

di / VISION interiors



explorations of the internal space

Lloyd Godman

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FOREWORD

Gavin Keeney

Images of all kinds are essentially and notoriously silent (or mute), and, as a consequence, they are often likened to death masks. Two seminal essays in this regard appeared in the 1940s, one from André Bazin and another by Emmanuel Levinas, as if the great film critic (Bazin) was being answered by the great skeptic (Levinas), yet[†] in this case, this mysterious aspect of the image was applied foremost to photography and its truth-telling potential.

Lloyd Godman's diptychs have the eerie or preternatural silence of German photographer Candida Höfer's best works – a silence commented upon by the Portuguese novelist José Saramago, in *Candida Höfer: Em Portugal / Candida Höfer: In Portugal*. This silence, in turn, commissions all types of speculation on the part of the observer, not the least of which is, quite simply, Why such silence? Or: Is it in the subject matter, or is it in the artistic values employed?

And then, as if to trouble trouble itself, there is so much unnecessary "noise" present in so much contemporary pho-

tography and associated media (video and installation art) that this unsettling silence given to the image is in many respects paradoxically amplified by the ever-present din of such contemporary arts. Godman's works, inclusive of his multimedia installations and his aerial gardens (the latter composed of Bromeliads, on found or custom-made superstructures), speak to this discord between so-called discursive noise and so-called non-discursive knowledge (the simple act of knowing something, without words). Additionally, the production of art books and catalogues (such as the one you now hold in your hands or are viewing on your computer screen) automatically engages with this old argument between words and images, or between noise and silence – but most of all, and most importantly, the book questions the silence of the image by providing it with a context (whether linguistic or simply formal).

Perhaps Godman's Quaker background has something to do with this embedded silence in his photography, and any words in support of that silence are almost destined to be forms of blasphemy. Yet Quakers are allowed to speak in their otherwise silent meetings, if only to comment from within reflection upon what passes in or through the silence ... Therefore, and as Mallarmé long ago pointed out, the unsayable is, sometimes, sayable (though usually through poetry).

Yet Godman's diptychs say that very unsayable thing that words generally fall short of – by saying it twice through the doubled agency of the diptych ...

Whatever these photographs say is, nonetheless, still a mystery. The photographer allows the subject of photography to speak by conjuring up the means of capturing the moment of expression. This is the death mask aspect. Is the conversation shut off in the making of the photograph? Is its doubling a way of reactivating the conversation or just a formal contrivance? These ques-

tions are for the art spectator, not the image or the artist. Most of all, there is no right answer.

As a result, all of these clever words in support of this book mean – more or less – “next to nothing.”

1 The two essays are: André Bazin, “Ontologie de l’image photographique” (1945); and Emmanuel Levinas, “La réalité et son ombre” (1948).

2 Candida Höfer, *Candida Höfer: Em Portugal / Candida Höfer: In Portugal* (Munich: Schirmer-Mosel; Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, 2007). Catalogue of an exhibition at the Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon, December 1, 2006-February 25, 2007). Texts by José Saramago and Shelley Rice. Saramago writes: “It is hardly original to say that all photographs are silent, but in these gigantic images the silence draws depth from the emptiness, whilst the empty space draws on the silence to become, at last, absolute: Emptiness, silence.” From the Press Release for “Candida Höfer: In Portugal,” Sonnabend Gallery, New York, New York, USA, September 15-October 2007.

3 There is a lovely convention in library catalogues to denote singular prints and photographs as having “no linguistic content.” This is a perhaps accidental commentary on the primary mute characteristics of such images, including those included in folios that have no text.

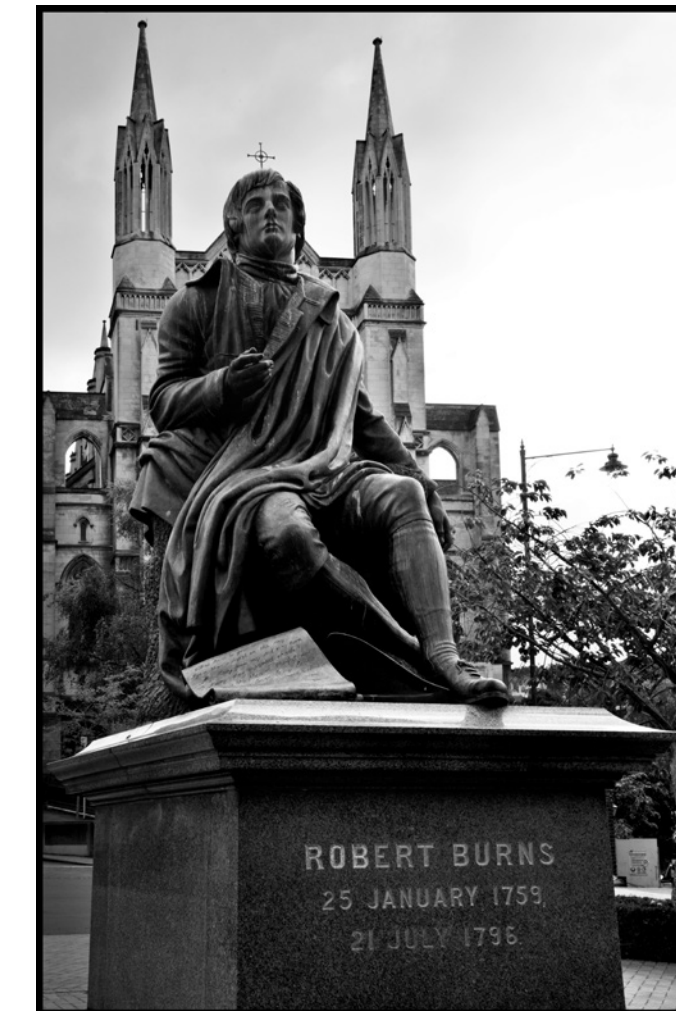
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explorations of the internal

As a teen, I was always spellbound walking into the huge, vaulted expanse of St. Paul's Cathedral in Dunedin where I grew up. Dunedin was a small town, but this was a large impressive structure, a megalithic stone skeleton with a hollowed-out body, where the slightest sound was amplified in echoes. Nearly every day, on the way to high school, I would walk past the imposing limestone-walled structure with buttresses and towers reaching high above me. And later, at 15, when I began work as an apprentice electrician at the Evening Star newspaper, sometimes during the lunch breaks I would go to the cathedral to draw, or take photographs. However, the results predictably fell short and never expressed the immense volume of the interior space, or the precision and intricacy of the architectural detail.

More than the reverence of the sacred spirit that might inhabit the space (for me, the natural world anchored this place, plus the ambience of history or the past echoes of events, celebrations, prayer, song, and chant), I was captivated by the science and engineering of architecture that kept the tons of stone from falling

upon my head. As I gazed upward, the vaulted structure with arching diagonal ribs and carved lace detail defied gravity, while the tall, slender, femur-bone-like columns that held all aloft proved its own powerful *raison d'être*.



Homage to Baxter, Resonance XXVI – Robert Burns Statue, Octagon, Dunedin – 2013 (St. Paul's Cathedral, Dunedin, is in the background)

As a photographer, one who looks critically at light and form, how the architect who conceived the geometric design of such spaces, wrapped as they are within an almost frightening and echoing immensity, was even more intriguing.

That these ideas and conceptual plans became an actually existing (real) edifice, which contained a huge but elegant space as a vessel might hold water, that the opposing forces of darkness and light were materialized through heavy, great blocks of stone set with coloured apertures, was utterly magnetic. At times, light played a dance through the apertures across the space to an adjacent surface. For the parishioners or visitor the irrelevant weight of mortal bodies might pass though the space on the polished, level marble floor, while the spirit was free to soar to the heights of angels.

During a trip to New Zealand's subantarctic islands in 1989, as we sailed down the coast of Stewart Island, I began photographing the distant, undulating, fine line of land that was the island, a thin dark line that cut across the bottom of



Stewart Island - 1989



Stewart Island - 1989

the camera frame, with a large area of the image above this dominated by the immense expanse of sky.

From the deck of a swell-tossed boat, keeping the horizon level in the viewfinder of the camera was demanding.

Fate intervened and a storm saw us land at Port Pegasus, to spend some time on Stewart Island. I soon began taking two related frames as a diptych. Not the traditional juxtaposition of two images placed horizontally, but a subversive vertical placement, one image above the other, where the horizon would sit at the very top of one frame and at the very bottom of the next frame.

The strategy was to avoid the obvious vertical panoramic and replace it with a diptych, where elements repeated like music and the occasional passing of time between frames was self-evident – a formalistic move plus an homage to the real. In the resulting images, there was a powerful gestalt that used the eye to separate the two individual camera frames, but

then persuaded the observer to mentally see a single, unified image. Thus the real and the transcendental merged in these images, as in the churches that inspired them.

This was more than the common interplay of negative and positive space, where one either perceives a wine glass or two faces, as in Rubin's vase (sometimes known as the Rubin face or the figure-ground vase).

So, while the thin line of sky cut the top of one frame, an equally thin land line cut the bottom of the second frame. As a result, the ensuing landscape – the combination of both frames – became larger than both images (or, "transcendental" in the Emersonian sense).

I continued to experiment with the vertical diptych, or di-VISION, and soon shot a series of images at the Auckland Islands. So, while our eyes are binocular (bi/vision), on the horizontal axis these works played with the binocular on a counter axis with the criticality of a crosshair.

Michael Kopp writes about the work in Photo Forum Review 1990: "Akatore River 1990,' stacks the firmament above the fundament, the latter being a volcanic beach. Godman seems to say we can see the whole or its parts, and the whole is a sum of its parts in nature as well as in our mind's eye. These pictures are more affecting than their somewhat deliberately careless scattergun approach and matching would seem to indicate. But do they readily read as statements about the land – or how we see it?"

