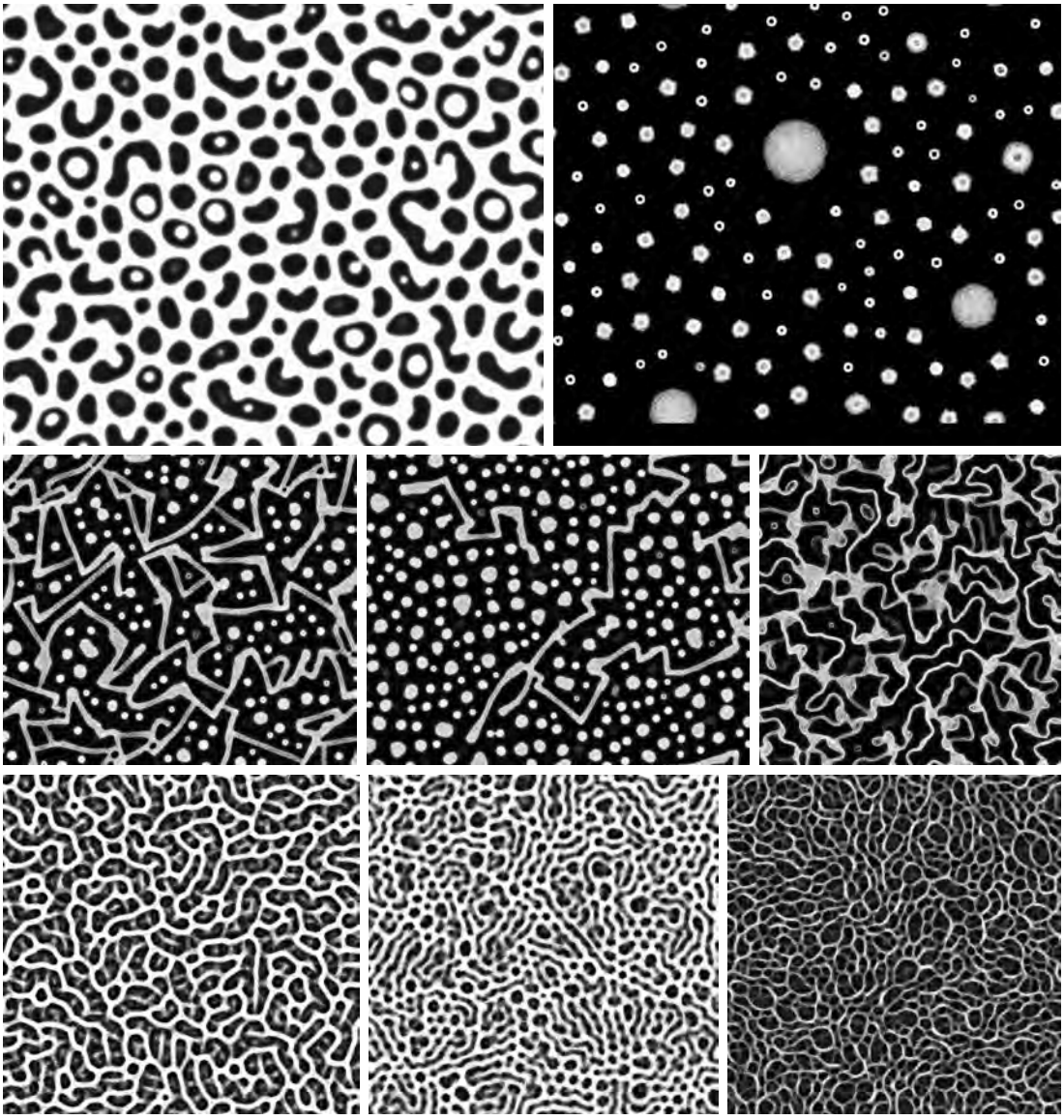
One of the highlights of sketching in 2025 was spending time with the physarum algorithm, an algorithm based on this paper by Jeff Jones and popularized by Sage Jensen. The interesting thing about this algorithm is that with a set of very simple rules, you can create almost boundless organic shapes. I spent so much time thinking about new rules and experimenting with different algorithmic approaches, and especially think about it's relationship to typography and the body.

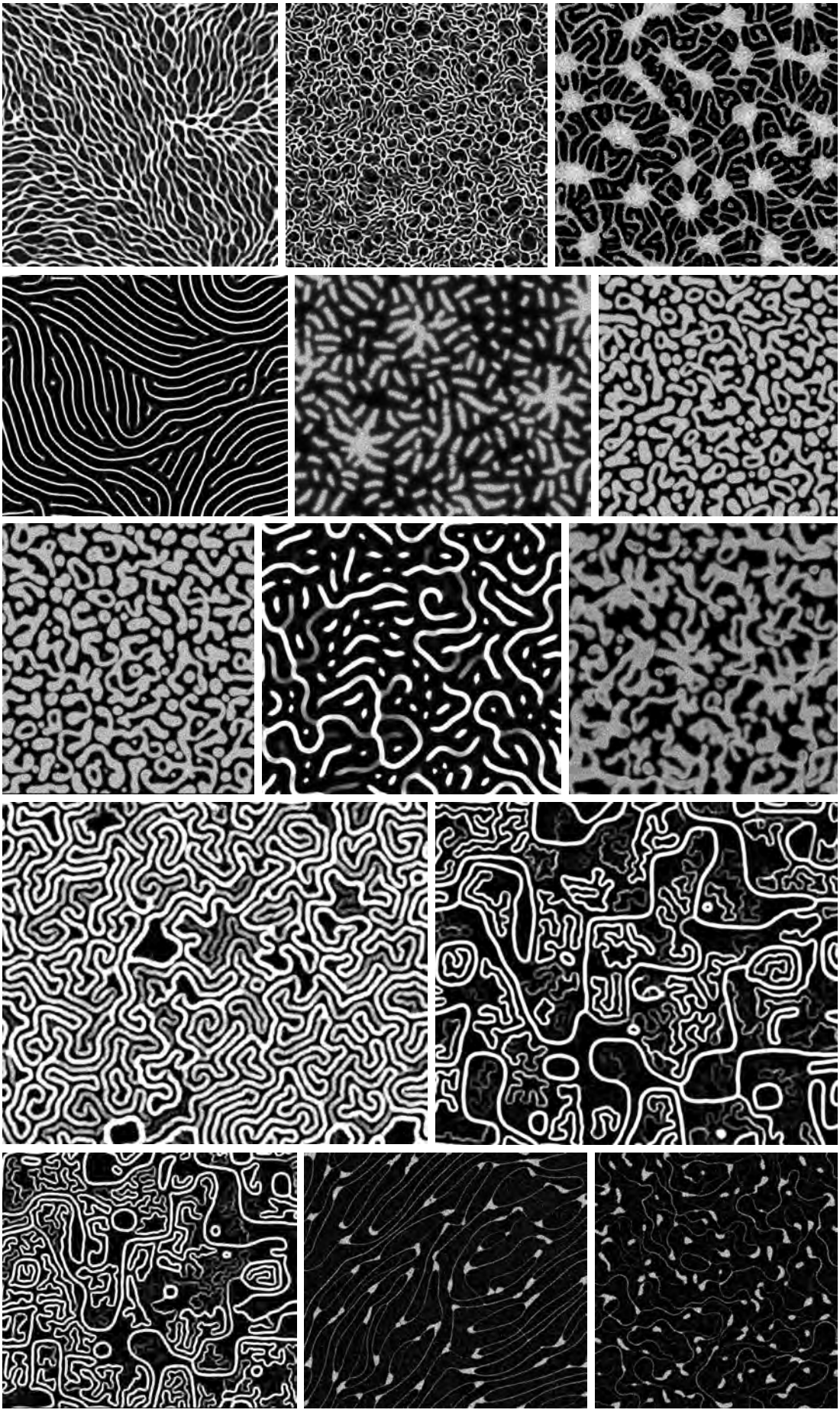


On a technical front, one thing I've struggled with often is on OSX the opengl support stopped at a certain point, so certain types of coding like compute shaders are impossible. For me this was one of those "aha" moments that LLM tools provide , that I could just ask, "help me design a system to run compute shaders in Metal inside of an openframeworks application." I'm sure I could learn the ins and outs of metal shaders, and do this on my own, but within 5–10 mins I had a working framework with interoperability between metal and OpenGL, and it made sketching and ideating so much

faster. As a creator I'm trying to find ways that AI can be a tool or an unlock to new mode of practice.

