

## Penlight Abstractions

**T**hese abstractions are made in the darkroom with penlights on photographic paper while I listen to music. They are a transformation of sound energy to visual energy through my body—a recording on a recording on paper of my visceral experience of the music. For example, the inventive, rhythmic energy of Senegalese musician, Youssou N'Dour. I was raised playing the piano, reading the ten line grand staff of musical notation. So in the larger drawings I use 10 equally spaced penlights. I move the penlights directly on the paper's surface. Sometimes the lights mar the surface making little rhythmic scratches. The scratches are a welcomed part of the image.

**T**his is a very open-ended way of working with photographic materials. I am a skilled master printer, and have printed for other photographers, including Robert Mapplethorpe and Roni Horn. As a master printer I had to be extremely careful not to damage the surface of a print or I would have to start all over again to make a new print. I feel a wonderful sense of freedom being able to explore and incorporate all aspects of photographic materials, including scratches on the surface. I like seeing the tiny bits of torn emulsion surface as a beautiful part of the image and beautiful part of how the materials function. In another recent series, I am actually cutting into the surface of the photograph with a mat knife

**F**rom the start I was interested in line. In these drawings I think of photographic paper as part of a ritual dance. The resulting drawings are what remain at the end of my movement. To me, visual line is like melody in music. Early in my career I spent some time with Aaron Siskind because I was so interested in his abstract work, particularly the lyrical quality of his lines. He said he wished that he could find the one line that would take him straight to heaven. That thought has stayed with me all these years. I think about the lines that are created in nature and by humans. What would the lines look like that are made by the movements of whirling dervishes, for example? If we put penlights on the dervishes' feet and had them whirl around on photographic paper, what would we see? It's this sort of recording of line that interests me.