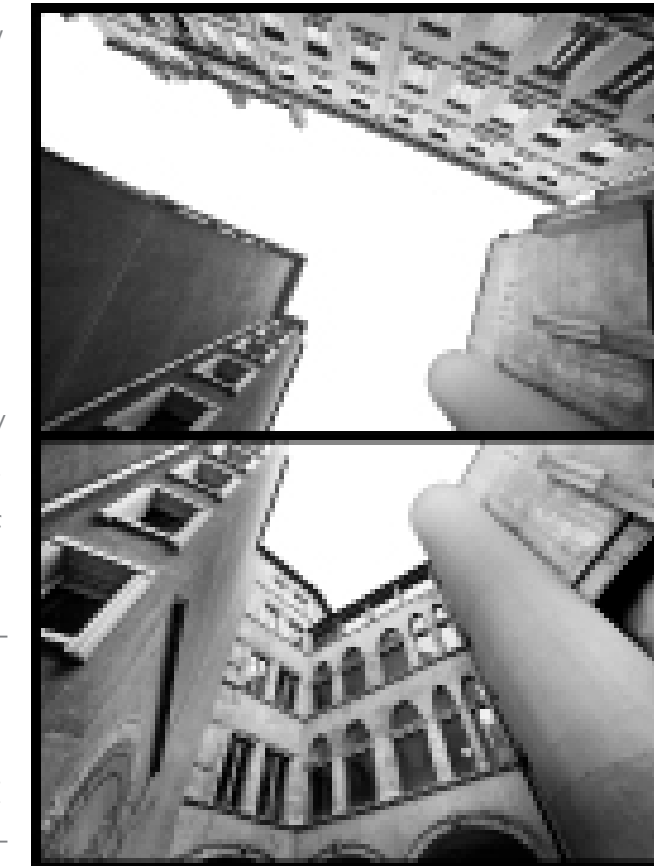
Later I began using the same aesthetic in documenting the built environment, in a series entitled di-VISION; but here the geometric lines of architecture played off each other through the distortive perspective of the wide-angle lens. Rather than use a tripod and align the two

frames perfectly, I deliberately shot handheld (scattergun), allowing aberrations of line and form to either intersect or displace. In some images the effect was jarring and awkward; in others it gained visual power with the infusion of a visual echo as elements repeated.

The resulting diptych expanded the space of the building; it presented a hyperbolic space, but with the complexity of conflicting perspective, where lines had no common vanishing point. Over the next few decades the design strategy was applied from time to time and in various situations. I was also interested in how high-rise buildings create closed, strange shapes of sky as they enclose the heavens above. Slowly, shooting and analysing the images gave me a critical understanding of structural forms within the built environment, and the spaces between these forms became valuable in the conceptualisation of the subsequent suspended air-plant sculptures. From this point (in 2013),

I conceived the concept of Alpha Space, where the suspended rotating plant work could inhabit new areas within the built environment, suspended between structures, rather than on them.

Often this di/VISION became something I would explore while travelling. The di/VISION composite images became my "tourist images", personal postcards of places I visited. Urban structures in cities of New Zealand, Australia, France, Germany, Singapore, and the Philippines featured in the images. While these are specific places, they are also places that I have not necessarily sorted out in advance and travelled to, to photograph; rather they are spaces I have found myself in as I wandered the streets of a city or randomly discovered when en route to another destination. For instance, a city like Paris is just like that; there is a new discovery around each corner, and subjects present themselves at every turn.



Traboule, Lyon, France - 2010

Many of the di-VISION images were shot in France and included large, impressive church buildings. In time the entrances of these structures drew me inside, camera in hand with intent. Stepping inside the entrance, the internal spaces were often dark and seemed difficult to photograph, but, with the wonders of digital technology and the forgiveness of the wide-angle lens, I was still able to photograph handheld – again, one frame “super-imposed” above the other (not unlike the superscript of a footnote in a text), these images more or less “fell into place” as an inspired text might. While strained, the analogy does say something about how images speak a secret language. Whereas the exterior façades are in monochrome, this series of interior explorations are in vibrant colour. Frequently I was surprised that from these dark cavernous spaces, the camera revealed colour and detail hidden to the naked eye. From this experiential and experimental datum, and its subsequent archive, the series of images in di-VISION evolved.

The frames and consequent diptych im-

ages taken within these internal spaces are quite different to those taken outside of architectural façades. Space is presented in a very different manner; it is contained within the “walled chalice” of architecture, but within a single plane, the two-dimensional image; the visual poetry is distinct. Through a di-VISION image the sense of space, the volume and outstretched vaulted ceilings are heightened. The mirrored geometric architecture is nearly always centred in the camera frame, with the viewpoint locating symmetries that act as visual keystones, anchors to lock the interior design into place. Yet, in contradiction, the precision of the vertical, strong lines of columns in the nave are broken by the juxtaposition of the two images; displacement shifts the perception of the structure as stable to one that is visually flexible, and less secure.

In some images, bold contours rush in countering directions, arches might double curve, decoration and pattern reverberate. When each frame is viewed in isolation, there is a logical perspective, but when the two frames are viewed as

is one there is an irrational viewpoint. The rendering of the real in two dimensions might reduce the curve of the apse to a flattened plane, the intersection of the transept visually dissolved. As a diptych, an Escher-esque quality emerges where there are impossible planes and spaces. Perhaps this is also the origin of Piranesi’s famous etchings ...

Occasionally a site might lend itself to shooting a triptych. Besides church interiors, stairwells, châteaux, public buildings and industrial sites, huge glass houses appear, and in each composite image the surface and space are treated by the vertical binocular lens to create a unique vision of the space.

While it may appear that many of these structures’ interiors, just like the great churches, are “timeless” (that is, they remain unaltered over time due to historic preservation, unchanged use, or financial limitations), we will never know the truth of such a surmise, of this peculiar form of transcendental apperception. Close scrutiny of the detail might re-

veal decay, water damage, evidence of fire, surface or even structural damage. However, any photograph locks the interior in a time capsule as a point of reference for the future, and, in spite of the abstraction, these photographs are no different.

Structural boundaries and the human interaction within these boundaries is present but also questioned. Unlike St. Paul’s Cathedral in Dunedin, which I visited often over the years, these are largely places I’ve visited only once, places where the temporary womb of shelter becomes the forbidden home one can never return to, but places where the photo-images are nonetheless records of one’s transitory presence. However, they are not simply photographic records in the manner a single photograph, the composite images are interpretations of interior space that open new insights, new ways of seeing an aspect of enclosed space.

While the visual strategy with the camera is the same from composite image to image, viewpoint above viewpoint, each space is distinct and, consequently, each place opens a new way to see the built environment.

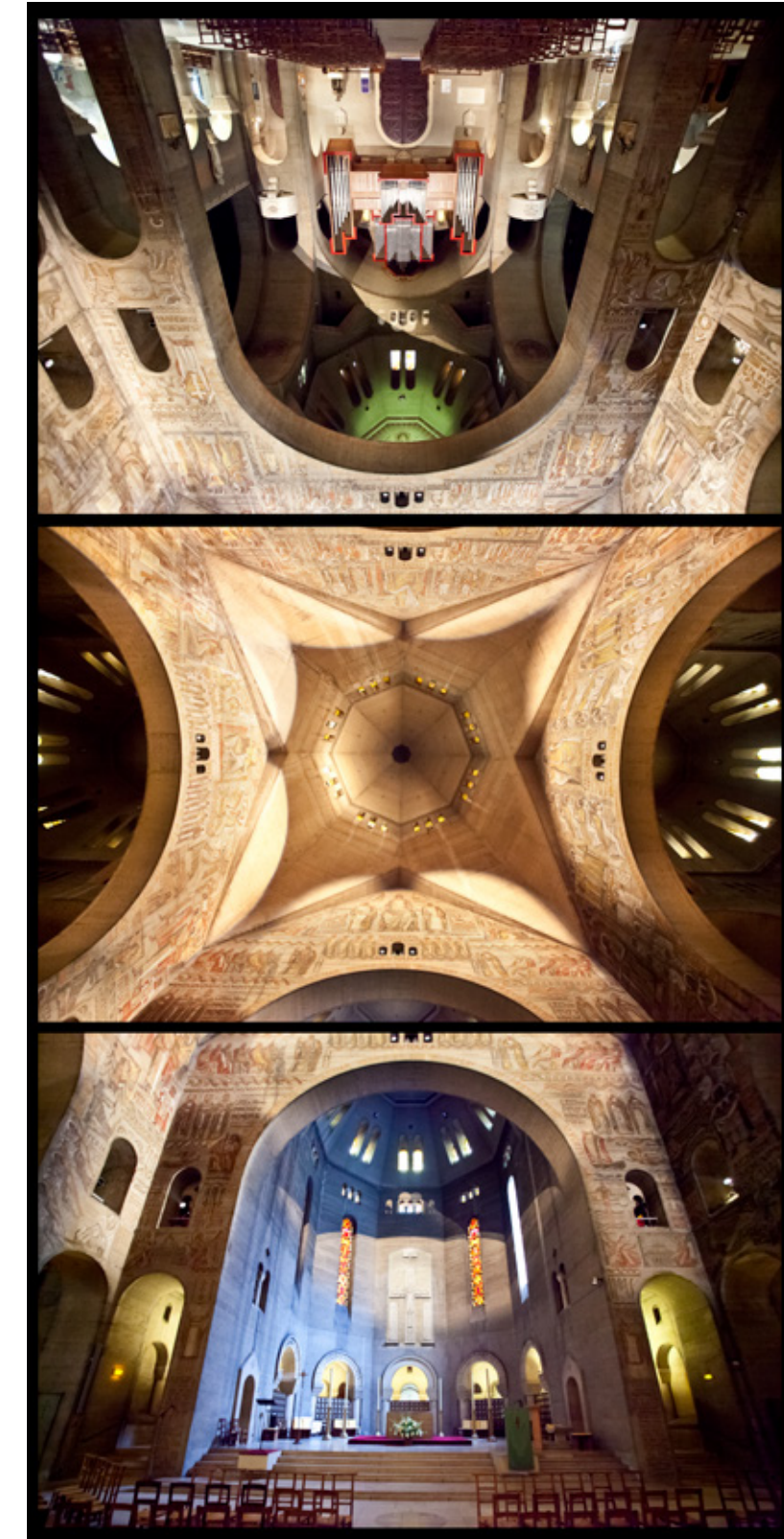
As in *The Poetics of Space*, where Gaston Bachelard suggests “when the image is new, the world is new”, here is both a combination of the familiar (the old) and the new – or, images that document and amplify the existing world of architecture... yet composite images that somehow (mysteriously through the alchemy of photography) end up being singular images anyway.

As in *The Poetics of Space*, where Gaston Bachelard suggests “when the image is new, the world is new”, here is both a combination of the familiar (the old) and the new – or, images that document and amplify the existing world of architecture...