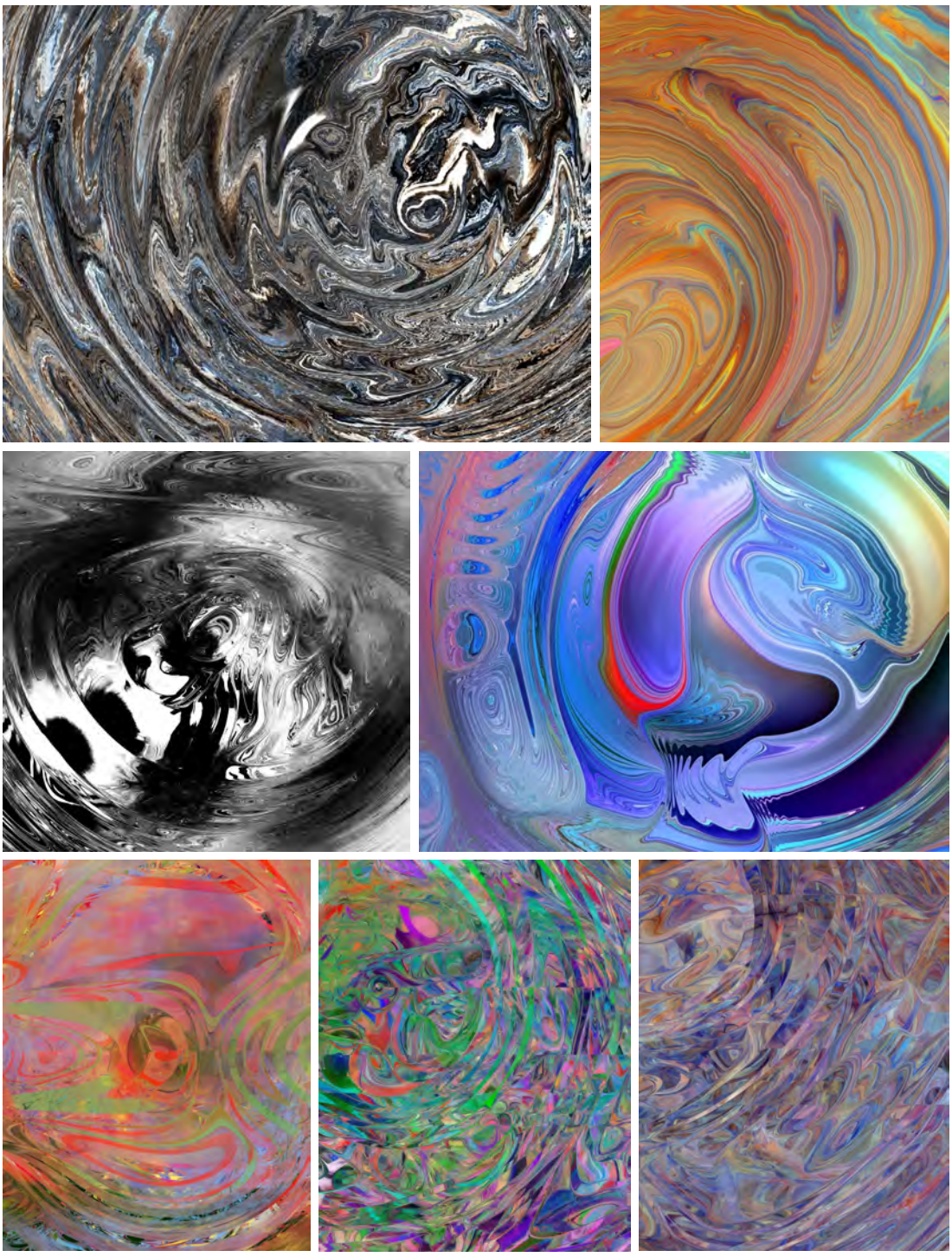
To me the most interesting thing about Physarum is how playful and dynamic the compositions are. Sometimes I think about how much time I could devote to a given algorithm or function. For example, I sometimes think I pretty much have dedicated my life to sin(). I wake up every day thinking about how to use sin() and cos() to make art. Not all functions are like that, and not all algorithms — like Delauny or Voronoi. In the case of Physarum I had the feeling like you could easily dedicate your life to see what stories it could tell.

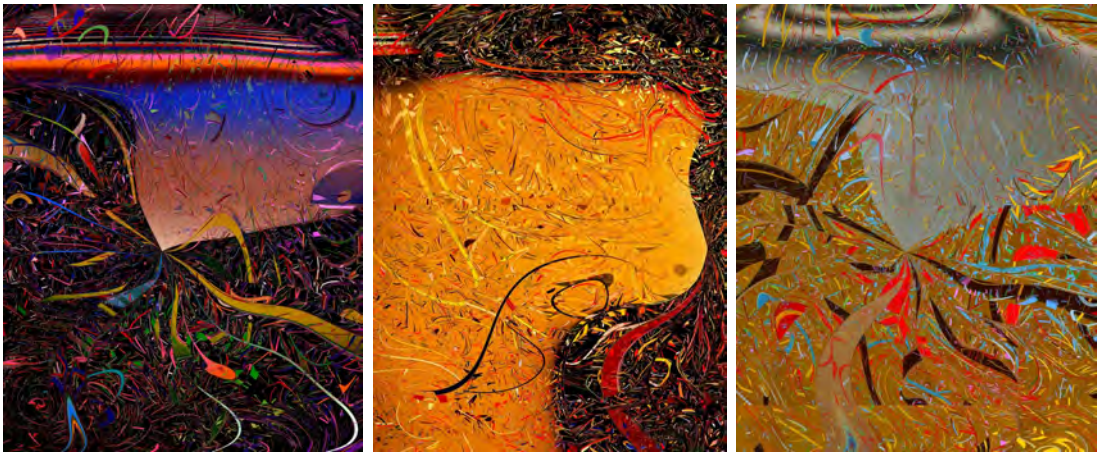




Fluid

One again, I fell back on the fluid train, a topic I revisit over and over again (it seems like every year now). I love to make images that feel like a water simulation, like milk in coffee or oil on water, and they are created just using displacement after displacement in shader code. I also tried to push them in weirder and weirder directions.

