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Authorial interpretation of the abstract photographic image: between intuitive perception and compositional analysis

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***Abstract.** The relevance of the study is determined by the growing role of abstract photography in contemporary artistic practice and the increasing interest in the mechanisms through which artistic meaning is constructed within a visually dominated culture. In the contemporary artistic environment, the abstract photographic image increasingly functions not as a means of representing objective reality but as an autonomous system of visual relationships in which meaning emerges through the interaction of form, perception, and authorial interpretation. This actualizes the need for a deeper investigation of the relationship between intuitive perception and compositional analysis as key factors in the interpretation of abstract photographic imagery. **The purpose** of the article is to investigate the mechanisms of authorial interpretation in abstract photography through the interaction of intuitive perception and compositional analysis, as well as to substantiate their significance in the formation of artistic meaning within contemporary photographic practice.*

Methods. The study employed methods of theoretical generalization, analysis and synthesis of scientific sources, structural-compositional analysis, visual interpretation, a comparative-analytical approach, and the method of conceptual generalization.

Results. The conceptual foundations of authorial interpretation in abstract photography were investigated, and the principal aesthetic factors influencing the perception of the photographic image were identified. The interaction between intuitive perception and compositional organization in the creation and interpretation of abstract photographic works was analyzed. The significance of visual elements, formal structures, and compositional strategies in the construction of artistic meaning was revealed. It was established that the expressive potential of the abstract photographic image is formed not through the representation of recognizable objects but through a system of visual relationships capable of activating associative, emotional, and conceptual mechanisms of perception. The principal theoretical and practical challenges of interpreting abstract photography were identified, including the absence of unified evaluation criteria, the growing influence of digital technologies on visual reading processes, and the complexity of reconciling subjective and analytical models of interpretation.

Conclusions. It was proven that the most productive approach to the interpretation of abstract photographic imagery is based on the integration of intuitive visual experience and systematic compositional analysis. Prospects for further research are associated with the investigation of cognitive mechanisms involved in the perception of abstract photographic images, the empirical analysis of contemporary interpretative practices, and the examination of the impact of digital and AI-oriented technologies on the formation of artistic meaning in abstract photography.

Keywords: visual perception, artistic meaning, abstract photography, visual structures, formal organization, aesthetic experience, visual ambiguity, photographic abstraction, artistic expressiveness, visual semantics.

Авторська інтерпретація абстрактного фотообrazу між інтуїтивним сприйняттям і композиційним аналізом

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Анотація: *Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ролі абстрактної фотографії у сучасній художній практиці та посиленням інтересу до механізмів формування художнього змісту в умовах переважання візуальної комунікації. У сучасному мистецькому середовищі абстрактний фотообраз дедалі частіше функціонує не як засіб відображення об'єктивної реальності, а як самостійна система візуальних відносин, у межах якої значення формується через взаємодію форми, сприйняття та авторської інтерпретації. Це актуалізує потребу в поглибленому дослідженні взаємозв'язку інтуїтивного сприйняття та композиційного аналізу як ключових чинників інтерпретації абстрактних фотографічних образів. Метою статті визначено дослідження механізмів авторської інтерпретації в абстрактній фотографії крізь призму взаємодії інтуїтивного сприйняття та композиційного аналізу, а також обґрунтування їхнього значення у процесі формування художнього змісту в сучасній фотографічній практиці. Методи. У процесі дослідження використано методи теоретичного узагальнення, аналізу та синтезу наукових джерел, структурно-композиційний аналіз, метод візуальної інтерпретації, порівняльно-аналітичний підхід та метод концептуального узагальнення. Результати. Досліджено концептуальні засади авторської інтерпретації в абстрактній фотографії та визначено основні естетичні чинники, що впливають на сприйняття фотообразу. Проаналізовано особливості взаємодії*