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triptychs / diptychs

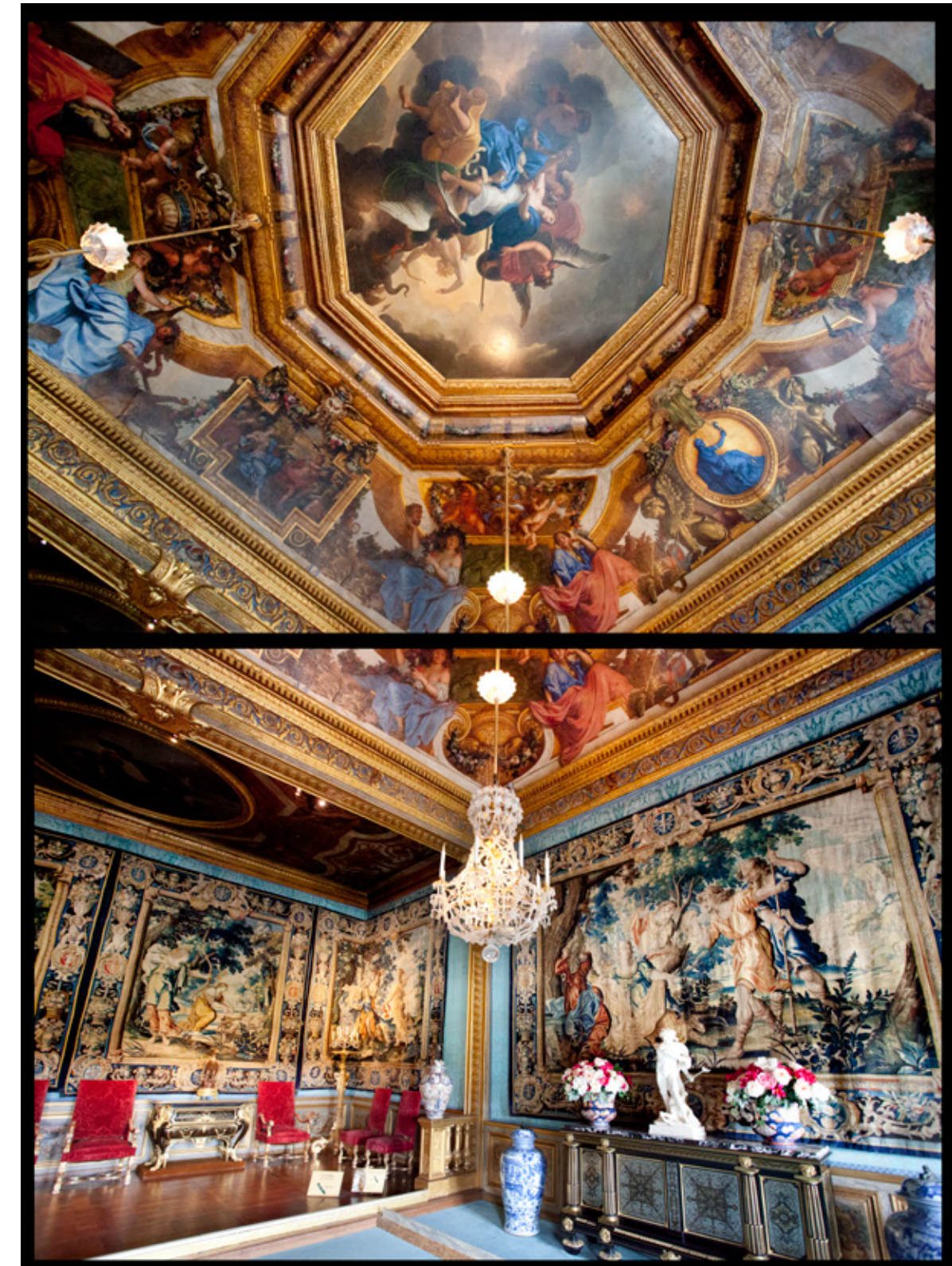
binocular explorations of the internal space



Interior, Church of Saint-Pierre-de-Chailot, Paris, France - triptych - 2013



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



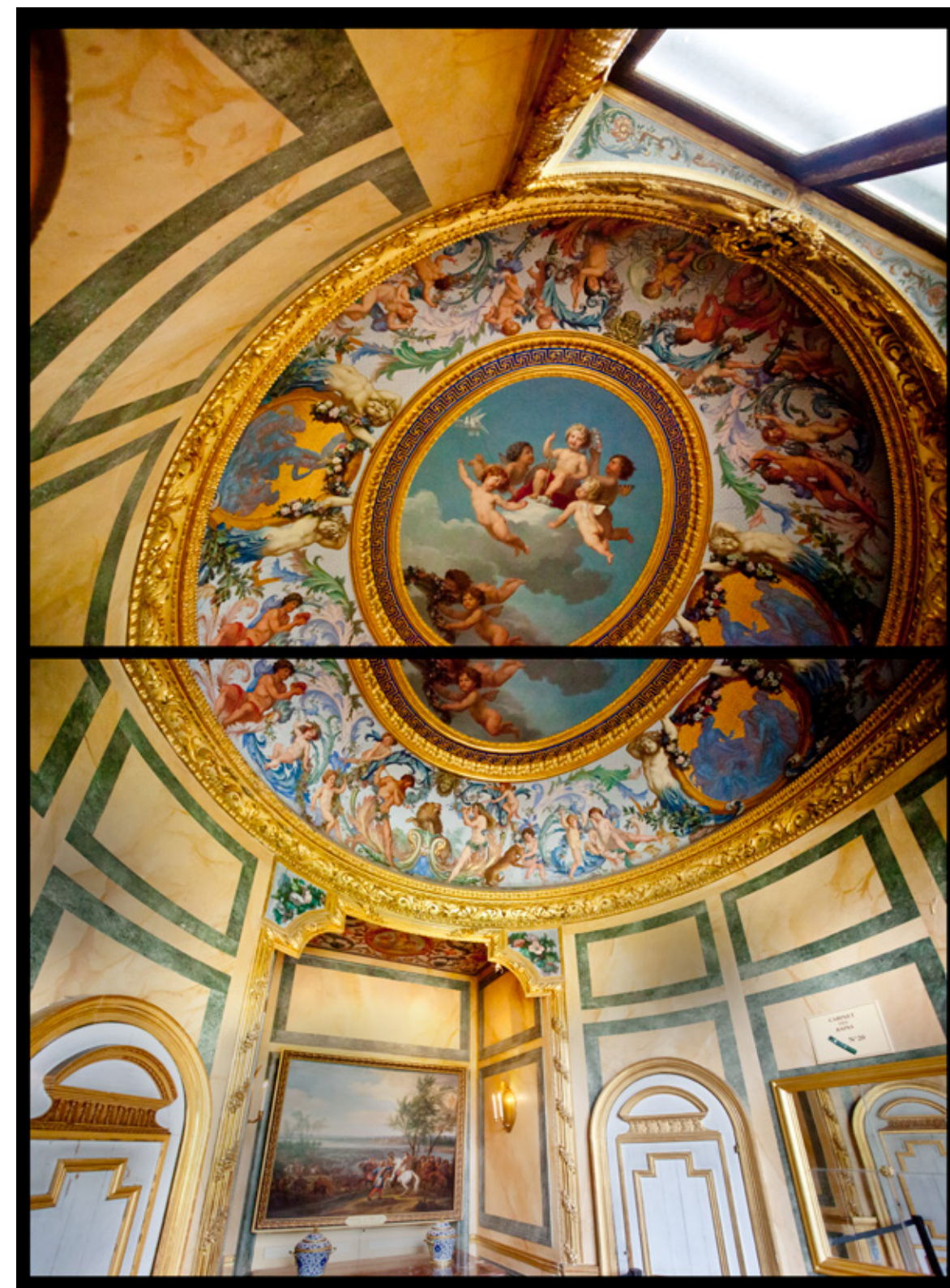
Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



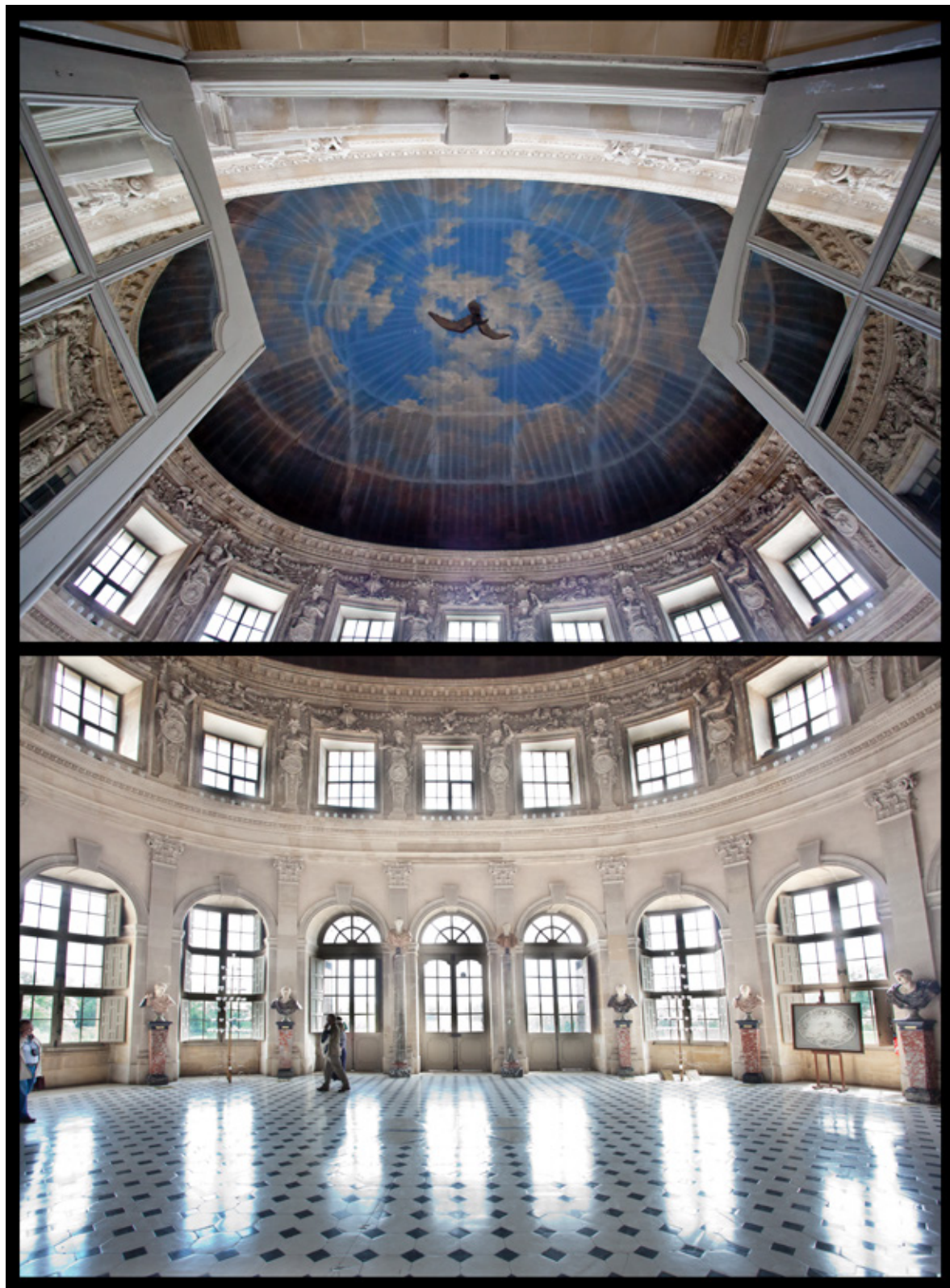
Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Basilique de Fourvière, Lyon, France - diptych - 2010



