

Digital Feedback

Photographer experiments with abstraction through video and images

By Rose Davidson

By looking beyond what others see, Robert Metzger is working to redefine how people understand the artistic medium of photography.

Born and raised on a small farm near Carroll, Ohio, Metzger started college at The Ohio State University on an engineering path. But after taking an introductory photography class as a sophomore, he began to plot a new course toward a bachelor's degree in that new field.

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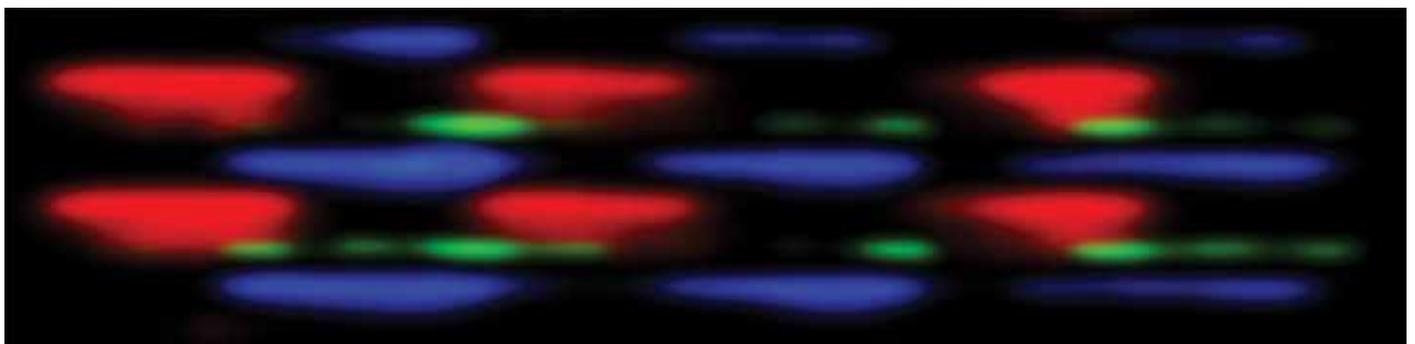
“I just loved everything about it, so I thought that was the best route to go and changed majors,” Metzger says.

Since earning his degree 20 years ago, he has been behind the camera professionally and received many awards. These include four grants from the Greater Columbus Arts Council's Individual Artist Fellowship program, the most recent in 2011.

