

# Slot Canyons: Form, Space, Light, Color

**Robert Fathauer and Nat Friedman**  
**tessellations@cox.net and artmath@albany.edu**

## Abstract

The slot canyons along the border between Arizona and Utah are among the most spectacular natural sculptures. They are formed by the timeless passage of water over stone. These images were taken by Robert Fathauer.

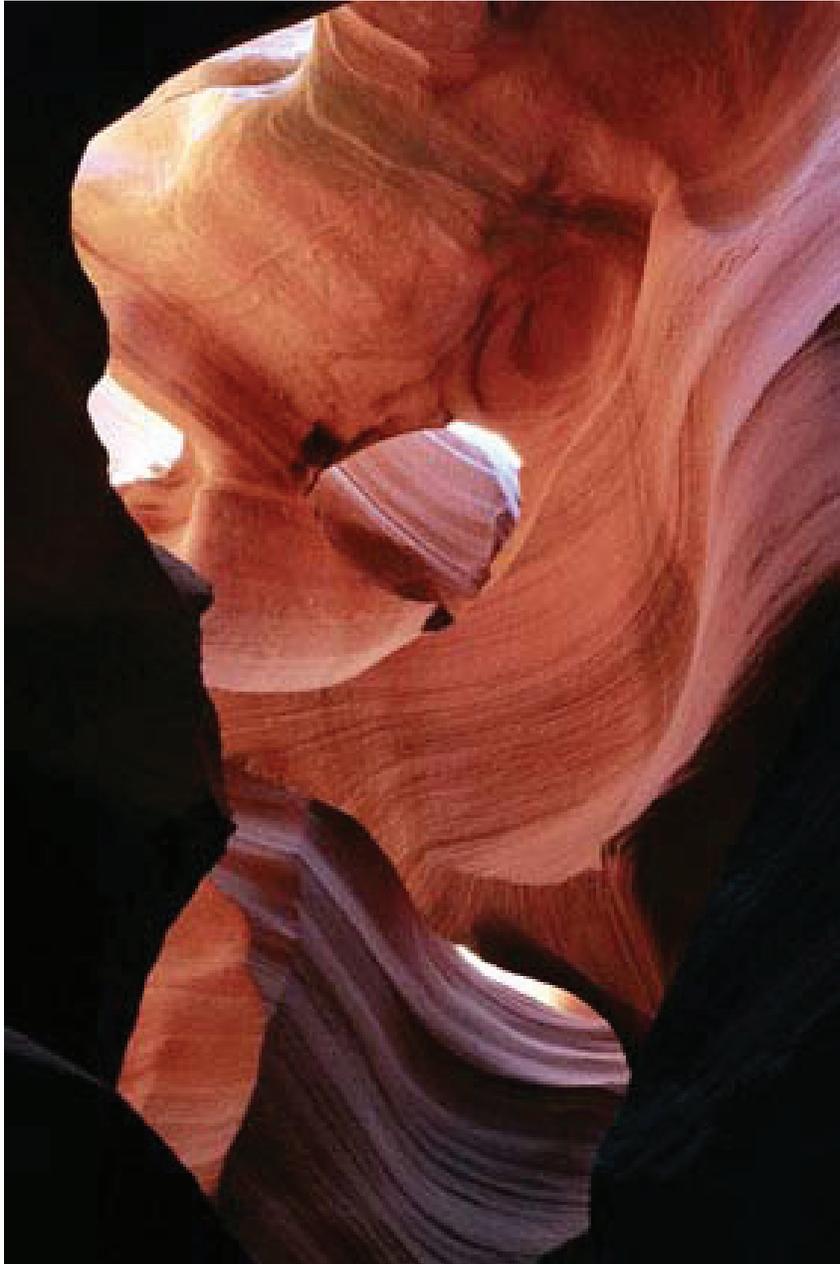
## Introduction

The slot canyons are wonderful inter-active form/space natural sculptures that you can enter and have a total experience of being in the spaces as well as viewing the forms. They are a photographer's delight as the range of light and color is dramatic. We also refer the reader to [1].



