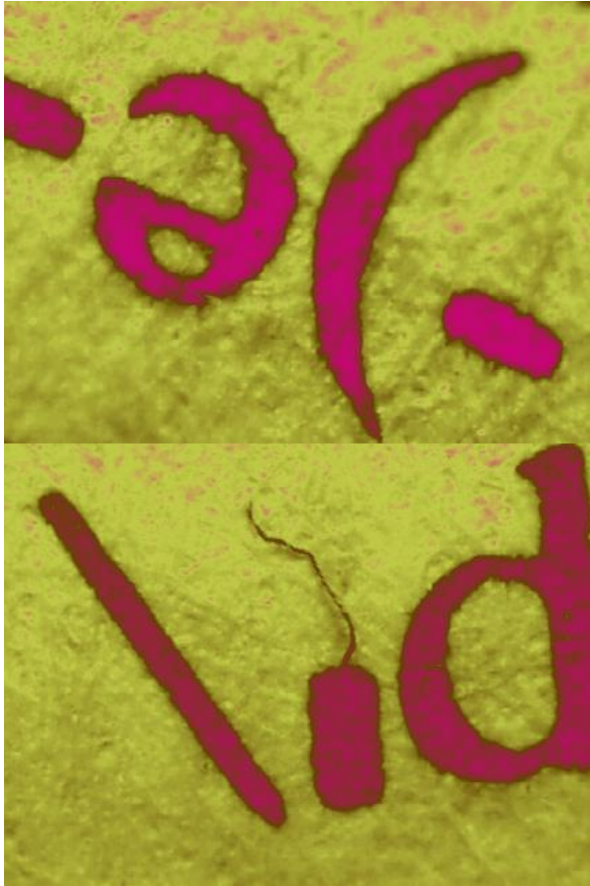


# DIPTYCHS



Visual Poems  
By Nico Vassilakis

Otoliths

## **DIPTYCHS**

Visual Poems by Nico Vassilakis

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Introduction ©2007 by Geof Huth

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Front cover image

*LET ER A TACK*

by Nico Vassilakis

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## Shimmer

That's the word: shimmer.

The bipartite pieces that make up Nico Vassilakis' *DIPTYCHS* shimmer on the page. The shimmer arises from the contrasting colors within an individual piece, which allows us to experience the illusion of light shining through each of them. The shimmer comes from the way each diptych is spliced tightly and precisely together along two borders that do not match up with each other. The shimmer flows from the watery look of some of these pieces, which seem inhabited by light reflecting off the surface of a small pool they must be submerged within. And this shimmer comes from the letters and partial words that rarely coalesce into a specific word or meaning. We are lost on an expanse of sand, the whole desert a mirage, and we do not care a whit because our hallucinations are the best part of the trip so far.

The individual pieces in this book are tiny visual poems that examine the materiality of visible language and find beauty by looking at that language from unexpected vantage points. Nico has created each of these poems through a sequence of steps that included capturing video of text, editing and modifying that video (which included changing the color), capturing screenshots of the video, and cutting and putting these final pieces together in little diptychs consisting of one rectangle of prepared text atop another. To some degree, the results are the children of Nico's important videopoetic work, *Concrete: Movies*, released in 2005. The numerical sequence "Writone to Written" is clearly a static selection of the kinetic version found on that collection of videopoems.

The cover piece provides a good example of Nico's technique. The color scheme is pink letters outlined in magenta on a field of golden ochre. The colors are meant to jar the viewers and then capture their imaginations. The top half of the diptych consists of the following text presented upside-down so that the e looks like a schwa: -)e-. And the lower half of the poem consists of characters that appear to spell out "lid," but which do not literally do that. When "lid" is combined with the adjoining text (which resembles "ed"), they suggest "lidded," the cover of the book, or heavy-lidded eyes left shut to enjoy a dream.

But these possible interpretations are usually beyond the point of these pieces. Nico is tearing away the signification of the characters, atomizing the words, all but eliminating the text. In some cases, all that remains are half-observed

spoons of a text we will never again see. The level of readability of the poems varies dramatically through the book, which is divided into ten brief sequences that hold together separate colorscales, different textual landscapes. The least textual of these sequences is “Aqua Letter,” which shows us nothing but the blurry legs of letters beneath a series of blurry dots resembling floating tadpole eggs. Taken alone, the three poems that make up this sequence would not seem like visual poems at all, but context tells us they are.

It is possible to find meaning in these pieces, but their real power is talismanic rather than semiotic. They entrance by capturing the subtle and visual pleasures of written language, by forcing us to see letters and color instead of words and messages. Even the “Umber” sequence of poems, one of the wordier sequences in this book, is not so much meaningful as about meaning. Each poem of “Umber” balances a blurry and swirling detail from a page of a dictionary with an extreme detail of a single word. The dictionary entries usually include readable words, but their connection to the terribly reduced words they are paired with is unclear. Readers look for meaning that might not be there, creating connections wherever they can.

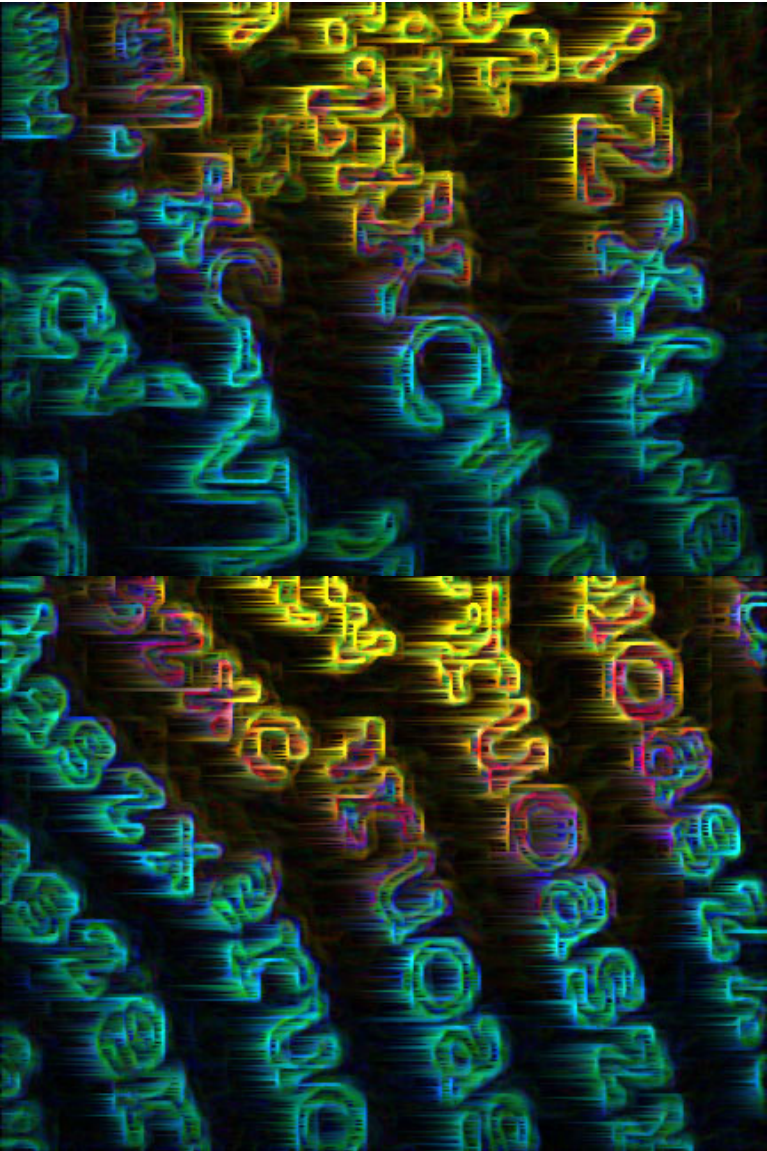
Yet these pieces also work by taking advantage of unexpected concordances. The human mind looks for patterns, and these almost random pieces satisfy this need. Even though erratic internally, they still cohere. The colors of the poems stitch the two halves of the poems together. And the patterns built up through the sequences of poems create expectations within us. In this way, we learn to read a language we do not know, a language that will never exist.

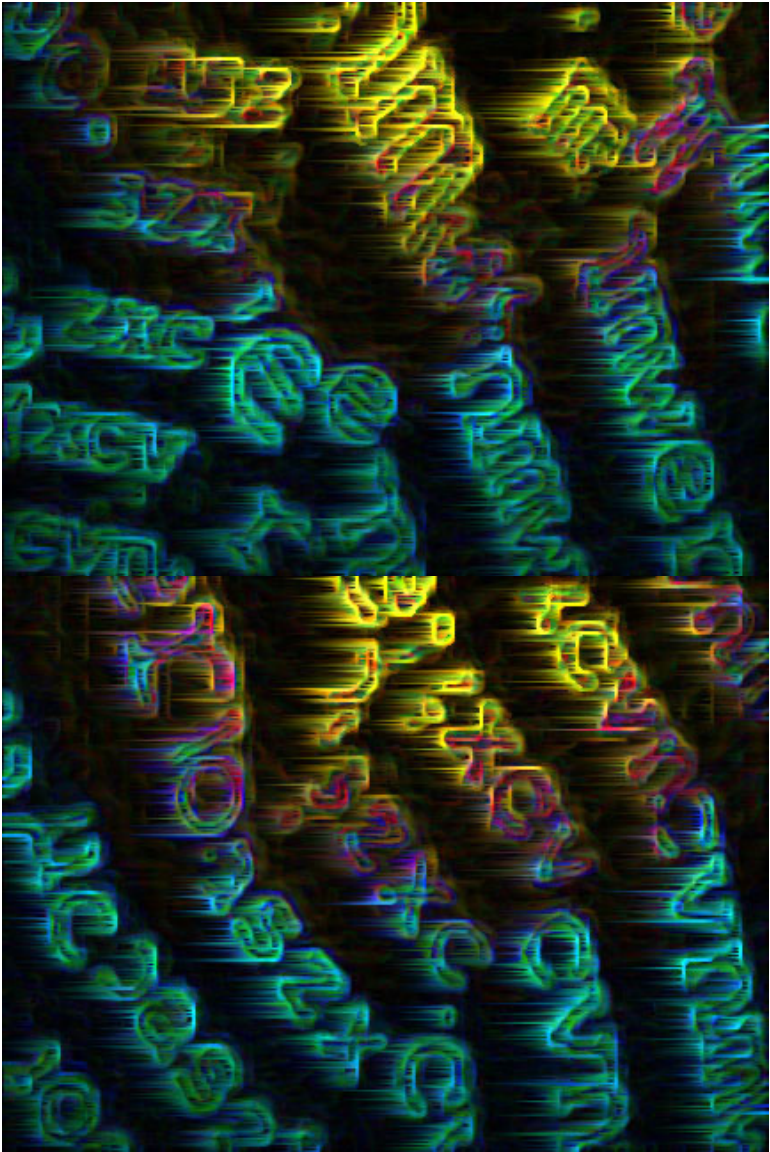
Sometimes, the language of exposition in these is English. We can see the words, so we know. The language of the last sequence in the book, “Hellenic Swim,” is Greek, a language of some significance to Nico Vassilakis. This last sequence is one of the most beautiful. The texts of each of these poems are startling and large and appear to float on water. Although we might be able to recognize the letters—a mu here, a delta there—these pieces of Greek are like English to us: impenetrable, yet penetrating.

What Nico does for us here is take the world and process it through his imagination. Reality comes out better in the end.