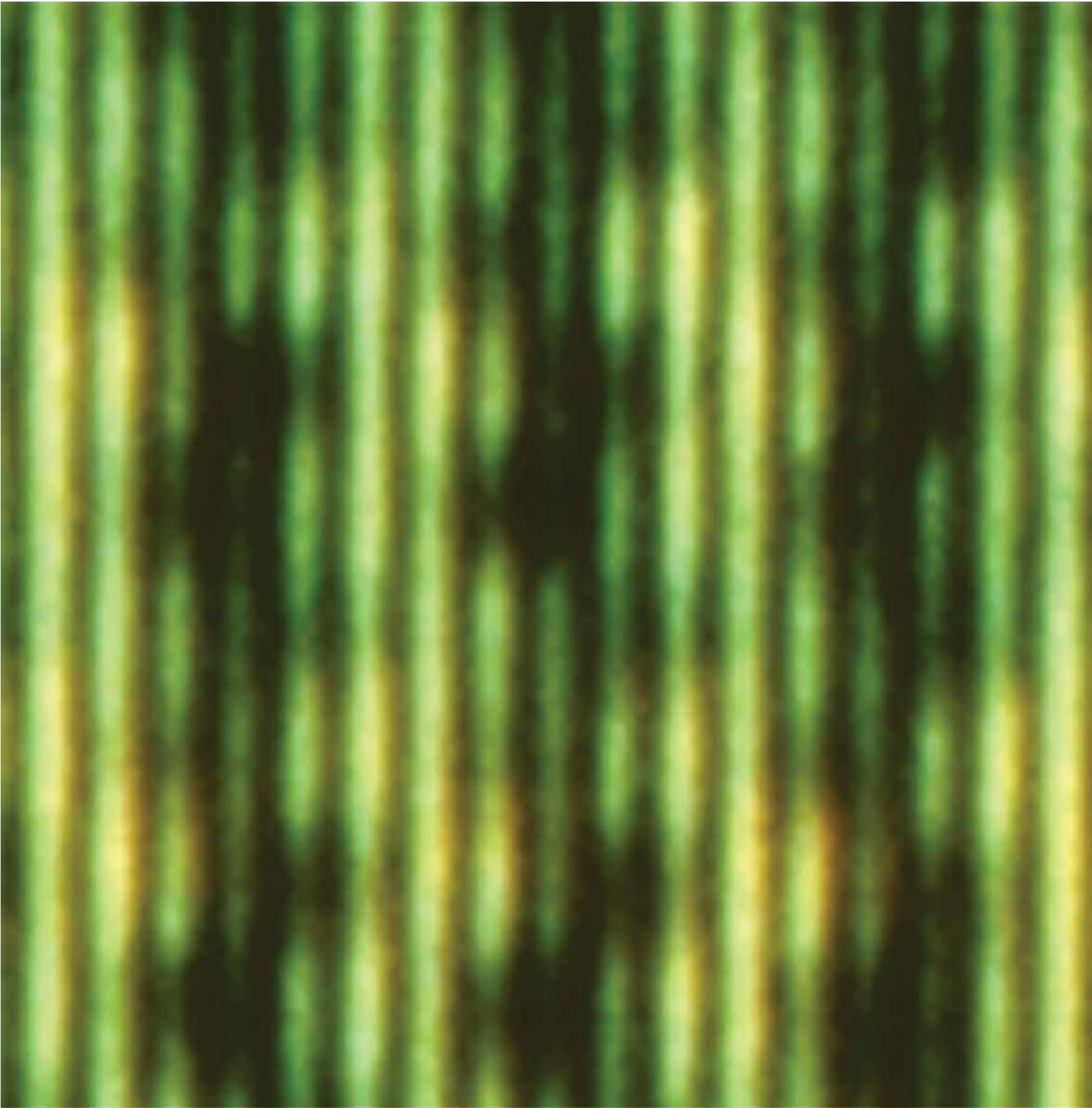
Though he's dabbled in various methods of photography, lately he's been focusing primarily on abstraction. Metzger credits his unique artistic process to curiosity and pure experimentation.

“This work was basically the result of an experiment that I did,” Metzger says. “I like to explore things – I like to look deeper, look beyond what might be the obvious.”

