



VENETIAN COLOR

Eric Uhlfelder



Made on a Mac

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Rio delle Muneghette

FOUND ART

Perhaps as incredible as any sight in Venice is that completely unexpected experience of seeing the city for the very first time. It is as remarkable a memory as any you carry away from the place. And yet, it is impossible to share this feeling with anyone who hasn't been there.

More than a century ago, Claude Bragdon, an architectural writer on tour in Venice, was all too aware of this dilemma in reporting back to his journal in the states.

"Everything I had read was clean forgotten--swallowed up in wonder--and during my first moments on the Grand Canal I suffered from a sort of indignation that no one had in any way prepared me for what I found there . . . The charm of the place is indescribable, that men through all the centuries have tried to utter it, and I was witness to their failure . . . How should one convey the idea of light to a blind man or of such color as is there to dwellers in the gray-brown cities of the North? Venice is a shattered rainbow, built into a city."

The experience of Venice is as much fairy tale as it is reality. She treats your senses to rare sights and then challenges them to acknowledge that what you are seeing actually exists. In realizing this, I no longer wondered why images could tell only part of her story? And this must be the ultimate paradox: a city that inspires artists from around the world, all realizing that the spirit that has touched can never be fully conveyed to those who haven't been there.

But some extraordinary paintings do indeed come close to bringing one to the Laguna: Renoir's fiery sky in his *Fog in Venice*; Sargent's luscious shades of pinkish browns in his nearly monochromatic *Par Temps Gris*. Perhaps the least realistic but most striking images are Turn-

er's tempestuous abstractions of the Grand Canal.

What these artists saw was not what you see touring with your eyes wide open, but what you take in when they are nearly closed, as if trying to correct for nearsightedness. But instead of clarity, you seek the opposite effect--relaxed, unfocused sight, reading only light, form, and color. Impression.

I have been inspired by these artists, seeking comparable effect when shooting through the city's winter fog. But the images in this collection represents a shift away from more broad, subtle composition, focusing instead on the pieces of Bragdon's shattered rainbow.

While it would appear that Venice has remained the same for centuries, the city's palette is constantly changing. And it's the hand-adorned pigment in which the city is finished that for me is Venice.

The local government strictly regulates the use of colors. But it's when Venetians take matters into their own hands that remarkable results are produced. However, this is sometimes only discernable when cropped by a camera's viewfinder.

Venetians like to paint things outdoors. When they are finished, cleaning their brushes first involves a good swipe along the nearest surface. It may be a parapet bordering a canal like the Rio Tera San Isepo and a barn in Murano. Long wooden walls that temporarily enclosed a portion of Giardini became a public canvas.

The layering of these smears over time has produced some pretty messy surfaces. But peer in a bit closer and occasionally you can uncover modernism. One could almost imagine Rothko or Kandinsky inspired by what came naturally to Venetians.

Graffiti is one of the city's biggest problems. It has scarred Venice, and attempts to conceal it have created an unnatural wainscot to the city's streets, permanently altering the look of Venice. But on rare occasion, the layering of some light-handed vandals has produced a striking look.

When using the same background color that's been sitting in a can rather than aging on a wall to cover up graffiti, building owners have often created Ad Reinhardt likenesses involving the monochromatic overly of patterns over patterns.

Venetian color is certainly not restricted to the walls of the city. We can see it in the rail freight cars in the Marittima, the floor tiles of San Marco, Murano glass, the handpainted fabrics of Norellen and the undulating chromatic swirls of Venetian papery found in stationary shops across the Laguna.

However, for me, the most compelling compositions are the found pieces of art secreted away along the back streets of Venice, uncovered by first scanning haphazardly across painted surfaces and then focusing in tightly to sculpt design that for me reveals the chromatic wonder of the city and character that is more than just accident.

Eric Uhlfelder
New York City
November 2007



Ramo Secondo de le Erbe.