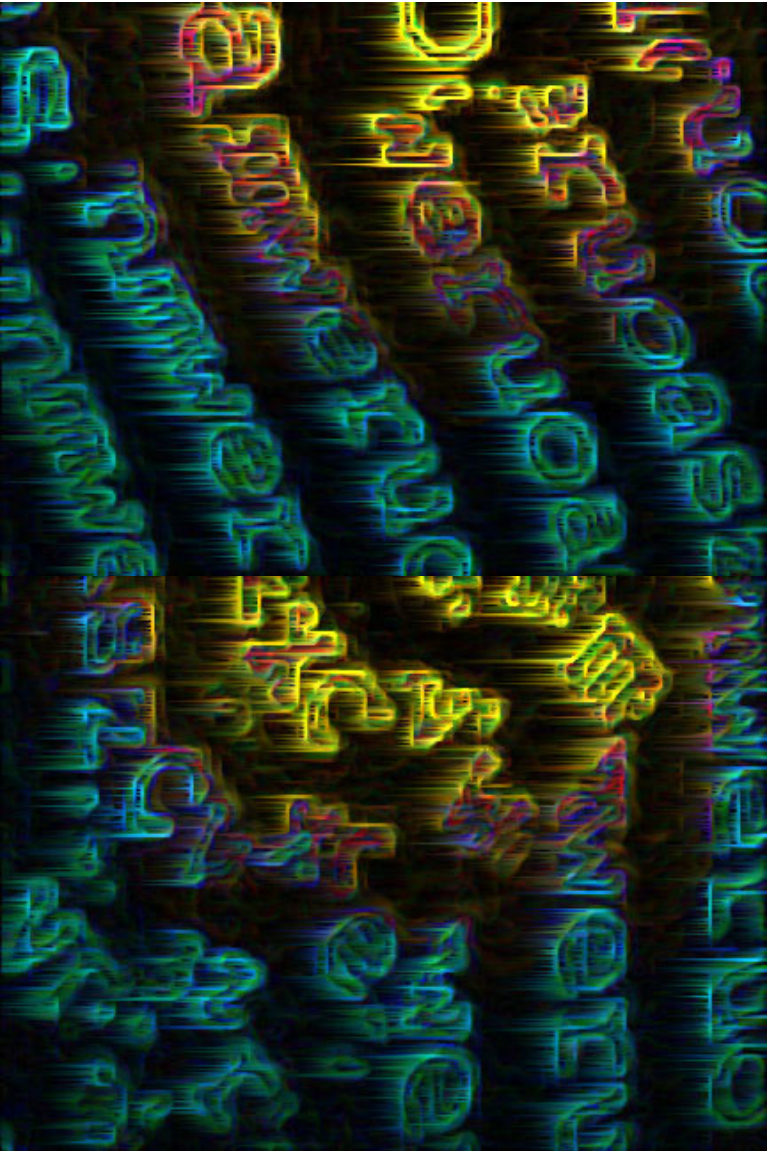
—Geof Huth

Agent X

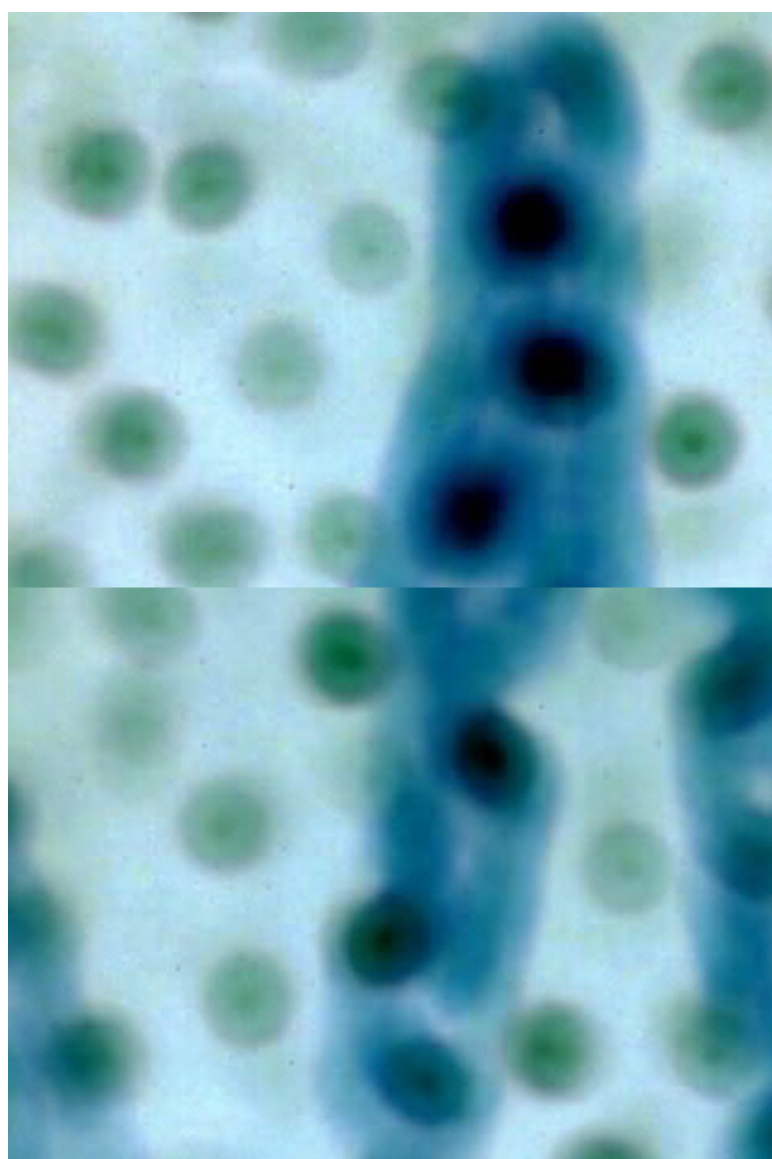


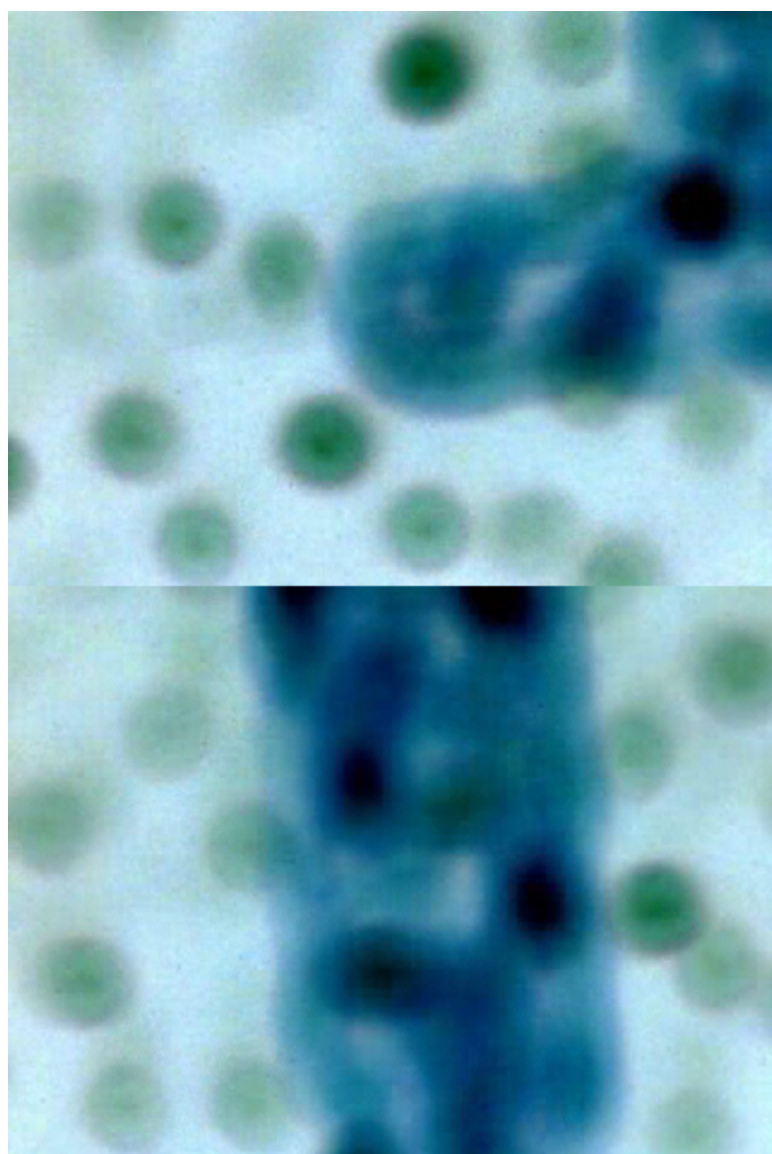


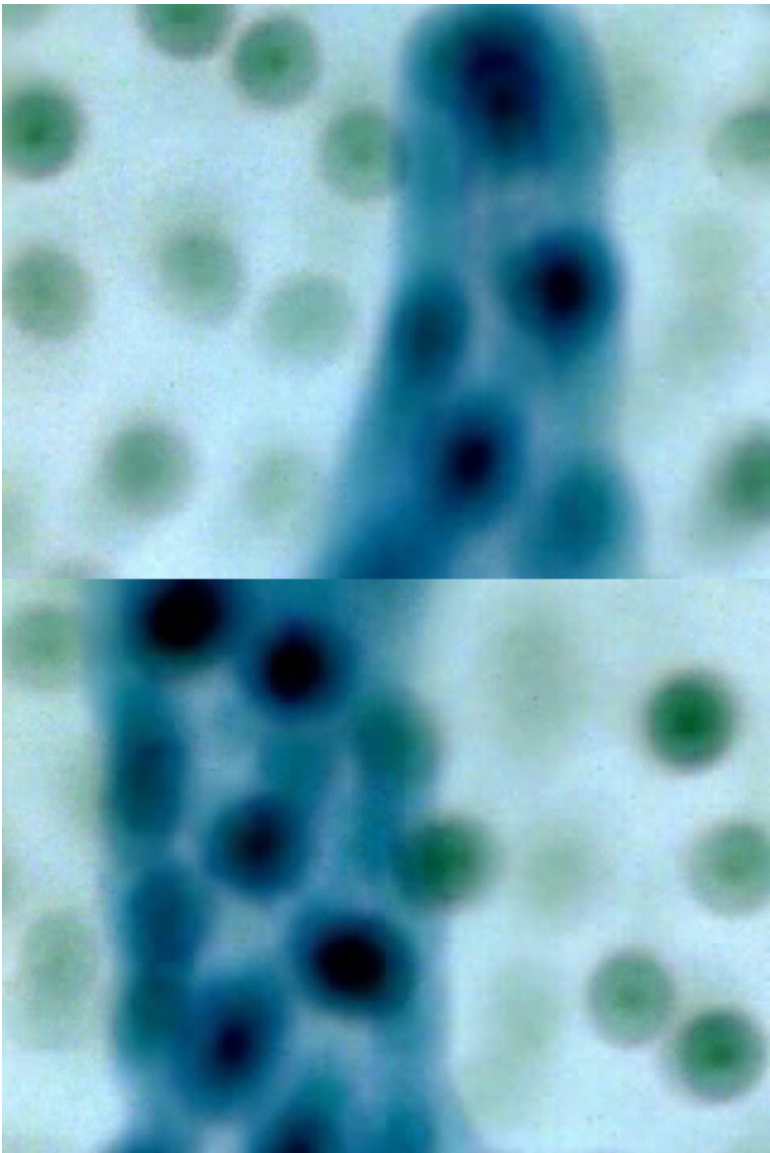




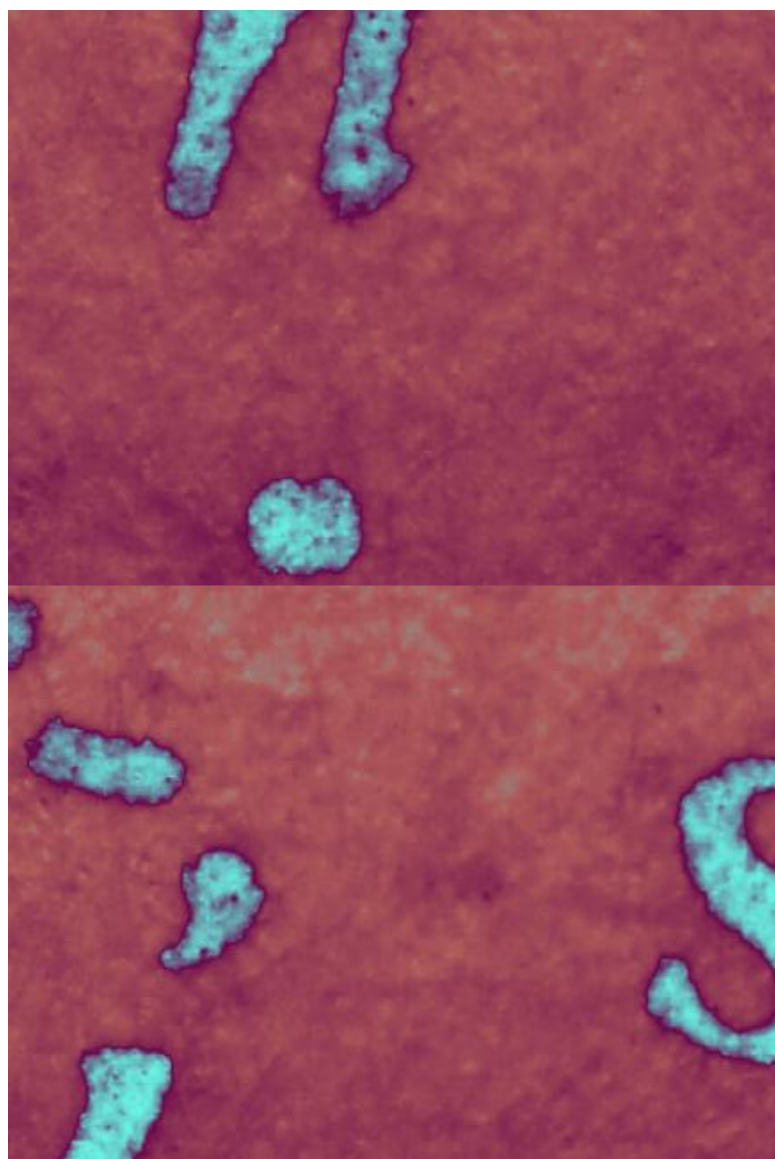
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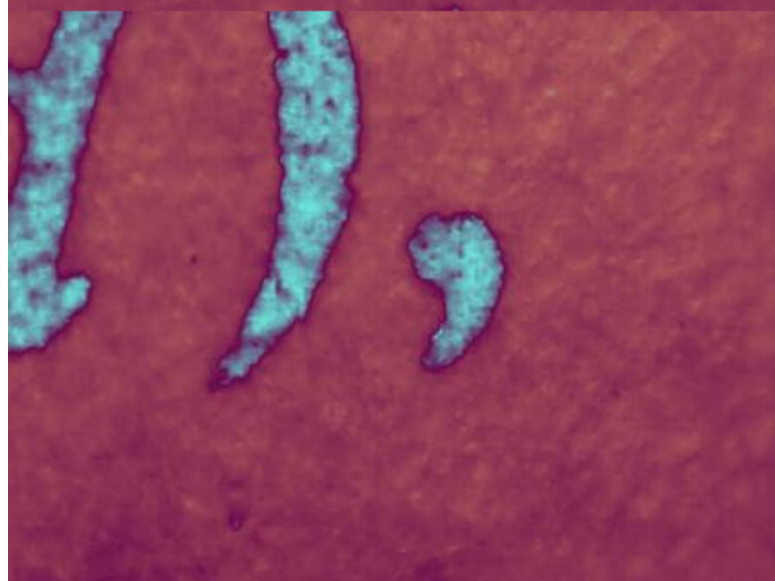