Interior, Basilique de Fourvière, Lyon, France - diptych - 2010



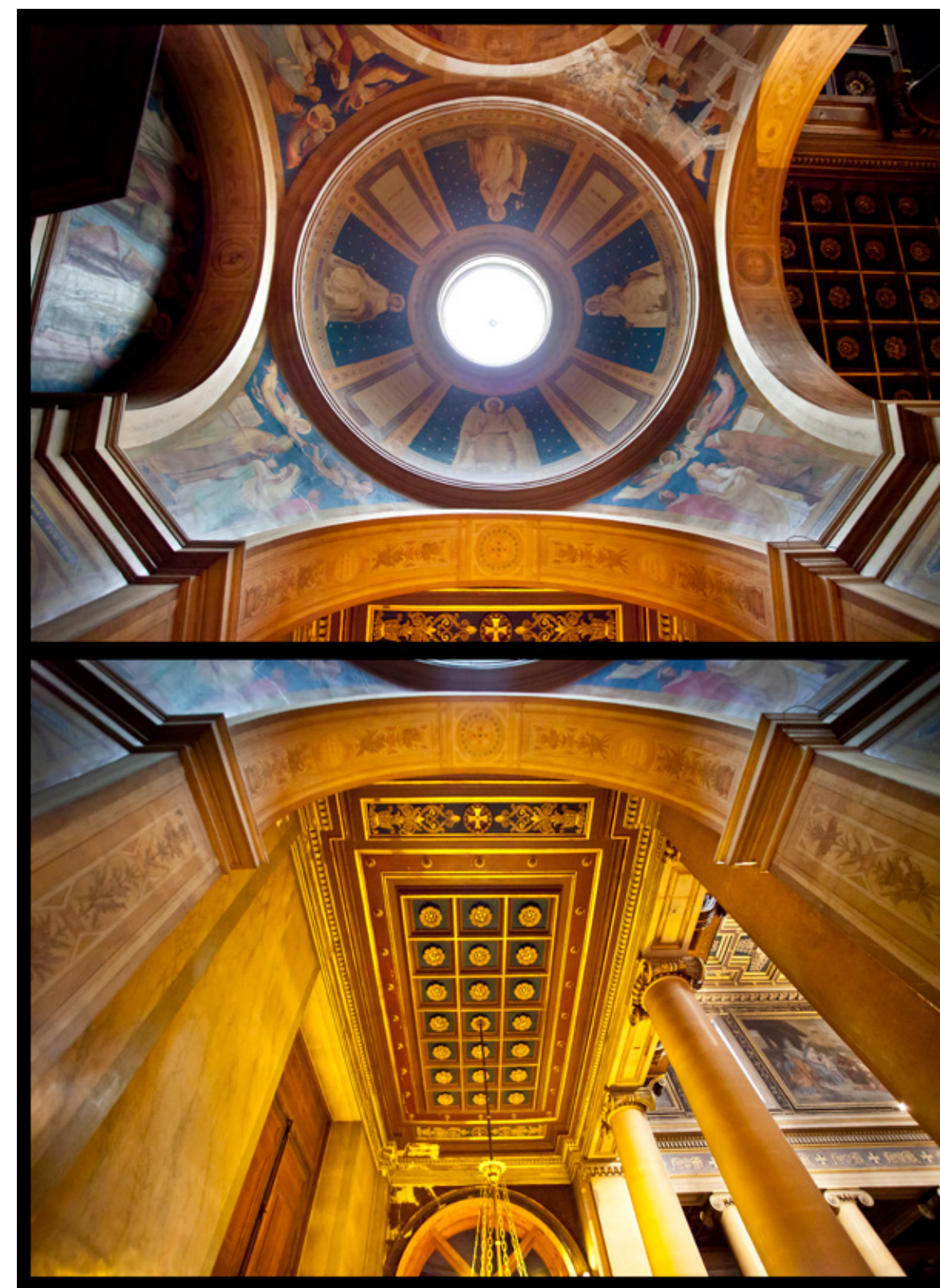
Interior, Notre-Dame de Lorette, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Lorette, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Lorette, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Lorette, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Merri, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



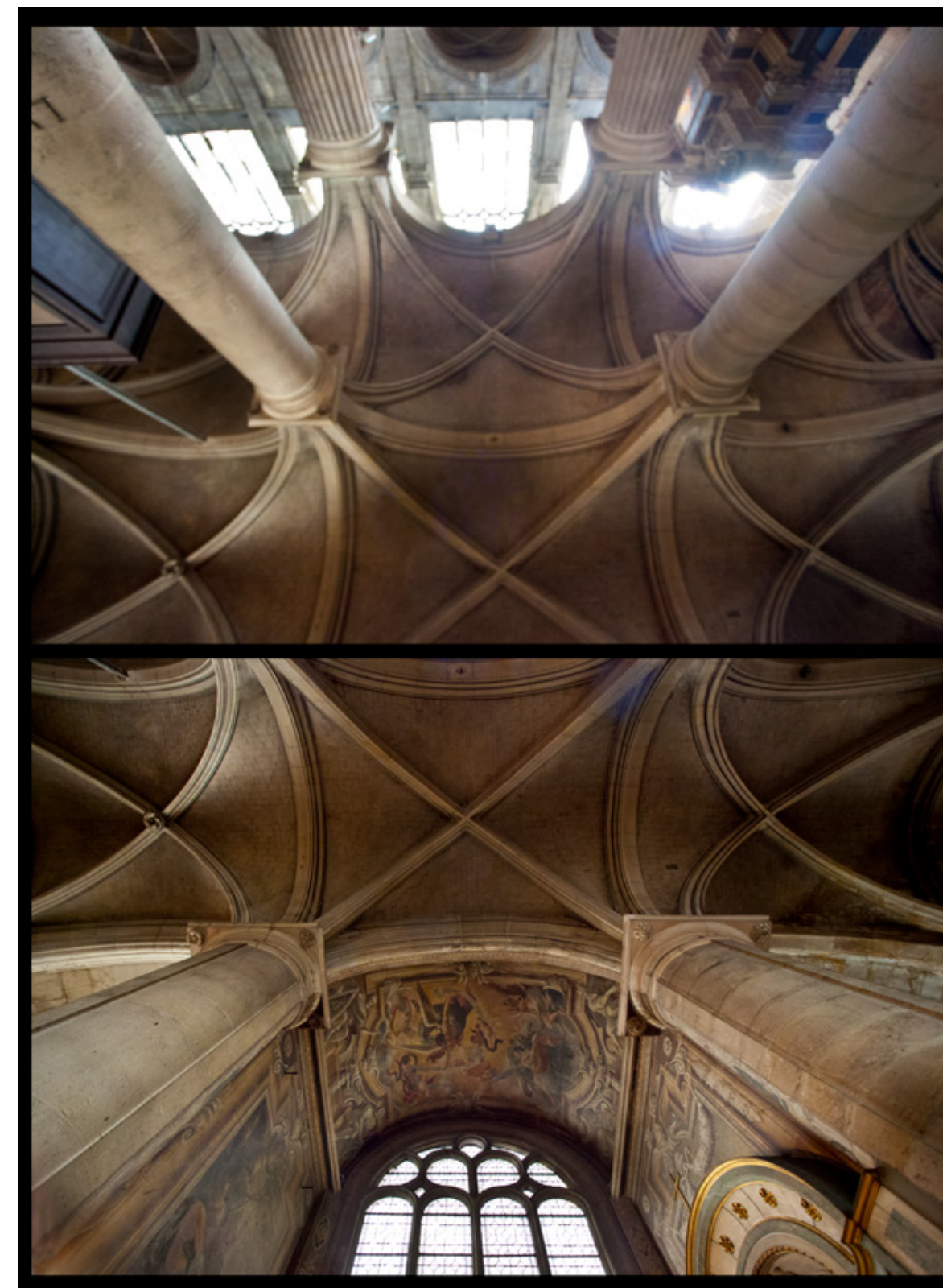
Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Musée Guimet, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Musée Guimet, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Musée Guimet, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Musée Guimet, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Church of Saint-Pierre-de-Chailot, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



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Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Abbey of Cluny, Cluny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of St. Blaise, Mazille, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of St. Blaise, Mazille, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of St. Blaise, Mazille, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Demeures Seigneuriales, near Jalogny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Demeures Seigneuriales, near Jalogny, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Demeures Seigneuriales, near Jalogny, France - diptych - 2013



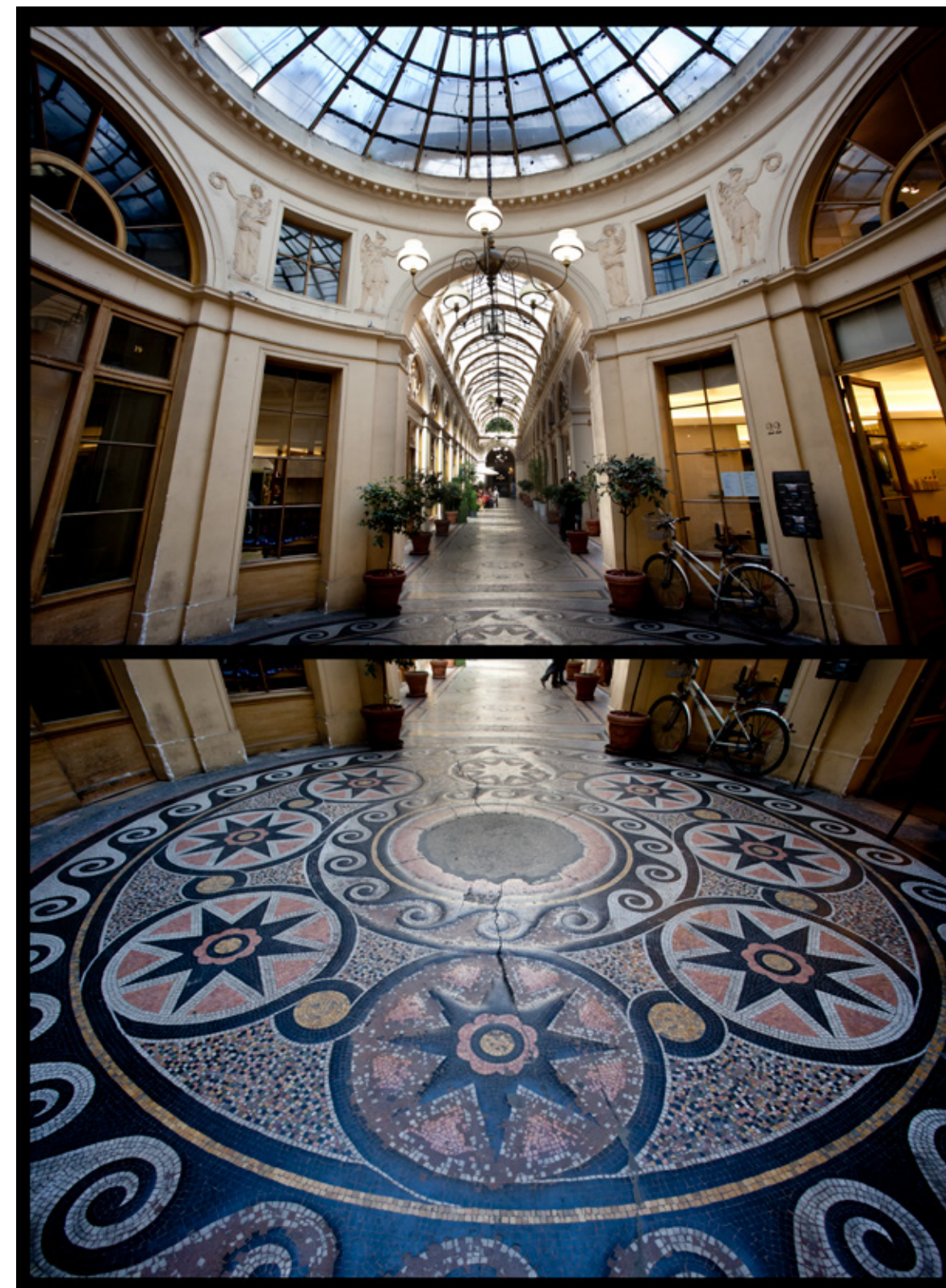
Interior, Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, Church of Saint-Nicholas-des-Champs, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



