

For my midterm assignment, I chose to create photographs in the style of Paul Strand.

Paul Strand (1890 - 1976) was an American artist, photographer and filmmaker who had an iconic and lasting career with the camera. He first got acquainted with the camera when he was a high school student at the Ethical Culture School in New York, where he got very concerned with matters of bettering humankind.

In 1907, during his school trip to Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, Strand was first exposed to pictorialism. It was then that Strand decided he wanted to become a photographer. He spent the first 7 years as a photographer trying to emulate the works of the great pictorialists, Edward J. Steichen and Clarence H. White.

However, in early 1915, Alfred Stieglitz criticised the softness of Strand's photographs. From then on, he tried to change his photographic style, making photographs based on three central themes: *movement in the city*, *abstractions*, and *street portraits*. Out of these three central themes, I was immediately drawn to *abstractions*.

"How you build a picture, what the picture consists of, how shapes are related to each other, how spaces are filled, how the whole thing must have a kind of unity." When making his photographs, Paul Strand not only focused on the subject of the image, but placed a great emphasis on the general composition of the image.

Making use of crockery and fruit from the kitchen, Strand would make arrangements with these objects around him and shoot photos of them. Creating a strong visual image with lighting, placement and depth became the artists' focal point. Eventually, Strand moved away from the familiar, traditional way of image-making and advanced his work into subjects that were almost unrecognisable at first glance. The subjects of the image falls away, and we are left with a beautiful balance of abstract shapes and tones. Strand's creations were the first serious abstractions created with a camera.



Paul Strand. Abstraction,  
Silver-platinum print, 32.8 x  
24.4cm



Paul Strand. Wire Wheel,  
Silver-platinum print, 33.1 x  
26.1cm



Paul Strand. Chair Abstract,  
Silver-platinum print, 33.1 x  
26.1cm

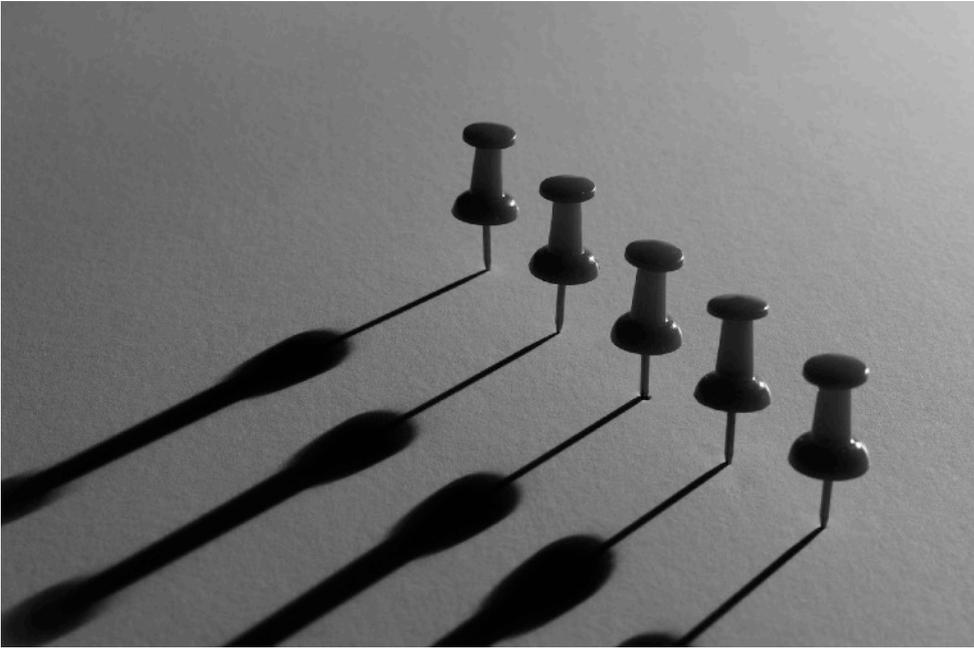
I was especially attracted to his series of abstract photographs as I feel that these photographs represent the essence and core of photographer and artist Paul Strand. Regardless of his portraits or street photography, there is always the motif of strong composition and attention to lighting that really sells each piece and tells the story. I appreciate the way that he conveys his message through the feelings that a certain assembly of objects can evoke. Paul Strand paved the way for American modernism through his specific way of seeing.