Campiello de le Strope



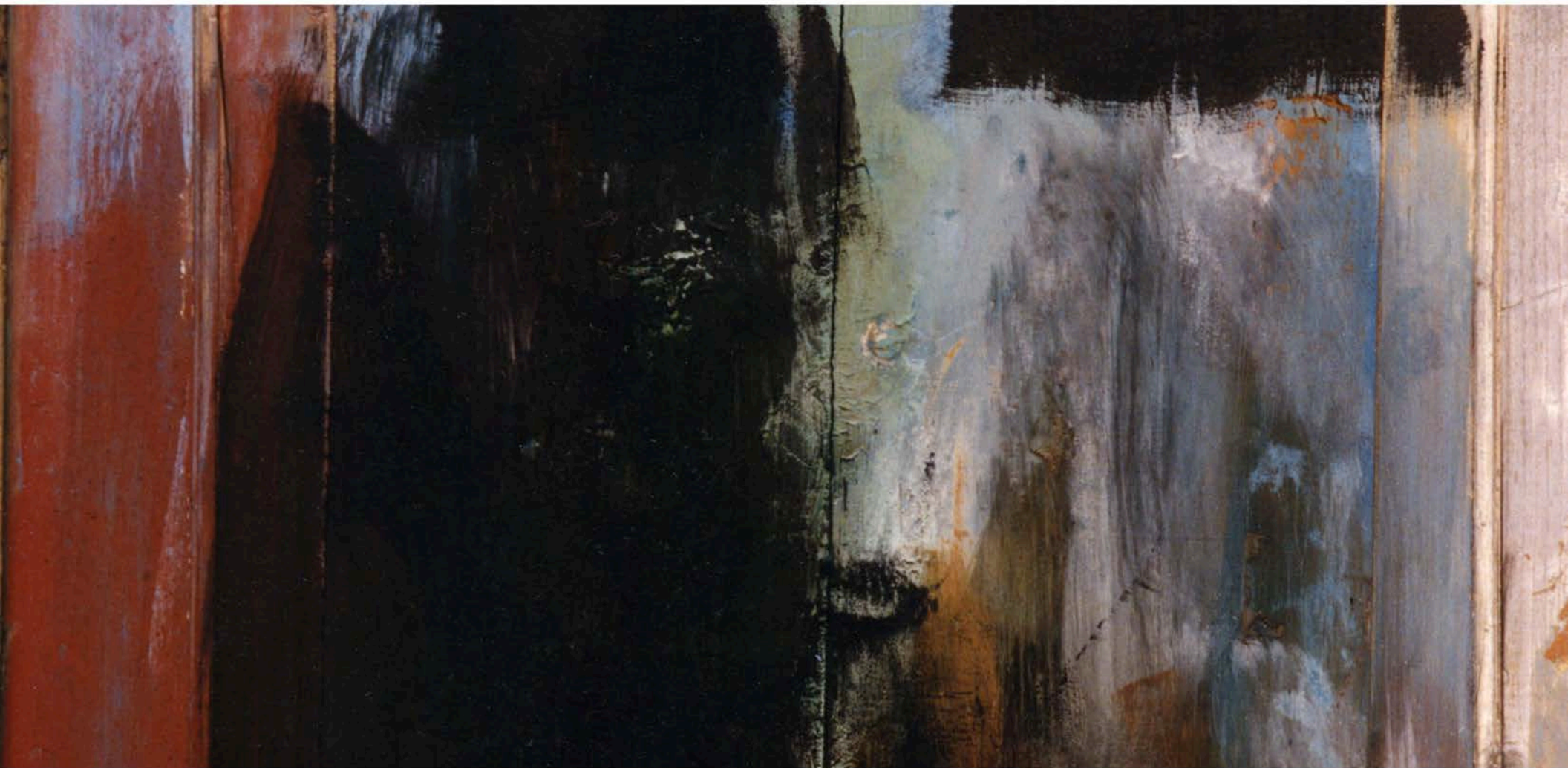
Campiello Querini Stampalia









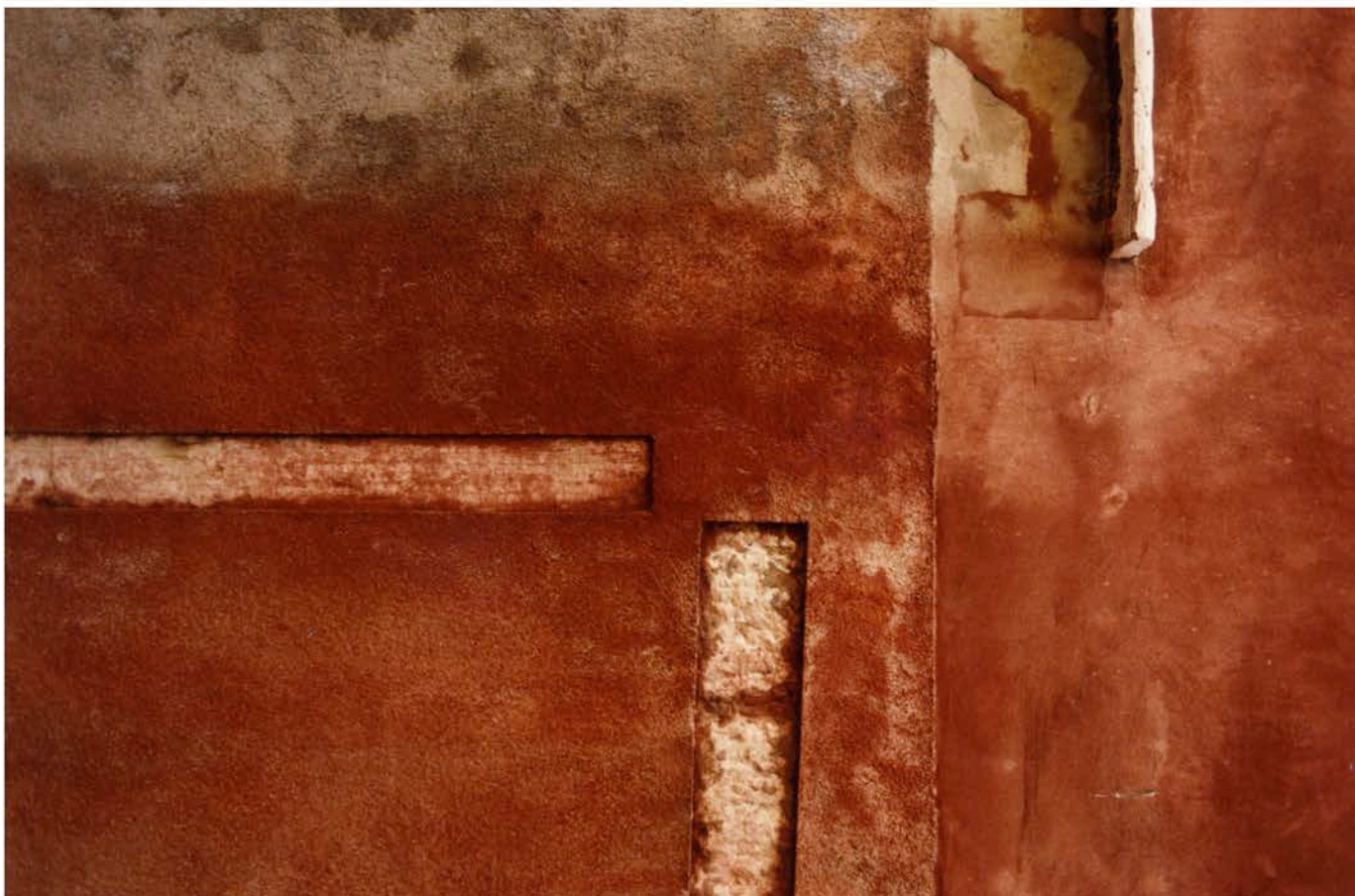


Barn Murano





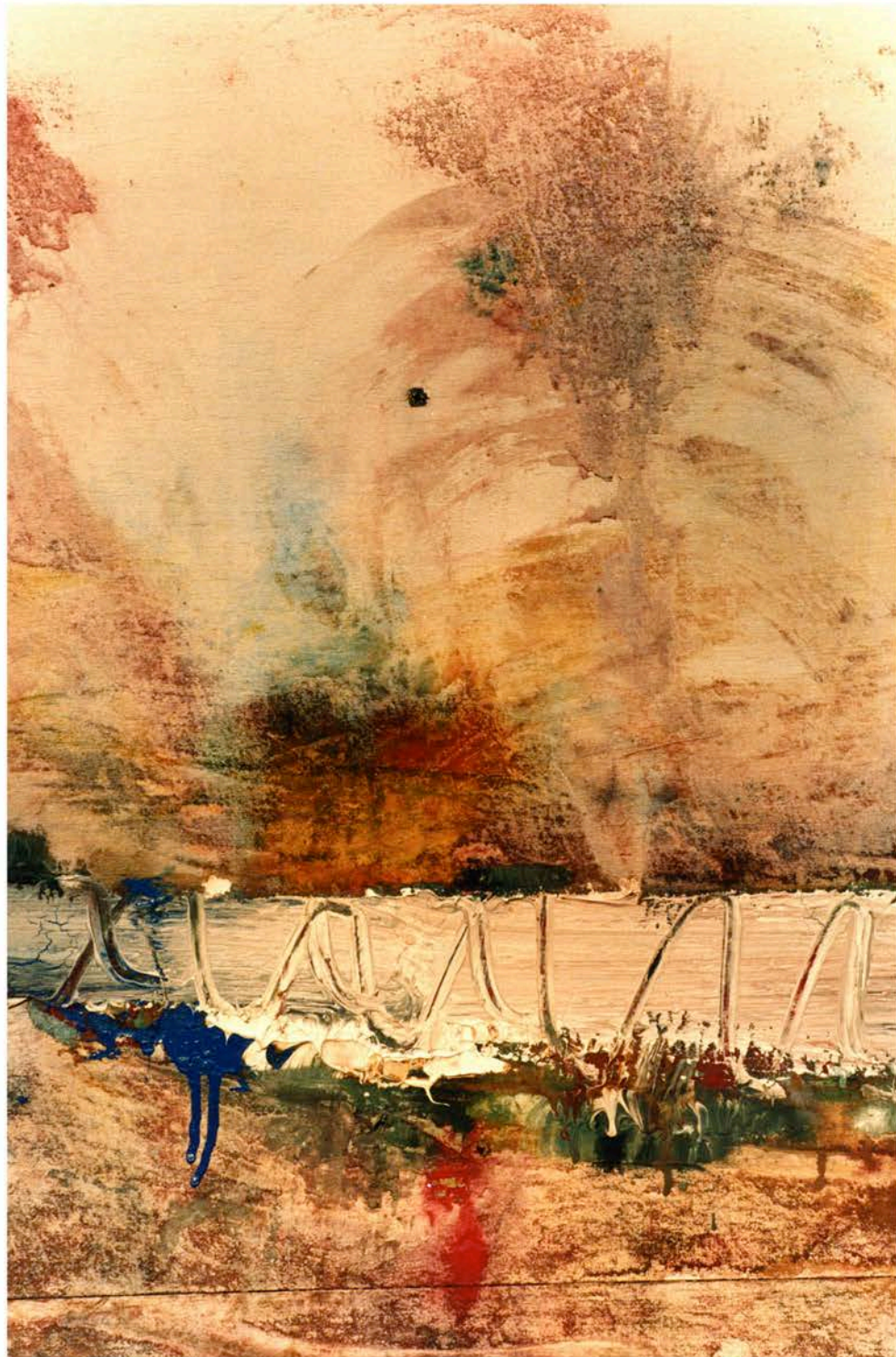
Seco Marina



Calle del Tabacco

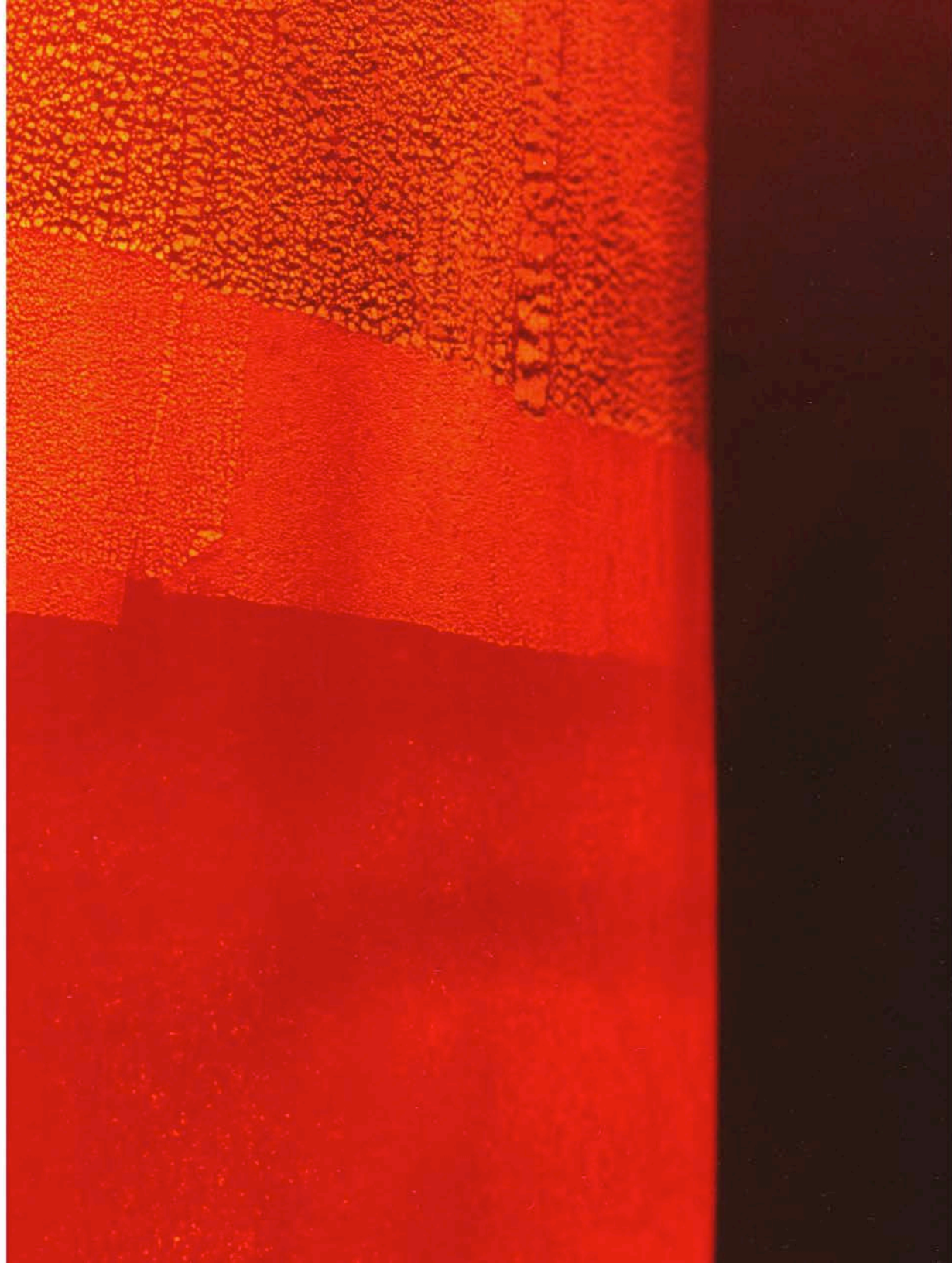


Marittima













Norellen tessuto

The Photography of Eric Uhlfelder

The work of Eric Uhlfelder is driven by two primary concerns: the beauty of urban form and the remembrance of things past. Over the past 30 years, he has focused on Paris, Venice, and New York, including excursions