*інтуїтивного сприйняття та композиційної організації у процесі створення й інтерпретації абстрактних фотографічних творів. Виявлено значення візуальних елементів, формальних структур і композиційних стратегій у конструюванні художнього змісту. Встановлено, що художня виразність абстрактного фотообразу формується не через репрезентацію впізнаваних об'єктів, а через систему візуальних взаємозв'язків, здатних активізувати асоціативні, емоційні та концептуальні механізми сприйняття. Визначено ключові теоретичні та практичні проблеми інтерпретації абстрактної фотографії, серед яких відсутність уніфікованих критеріїв оцінювання, зростання впливу цифрових технологій на процес візуального прочитання, а також складність узгодження суб'єктивних і аналітичних моделей інтерпретації. **Висновки.** Доведено, що найбільш продуктивний підхід до інтерпретації абстрактних фотографічних образів ґрунтується на поєднанні інтуїтивного візуального досвіду з послідовним композиційним аналізом. Перспективи подальших досліджень пов'язані з вивченням когнітивних механізмів сприйняття абстрактних фотообразів, емпіричним аналізом сучасних інтерпретаційних практик та дослідженням впливу цифрових і ШІ-орієнтованих технологій на формування художнього змісту в абстрактній фотографії.*

Ключові слова: *візуальне сприйняття, художній зміст, абстрактна фотографія, візуальні структури, формальна організація, естетичний досвід, візуальна неоднозначність, фотографічна абстракція, художня виразність, семантика образу.*

Problem statement. The growing expansion of visual communication within digital culture has substantially transformed the role of photography as a medium of artistic expression and interpretation. In this context, abstract photography occupies a distinctive position because it shifts attention from the direct representation of reality

toward the creation of visual structures that activate subjective perception, emotional response, and individual meaning-making. The absence of explicit narrative references within abstract photographic images increases the significance of authorial decisions related to form, rhythm, texture, light, color, and spatial organization, while simultaneously complicating the processes of interpretation and analytical evaluation. Contemporary artistic practice demonstrates that abstract photographic works are often perceived through intuitive and affective mechanisms, whereas professional visual analysis relies on compositional principles and formal characteristics. This creates a methodological challenge associated with understanding how intuitive perception and compositional analysis interact in the formation of the authorial photographic image. Addressing this issue is important for advancing contemporary photographic theory and for developing more comprehensive approaches to the interpretation of abstract visual artworks within current artistic practice.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A review of contemporary scholarship demonstrates that the issue of authorial interpretation of the abstract photographic image lies at the intersection of aesthetics, perception psychology, art theory, and the ongoing digital transformation of visual culture. A substantial body of research focuses on the formation of artistic meaning, the mechanisms of visual perception, and the role of the author in constructing and communicating visual narratives. A. Rochnyak examines fine art photography as an independent form of visual art, emphasizing the importance of compositional organization, artistic intention, and aesthetic strategies in shaping the photographic image and its interpretative potential [1]. L. Bellaiche and co-authors investigate the perception of human-created and AI-generated artworks, demonstrating that knowledge of authorship significantly influences aesthetic evaluation and the interpretation of visual meaning [2]. Similarly, R. G. Wilner explores the phenomenon of pareidolia as a cognitive mechanism through which viewers identify recognizable forms in ambiguous

images, highlighting the inherently subjective nature of interpreting abstract visual representations [3].

A separate strand of research addresses the transformation of authorship and artistic meaning in the age of artificial intelligence. D. Grba analyzes how AI-generated visual content challenges traditional concepts of creativity, artistic value, and human authorship [4]. A. Ogundipe focuses on issues of agency and aesthetic disruption in photographic art, arguing that generative AI reshapes conventional understandings of artistic creation and interpretation [5]. O. Yavuz examines the relationship between generative adversarial networks and photographic practice through the lens of rhizomatic thought, proposing alternative frameworks for understanding image production and meaning-making in contemporary visual culture [6]. Likewise, L. Hausken investigates the relationship between photography and AI-generated photorealistic imagery, emphasizing questions of authenticity, representation, and interpretative legitimacy [7].

Important contributions to understanding the psychological foundations of artistic perception have been made by researchers investigating emotional and cognitive responses to abstract art. P. N. Johnson-Laird and K. Oatley examine the role of emotional simulation in the experience of abstract artworks, demonstrating that interpretation is deeply influenced by viewers' emotional and imaginative engagement with visual stimuli [8]. R. Pepperell applies the predictive processing framework to artistic perception, arguing that aesthetic experience emerges through the dynamic interaction of sensory input, expectations, and intuitive cognition [9]. U. Ansorge and co-authors advocate the use of empirical aesthetics as a methodological approach for investigating consciousness and visual experience, highlighting the value of interdisciplinary perspectives in art research [10]. M. J. Dolese proposes an integrative model of aesthetic experience in which artworks function as meaningful environments that support the construction of personal and culturally situated interpretations [11].