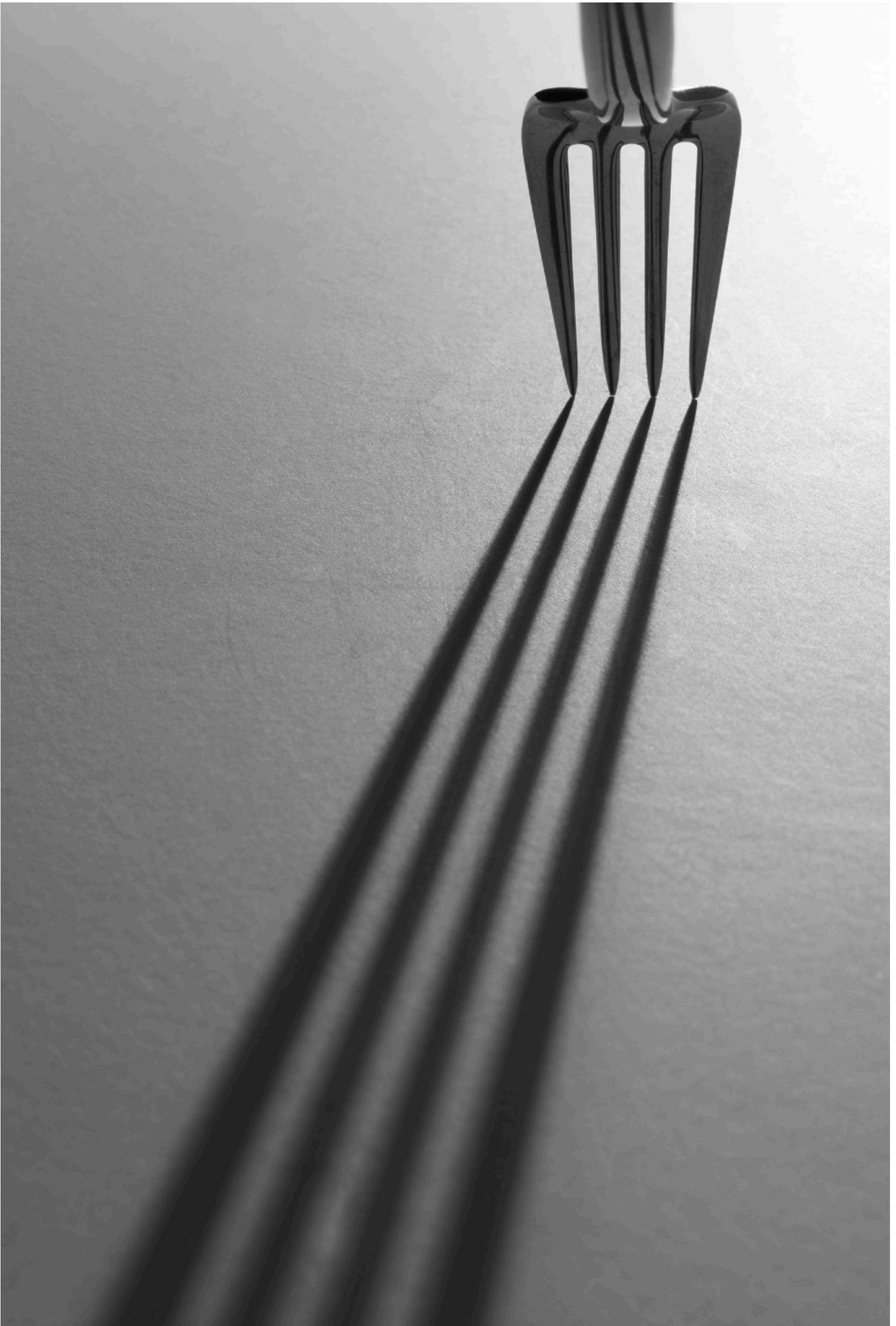
In 1919, Strand started to use an 8x10 view camera, and became interested in the camera's ability to see better than the human eye. This was reflected in his abstractions, as they got closer and showed objects in much more detail and sharpness. He made platinum prints of his photographs, called platinotypes. A platinum print is made by placing the negative and emulsion-coated paper in direct contact with the negative. Hence, the size of a photographic print is equal to the size of the negative.