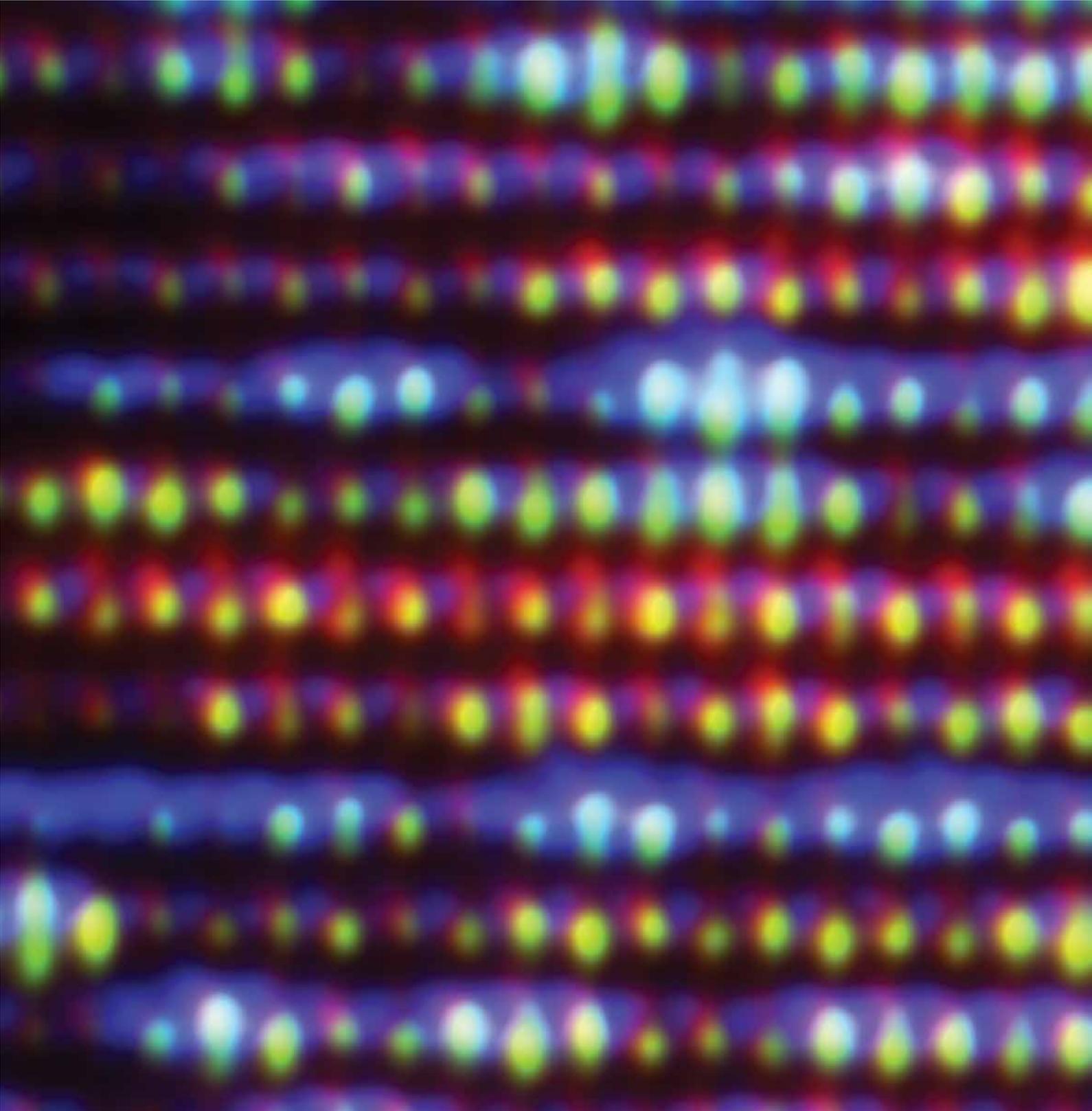
Rather than photographing traditional subjects, such as animals or cityscapes, Metzger has developed a new way of looking at what's considered a photograph. His artistic process centers on exploring the effects of digital feedback. By placing



Blackjack



Helix



Abacus

video cameras in front of color television monitors, Metzger began by recording the video feedback as the camera lens attempted to focus in on its subject. On his website, he describes the effect as “similar to the repel of two magnets at odds with each other’s polarity.”

From there, Metzger has reviewed the video footage and taken photographs to isolate still images. The video material served as the original source for his photographs, but his photographs also become new sources of imagery as he continues to create his art. Each generation of photographs becomes material for the next, he says.

“That’s the way I continue to work, so certain pieces of work may become a brand new piece,” Metzger says. “I focus deep down on certain aspects of an image and transform that into a new piece. That element kind of transforms and distorts and really becomes a new image in and of itself.”

He’s inspired by his understanding of the photographic process as it was conducted prior to the digital revolution, when darkroom techniques presented a plethora of challenges for photographers.

“When I was in school, photography was still very much a hands-on, wet process with negatives and film paper, so that whole tactile experimenting and knowing the physics and science behind the medium inspired me to look beyond the obvious,” Metzger says.

Metzger, who currently resides in the Short North, also offers his creative energy to his job as wholesale business director for Stauf’s Coffee Roasters in Grandview Heights. He stays busy with other endeavors as well, contributing photographs to an upcoming cookbook titled *Better than Vegan* by friend and local chef Del Sroufe, executive chef at the Wellness Forum. The book is due out in early December.

Metzger also serves as a board member for the Columbus Film Council. Recently, he acted as a juror for the council’s screening of the Columbus International Film + Video Festival, which takes place Nov. 3-17.

But with so much going on, Metzger still manages to find time to create two or three finished pieces in the average month.

