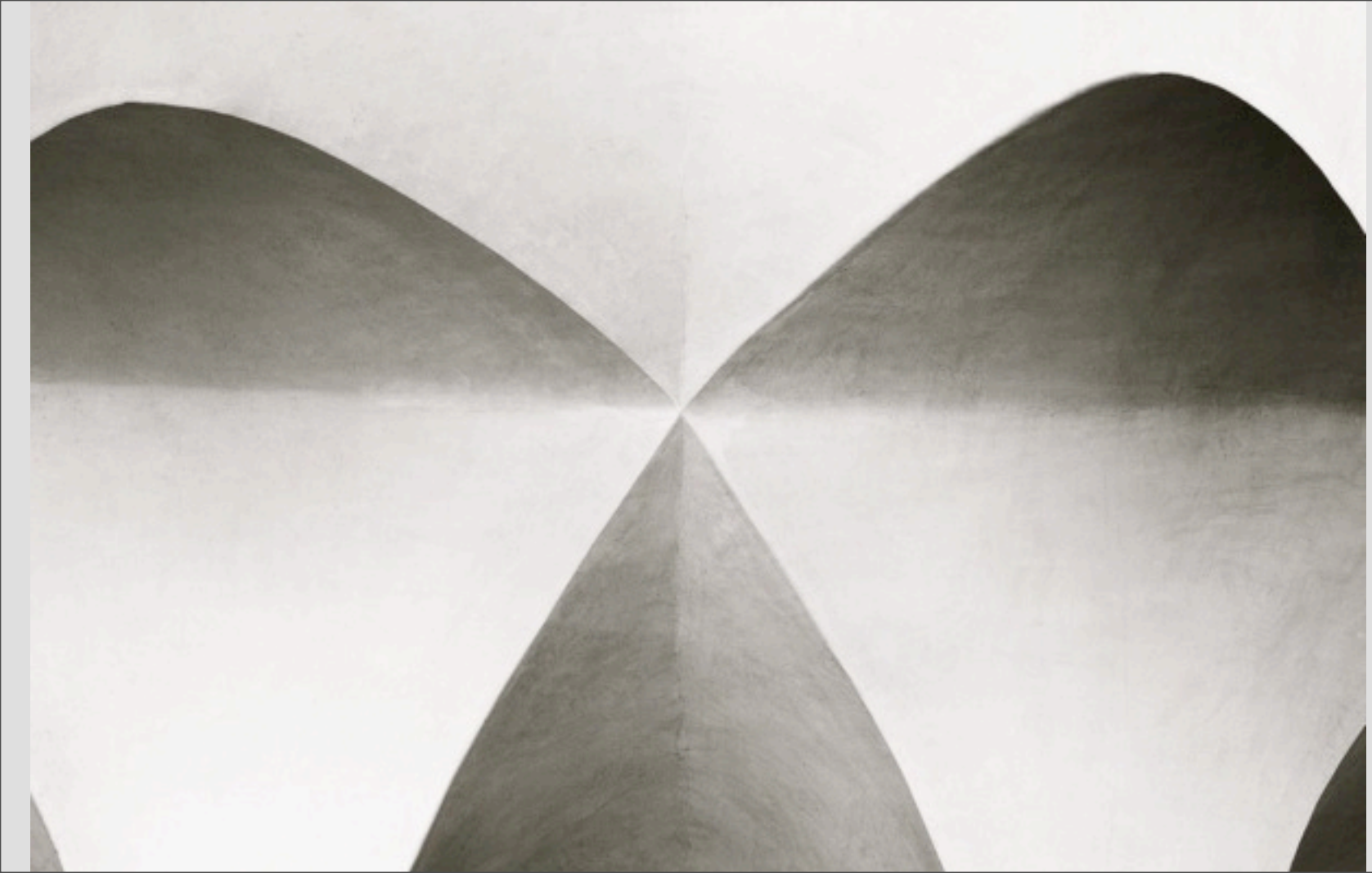




i would like now to introduce a series of details from plaster Cross-Vaults, some from old Jerusalem and others from old Aleppo.

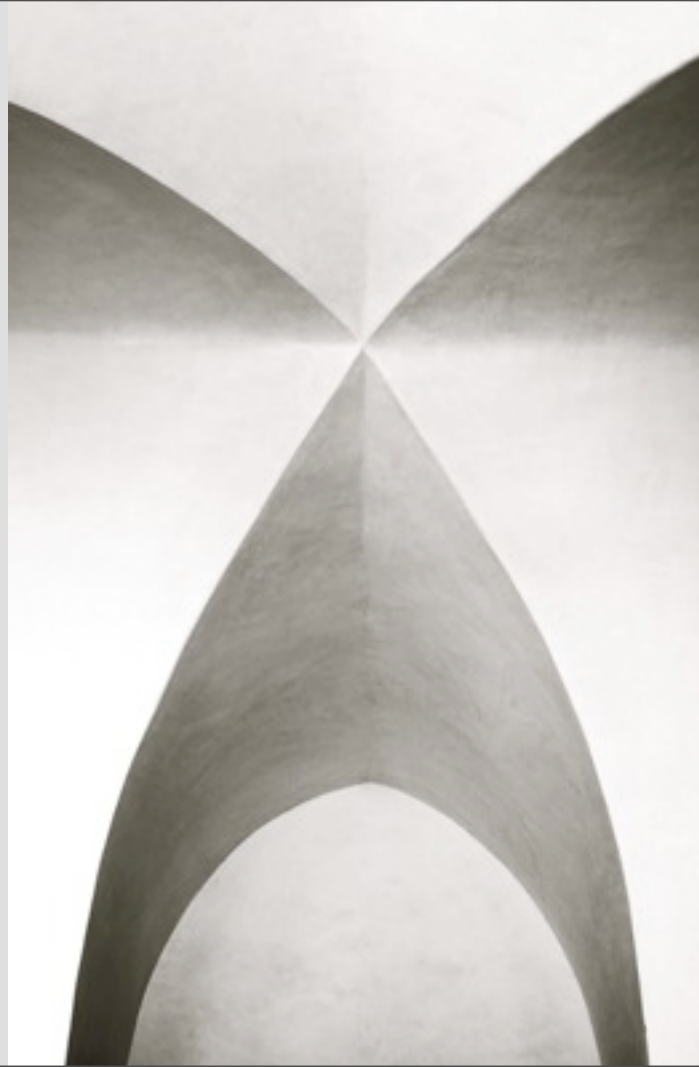


Ruth once remarked, the only hope for the future lies in miscegenation, in cross-fertilization.

Second and third generation immigrants drive (or not) the deepening awareness of the Other. I am one such actor, trying to bridge a Palestinian and American heritage. These vaults accomplish this bridging in a uniquely personal way for me.



With these Vaults, I like to take one of my most despised forms, the X, which for me is a symbol of exclusion, I want to make it beautiful, to plumb it for poetry, for shade, for texture, for pattern. I want to reduce it, and see how its geometric components collide, how they define their relationship to each other and the world around.



4

Instead of the X-clusion of this form elsewhere (in fences, in language, in the gestures of people warding off evil), I find here urban symmetries of rough hand labor, [CLICK] the plaster skin that finishes the bullwark of the compressed rubble of these urban stone architectural vaults... pushing down towards the earth's core.
zoom in....