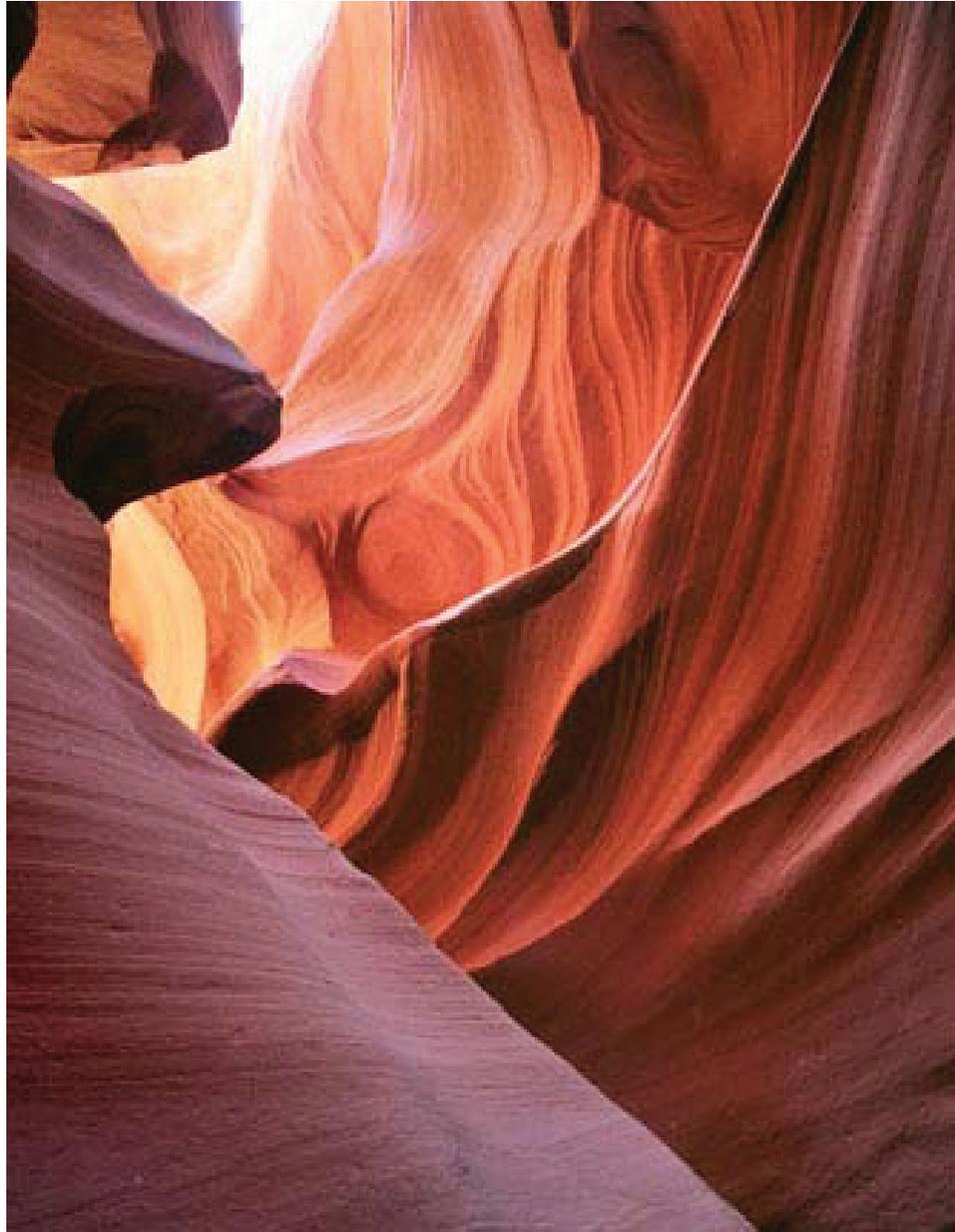
**Image 1.**

Here we see the linear horizontal surface marks of the powerful water pressure swirling through the canyon. The narrow vertical spaces and range of light/dark colors is striking. NF.



**Image 2**

This image is quite deceptive. At first I thought the lower central dark portion was coming forward as a positive form. Then I realized it was actually a receding wall passing under the lighter colored central overhang. The five spaces, or “windows”, in the image, including the lower left, allow light to enter from various directions. This is truly a great image. NF



**Image 3**

Here one can really feel the light coming from the left. It lights up the thin diagonal edge from the upper right. This particularly delicate wisp of a curved line still seems to dominate the view.  
NF

The variety and complexity of these sandstone forms is a source of endless fascination. RF  
These slot canyons are dry most of the time. Erosion occurs primarily during flash floods, in which water gathered over a large area is forced into a narrow slot. These are violent events, and the water is carrying sand as well as rocks. The erosion is therefore caused by what is in the water as well as by the water itself. Presumably the scalloped features are due to large chunks of sandstone being broken off by large rocks. The creation of such beauty through acts of violence is a bit paradoxical. These photographs were taken in Lower Antelope Canyon, also known as

The Corkscrew. Eleven tourists were killed here by a flash flood in 1997, reportedly caused by a thunderstorm five miles away.