Interior, The Church of Saint-Merri, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



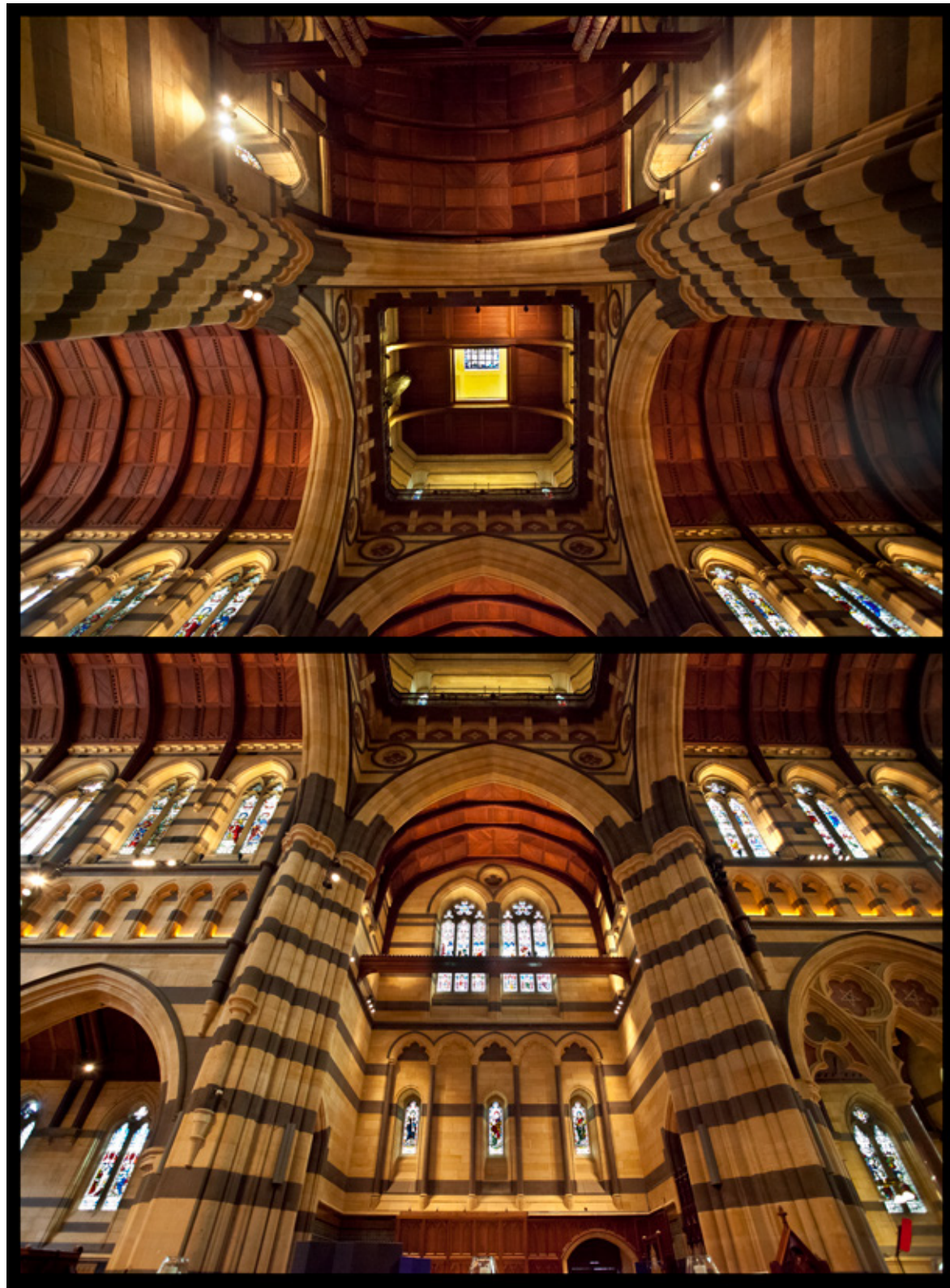
Interior, Rue de la Banque, Paris, France - diptych - 2013



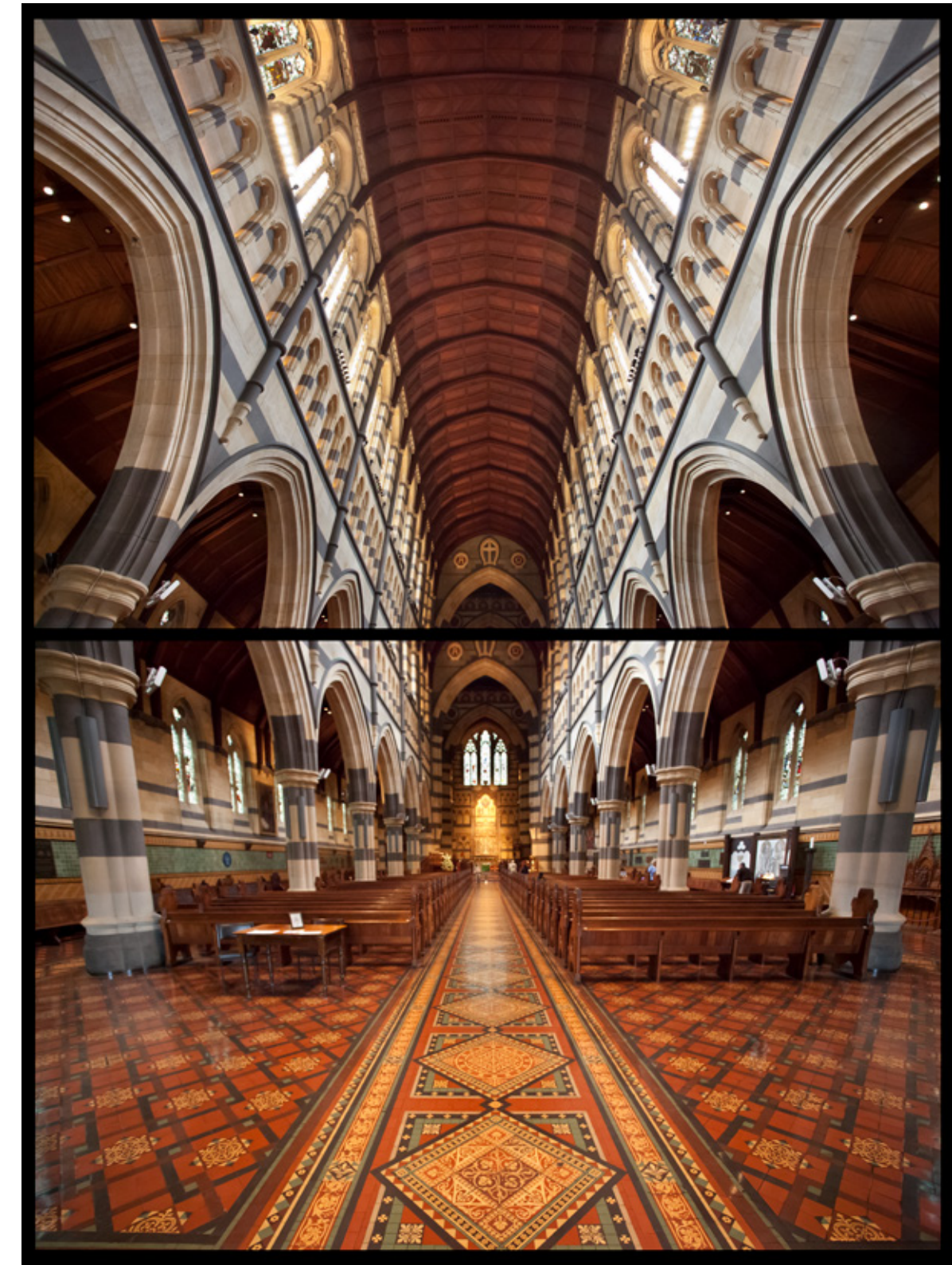
Interior, St. Nizier Church, Lyon Presqu'île, France - diptych - 2010