...the plaster skin that finishes the bullwark of the compressed rubble of these urban stone architectural vaults... pushing down towards the earth's core.
zoom in....

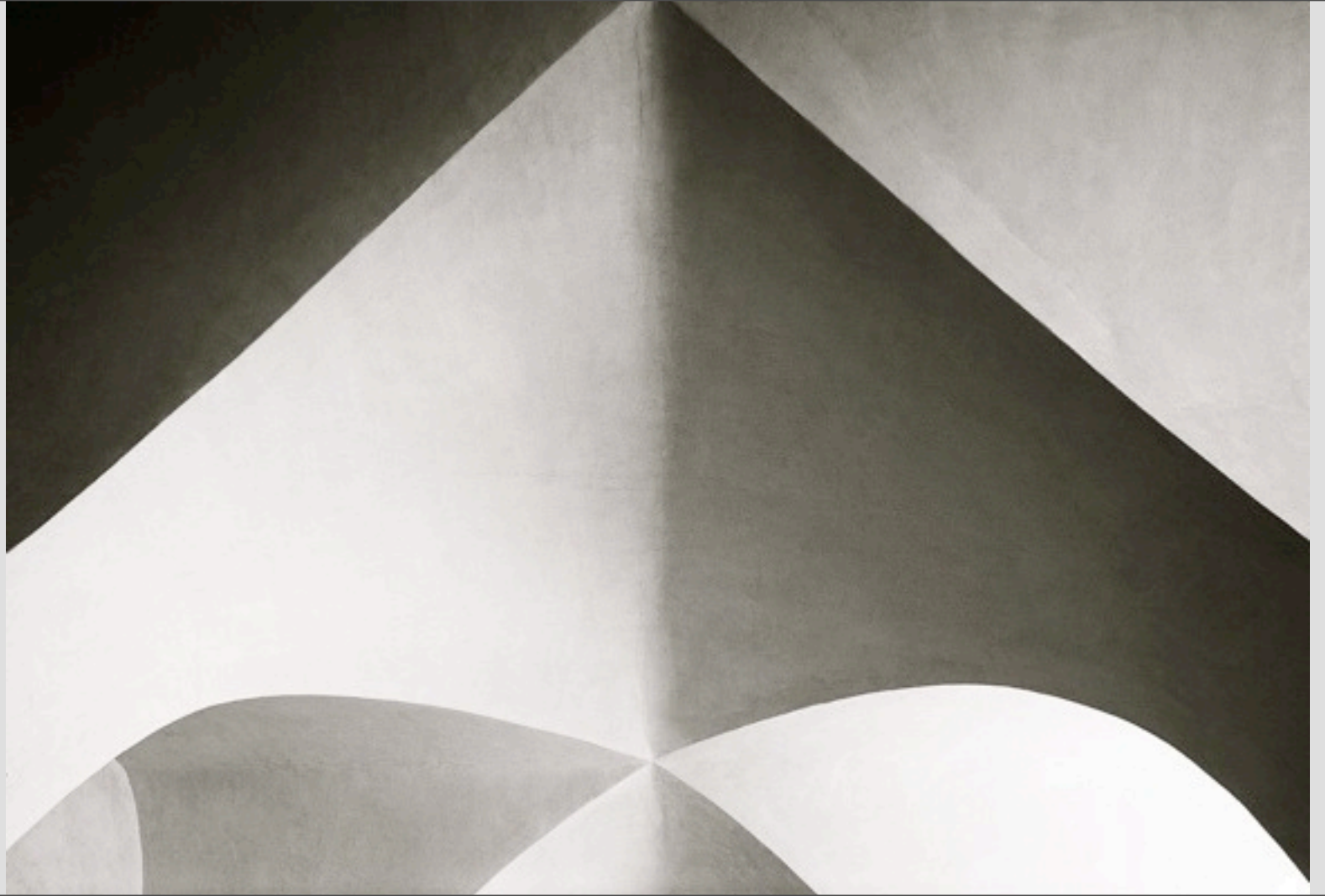
Close-up, it's sometimes a delicate quiet texture with fine scrapes and scratches of hand happenstance.



6

Individually, these are studies in Point, Line, & Intersection.

[I experience them as fugues with a rhythmic interplay of light and dark.]



They are also an exercise with visceral tensions:
My goal is to juggle & balance direction, line, plane,
symmetries, shapes



I am delighted by Figure–Ground inversions, by interactive patterns that im–ply and multi–ply beyond their limits in a given frame.



Especially in arcades, the vaults do in fact tessellate. Wikipedia, in defining tessellation, notes that **“Generalizations to higher dimensions are also possible.”** i.e. people get metaphysical about this stuff, and I am no exception. There is something atavistic about both the forms and the repetitions.



The abrupt juxtaposition of these instances of aesthetic geometric order and tactile nuance and delicacy in an otherwise loud dank urban chaotic environment incidently provide **adornment, livlieness, meaning,** and an **agreeable mystification** of underlying structure. This is just one of the ways that pattern and environment conspire to create metaphor.



These Vaults are ultimately chthonic creations.
a. they are an outgrowth of an urban underworld, normally dark, unmolested by graffiti. They are basic raw elementary geometric designs; they are the unconscious expression of structural order that is particular to this region, and which I have never seen anyone stop to savor.



They are also indigenous subterranean rhythms that re-appear across the regional urban landscape, from the Atlantic toward the Asian steppes. They show a Culture modulating, re-articulating itself across time & space, in a manner consistent but totally non-national.



These Vaults, in their regional expression, blur the petty borders and insistent nationalisms that pepper today's headlines.



I first noticed and after a few weeks began working with these Vaults back in 1994. Here you see the most rudimentary hourglass form of the X.



15

Here's a study of an entirely different expression of the same form from Ayyubid (13th c.) woodwork. Same inversion of triangles, in an interlace pattern, and their integration or expansion with hexagons



With my Vault studies, these geometric figures appear in an organic form. They move, dissolve, bend...