**Image 4**

A vertical image catching the curving wave of stone like drapery in the upper center. One can imagine the water hollowing out this space. NF



**Image 5**

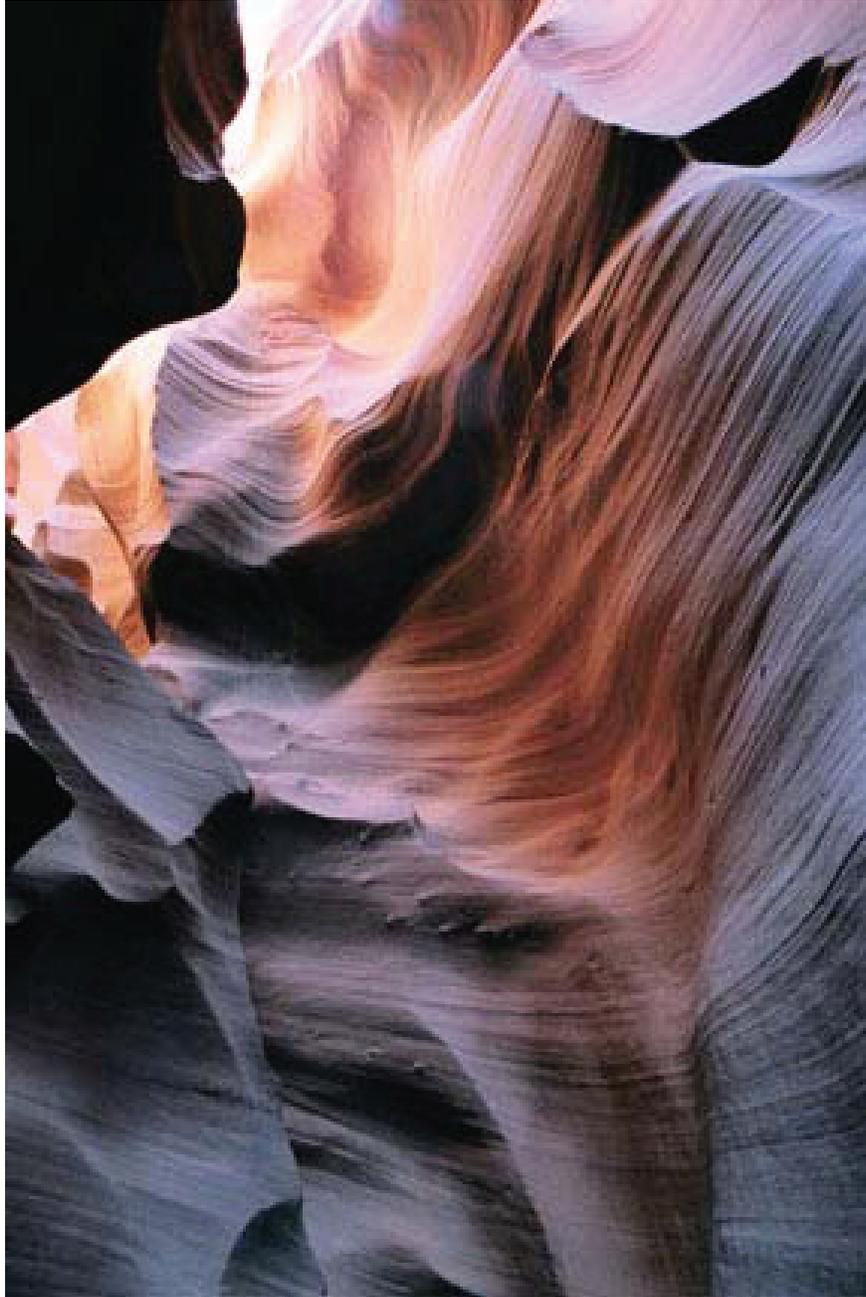
A minimal image accentuating the light/dark contrast. This image seems quiet in relation to some of the more active forms. NF

These photographs were taken with either an Olympus FE-340 compact digital camera or with a Minolta X-700 35-mm film camera. A tripod was used due to the low light levels in these narrow and relatively deep spaces. Some adjustments of levels in the images was performed in PhotoShop. In most of these images, there is neither sky nor directly sunlit rock, only shadow. This allows the subtle colors in the sandstone to come out, as bright areas would make the rest of the image extremely dark.