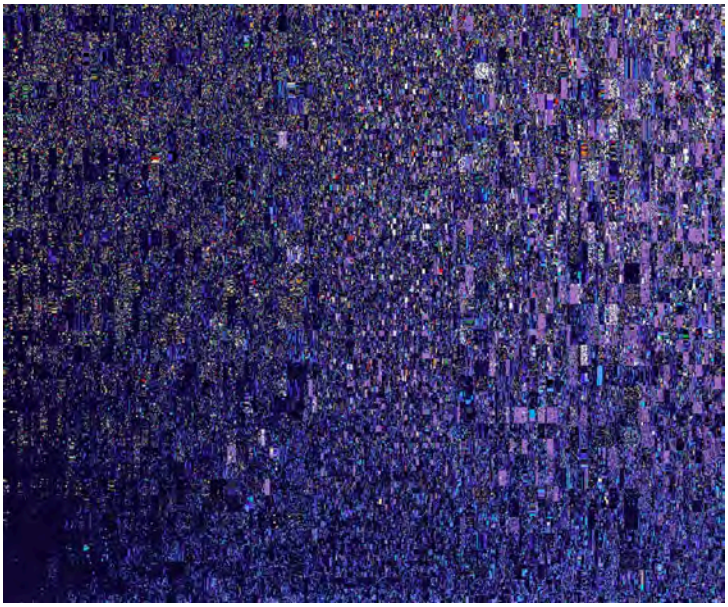


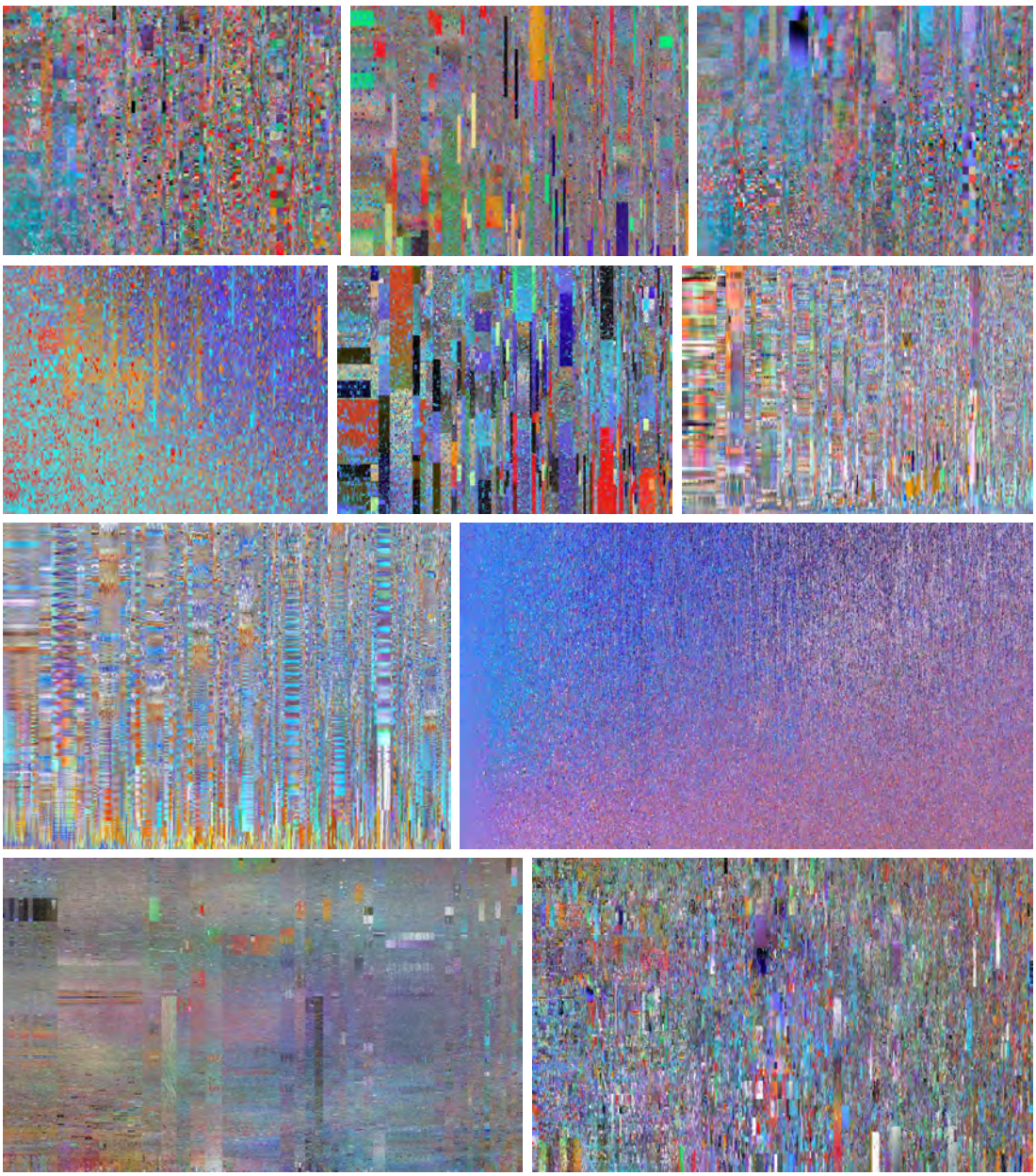


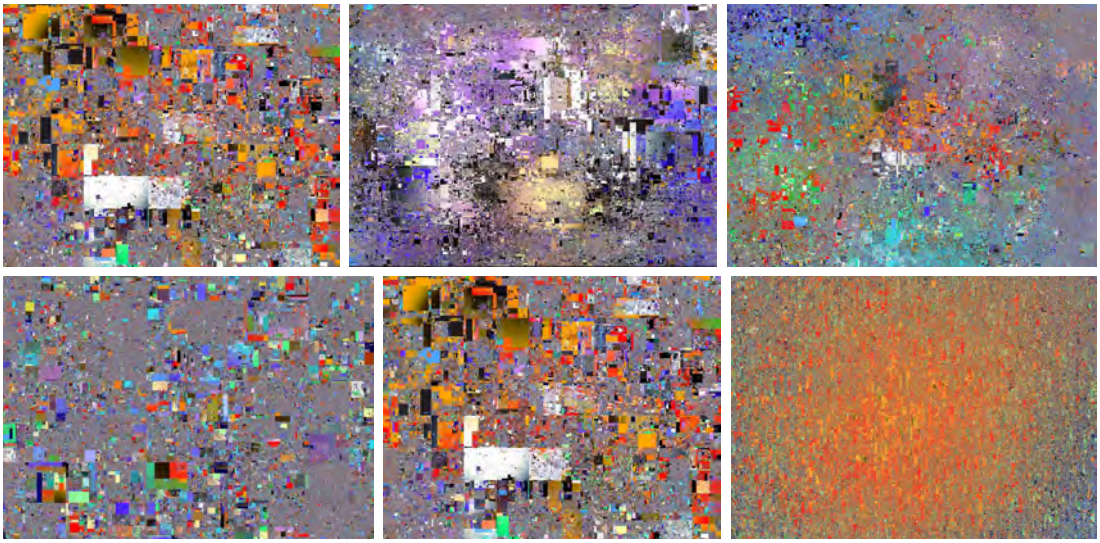
Glitch work

Continuing on the theme of revisiting work, I was showing another artist how to work with glitch and I found myself revisiting a form that has brought me a lot of joy. These glitch images are a result of recursive subdivision and often create pretty fragmentary and textile type images.