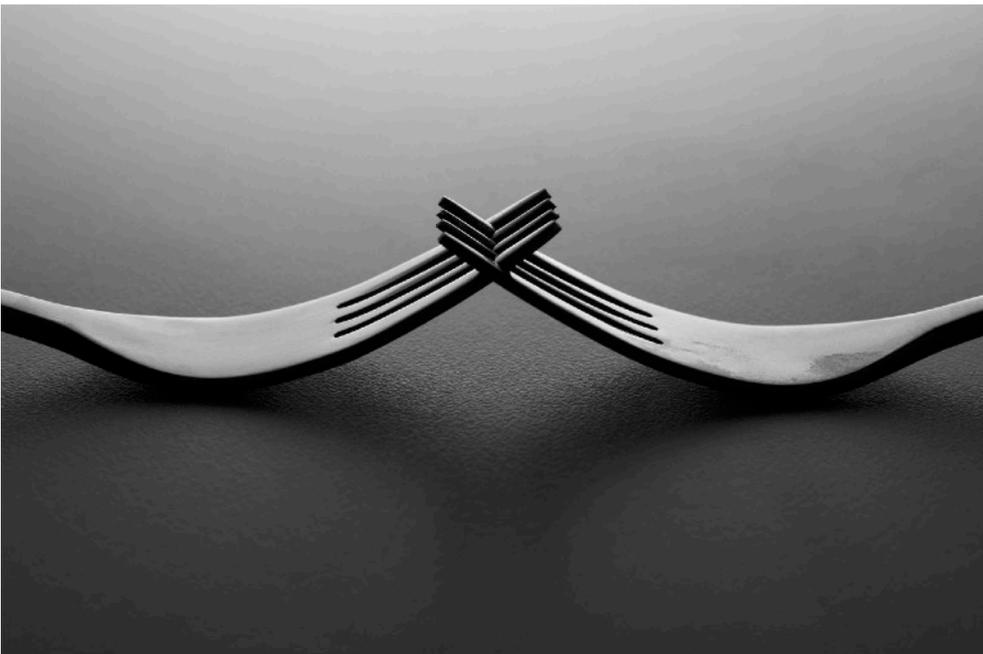
These prints are known for their archival stability, and have a matte finish because the sensitiser is absorbed into the paper instead of sitting on the surface. Platinum prints provide a deeper, richer look as there are more stops between pure black and pure white in these prints.

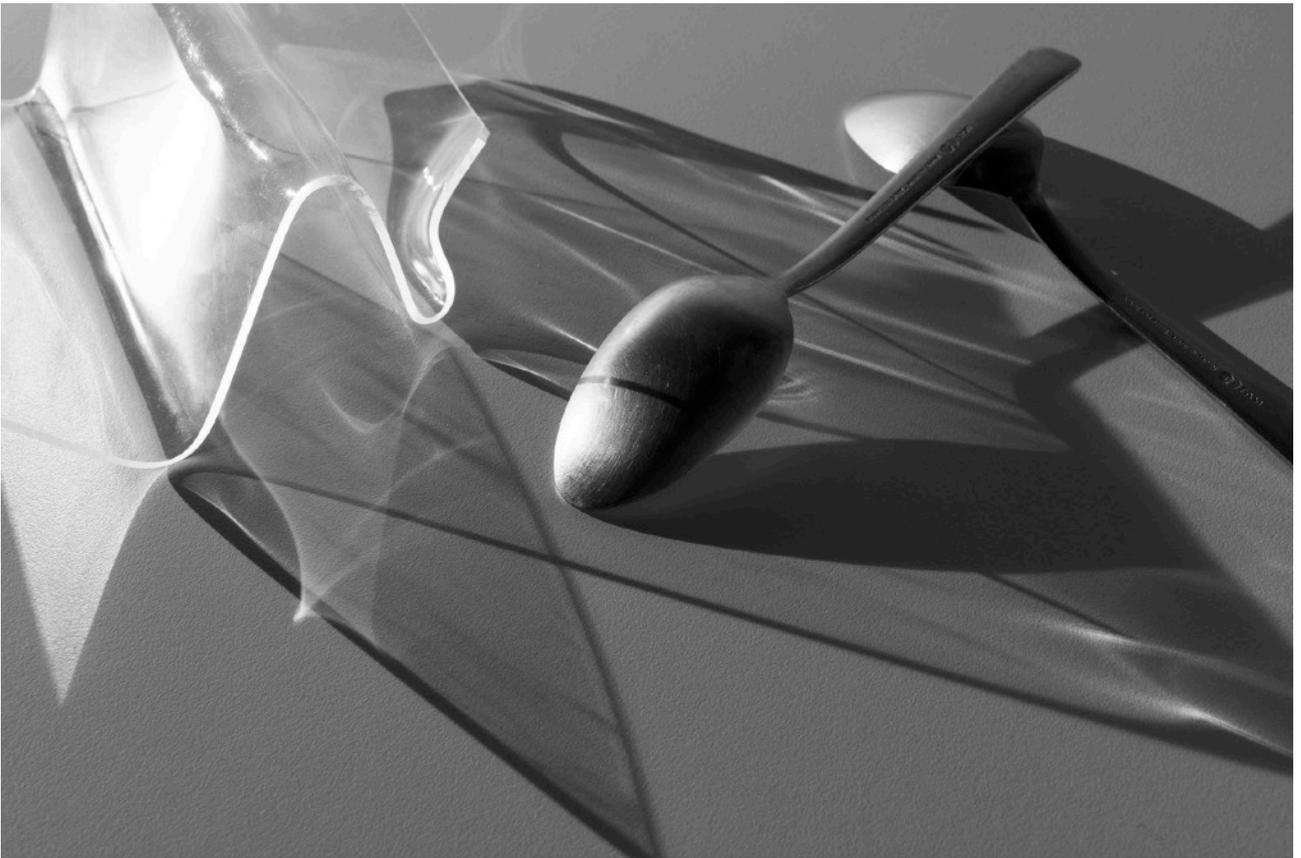
As a filmmaker and image-maker, I love creating beautiful images and playing with composition and placement of my subjects as well. Working with relatively dull, day-to-day still-life objects stripped away interest from the subjects themselves, and allowed me to focus on purely lighting and composition, as Strand would have.