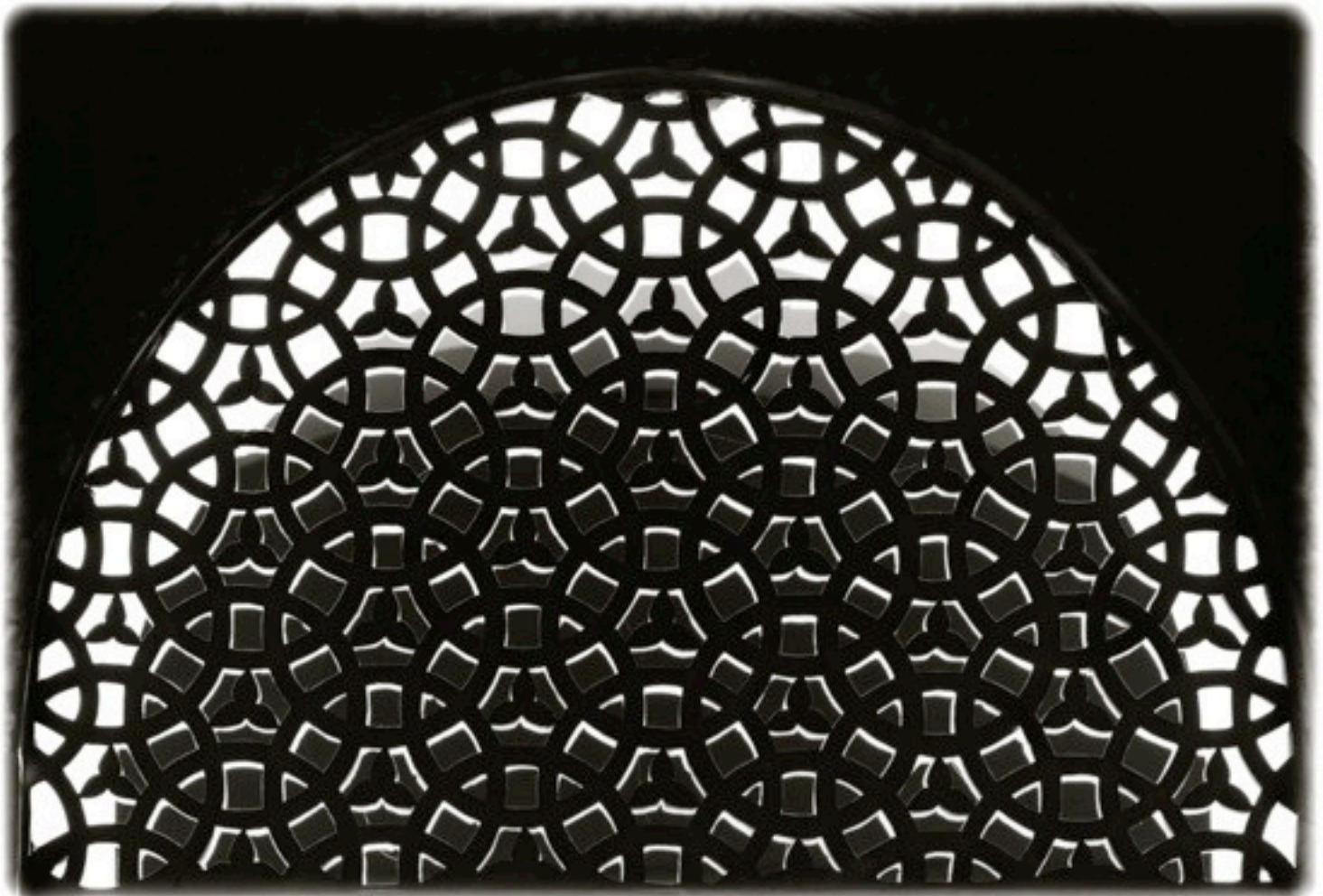


...spin about their apex, and blur about their boundaries, forever giving new expression.

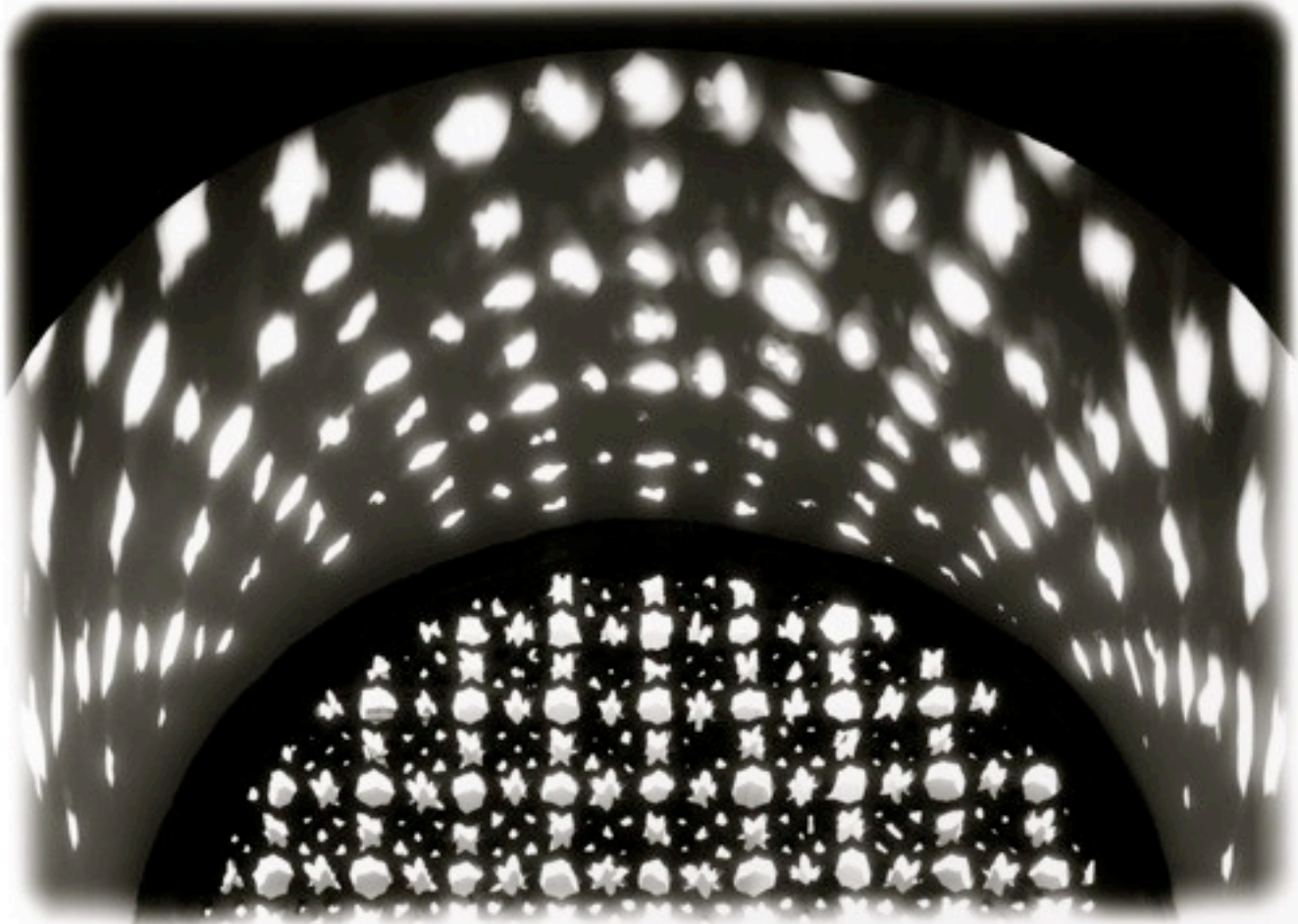
I hope you see how they bridge a geographically distant concrete reality with a complex geometric tradition and an elaborate web of psychological associations.