**Image 6**

Here I am reminded of sand dunes blown by the wind. Thus there is a form equivalence of water on stone and sand on wind. NF



**Image 7**

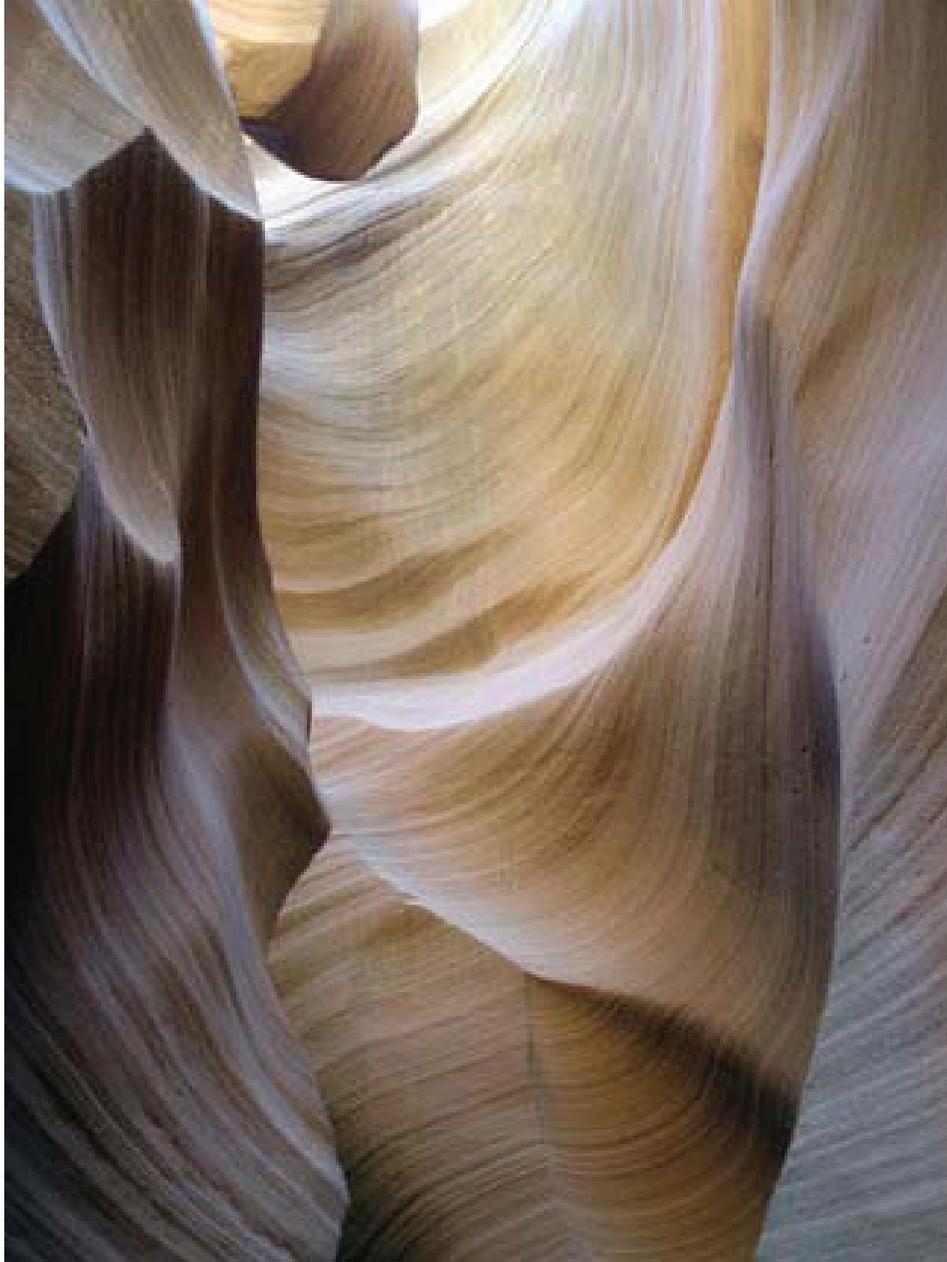
The variety of forms in this image reflect parts that have broken off leaving sharp edges, as well as those smoothed by time. Again the surface flow lines are the water's footprints. NF  
The turbulent motion in this image is striking. RF



**Image 8**

A beautiful detail shot of a form that is a sculpture in itself. An example of the photographer high lighting a detail. NF