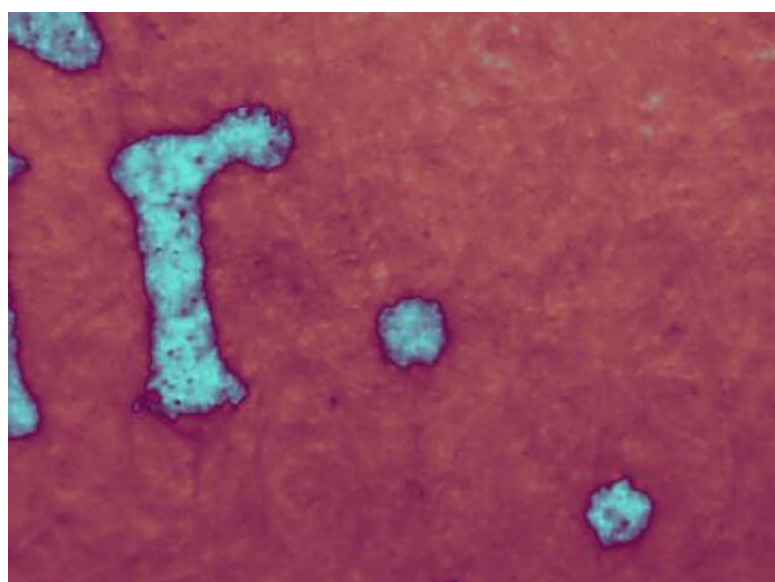






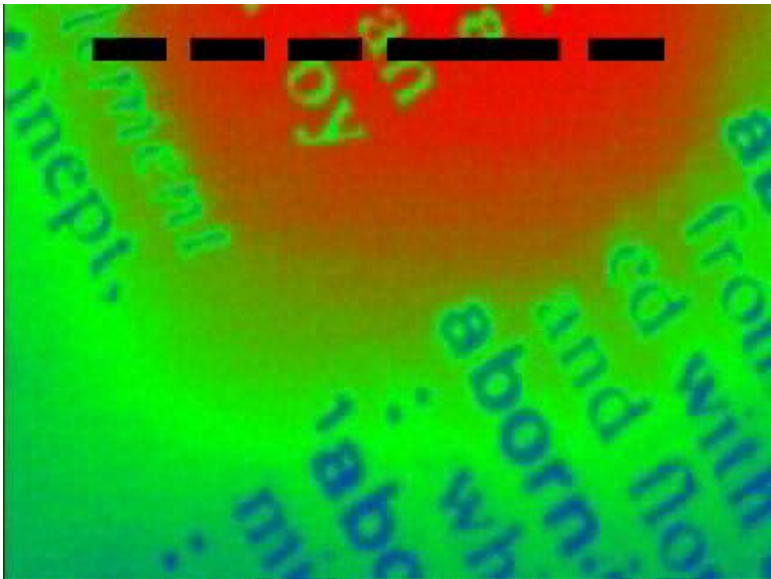
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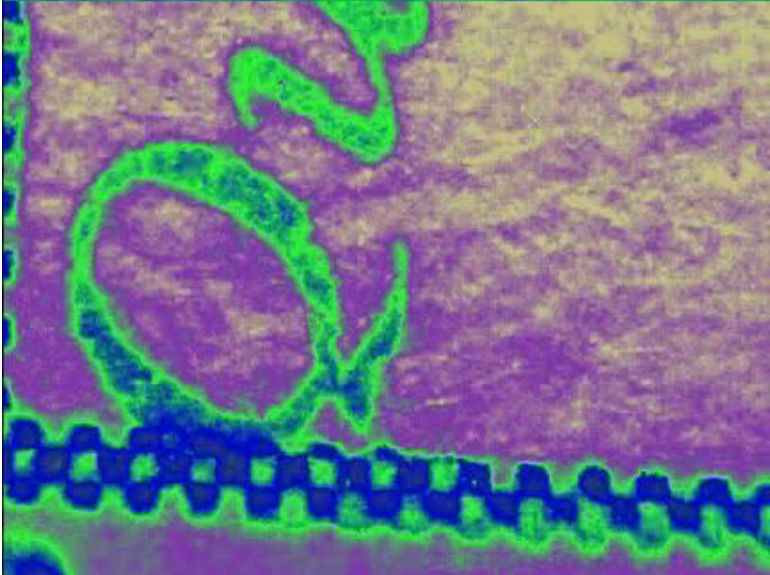
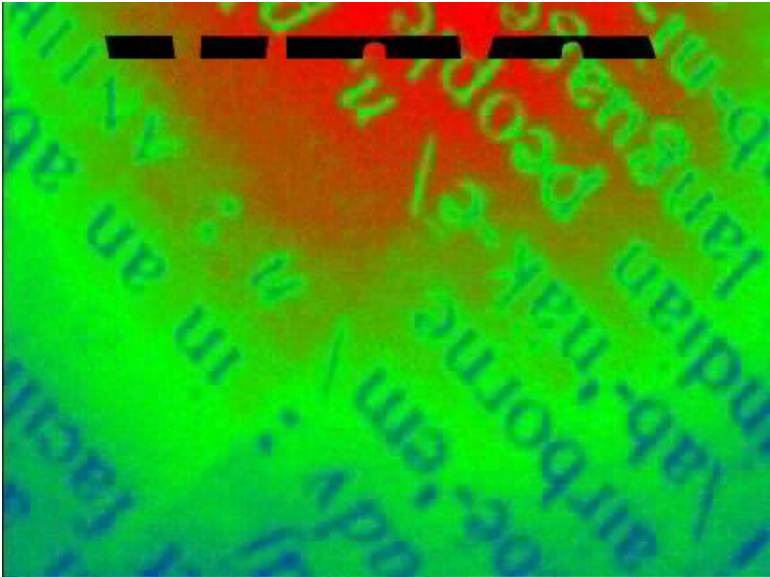


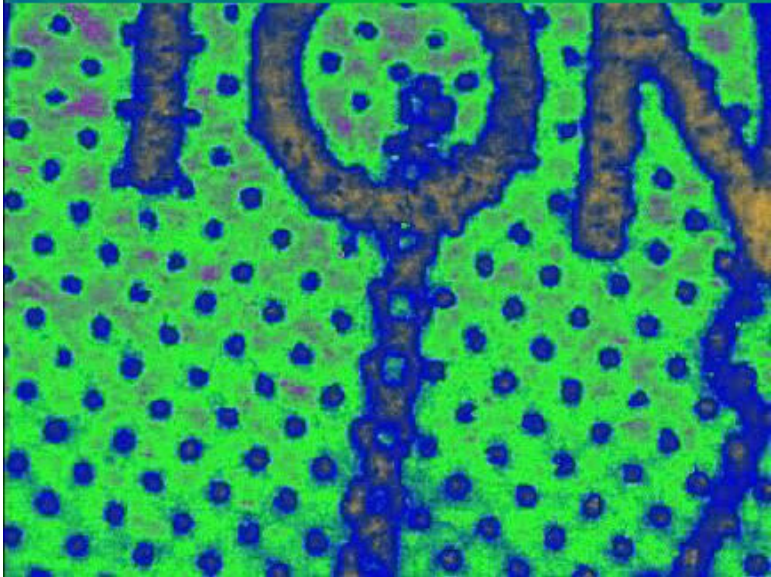
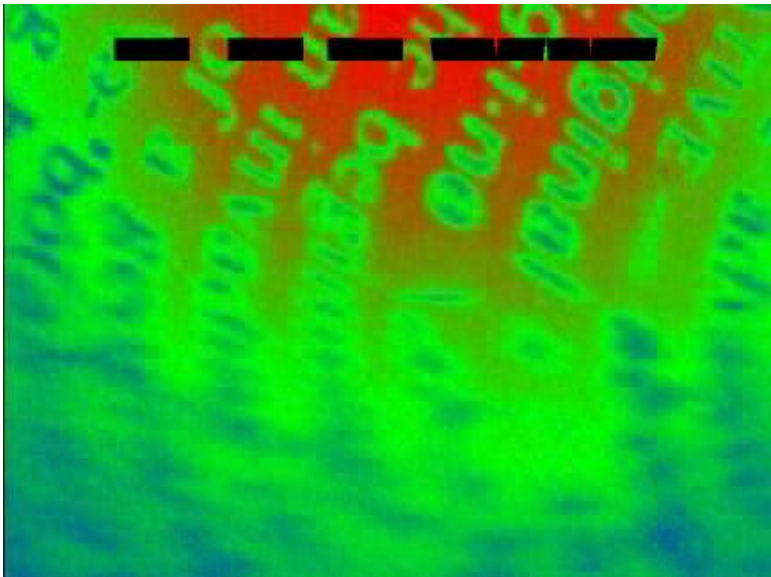