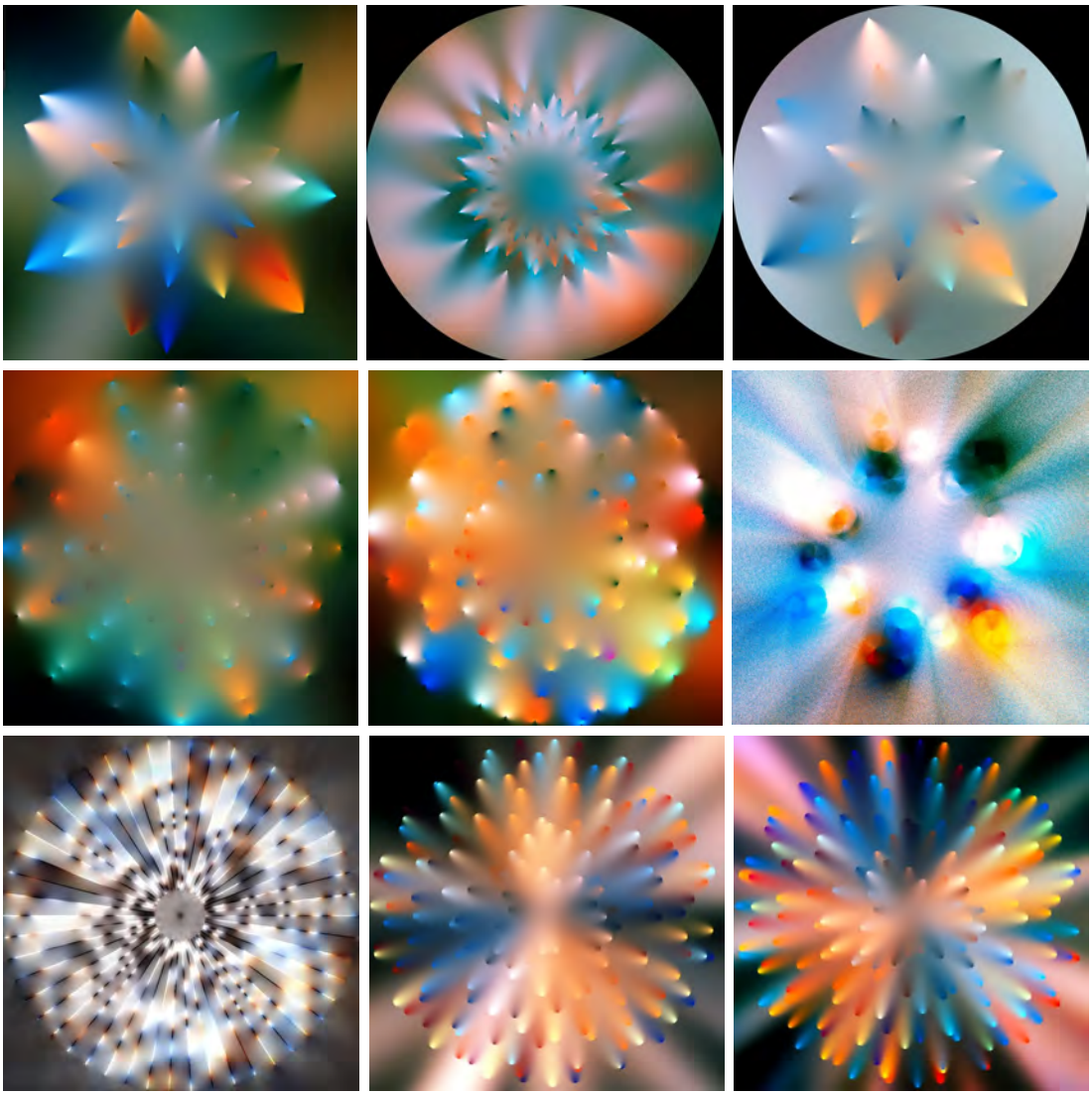
One thing I love is just going back to an old idea and seeing it again with new eyes. I'm not always sure I'm making anything new, but I'm new, my eyes are new and I see everything differently.





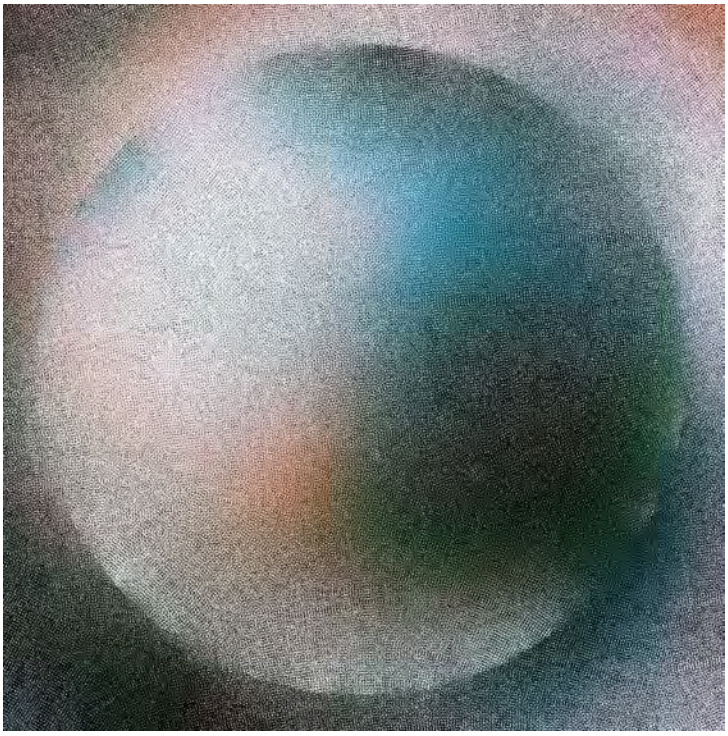


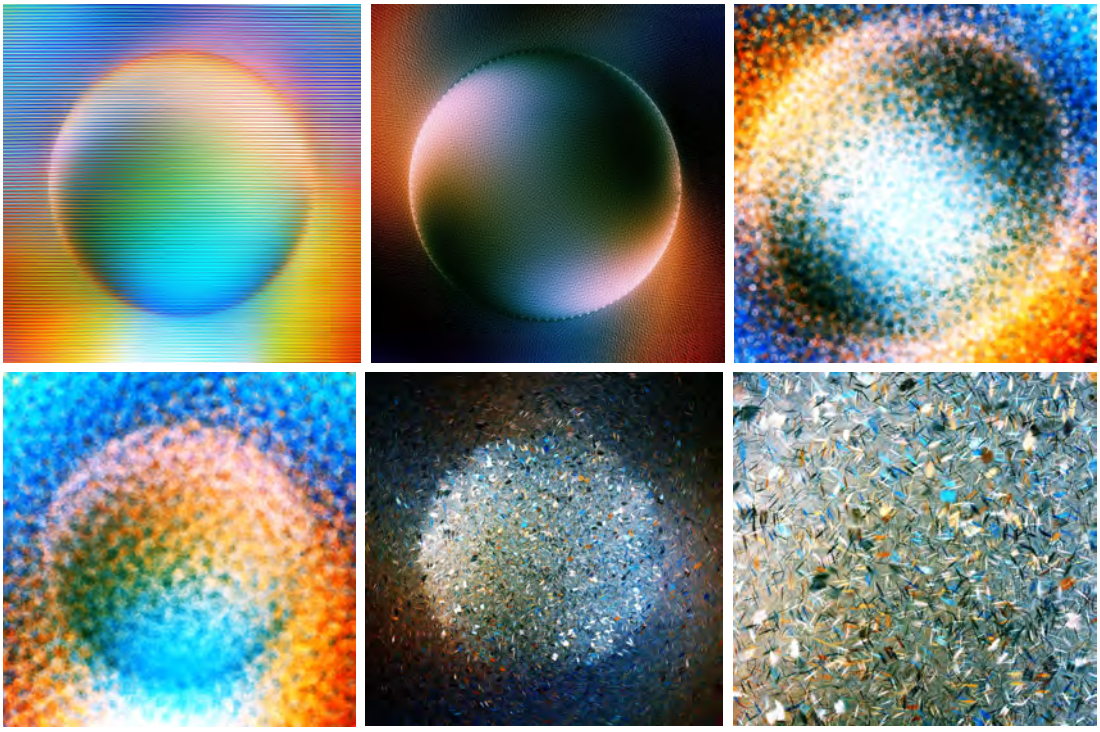
I also revisited cone gradients for a large circular print that was on exhibition over the summer.