to London, Prague, Milan, Rome, Frankfurt, Salzburg, and Dachau. Shooting in black-and-white and color, his portfolio also includes landscapes of the Dordogne, Normandy, Switzerland, the Veneto, eastern Long Island, and Maine.

Commenting on Uhlfelder's black-and-white work on Venice, the Italian designer Massimo Vignelli wrote: "For someone like me who spent years in Venice, the sites in Eric's book are familiar, but his photographs transform them into new unpredictable images, beautifully composed and bathed in a magical stillness."

Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize winning architectural critic of *The New Yorker*, described "Eric's Paris ... as rendered fresh and new ... full of energy ... exhilarating, yet intimate, powerful, yet delicate, and ever so slightly mysterious."

Uhlfelder's exhibitions have included one-man shows at the national headquarters of the American Institute of Architects in Washington, the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimo and the Maison Française in New York, the French Library in Boston, and La Rotonde en Montparnasse in Paris. His work is regularly displayed at RVS Fine Art in Southampton, New York and Venice Design in Venice, Italy.

His images have been acquired by various institutions, including the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Galeries Lafayette, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdales, ITT Sheraton, and Proctor & Gamble.

And his work has been published by Editions Flammarion, Rizzoli International, *The New York Times*, *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Architectural Record*, *Metropolis*, *World Architecture*, *Italian Life*, *Avenue*, and Editions Hazan.