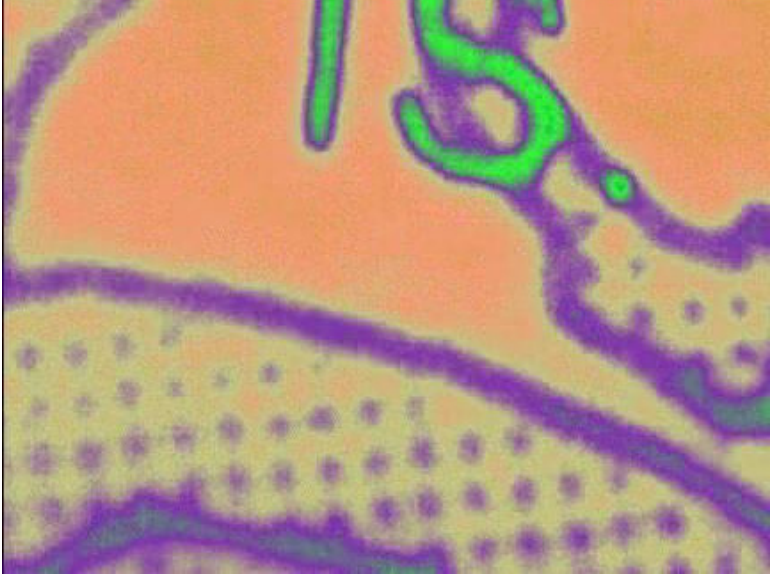
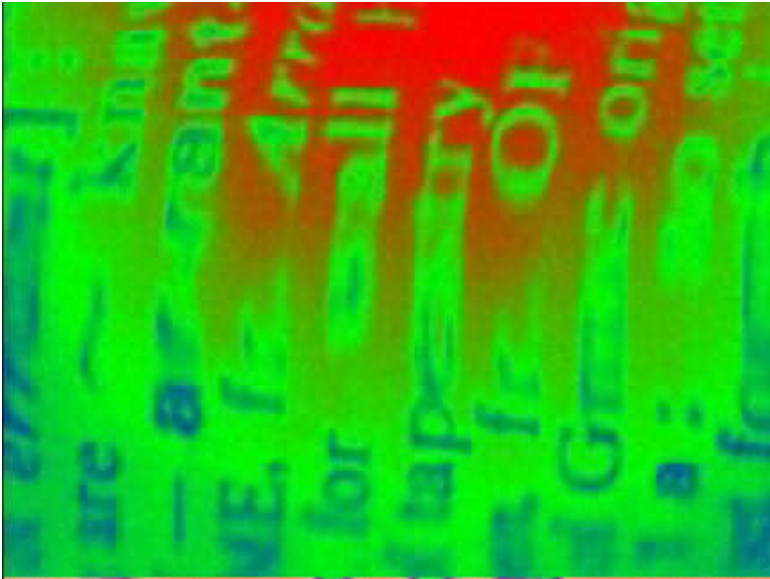


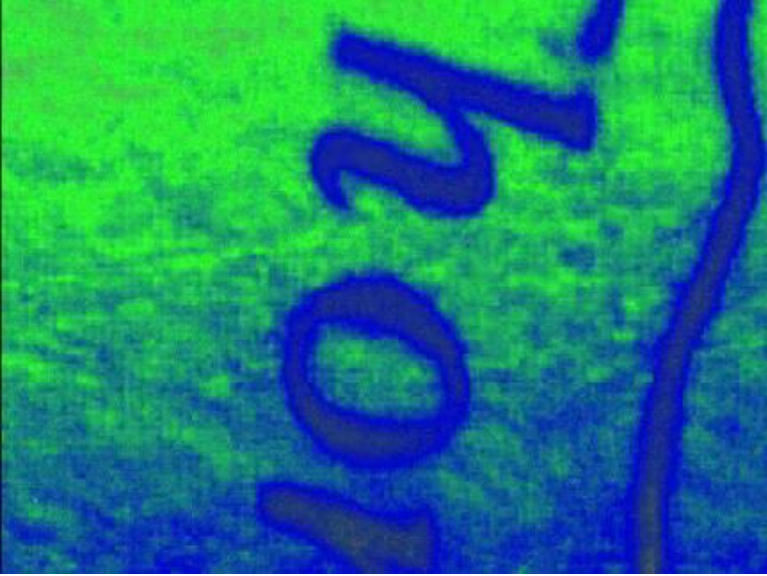
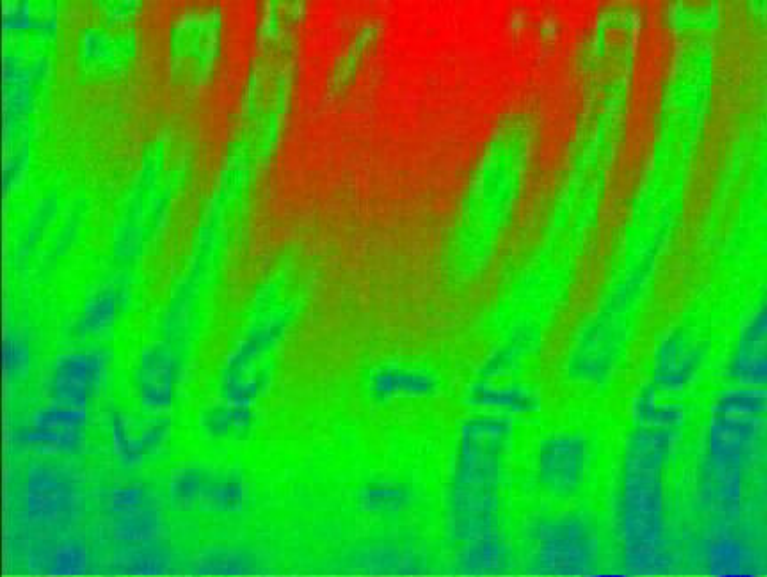
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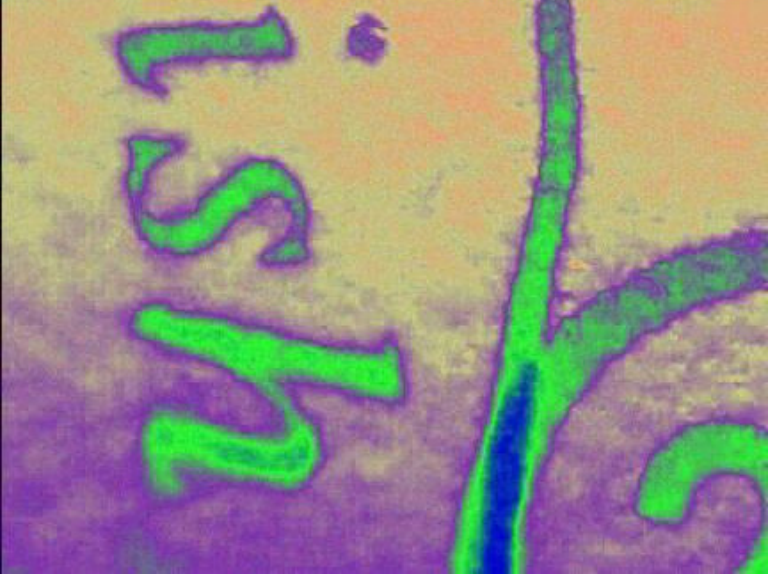
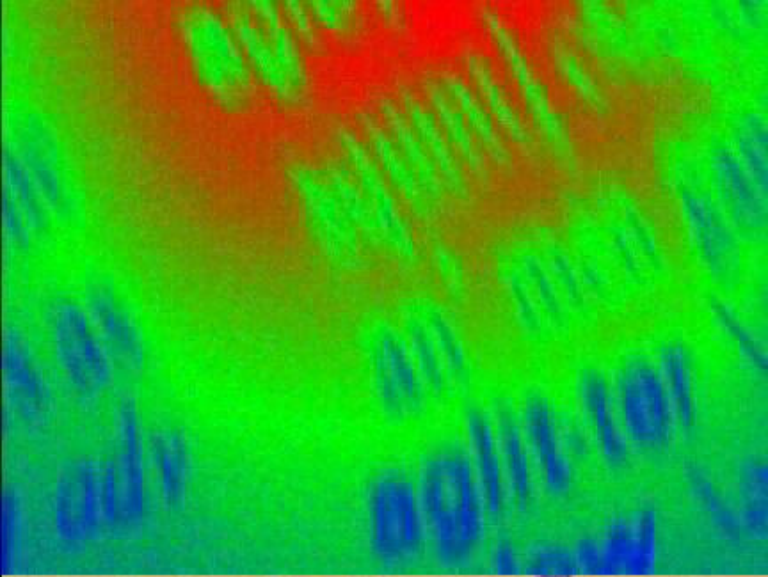