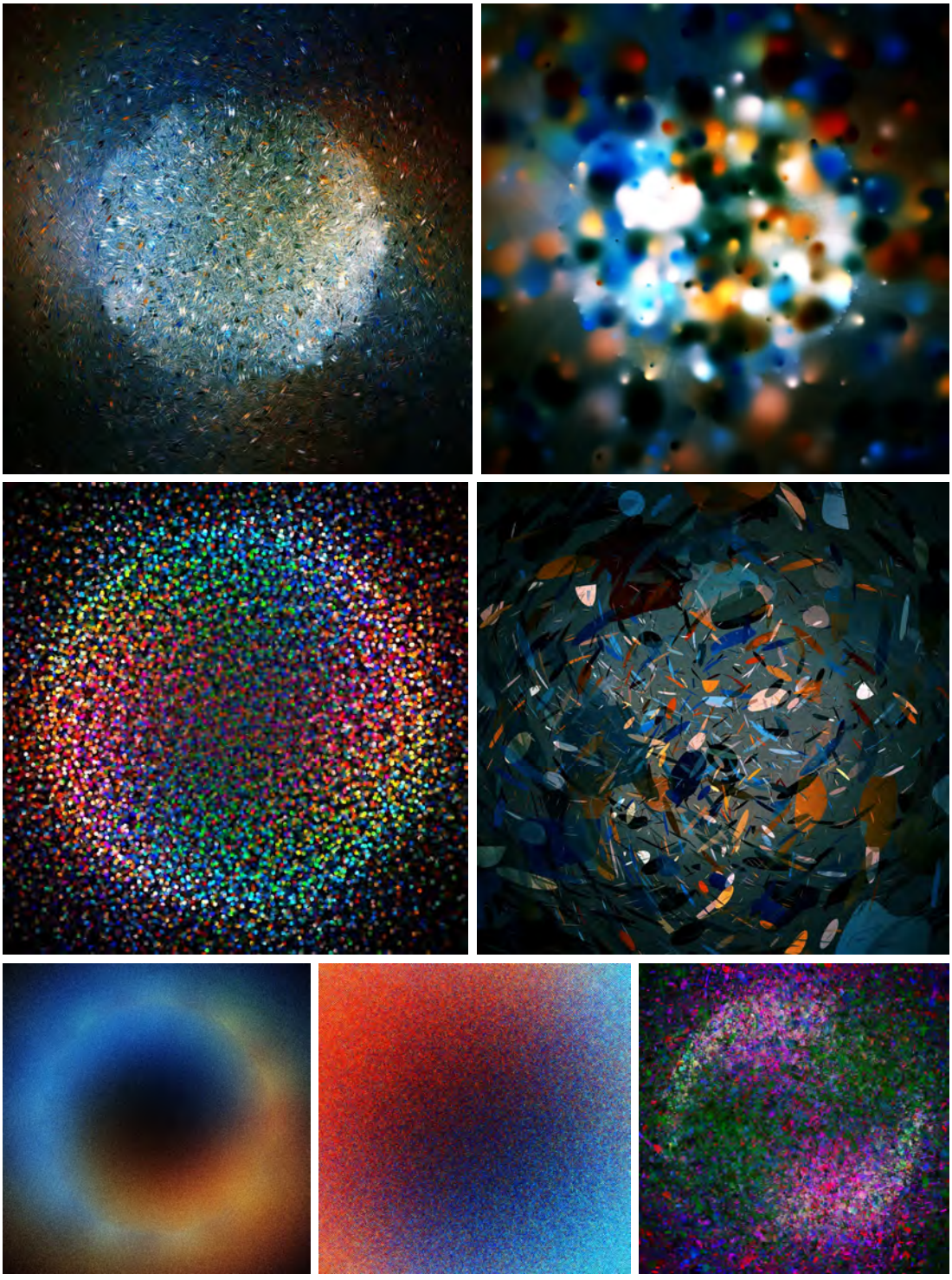


Dots

I love working with dot patterns, halftones and other pattern type approaches. I find the textures it produces fascinating, and in these sketches, I approximated a circle through a series of points of color that essentially paint a circular shape. Each of them has their own orientation and pattern, and the layering produces some interesting effects. I also experimented with non linear distributions, having really large and small dots, warping the dots, and seeing the various ways I could bend or break this approach.



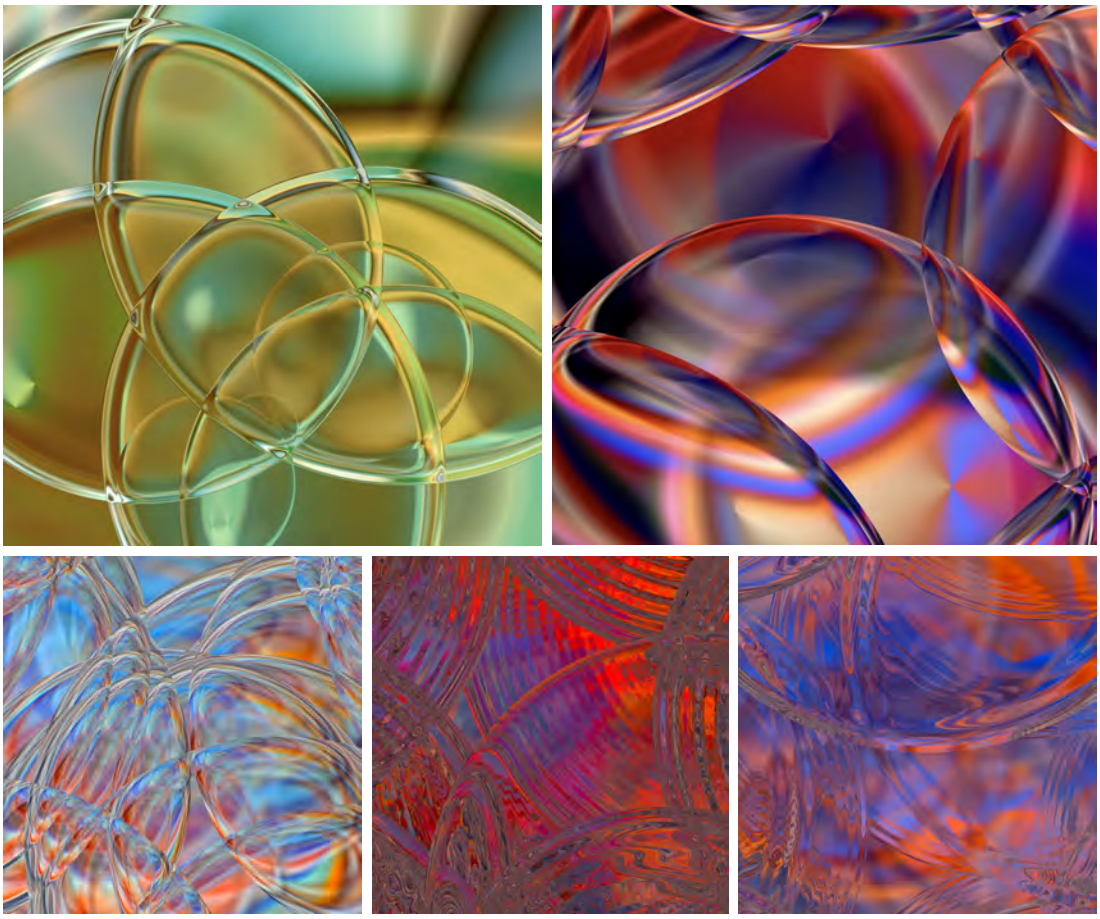


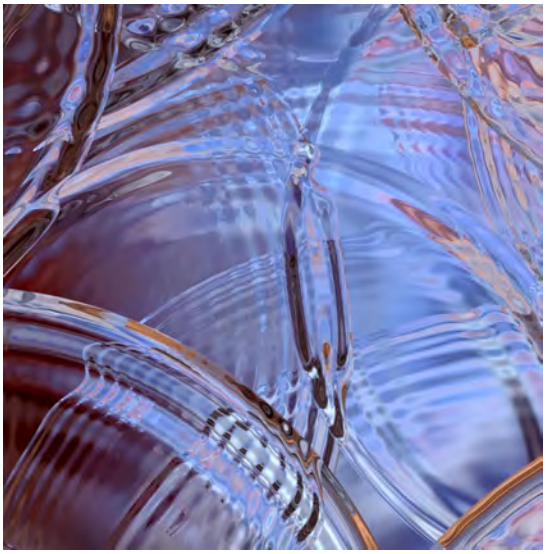
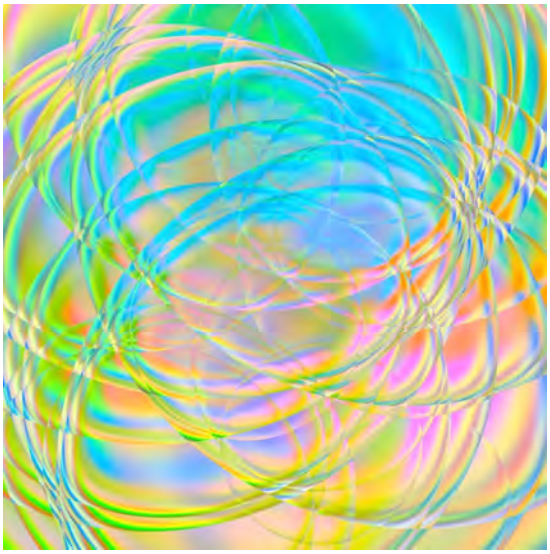


One example, that was aided by this post by XOR about randomness, was trying really trying to push the scale and warping of the dots. I love how this feels like a ball of organic shapes. We've move out of the halftone space into something that feels really alive and frenetic.