A significant group of studies further investigates the relationship between formal image characteristics and aesthetic perception. C. Damiano and D. B. Walther analyze the visual representation of emotions in abstract art, revealing how color, compositional arrangements, and visual structures contribute to emotional interpretation [12]. A. Swartz and co-authors demonstrate that perceived beauty in artworks cannot be adequately explained solely by low-level image statistics, emphasizing the complexity of aesthetic judgment and subjective meaning-making processes [13]. H. A. Geller and co-authors identify significant relationships between statistical image properties and aesthetic evaluations of abstract artworks, highlighting the importance of compositional structure in shaping visual appeal [14]. Comparable conclusions are presented by C. Redies and R. Bartho, who show that statistical and compositional characteristics of abstract paintings influence aesthetic judgments and viewers' interpretative responses [15].

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem. Despite the growing body of research on photography and visual culture, the mechanisms through which artistic meaning is constructed in abstract photographic imagery remain insufficiently explored. Existing studies primarily focus on formal characteristics of images or perceptual processes, whereas the interaction between intuitive and analytical dimensions of interpretation continues to be addressed only fragmentarily.

This limitation restricts a comprehensive understanding of abstract photography as an autonomous artistic practice. Therefore, further research is required to clarify the theoretical foundations of authorial interpretation and to explain the interaction between perceptual and compositional mechanisms involved in the construction of artistic meaning in abstract photography.

Formulation of the objectives of the article (task setting). The purpose of the article is to investigate the mechanisms of authorial interpretation in abstract photography through the interaction of intuitive perception and compositional analysis,

as well as to substantiate their role in the formation of artistic meaning within contemporary photographic practice.

Objectives of the article:

1. To determine the conceptual foundations of authorial interpretation and artistic meaning in abstract photography.

2. To analyze the interaction between intuitive perception and compositional organization in abstract photographic imagery.

3. To identify key theoretical and practical challenges in the interpretation of abstract photographic imagery and to substantiate approaches to their resolution.

Main material. Abstract photography extends beyond the documentary function traditionally associated with the photographic medium and operates as an autonomous visual language in which meaning emerges through the interaction of form, perception, and authorial intention. Unlike representational imagery, abstract photographic works do not rely on recognizable subjects as primary carriers of meaning. Instead, they activate visual experience through relationships among light, texture, color, rhythm, contrast, scale, and spatial ambiguity. As a result, the process of interpretation becomes closely connected with the photographer's ability to transform fragments of reality into independent aesthetic structures. Contemporary artistic practice demonstrates that the perception of abstract photographs is shaped not only by formal compositional qualities but also by the subjective experience of both the author and the viewer, making the image a dynamic field of visual and conceptual associations (table 1).

Table 1

Conceptual foundations of authorial interpretation in abstract photography

<i>Conceptual component</i>	Essence	Manifestation in photographic practice	Role in image perception
<i>Authorial intentionality</i>	Conscious artistic orientation in image creation	Selection of visual fragments, framing, and transformation of reality	Directs semantic and emotional interpretation

<i>Visual abstraction</i>	Departure from direct representation of recognizable objects	Fragmentation, distortion, simplification, or isolation of forms	Expands interpretative possibilities
<i>Aesthetic experience</i>	Sensory and emotional engagement with visual form	Interaction of light, color, texture, and spatial relations	Shapes individual visual responses
<i>Compositional organization</i>	Structural arrangement of visual elements	Balance, rhythm, contrast, proportion, and visual hierarchy	Ensures coherence and visual integrity
<i>Perceptual ambiguity</i>	Openness of the image to multiple readings	Indeterminate forms and absence of explicit narrative references	Stimulates active interpretation
<i>Symbolic association</i>	Generation of meanings beyond visible form	Emergence of personal, cultural, or emotional references	Deepens conceptual engagement with the image

Source: developed by the author based on [1, p. 97; 3, p. 639; 8, p. 268; 9; 11; 15].