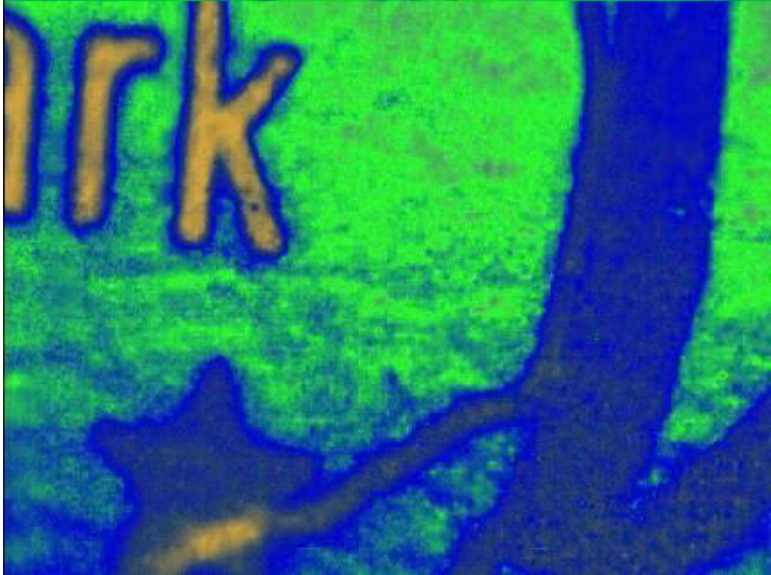








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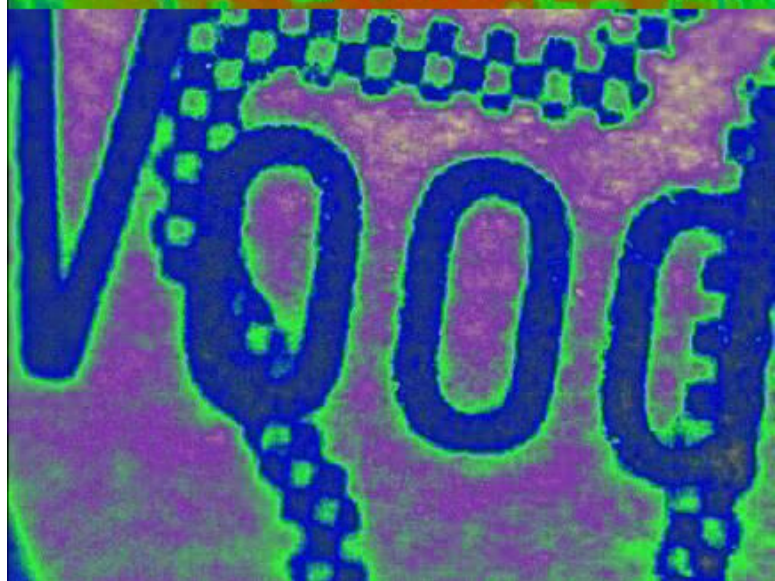
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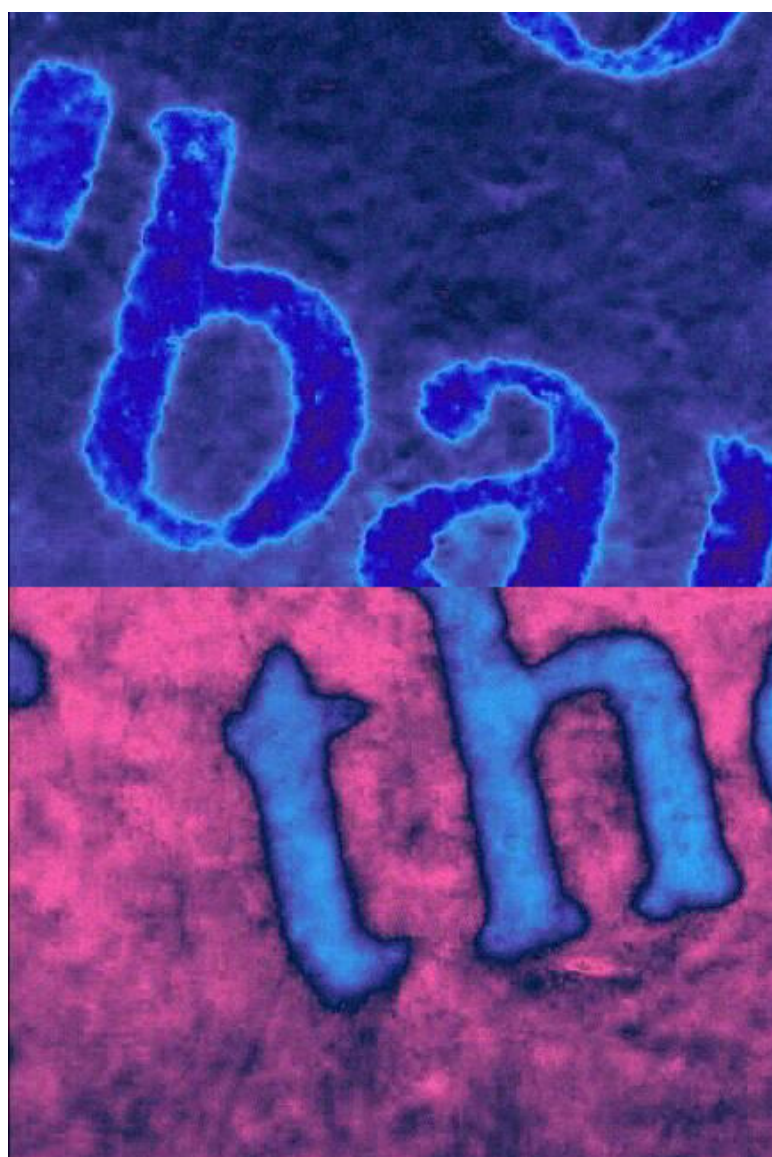
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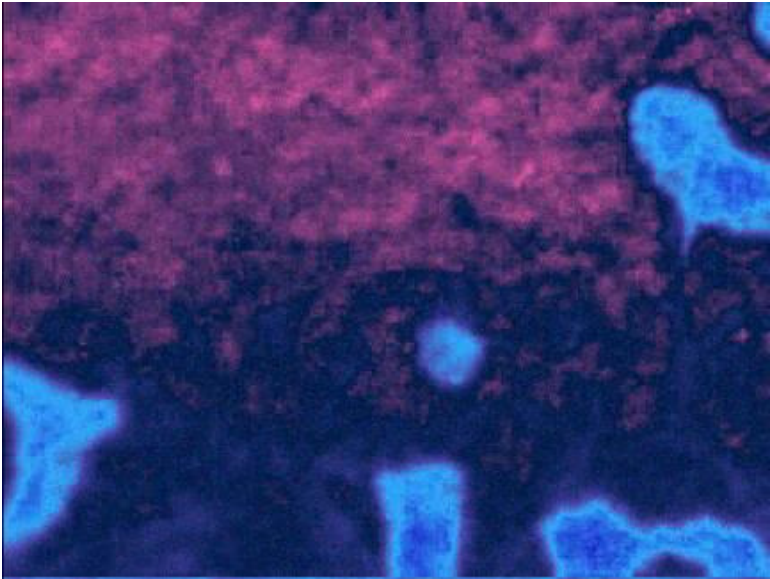


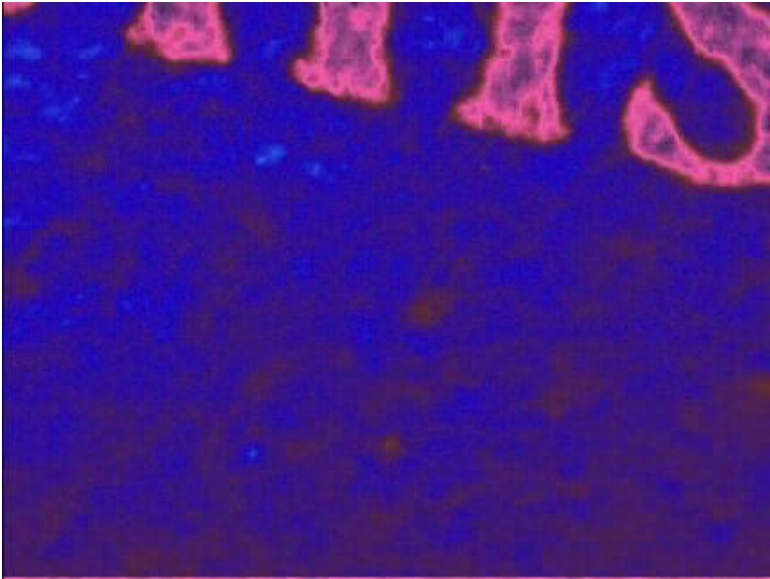
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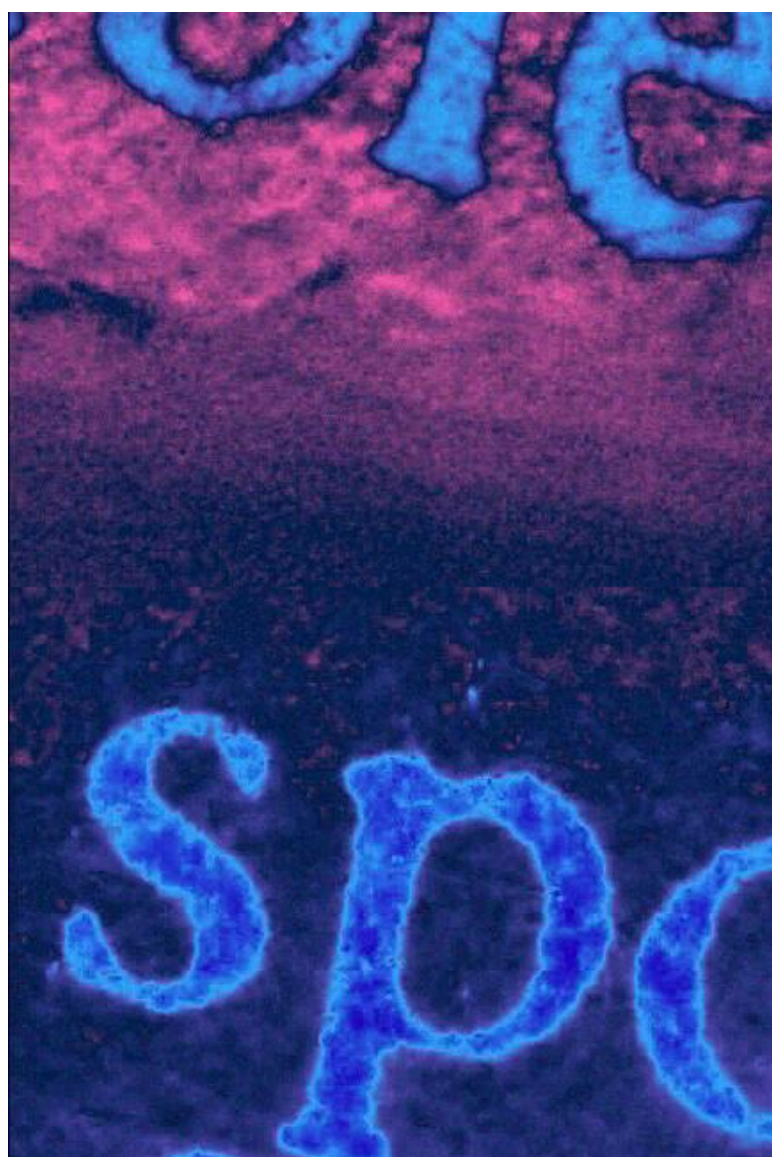
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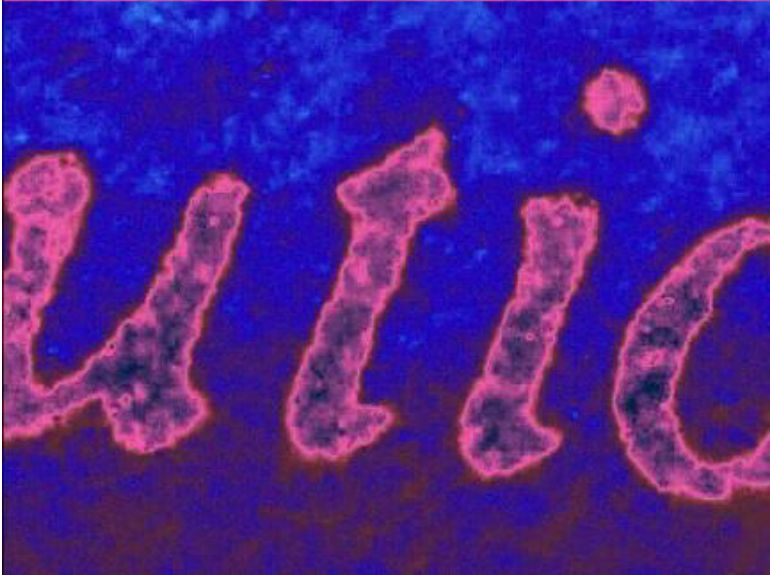
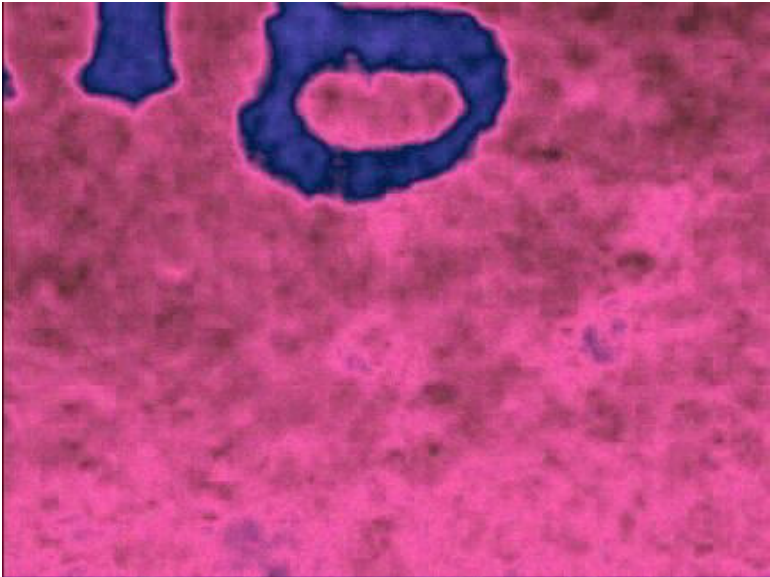