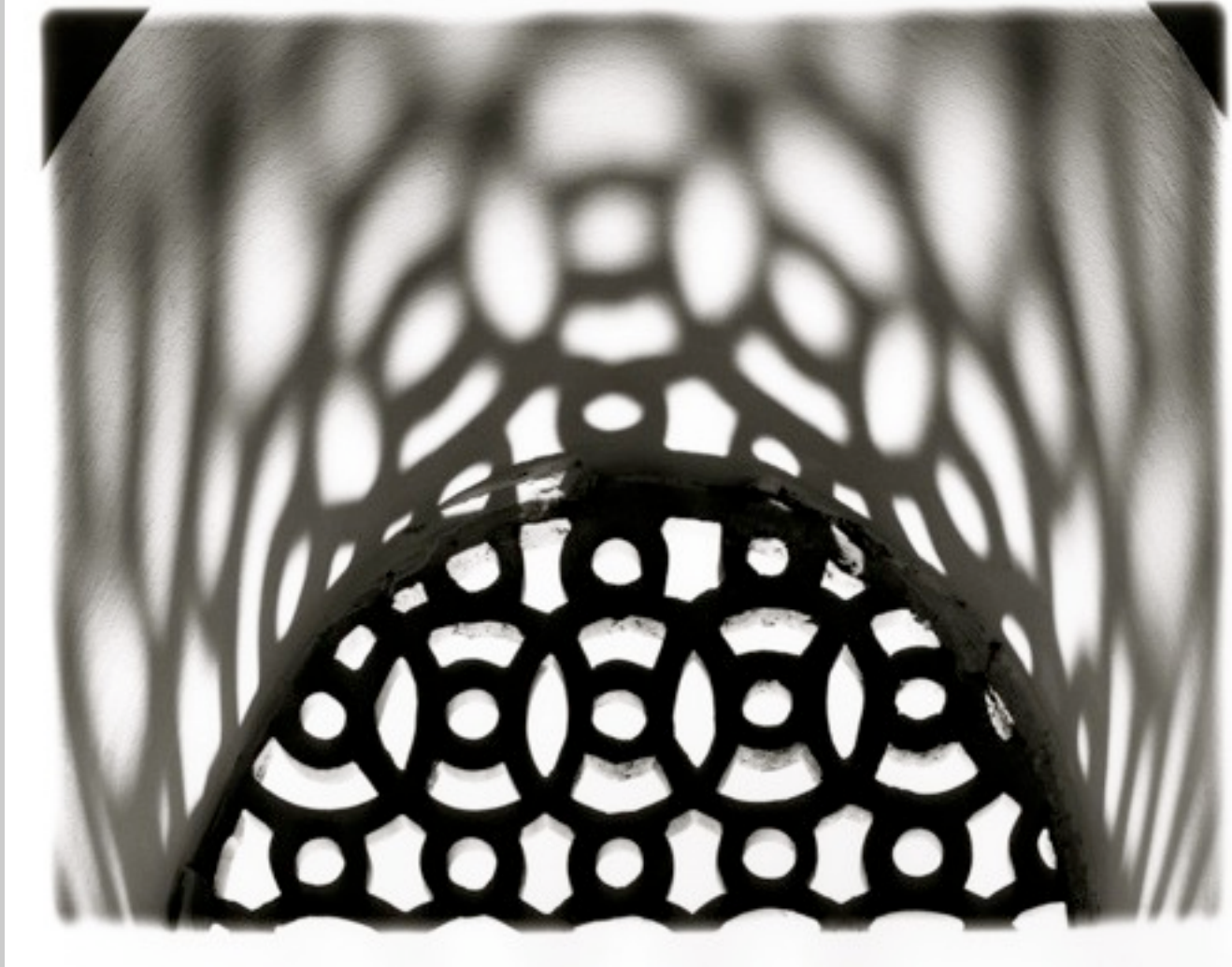
I'll continue working with these forms. But I want to take my few final minutes and share another recent series...



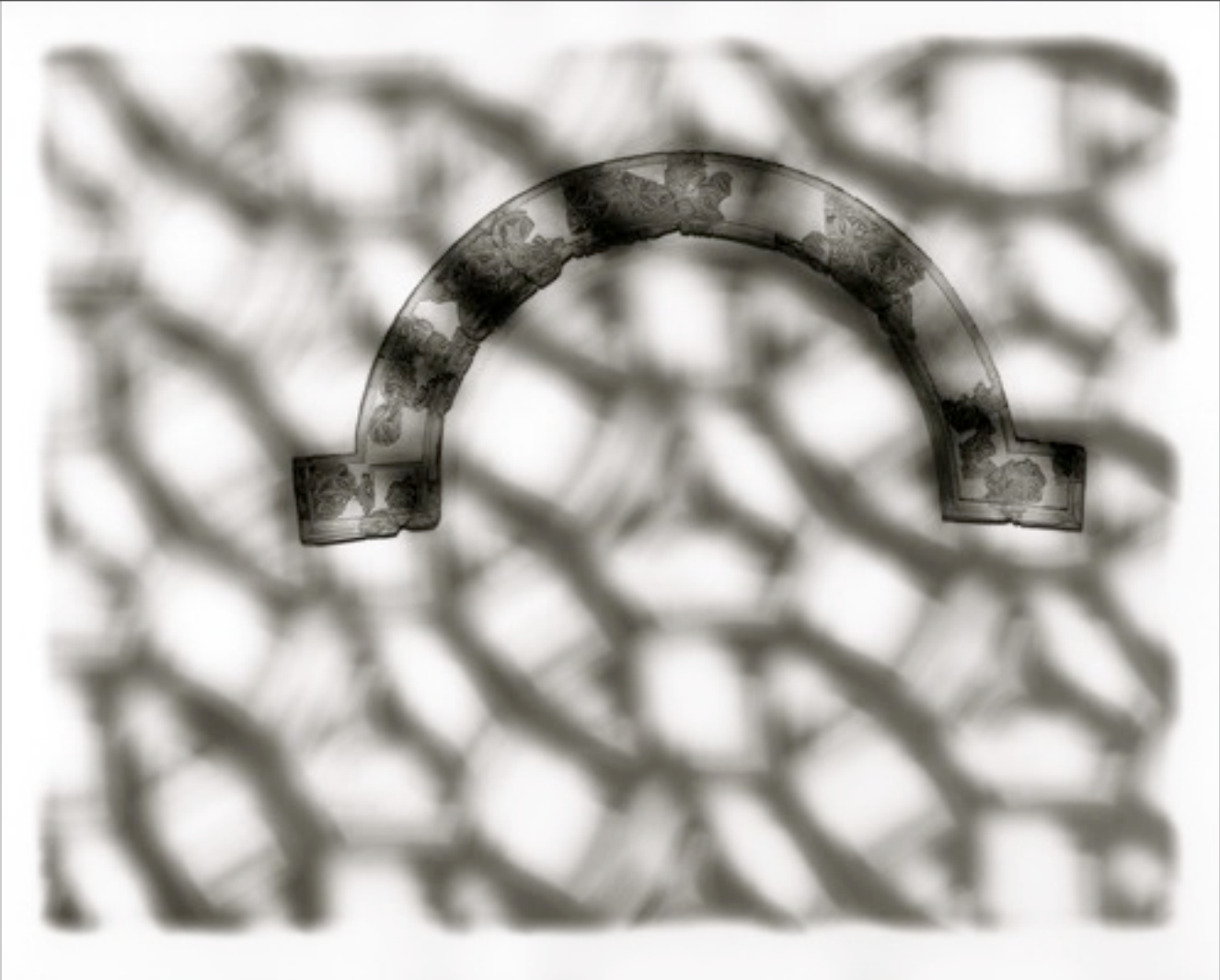
Modulations of Light. A study of the Umayyad grilles excavated from QHG and reconstructed in the DNM. They too are a distillation of influence