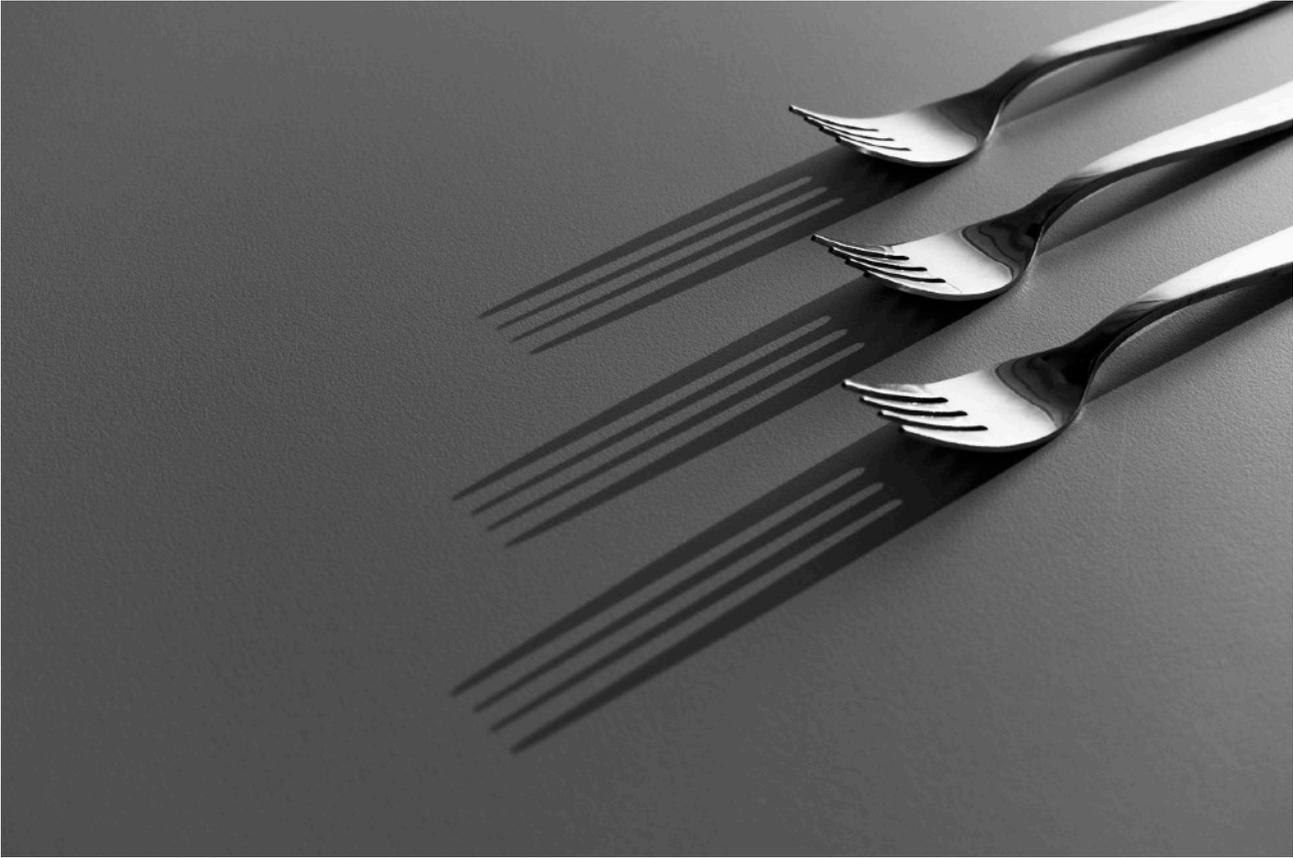
These are the final images that I have created:











Bibliography:

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