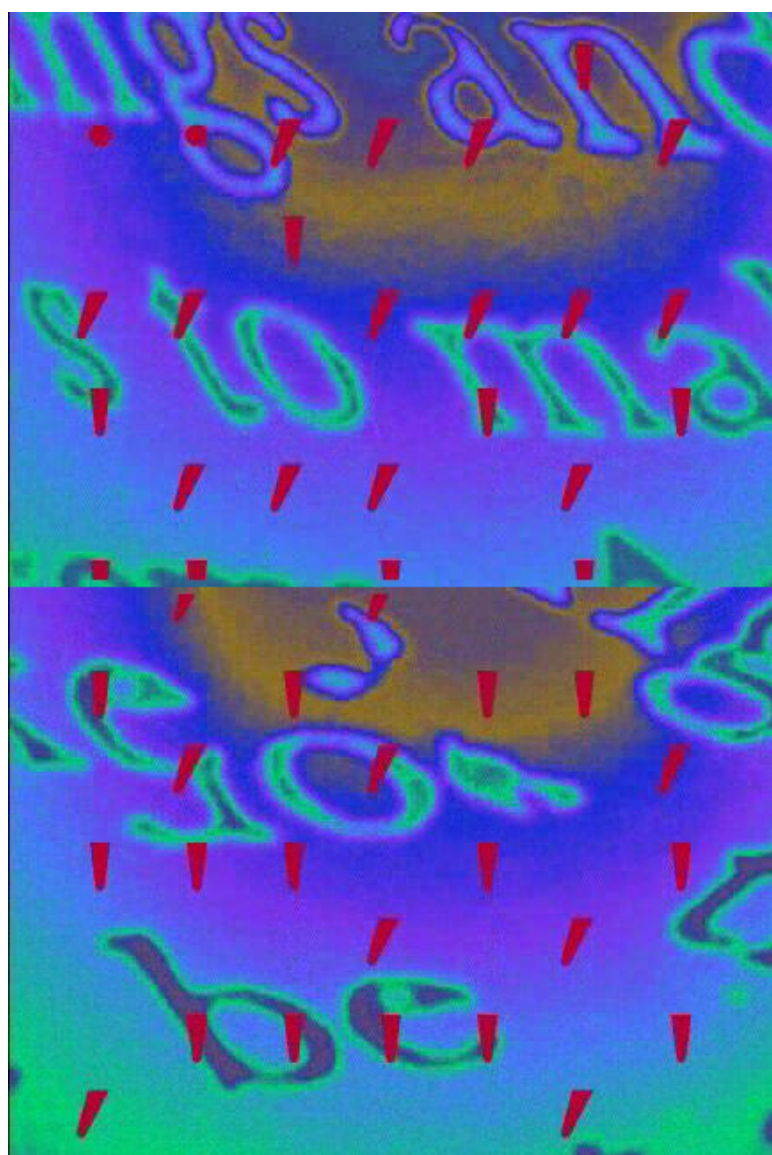


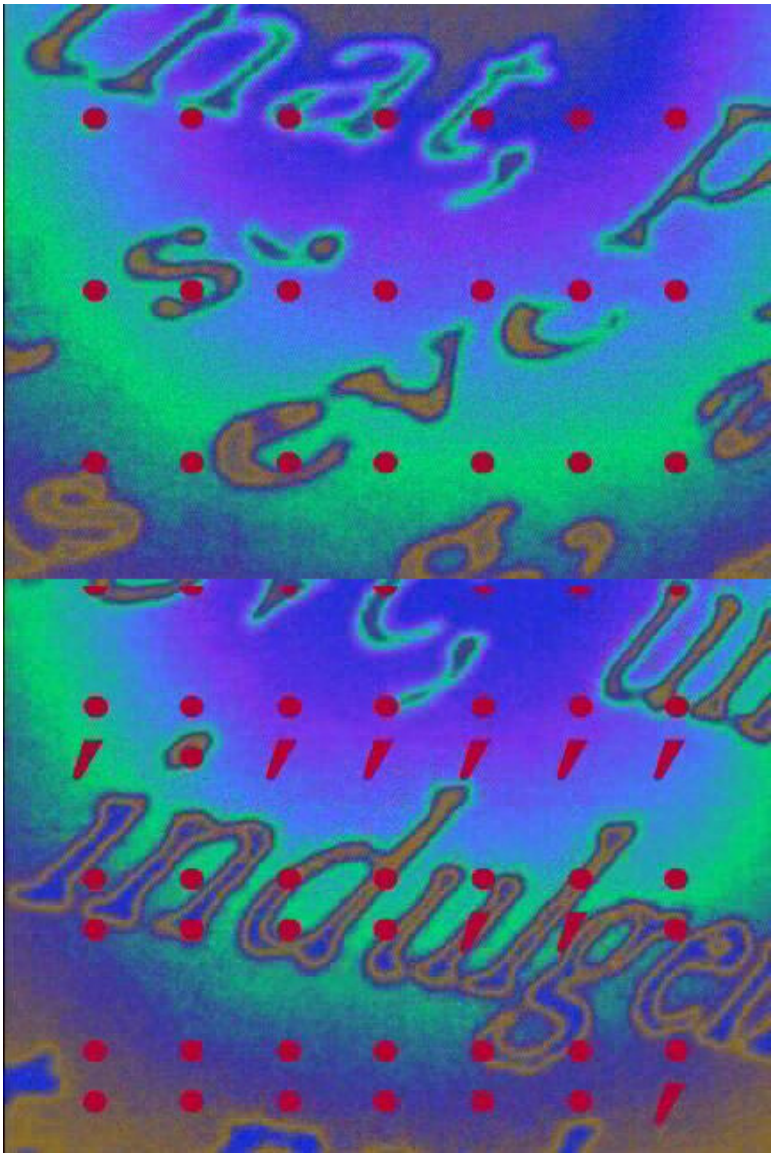


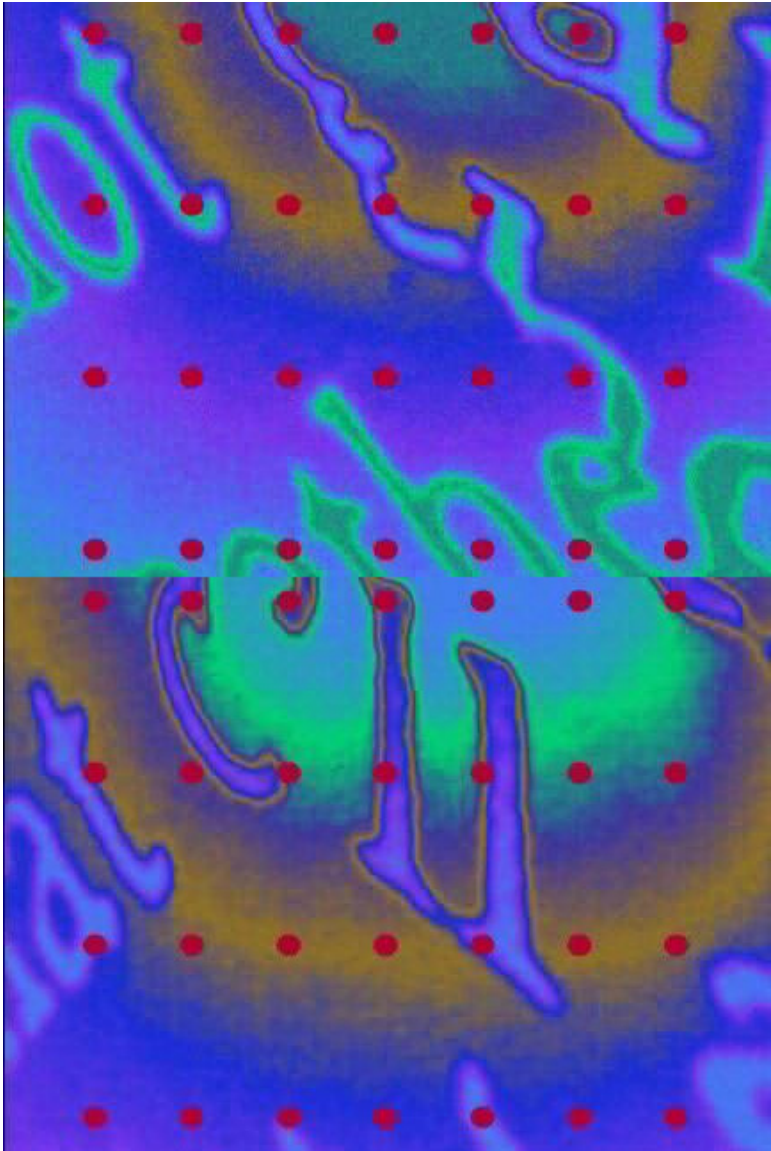


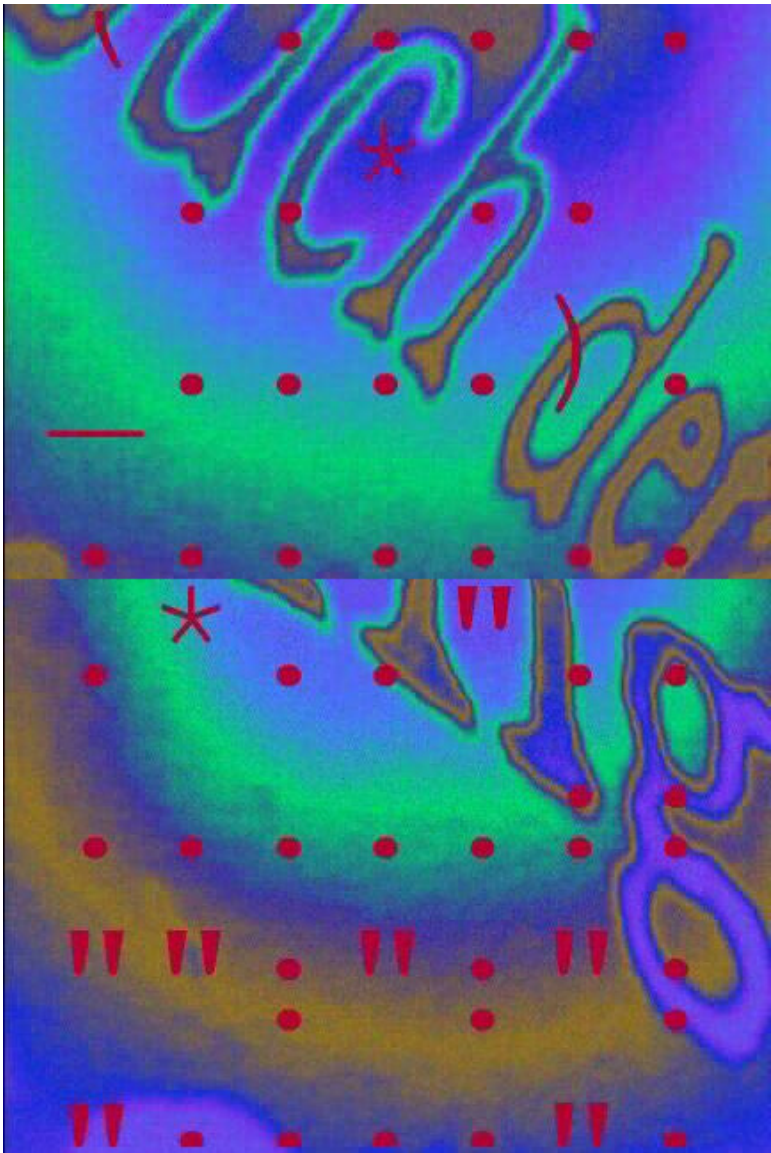


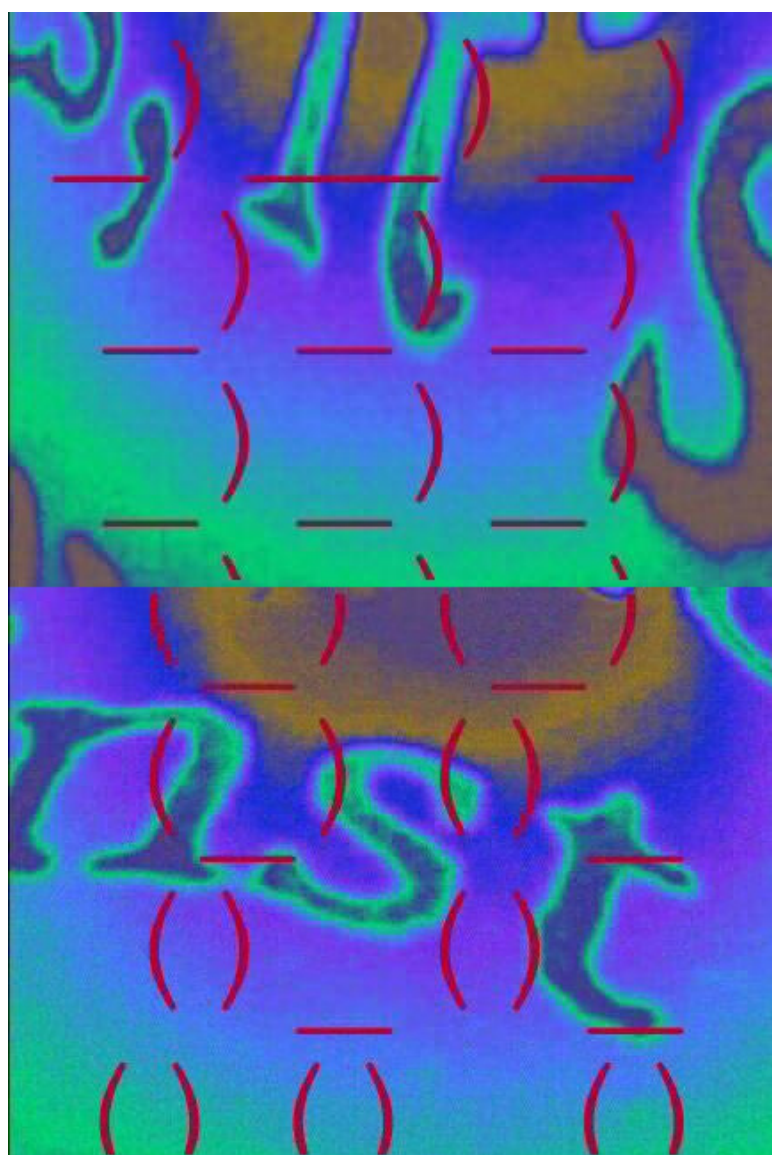