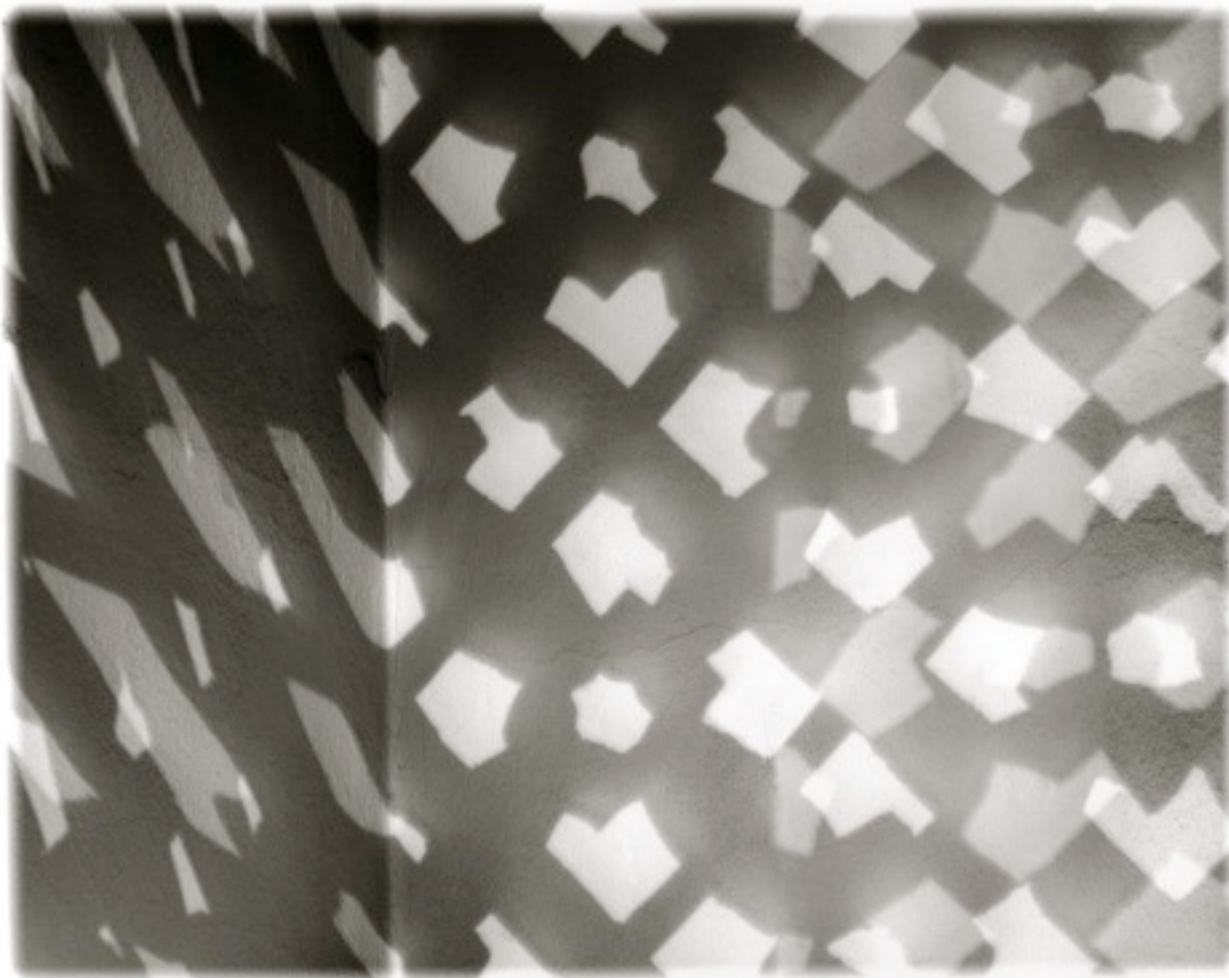
I was trying to take these Umayyad designs beyond static 2-dimensions: I used my lights to activate their shadow role



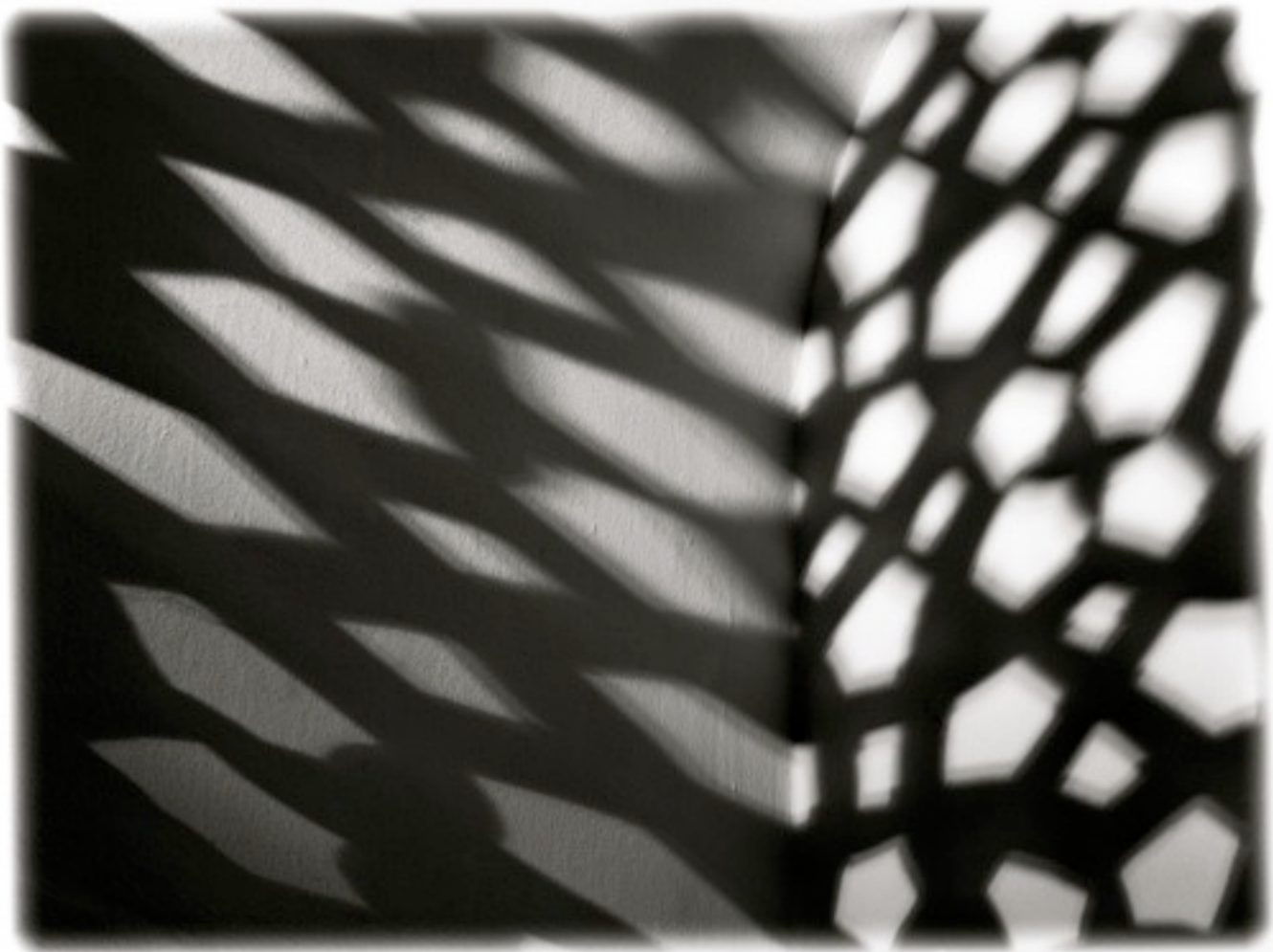
Not only was I trying to imagine how these grilles enlivened their original domestic environments, I was trying to get at their active energy impulse itself