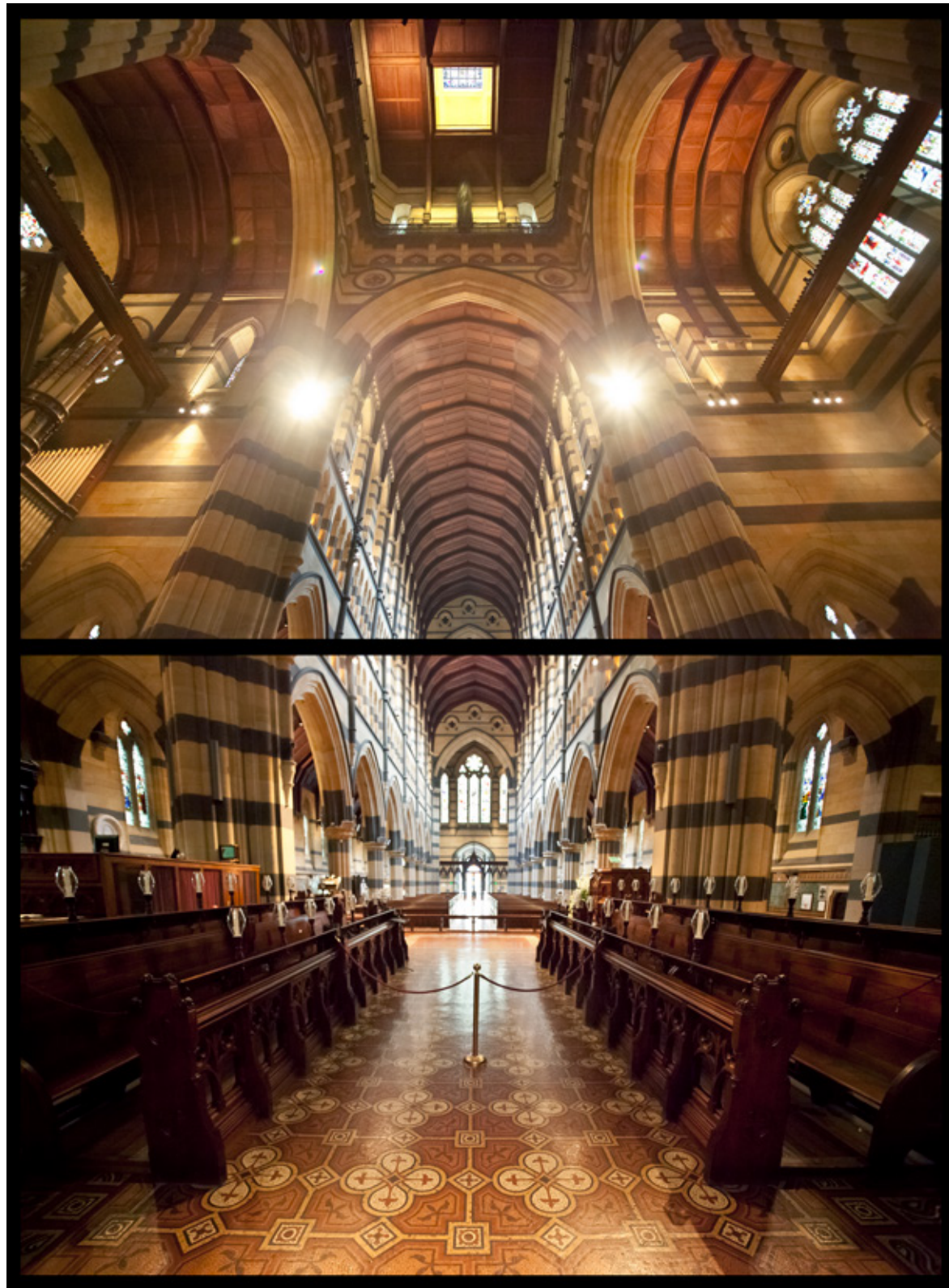
Interior, Untitled, Paris, France - diptych - 2010



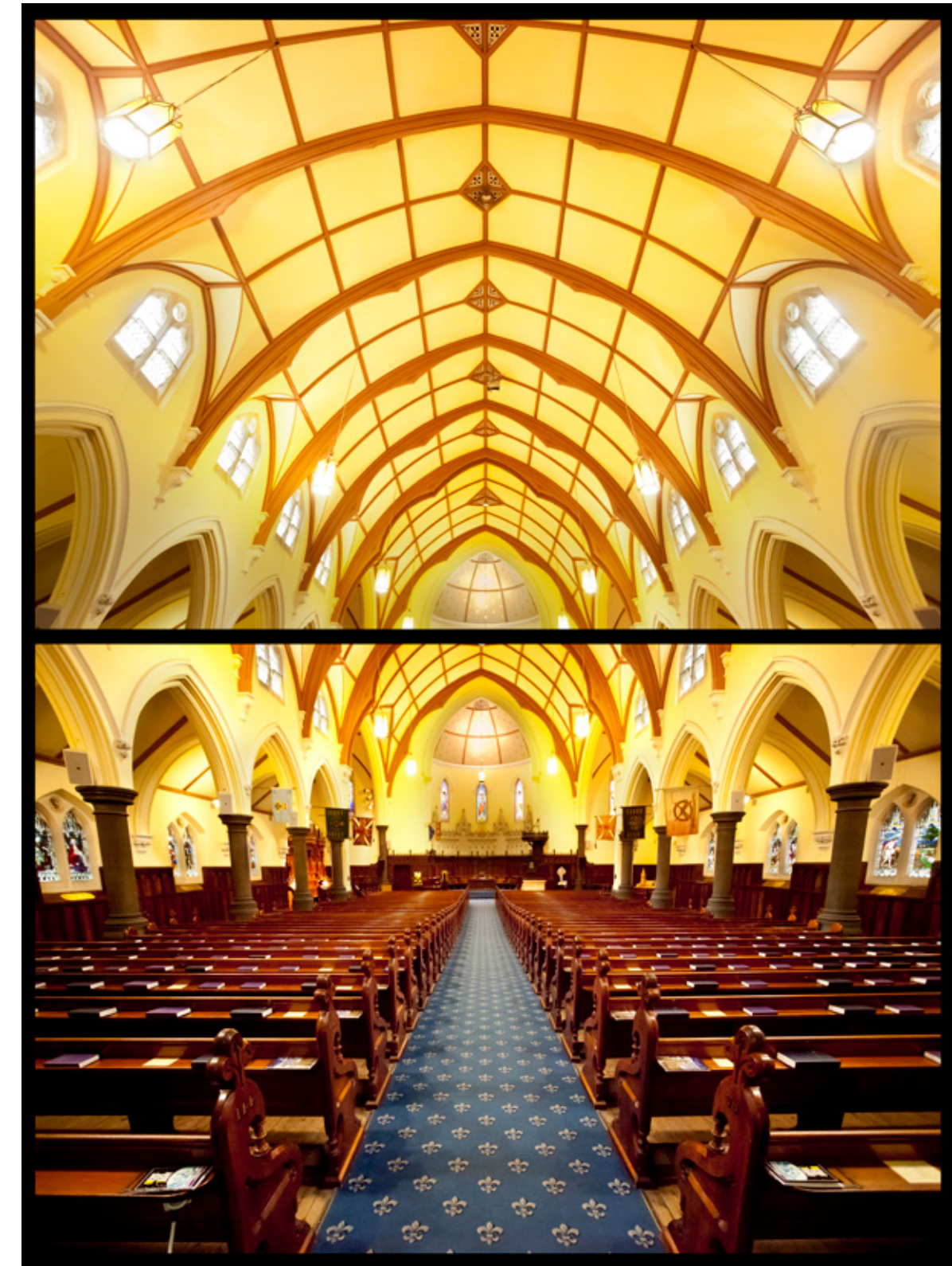
Interior, St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



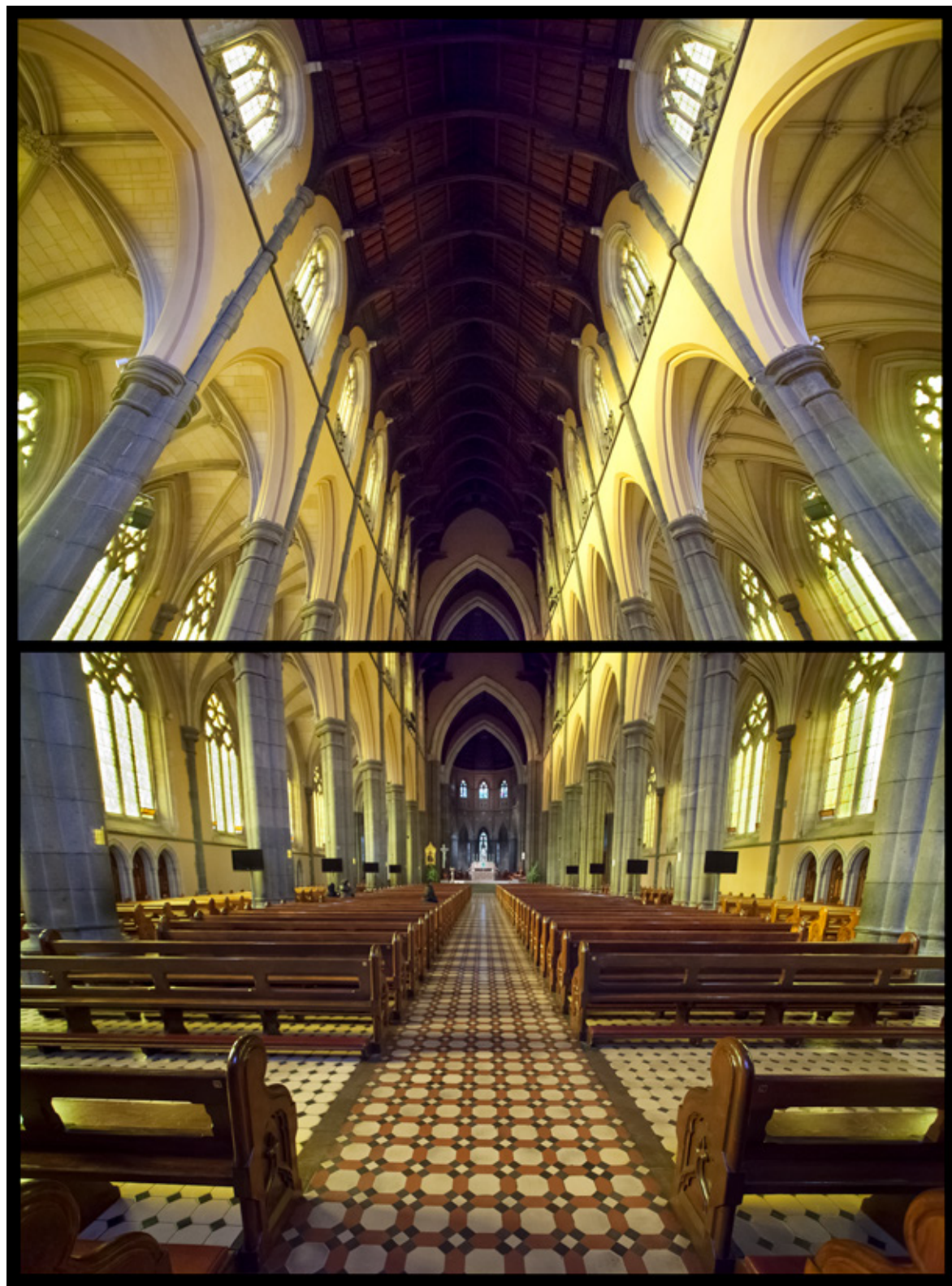
Interior, St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