Lenses

I also revisited lenses, producing images for print:

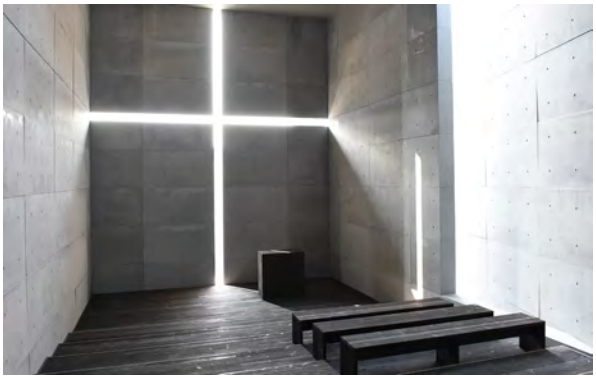


Circles and Rectangles

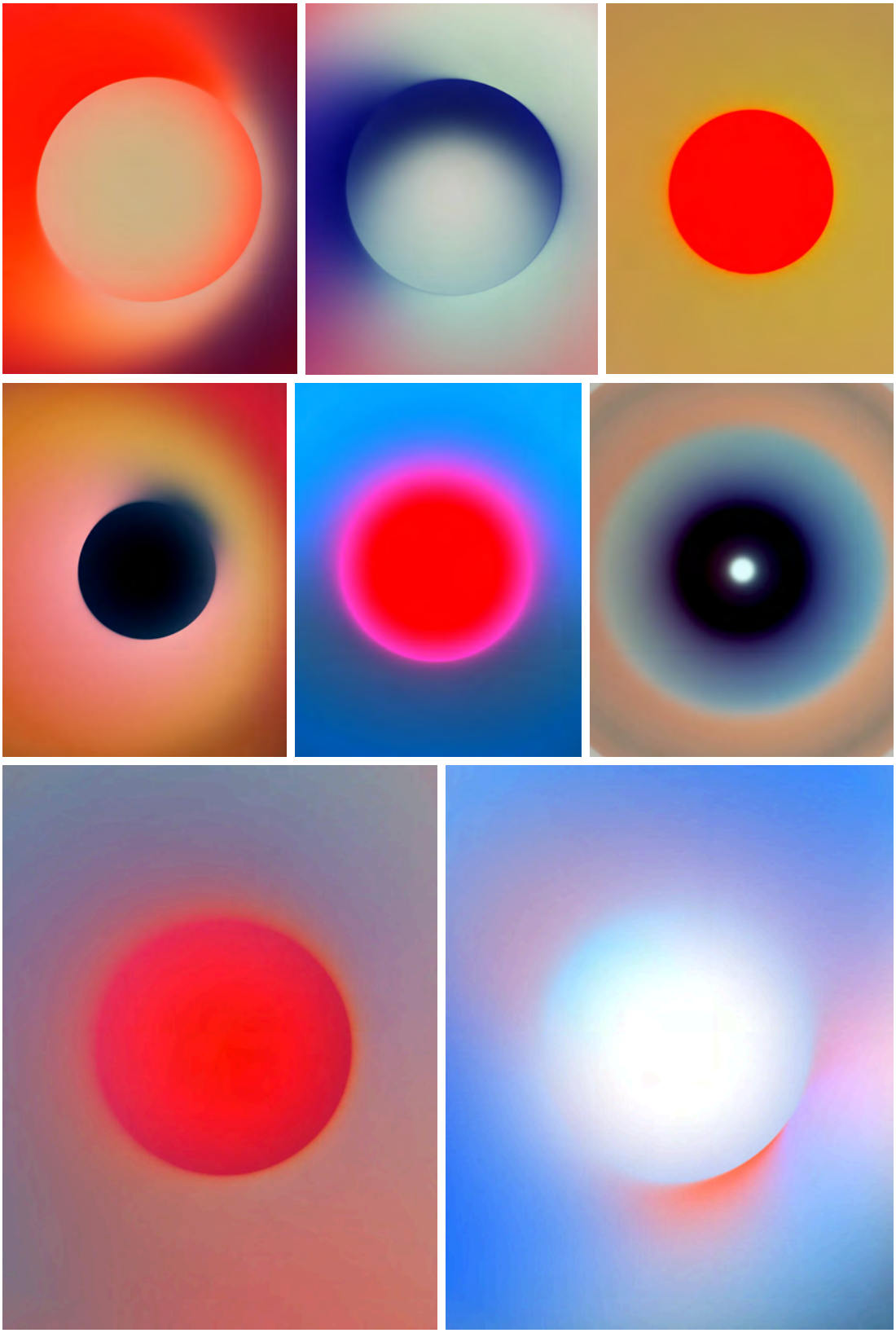
I always think of this quote from Vera Molnar, an artist I admire and teach about, “I have no regrets. My life is squares, triangles, lines.” She spent her life creating computational artworks rooted in geometry that use the tension between order and disorder that are full of warmth and humanity.

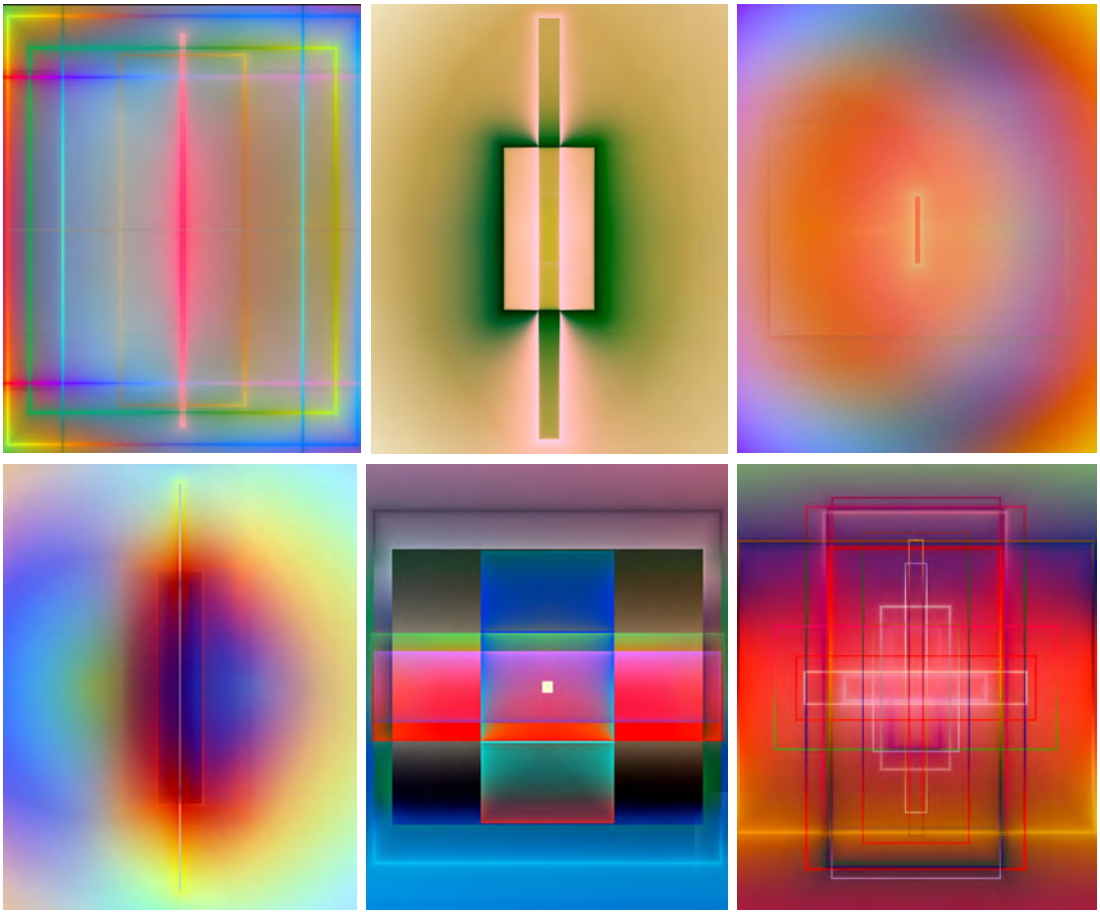
I think about this quote constantly when I make work using simple geometric shapes. In 2025 I spent time looking at circles and rectangles, trying to find a softness and an airiness in them. For me these pieces are really about light. With the rectangle works, I was thinking of things like Tadao Ando’s Church of Light. And with the circle works, I kept coming back to Turrell pieces.