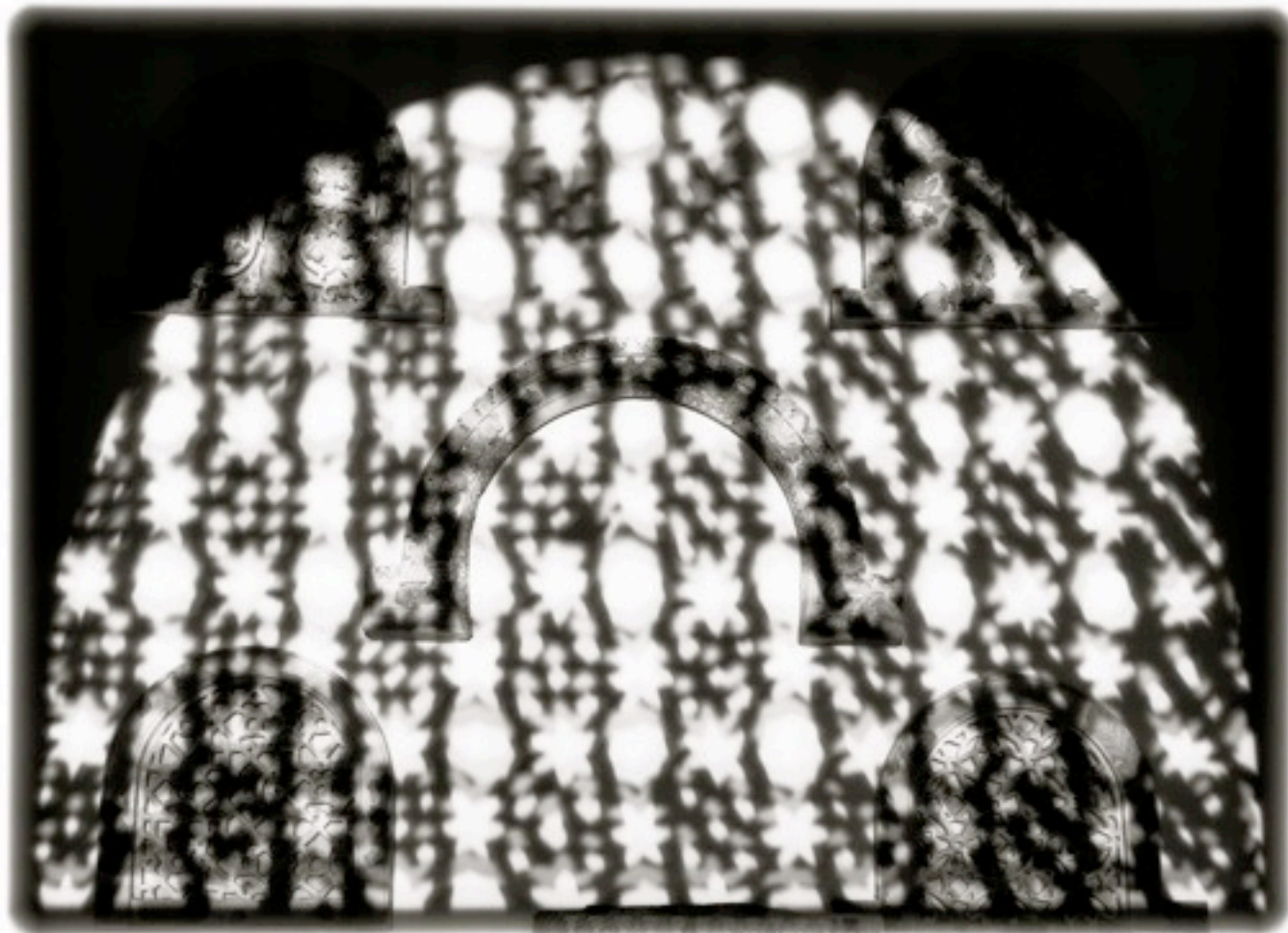
You see, my game is to fuel the creative fires within and simultaneously preserve something culturally delicious. I want to interpret and amplify the expressive potential of some of these early designs.



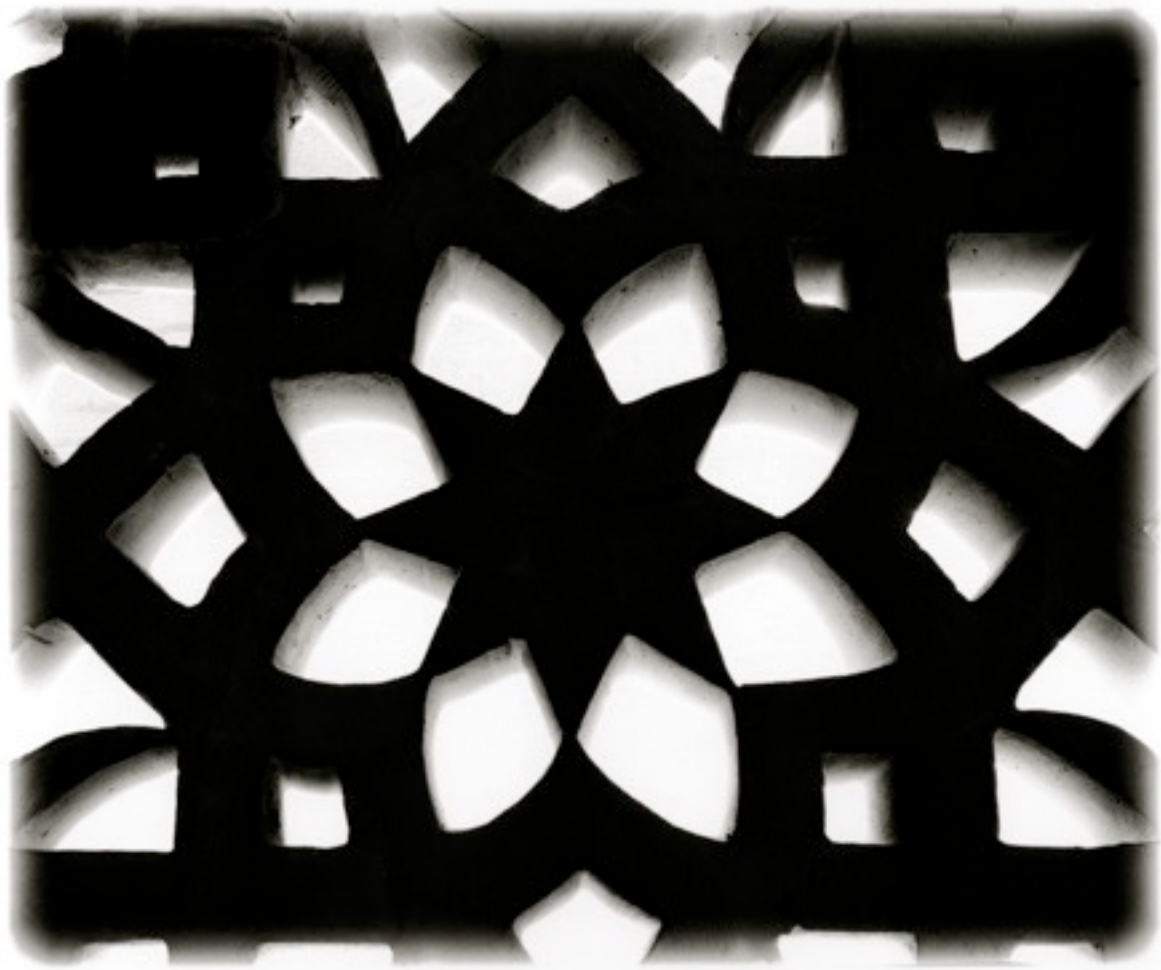
The Islamic curator in Damascus, upon seeing these studies, exclaimed with delight that people had been coming to her institution for 40 years and no one had ever done anything like this before. For me, this was one of the highest compliments I could receive.