The process of creating an abstract photographic image rarely depends on a single visual principle. Artistic practice indicates that meaningful abstraction emerges when several conceptual dimensions operate simultaneously, allowing the image to move beyond formal experimentation and acquire interpretative depth. Authorial intentionality determines the direction of visual inquiry, whereas abstraction itself functions as a mechanism for separating visual phenomena from their conventional meanings [1, p. 97]. This explains why identical subjects may generate entirely different photographic results depending on the photographer's perceptual focus and compositional decisions.

Particular attention should be given to the interaction between compositional organization and perceptual ambiguity. Contemporary abstract photography demonstrates that openness of interpretation does not arise from visual randomness. On the contrary, the most compelling works often possess a highly structured internal order based on rhythm, balance, repetition, tonal relationships, or spatial tension [8, p.

268]. For example, fragmented reflections in urban glass surfaces, close-up studies of industrial materials, or decontextualized architectural details may appear spontaneous at first glance, yet their visual impact largely depends on deliberate compositional control.

Another important observation concerns the role of symbolic association in the construction of photographic meaning. Abstract images frequently encourage viewers to establish connections that are absent from the physical subject itself. A photograph of weathered concrete may evoke geological formations, while blurred light trajectories can suggest movement, memory, or emotional states. In such cases, interpretation develops through the encounter between the material qualities of the image and the viewer's experiential framework [11]. Consequently, the artistic effectiveness of abstract photography is increasingly associated not with the representation of identifiable objects but with its capacity to sustain visual engagement and generate multiple layers of meaning through carefully orchestrated formal relationships.

The creation of abstract photographic works is often described as a dialogue between spontaneous visual discovery and deliberate formal control. While intuitive perception enables the photographer to recognize expressive visual situations that may otherwise remain unnoticed, compositional organization transforms these observations into coherent artistic statements. Rather than functioning as opposing approaches, intuition and composition operate as complementary dimensions of the creative process, influencing both image construction and subsequent interpretation (table 2).

Table 2

Interaction between intuitive perception and compositional organization in
abstract photography

<i>Creative dimension</i>	Characteristics within photographic practice	Contribution to image formation	Interpretative outcome
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<i>Immediate visual response</i>	Instant recognition of expressive visual phenomena	Identification of potential subjects, forms, or light conditions	Establishes initial perceptual engagement
<i>Selective observation</i>	Concentration on specific visual relationships	Isolation of details from broader visual environments	Directs attention toward essential elements
<i>Spatial structuring</i>	Deliberate arrangement of visual components within the frame	Formation of visual order and internal coherence	Facilitates readability without reducing ambiguity
<i>Control of visual tension</i>	Regulation of balance, contrast, density, and movement	Enhancement of expressive intensity	Strengthens emotional and aesthetic impact
<i>Temporal responsiveness</i>	Adaptation to changing light, movement, or environmental conditions	Integration of transient visual events into composition	Preserves immediacy within a structured image
<i>Reflective refinement</i>	Evaluation and adjustment during image selection or post-processing	Consolidation of artistic intent	Supports consistency between perception and final work

Source: developed by the author based on [1, p. 99; 8, p. 274; 9; 10; 11; 14].

A closer examination of contemporary abstract photographic projects suggests that intuition and composition should not be understood as separate stages of image creation. In practice, they function as interdependent processes that continuously influence one another throughout the development of a photographic work. Intuitive perception enables the recognition of visual situations that possess expressive potential, whereas compositional organization determines whether this potential can be transformed into a coherent and communicative image [10].

This relationship becomes particularly evident in photographic work based on unstable or rapidly changing visual conditions. Reflections on wet asphalt after rain, fragmented light on glass façades, shadows cast by moving structures, or distortions created by water surfaces often attract attention because of their unexpected visual qualities. Yet the final artistic value of such images is rarely a consequence of the

phenomenon itself [14]. What differentiates a successful abstract photograph from a merely interesting visual fragment is the photographer's ability to organize spatial relationships, control visual weight, and establish a balance between complexity and clarity.