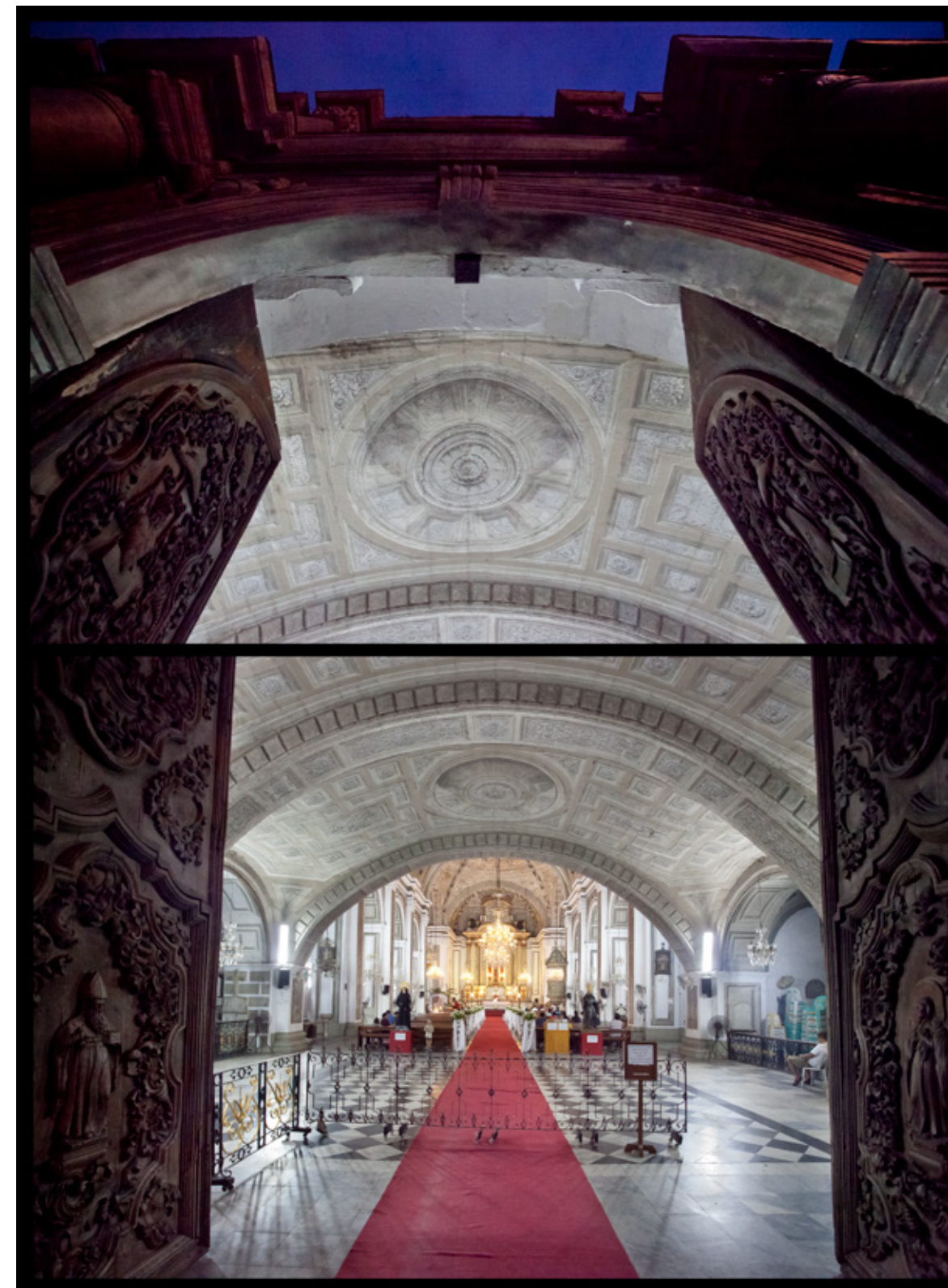
Interior, St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



Interior, Scots' Church, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



Interior, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



Interior, San Agustin Church, Manila, Philippines - diptych - 2014



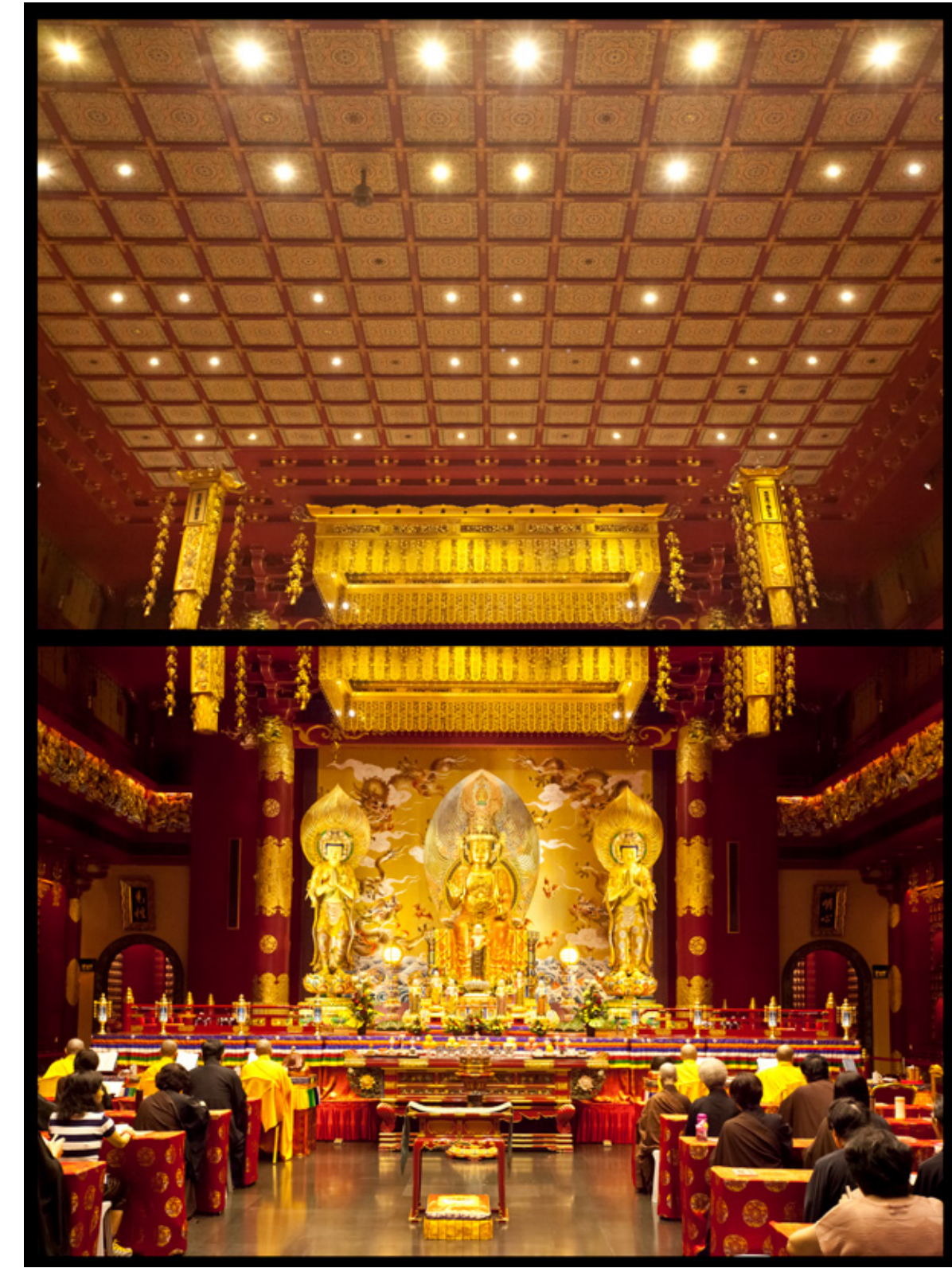
Interior, Peninsula Hotel, Manila, Philippines - diptych - 2014



Interior, Shopping Centre, Manila, Philippines - diptych - 2014



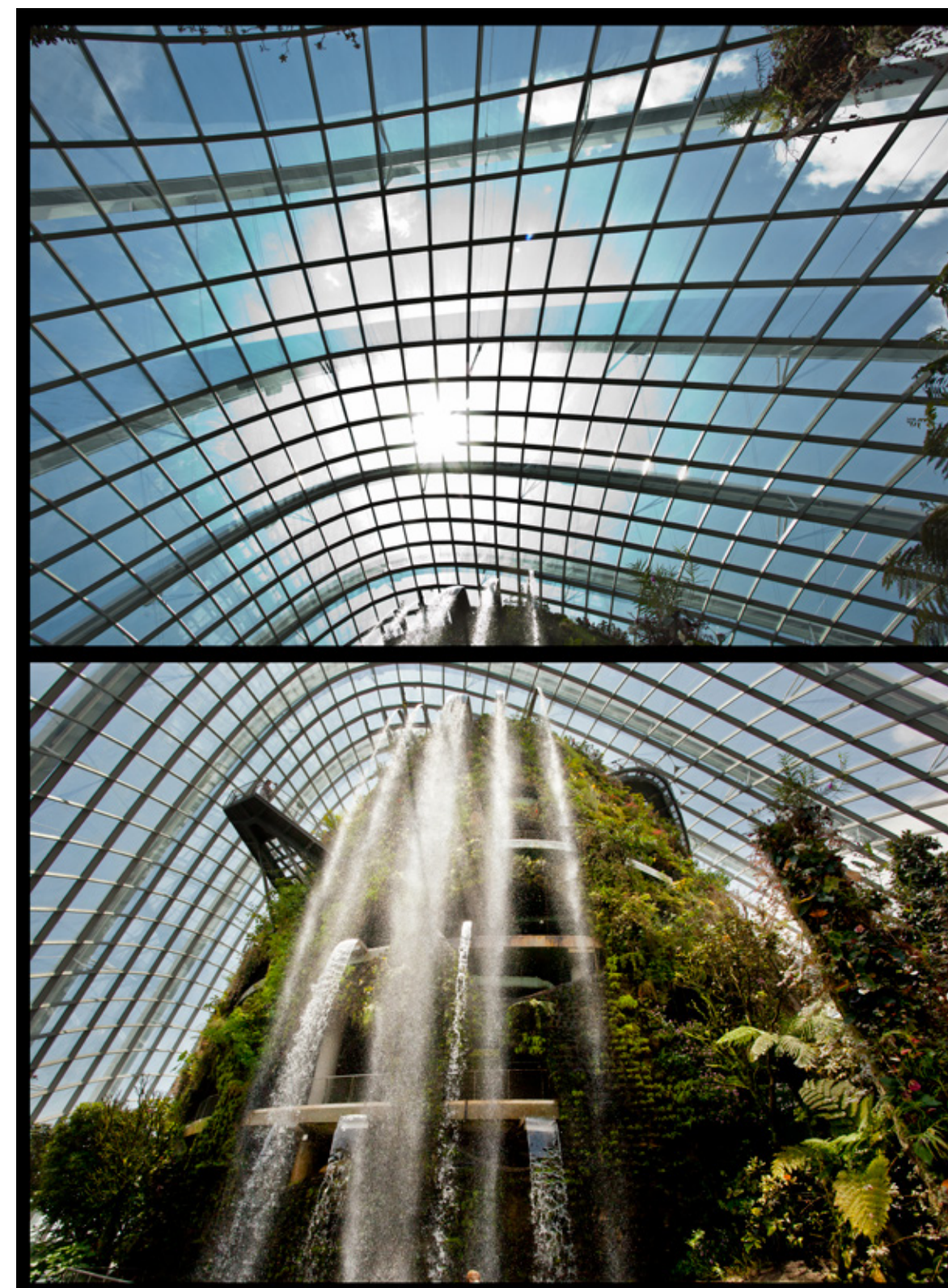
Interior, Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum, Singapore - diptych -