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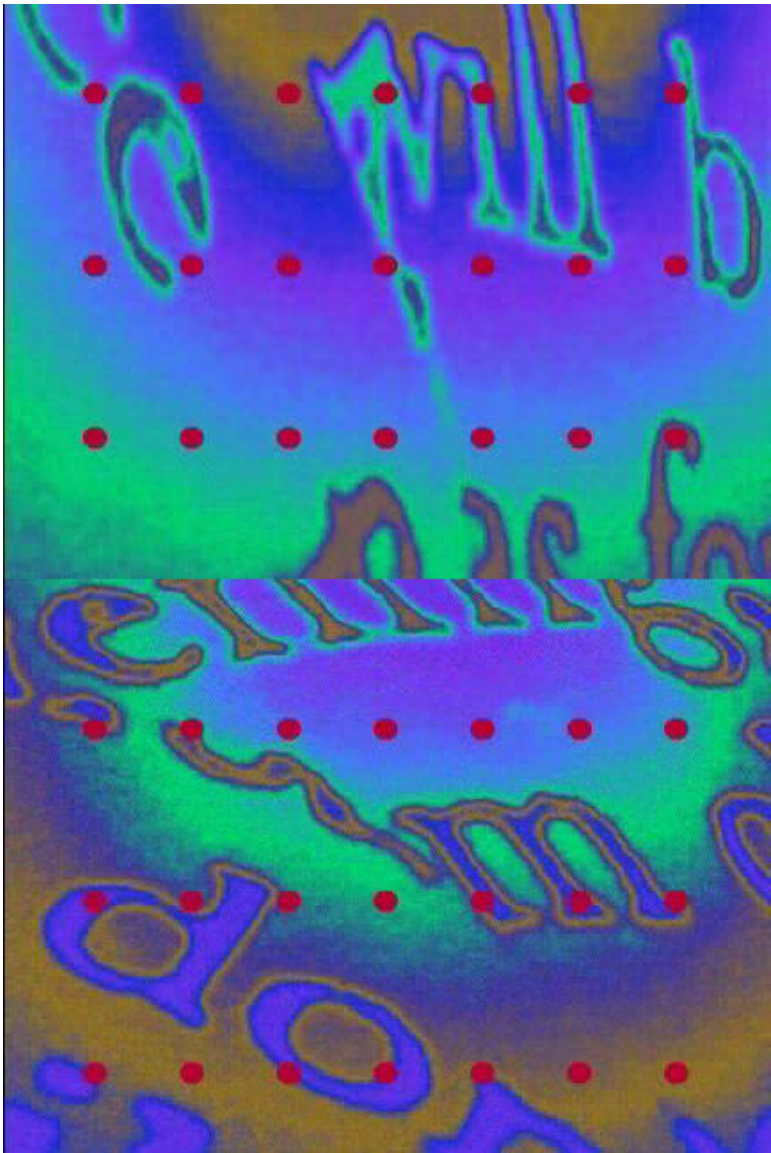












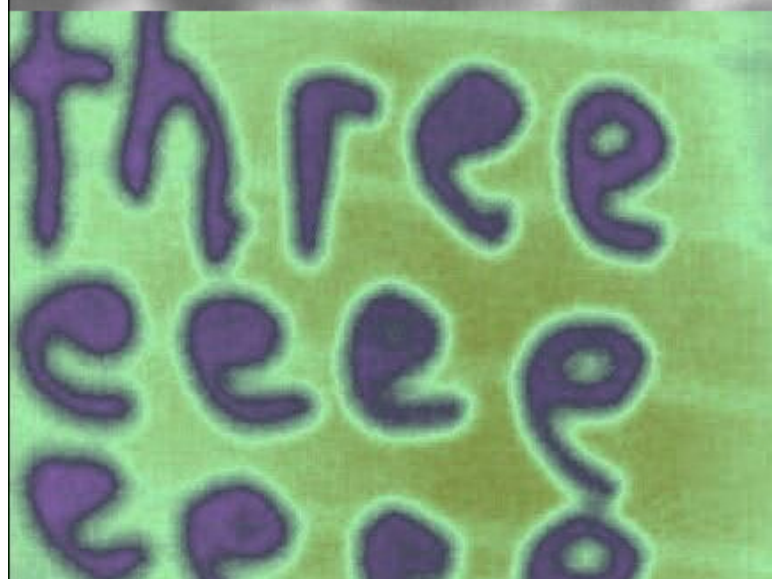
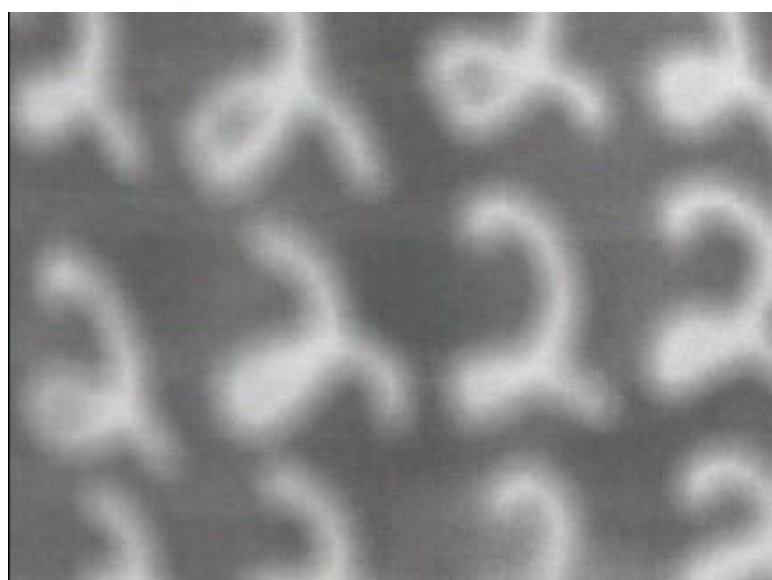