Field experience also demonstrates that intuitive decisions frequently emerge from accumulated visual knowledge rather than from spontaneity alone. The ability to recognize significant formal relationships within ordinary environments is often developed through prolonged observation and repeated engagement with similar visual situations [1, p. 99]. Consequently, intuition in abstract photography may be viewed as a highly refined perceptual competence grounded in experience. A photographer working with industrial textures, for instance, gradually learns to identify subtle interactions of light, materiality, and scale that can later become central compositional elements.

At the same time, excessive reliance on compositional control may reduce the openness that gives abstract photography much of its interpretative richness. Many contemporary works achieve their strongest visual impact when formal structure remains sufficiently flexible to preserve traces of uncertainty and discovery. This balance allows viewers to engage with the image actively rather than merely decode a predetermined visual message. As a result, the most effective abstract photographs often operate within a productive tension between order and unpredictability, where intuitive perception generates visual possibilities and compositional organization transforms them into enduring artistic forms.

In abstract photography, artistic meaning emerges through the organization of visual relationships rather than through the representation of identifiable subjects. Consequently, visual elements and compositional strategies become primary instruments for shaping the interpretative and emotional dimensions of the photographic image (table 3).

Table 3

Role of visual elements and compositional strategies in the construction of
artistic meaning in abstract photography

<i>Visual factor</i>	Functional manifestation	Influence on semantic formation	Artistic effect
<i>Line and directionality</i>	Organization of visual movement within the frame	Guides perceptual pathways and focal attention	Creates dynamism or stability
<i>Tonal relationships</i>	Distribution of light and dark values	Shapes visual hierarchy and atmosphere	Enhances emotional resonance
<i>Texture and surface qualities</i>	Emphasis on material characteristics	Generates tactile and associative responses	Strengthens sensory engagement
<i>Geometric and organic forms</i>	Structural configuration of visual components	Produces symbolic and conceptual associations	Defines visual identity of the work
<i>Repetition and rhythm</i>	Recurrence of forms, patterns, or intervals	Establishes continuity and perceptual order	Creates visual cohesion
<i>Scale and spatial relationships</i>	Manipulation of proportion and depth cues	Alters interpretation of objects and environments	Expands ambiguity and interpretative openness

Source: developed by the author based on [1, p. 101; 12; 13; 14; 15].

An important characteristic of abstract photographic practice is that meaning often develops before the viewer identifies any specific object or visual source. Perception is initially directed by formal relationships within the image itself. The eye responds to contrasts, rhythms, directional forces, density variations, and spatial tensions, creating a sequence of visual reactions that gradually evolve into conceptual interpretation [12]. For this reason, artistic meaning in abstract photography is not simply embedded within individual elements but arises from their interaction as a unified visual system.

This process can be observed in a wide range of contemporary photographic approaches. For example, images based on repetitive architectural fragments frequently generate impressions of order, regulation, or mechanical precision. Conversely, irregular organic textures captured at close range may evoke associations with growth, transformation, erosion, or instability [15]. In both cases, the photographed subject remains secondary to the visual logic established within the frame. What acquires significance is not the physical object itself but the network of relationships constructed through framing, scale selection, tonal balance, and structural emphasis.

Practical experience also indicates that the same visual element can produce markedly different meanings depending on its compositional context. A strong diagonal line may communicate movement and energy when isolated against a minimal background, yet the same line integrated into a dense arrangement of forms can contribute to visual tension or instability. Likewise, repetitive patterns may create a sense of harmony when evenly distributed, while disrupted repetition often introduces uncertainty and perceptual dissonance. Such variations demonstrate that artistic meaning is not inherent in individual forms but emerges through their relational organization.

Current developments in abstract photography increasingly emphasize the strategic use of reduction. Many successful projects deliberately limit visual information, allowing tonal transitions, material textures, spatial intervals, or subtle geometric structures to become the primary carriers of expression. This approach reflects a broader tendency within contemporary visual culture toward concentrated visual statements, where semantic depth is achieved through precision rather than accumulation [3, p. 639]. As a result, the effectiveness of abstract photographic imagery depends largely on the photographer's capacity to transform formal structures into meaningful visual experiences that remain open to multiple yet coherent interpretations.