Tadao Ando and James Turrell

I made a ton of sketches involving boxes and circles

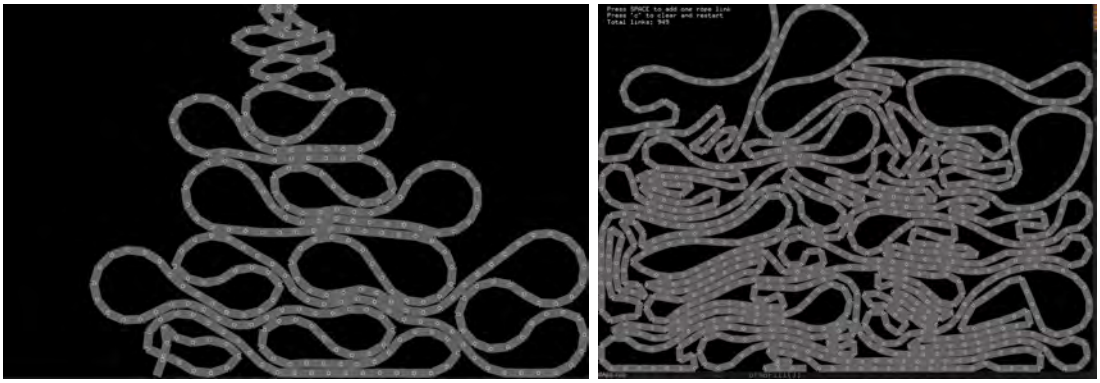




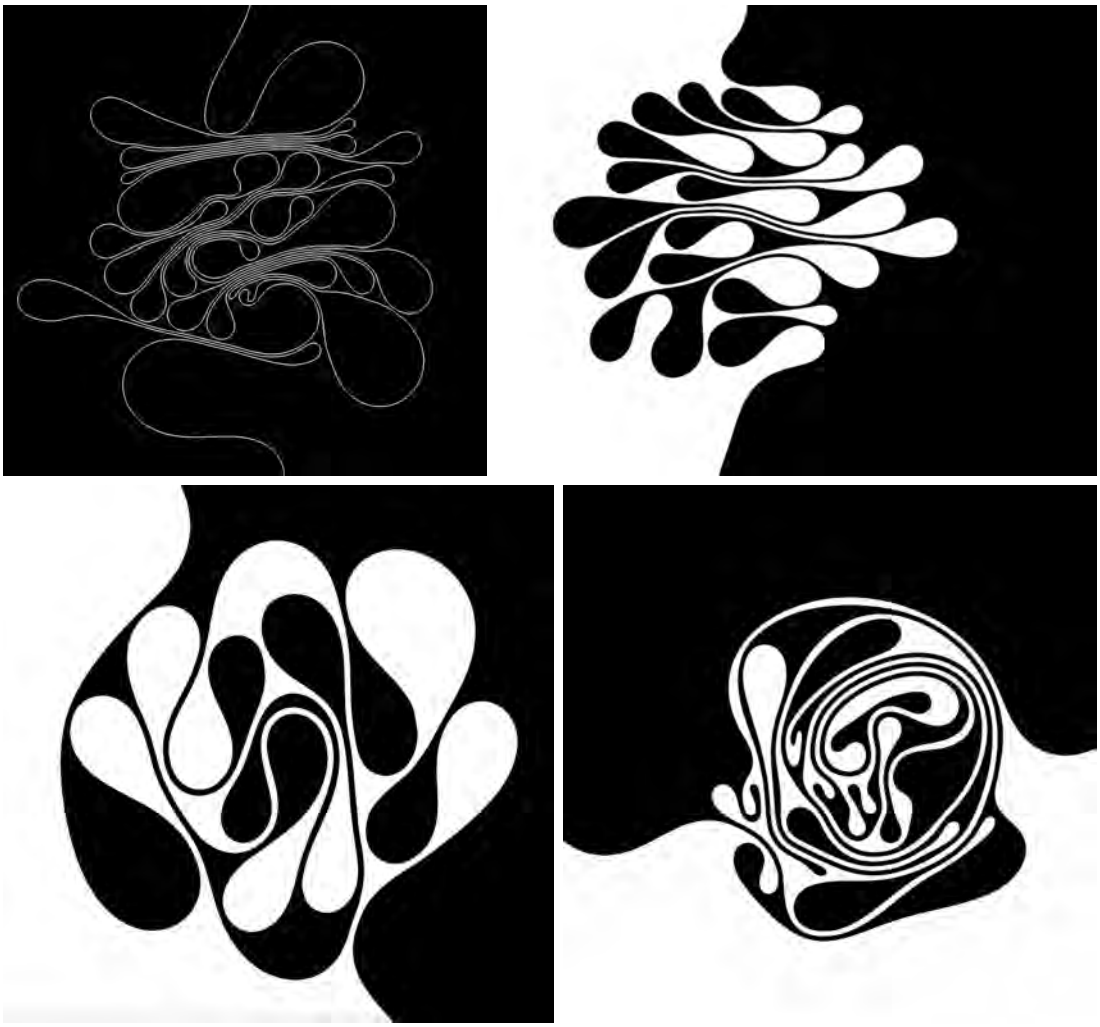
Line blob / New Yorker

One shape I've always tried to simulate and strugle with is a kind of form you see in tape delay machines. I love how these blobby shapes are rigid but also they fold in on themselve and touch to actually negotiate space. I've tried to simulate this using my traditional blob techniques (particles that repel away from each other and are connected by springs) and I find they self intersect and I can't get them to actually touch cleanly like this.