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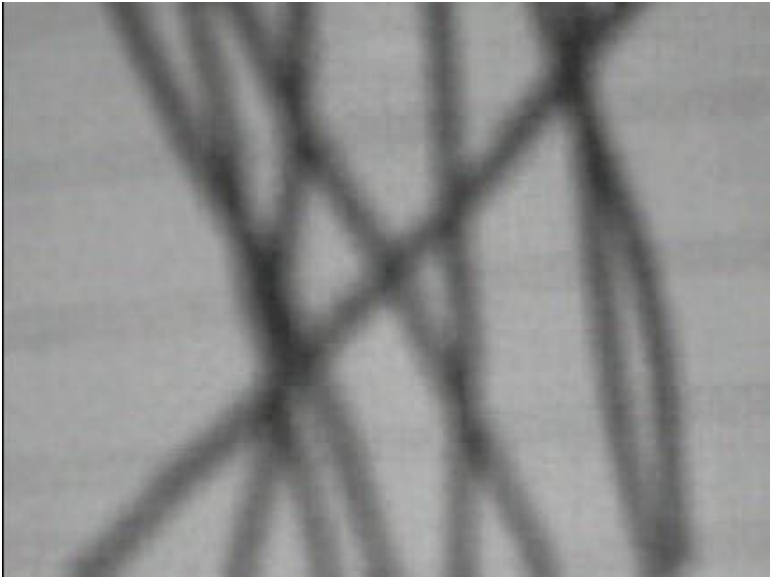
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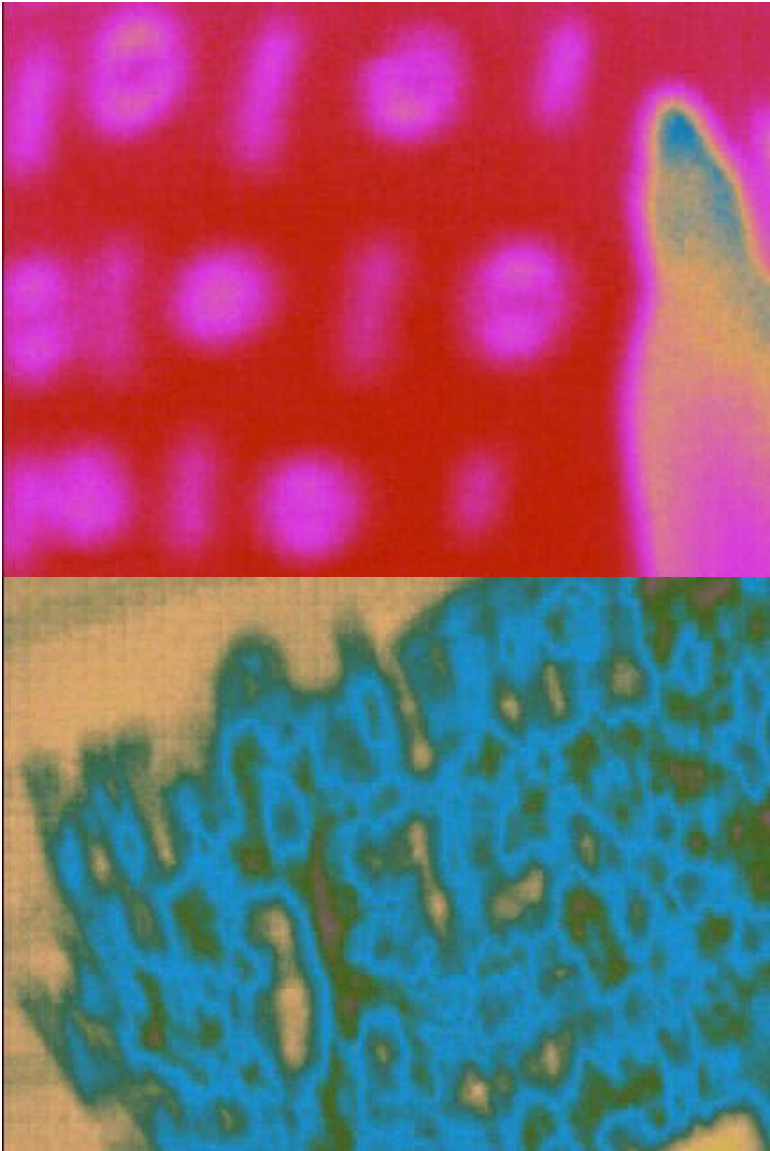
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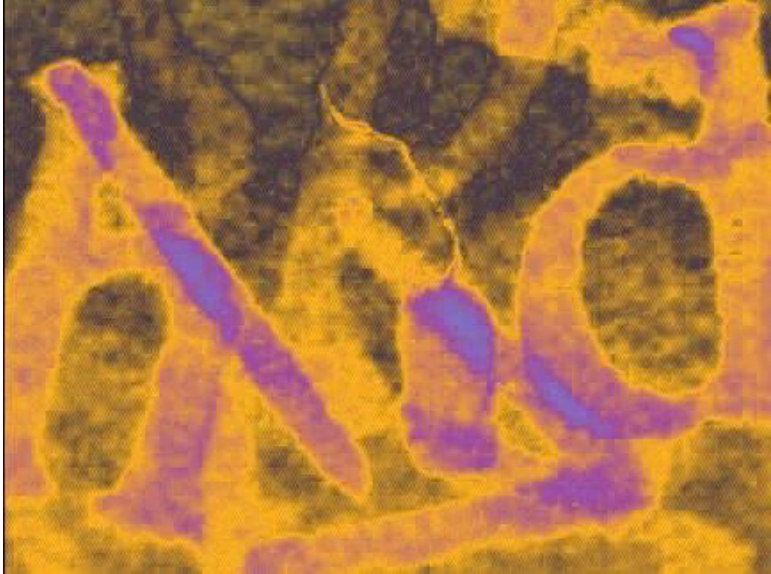
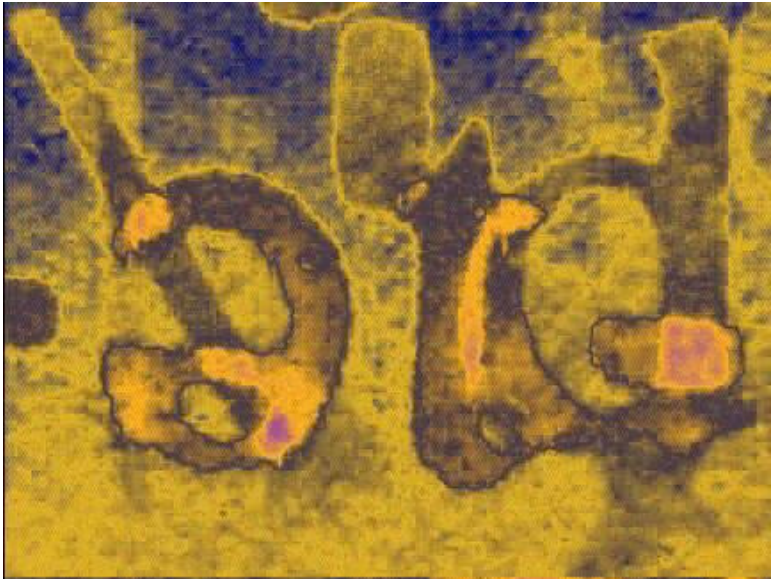
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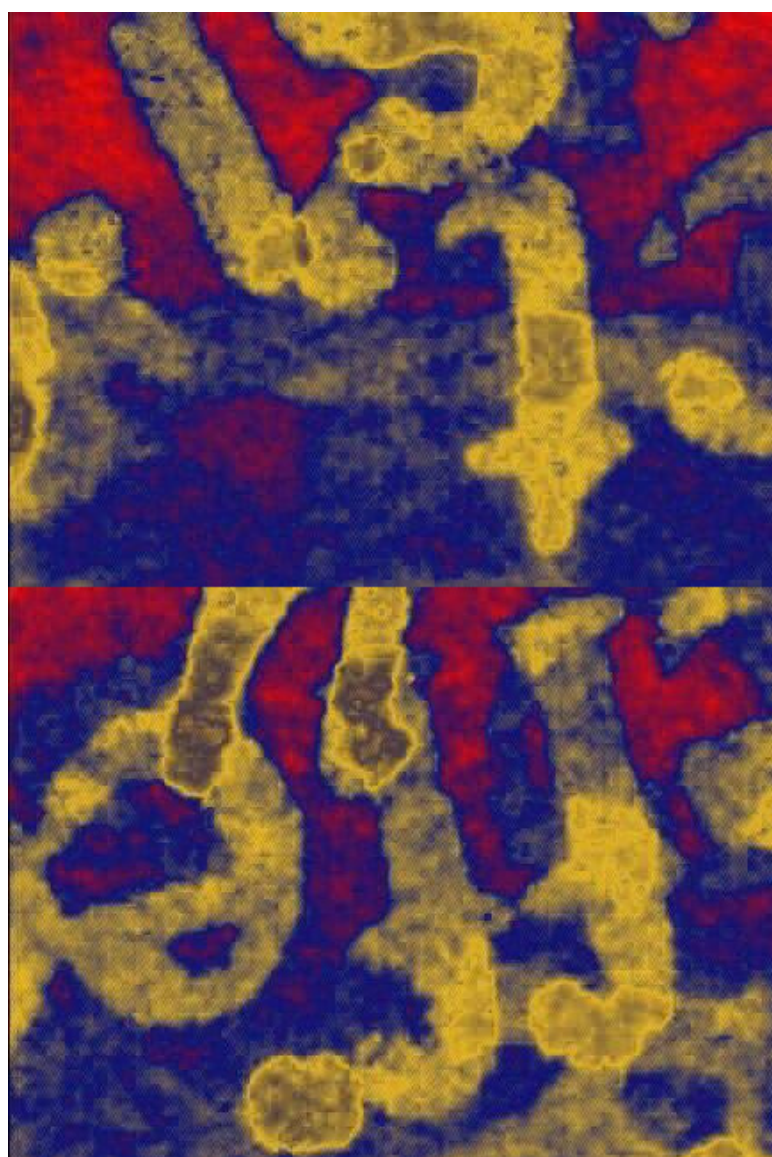




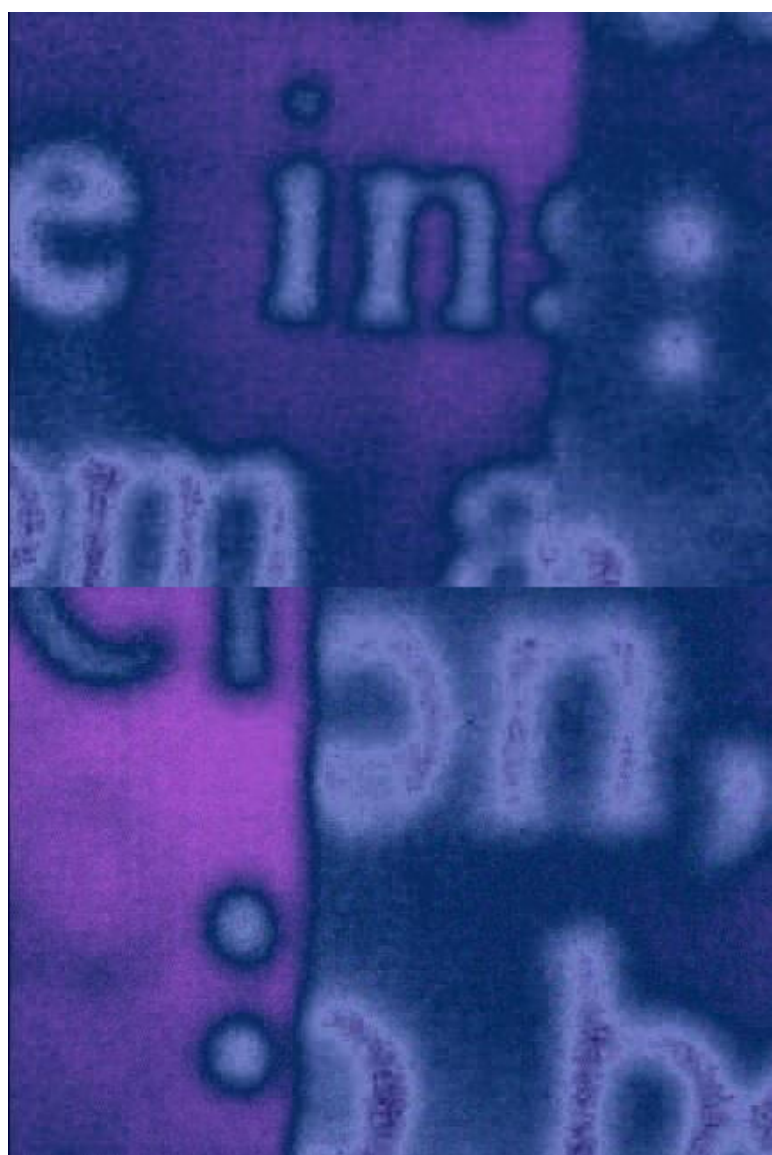
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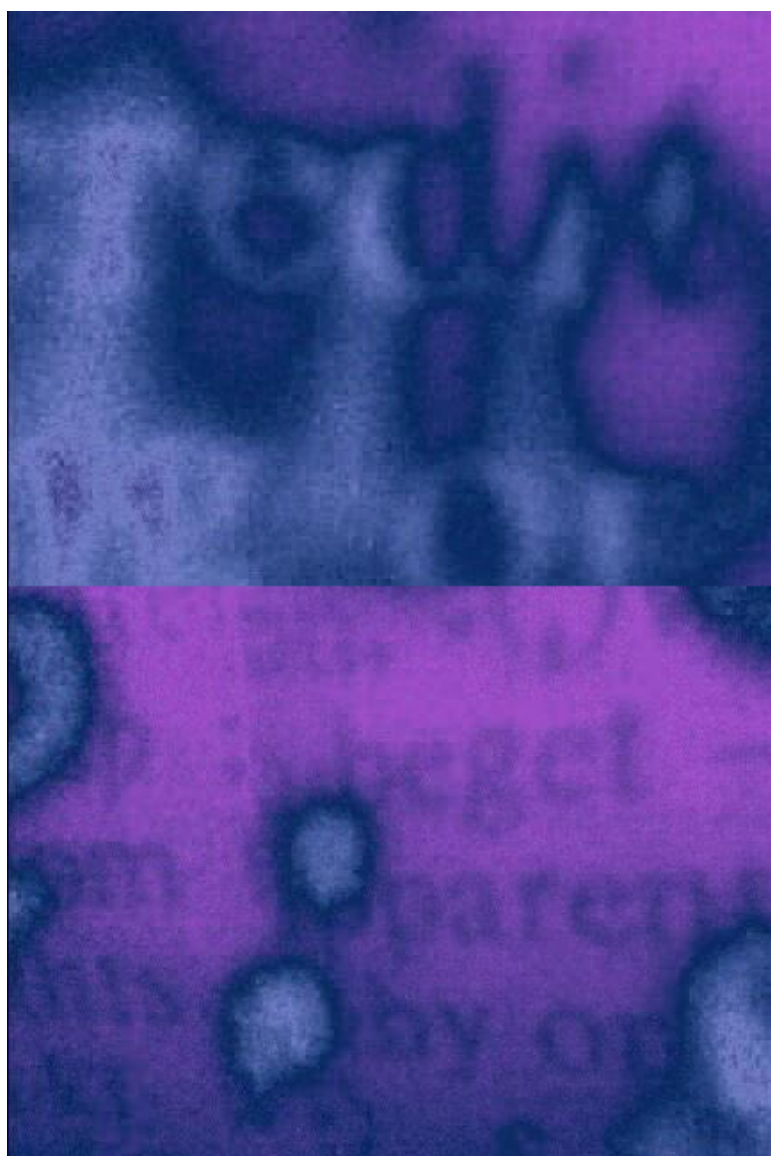


Staring Index 2





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# Hellenic Swim

