

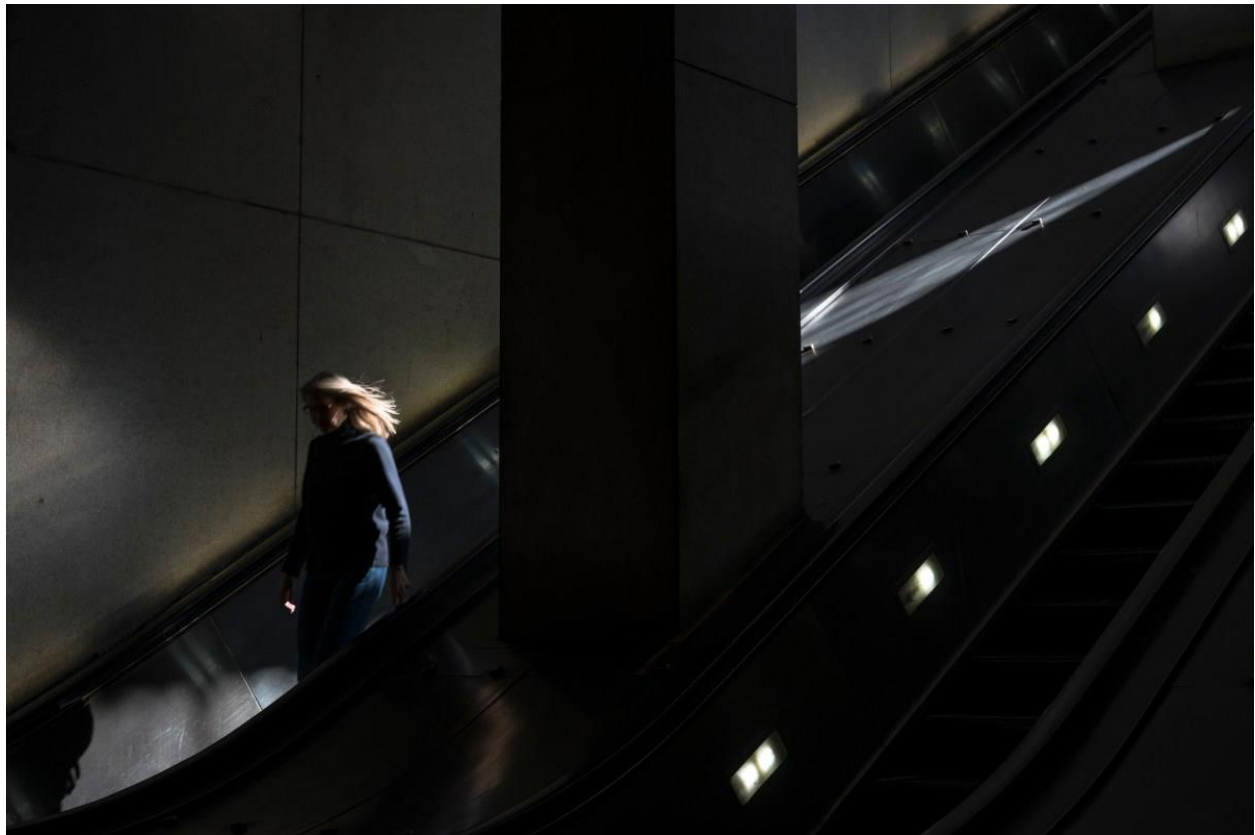
[Arts](#)

# City Lights: Photographer Fred Zafran Captures Metro's Otherworldliness

The Transit of Shadows: An Allegory takes a deeper look at D.C.'s public transit hubs, on display to Oct. 17.

by [Louis Jacobson](#) September 24th, 2021

<https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/533335/city-lights-photographer-fred-zafran-captures-metros-otherworldliness>



#1 Descending, Fred Zafran Sept. 2021

A couple of years ago, Loudoun County-based photographer **Fred Zafran** took photographs along the [same route as Matsuo Bashō](#), an Edo period haiku master, who cast off his possessions and hiked 1,500 miles through the wilderness in search of poetic inspiration. But Zafran's most recent muse is likely much more familiar to the average D.C. resident: the escalators, platforms, and rail cars of the Metrorail system. For everyday users, the Metro system may look prosaic, but

to Zafran, it's a "great, mythological, underground river" and "a realm of shadow and solitude." Sometimes the philosophical gravitas of Zafran's images is hard to discern, but in others, the linkage between transit and mythology becomes clear. As passengers descend escalators amid the shadows, for instance, it's possible to imagine them moving from the world to the underworld. Elsewhere, ghostly figures waiting for a train suggest passengers waiting to be ferried across the River Styx. Still, other images suggest the driving metaphor of the 1998 **Gwyneth Paltrow** movie *Sliding Doors*, which concisely communicates the randomness of fate. Ultimately, the series' brightest locations are illuminated by harsh, antiseptic light inside the rail cars—more like purgatory than heaven. *To Oct. 17 at Multiple Exposures Gallery in the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union Street, Studio 312, Alexandria. [torpedofactory.org](http://torpedofactory.org). Free.*