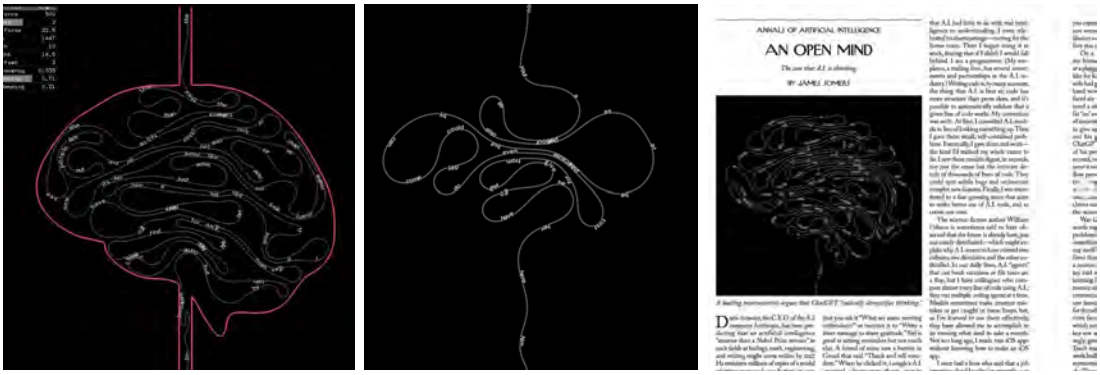
To solve this, I turned this time to box2d, which has an interesting feature called joints, you can connect objects together and constrain their angles:



After some experimenting I got a look I was really happy with:

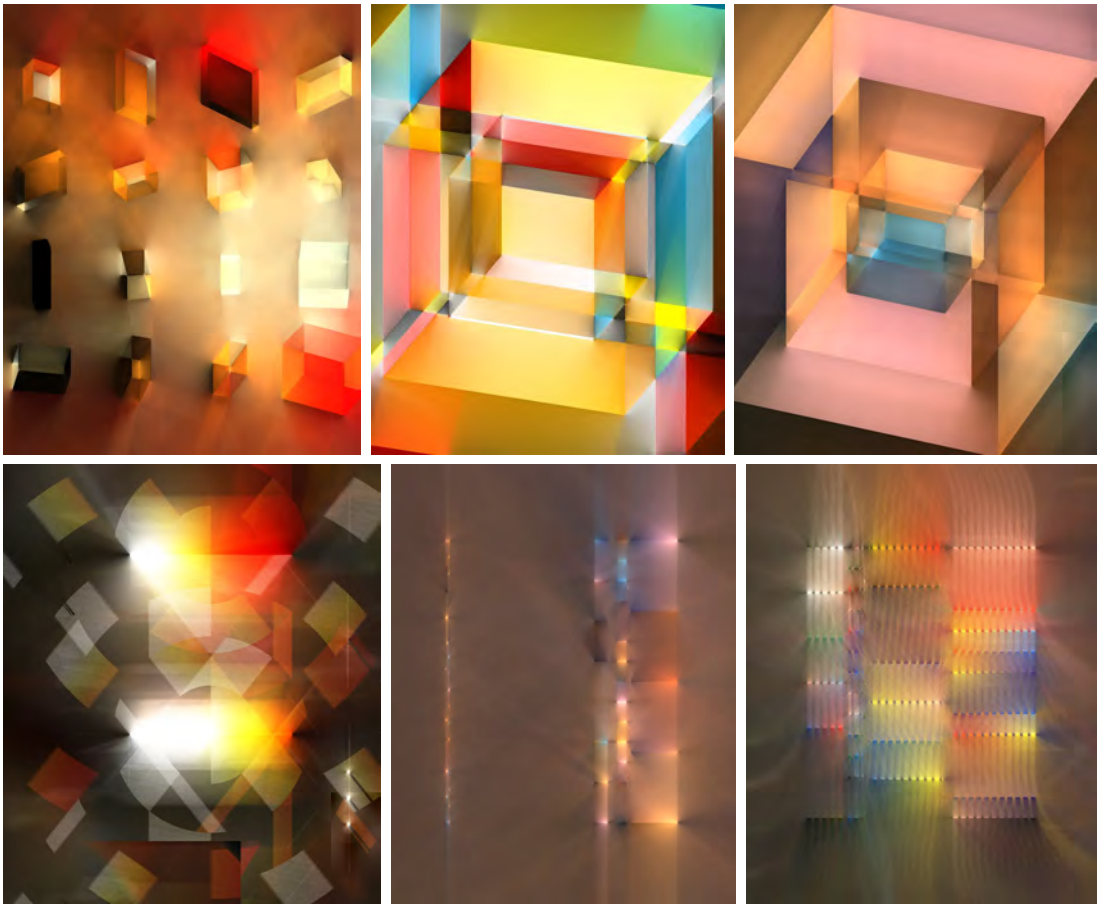


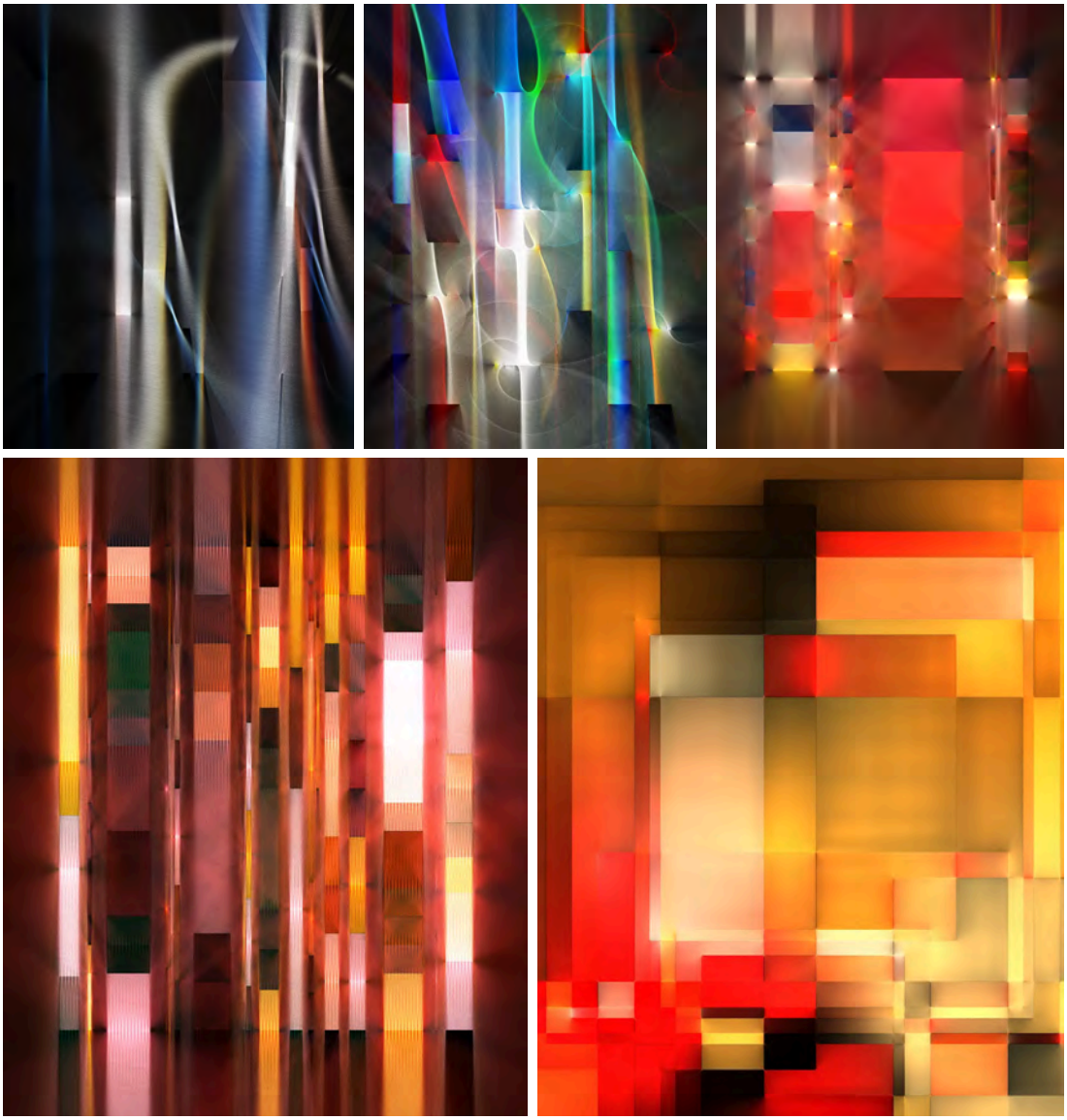
I wound up using this technique for an illustation / animation for the New Yorker for an article about AI. I made this blobby line compress into the shape of a brain (I actually had to make something a mold for it so it would really get brain shaped!).



Light

Finally, I closed the year looking at light again. When I started sketching in 2016, 10 years ago, I began with light. It felt kind of nice to end thinking of light, revisiting some of my favorite recent techniques and see how I might see them with new eyes.





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