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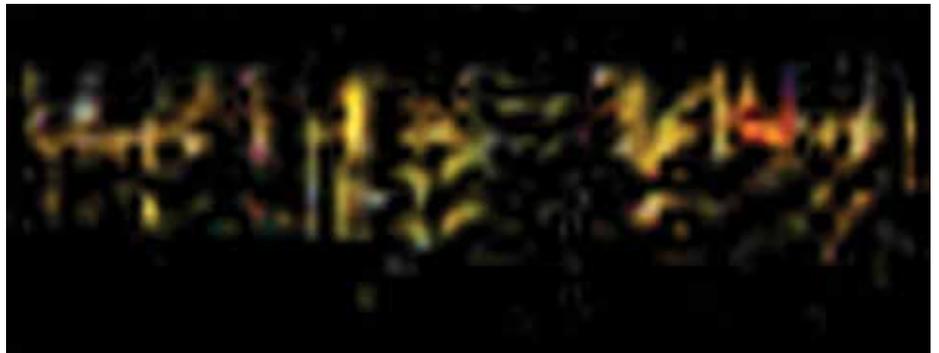
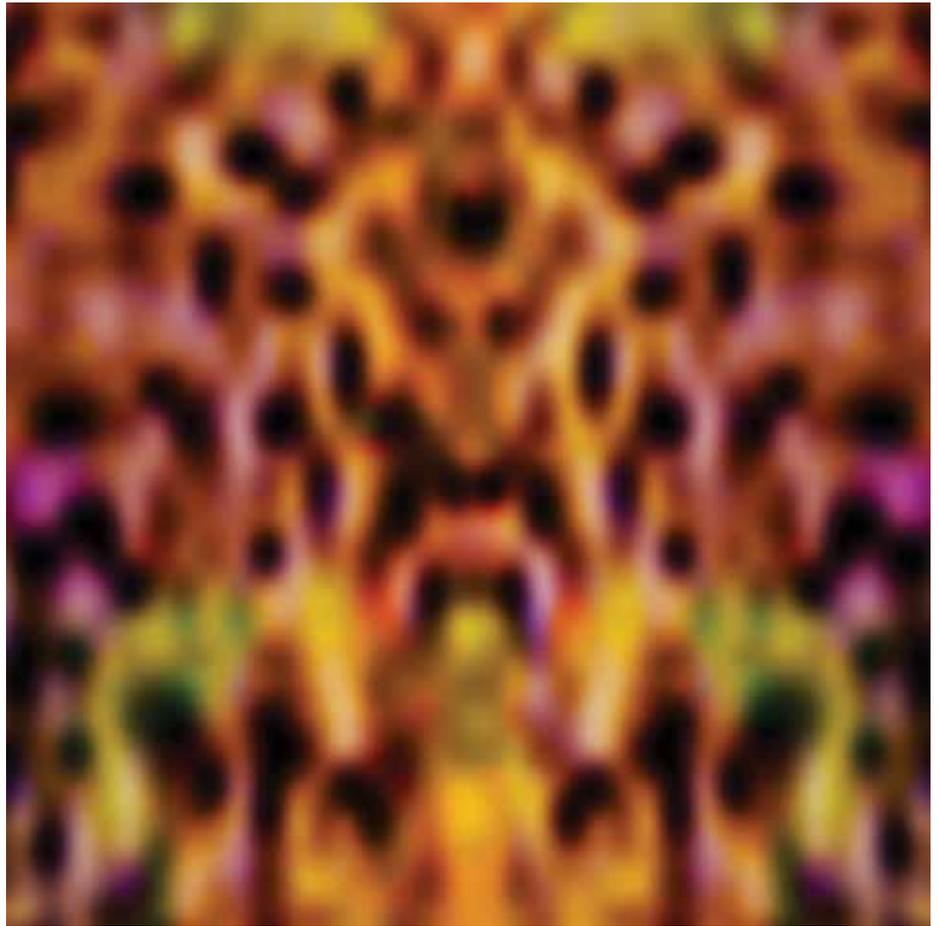
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“There’s always my ‘work in progress’ folder that I’m constantly going through,” Metzger says. **CS**

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Top: *Release*

Middle: *Club*

Bottom: *Zenith Beach*