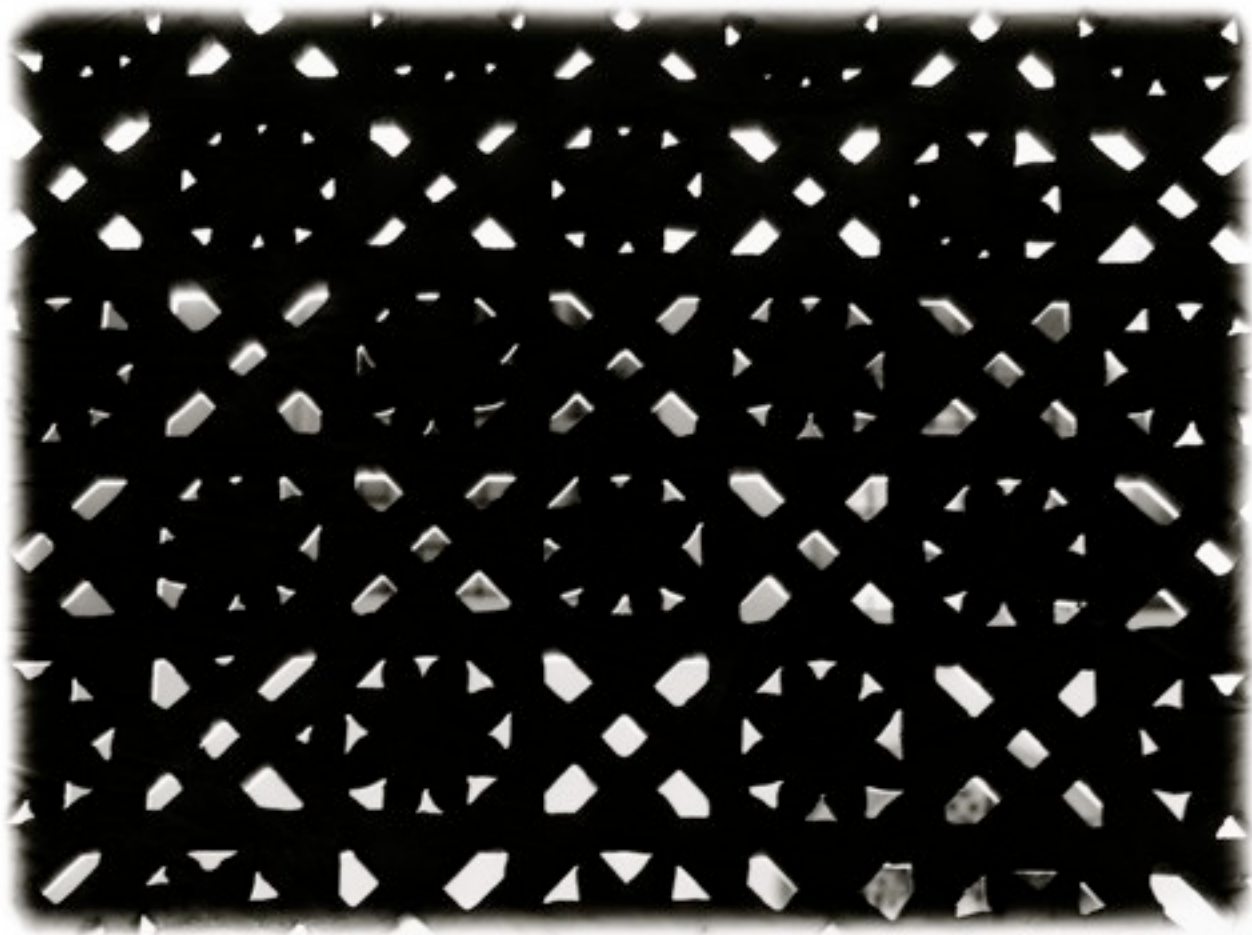
These latticeworks and interlaces represent to me a cultural preoccupation with diversity and the integration of multiple elements in a unifying whole.



By going back to the origins of the Islamic culture, and by showing you examples from over 1400 years of creative production, including my own... I hope to demonstrate my observation that this preoccupation is not just my own, it is in the DNA of the culture