Interior, Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum, Singapore - diptych -



Interior, Foyer, Santa Grand Hotel, Singapore - diptych - 2013



Interior, Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore - diptych - 2013



Interior, Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore - diptych - 2013



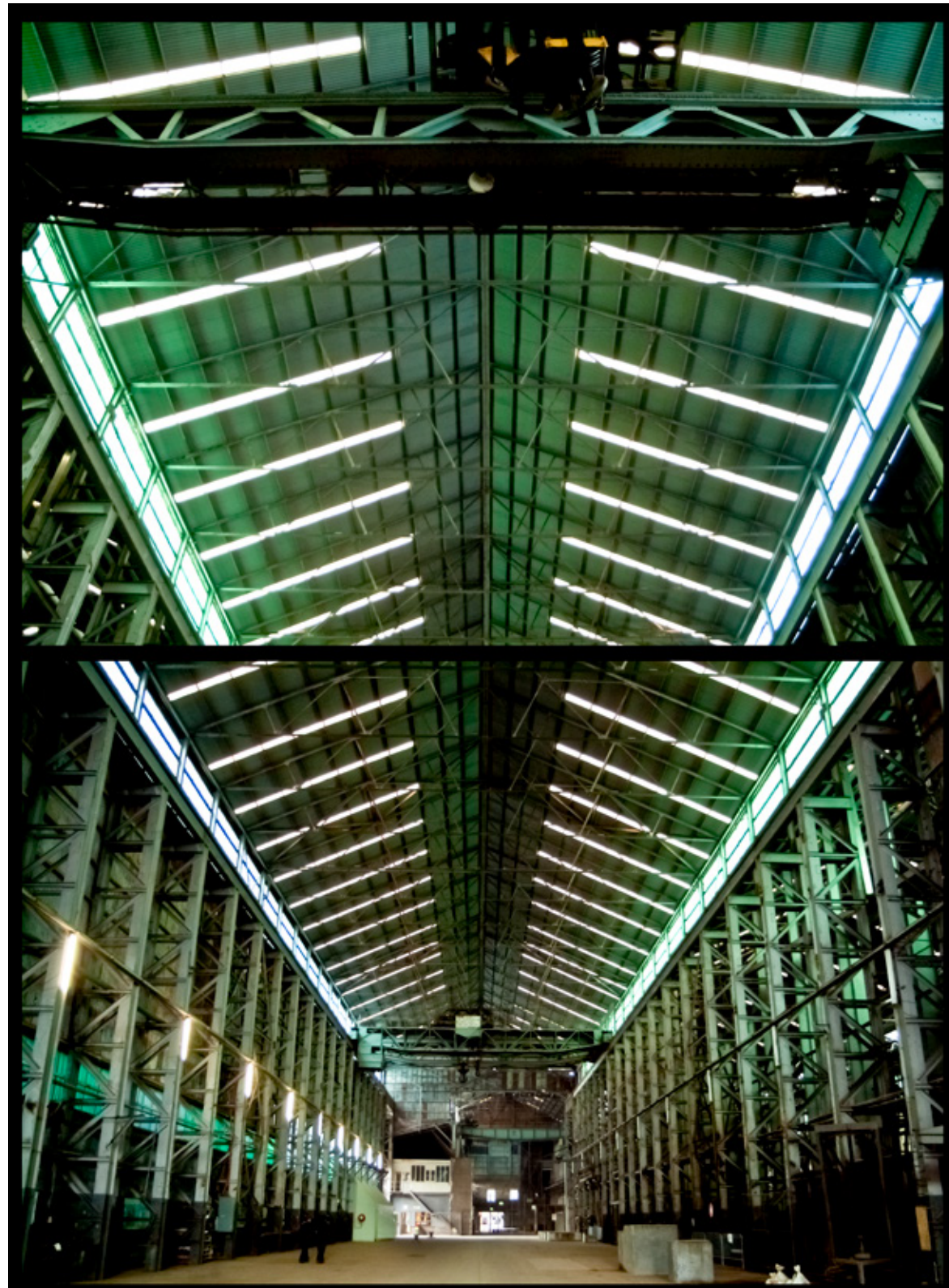
Interior, Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore - diptych - 2013



Interior, Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore - diptych - 2013



Interior, Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, Singapore - diptych - 2013



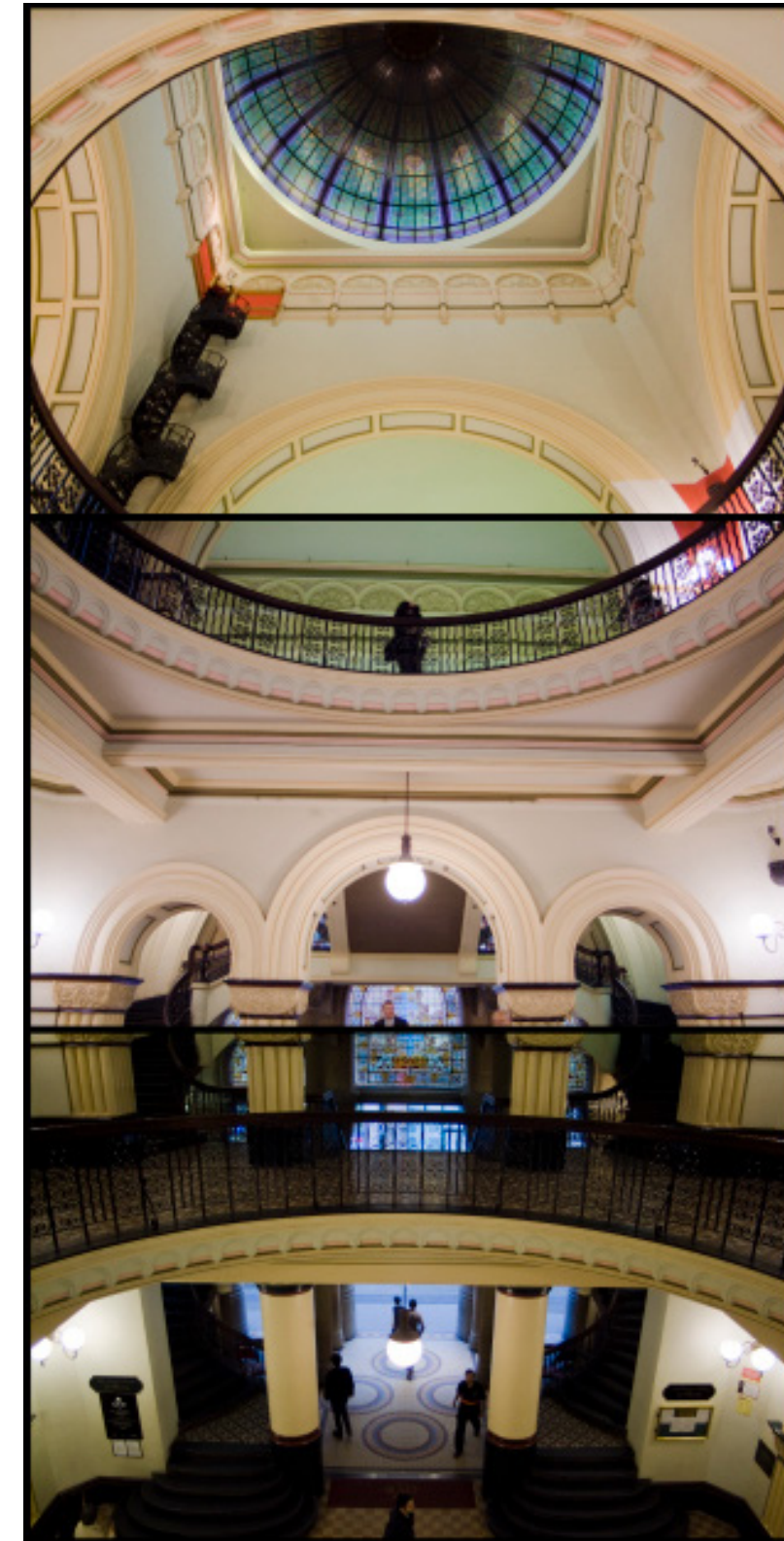
Interior, Industrial Complex, Cockatoo Island, Sydney, Australia - diptych - 2008



Interior, Industrial Complex, Cockatoo Island, Sydney, Australia - diptych - 2008



La Trobe Reading Room, State Library, Melbourne, Australia - diptych - 2014



Interior, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney, Australia - triptych - 2008

From 1989, Lloyd Godman explored the visual strategy of what he termed di/VISION, where two camera frames are shot of a scene, one frame above the other, but with elements repeating in the resulting composite diptych. He explored this over several decades in landscapes of both the natural world and the built environment. Godman uses the technique with stealth to exploit the human desire to make sense of what we see - so while the eye sees two images, the mind wants to read a single image.

In this series he confronts architectural interiors and offers new visions of internal architectural space. There is a play with the simplicity or complexity of geometry and decoration within. As the frames are shot with a wide- angle lens, a strange perspective ensues that often suggests the dimensions and geometry of a new space, an unreal space, where an Escher-like quality emerges.



Lloyd Godman established and was head of the Photography section at the School of Art Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, for 20 years. While he has worked on many environmental projects, he has also explored the architectural spaces of cities as environments. His recent work aims to integrate super-sustainable living plants works with the built environment.



Gavin Keeney is a writer, editor, and critic. His recent books include Dossier Chris Marker: The Suffering Image (2012) and Not-I/Thou: The Other Subject of Art and Architecture (2014).

<http://www.cambridgescholars.com/not-ithou>

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