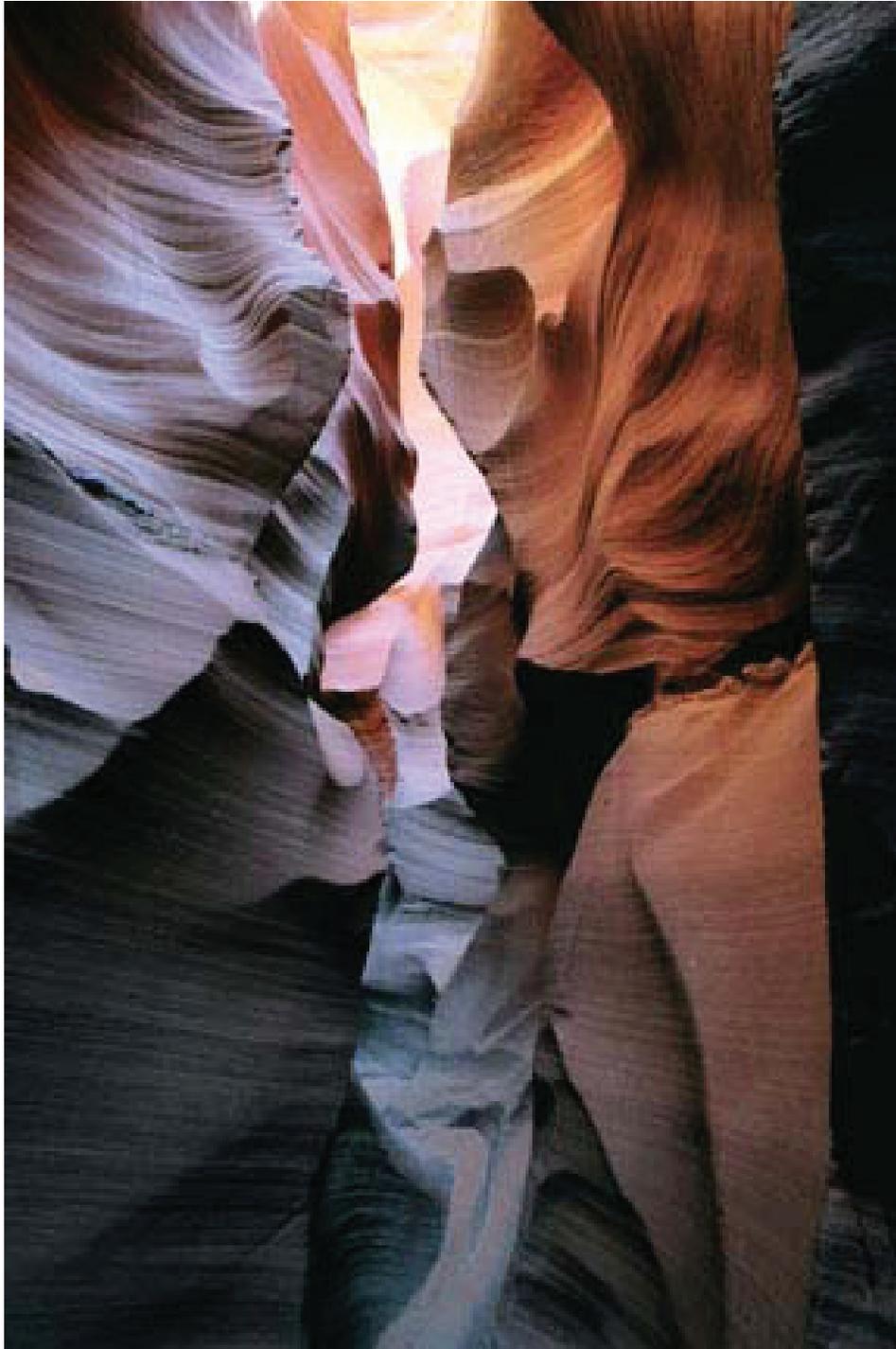
This powerful upward thrusting form contrasts nicely with the restfulness of image 9. RF



**Image 9**

Here is a quiet image with a delicate color. This is one of many inspirational images for a stone carver. NF

In this and many of these images, the camera sees more color than the naked eye. However, the experience of walking through these spaces is wonderful for the fact that one is surrounded by three-dimensional forms that are constantly changing. RF



**Image 10**

A tall narrow space emphasizing the range of light and color. The narrow walking path is visible at the bottom. This is a classic slot canyon image. NF



**Image 11**

This horizontal image accentuates the feeling of wave forms in stone. A feature I hadn't thought of before. The camera angle changes the vertical wall to a more horizontal wave surface. NF  
The amount of movement one feels looking at this image of static stone is remarkable. RF

#### **Reference**

[1] Robert Fathauer and Nat Friedman, Water Holes Canyon: Form, Space, Light, and Color, Hyperseeing, March/April 2008, [www.isama.org/hyperseeing/](http://www.isama.org/hyperseeing/)