The interpretation of abstract photographic images remains one of the most contested issues within contemporary artistic discourse due to the absence of stable representational references and the inherently open nature of visual meaning. A fundamental theoretical challenge concerns the determination of interpretative boundaries [11]. Unlike documentary or representational photography, abstract works often resist definitive readings, creating uncertainty regarding the extent to which meaning is shaped by authorial intention, visual structure, or the subjective experience of the viewer. This problem is further complicated by the coexistence of formalist, phenomenological, semiotic, and post-structural approaches, each proposing different criteria for understanding abstract visual expression.

Another significant challenge involves the tension between visual autonomy and contextual dependence. While abstract photography is frequently valued for its capacity to function independently of narrative content, contemporary exhibition practices, curatorial texts, digital platforms, and artist statements increasingly influence how works are perceived and interpreted [13]. As a result, the distinction between meanings generated by the image itself and those introduced through external contextual frameworks becomes progressively less clear.

From a practical perspective, the growing circulation of photographic images within digital environments has intensified issues of visual saturation and interpretative simplification. Abstract works are often encountered within accelerated viewing conditions dominated by social media interfaces and algorithmically curated visual streams, where sustained observation is replaced by rapid recognition. Under such circumstances, subtle compositional relationships, material qualities, and perceptual ambiguities that constitute the core of abstract photographic expression may remain insufficiently explored.

Additional difficulties arise from the increasing use of digital manipulation technologies and artificial intelligence–assisted image production. The expanding range of image-generation tools challenges conventional assumptions regarding

photographic authenticity, authorship, and the relationship between photographic observation and artistic construction [2]. Consequently, distinguishing between photographically derived abstraction and digitally generated visual simulation becomes an increasingly complex interpretative task.

A further problem concerns the absence of universally accepted evaluative criteria for abstract photographic works. Technical excellence alone does not guarantee artistic significance, while highly subjective interpretations may weaken analytical consistency. This creates difficulties for critical assessment, exhibition selection, collection practices, and scholarly analysis. At the same time, the broad accessibility of photographic technologies has contributed to a substantial increase in visually similar abstract imagery, making originality, conceptual coherence, and individual visual language increasingly important yet more difficult to achieve.

The cumulative effect of these challenges indicates that contemporary abstract photography operates within a dynamic field where perception, theory, technology, and artistic practice intersect. The principal difficulty is no longer the production of abstract images themselves but the development of interpretative approaches capable of accounting for their visual complexity, conceptual openness, and evolving cultural context without reducing them to either purely subjective impressions or narrowly formal analyses.

Enhancing interpretative approaches to abstract photography requires a balanced integration of intuitive perception and analytical examination. Such an approach makes it possible to preserve the openness of visual experience while ensuring a more grounded understanding of the formal mechanisms through which artistic meaning is constructed.

Interpretation should combine initial perceptual impressions with a systematic analysis of compositional relationships, including rhythm, contrast, texture, scale, and spatial organization. Greater emphasis should be placed on the interaction of visual elements rather than on the search for identifiable subjects or fixed meanings.

Contextual information related to artistic intention or project conception may enrich interpretation, but it should not replace direct engagement with the image itself.

Particular attention should also be given to the impact of contemporary digital technologies, which increasingly influence the production, circulation, and perception of abstract photographic works. At the same time, sustained visual observation and comparative analysis remain essential for developing more nuanced and critically informed interpretative practices. Such an approach enables a deeper understanding of abstract photography as a form of artistic expression situated between perceptual experience and formal visual construction.

Conclusions. The study has established that the artistic meaning of an abstract photographic image is constructed through the interaction of intuitive perception and compositional organization. It has been demonstrated that visual elements, formal structures, and compositional strategies function as the primary carriers of meaning, enabling abstract photography to operate as an autonomous form of artistic expression.

The principal challenges involve the absence of unified interpretative criteria, the growing influence of digital technologies on image perception, the tension between subjective and analytical readings, and the increasing difficulty of maintaining originality within a visually saturated environment.

It is substantiated that a balanced combination of intuitive engagement and compositional analysis provides the most productive framework for interpreting abstract photographic works. Prospects for further research include the study of cognitive mechanisms of visual perception, the empirical analysis of interpretative practices in contemporary photography, and the impact of AI-based technologies on abstract photographic creation and reception.

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