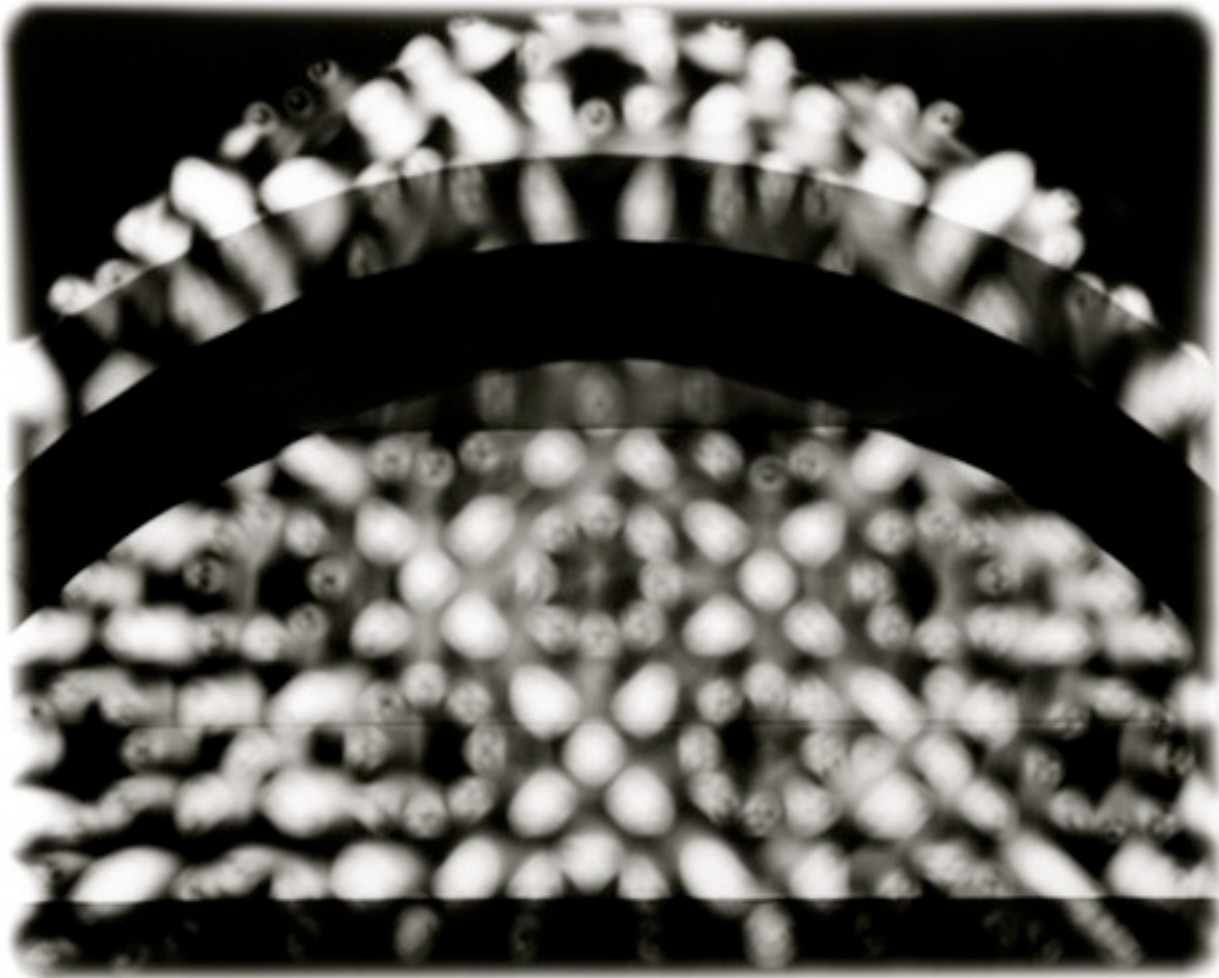


So when you see these patterns over the shoulders of mediaheads, in the usually violent and politically-biased news, when you hear people say that “there are no partners for peace on the other side,” remember these images as paths, as a language, a code, and an urging, longing, creative struggle to integrate and heal the web of personal, social, and spiritual inter-relations

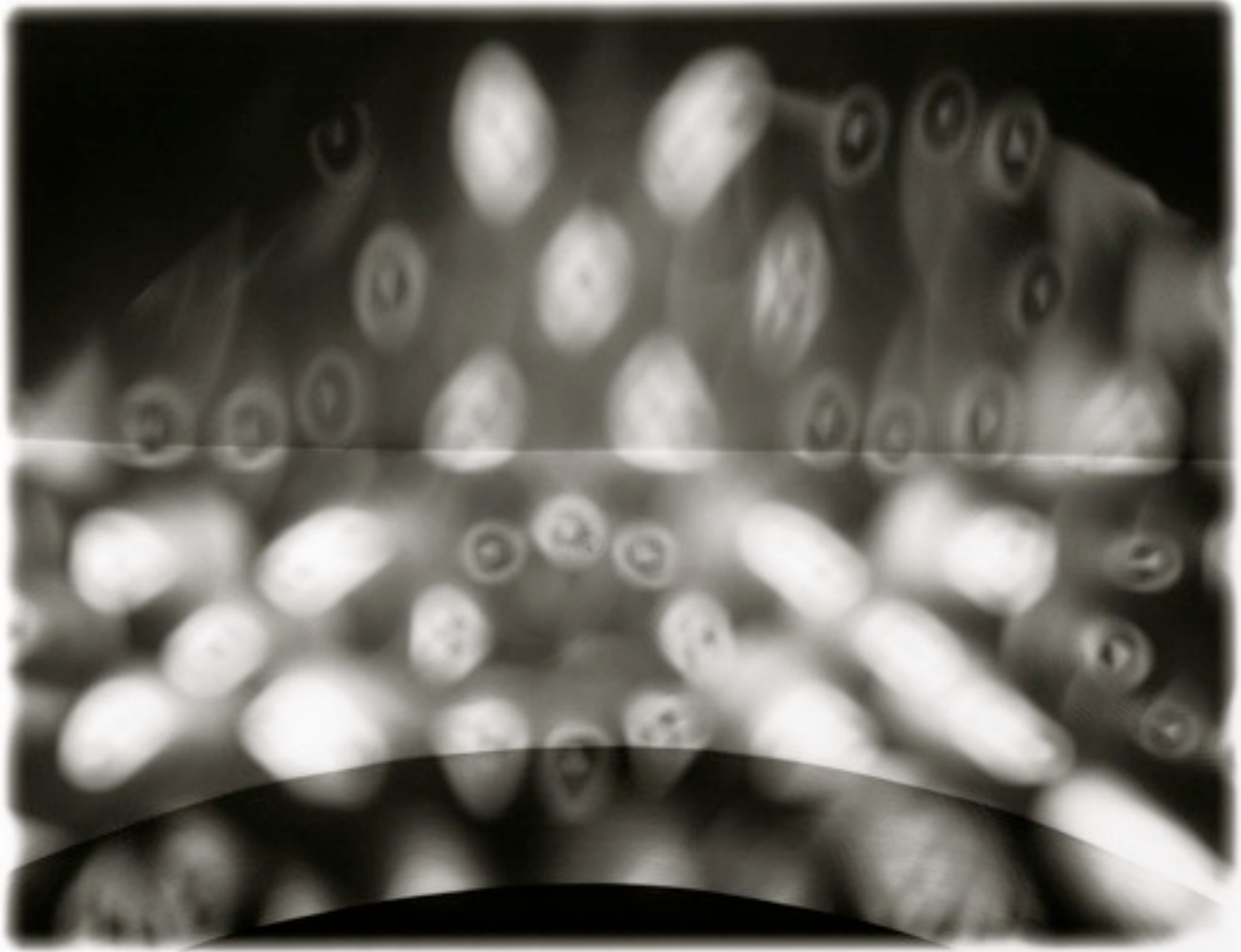


Even in the darkest shadows of human experience, the bonds that hold us together are far more beautiful than those that push us apart.

this is the song i sing



In a lot of my work, I try to make this insubstantial power, this force that holds things together and animates creation, I try to make it explicit. You saw how I did it with iridescence.



I found that I could make these plaster grilles work like prisms and lenses: they diffracted and broke up the light into constituent integral —and coincidentally, geometric— components. Gelatin silver prints, their extraordinary detail and capacity for communicating minutiae...



...literally reveal —in this detail— the vibrating forces that animate us. They also manifest some of the geometric forms and patterns that are the building blocks, not only of matter but of light. What a thrill as a photographer and human to not only see this language and this line of thought expressed so regularly through history, but to dip into this trough repeatedly and find new ways to express hope, optimism, and affirmation. It is not necessary for me to focus on Islamic art and culture in order to have this experience...

{detail of previous}



I've found many ways to explore the same themes, here in 1992 in the Mojave Desert, looking up through a smokethorn bush. It's probably no more than my mischievousness that keeps me illuminating fraternity in an Islamic context, but dammit, in this country i cannot find many opportunities to see and hear this language...



... so i have to resurrect it or make it myself.
Thanks for listening and looking.