

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #34

December 2023

from

FREEMAN PATTERSON





It's December, which means frosted windowpanes in Canada, unless the windows in your house or apartment are made with double or triple glazing, which most homes are these days. But, what we gain in heat, we may lose in beauty. So, when I built my house, I installed one window with single glazing. The two preceding images are examples of what I gained.

This winter I'm staying home. As much as I'll dream about being somewhere in the southern hemisphere, I want to spend a few months with Tess, my German Shepherd, who is now two years old and maturing into a magnificent companion. Besides, my introverted side needs attention. I deeply value the friendships I've made and strengthened in the 2023 artist's retreats and workshops, but it's time now for me to spend more time alone.

Yes, I'll be shovelling a lot of snow – one of the world's most boring jobs, but great exercise if I don't overdo it. And, one night when the moon is full, Tess and I may go to a little island in the large upland bog in the woods behind my house, where we will sit in the perfect silence and watch snow diamonds sparkling in the brilliant moonlight.

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"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

Annie Dillard

In the southern hemisphere it's summer, and I'm thinking of the many years I've shared the season with good friends in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, or southern Argentina. I vividly recall the two Christmases I spent on a huge, exceedingly remote ranch under some of the tallest peaks in the Andes. Dinner was about six o'clock, and we all ate outdoors next to a large barbecue built from local timber where a sheep has been slowly roasting all day long.

Argentina was on double daylight saving time, sunset came at midnight, and on the occasions I photographed Mt. Fitzroy/ Chaltén at sunrise, I began climbing about three a.m.



For me, summer in New Zealand is the perfect antidote for winter in Canada. Besides teaching many workshops with Sally Mason in both South and North Islands, I've made a couple of long trips by car with a friend and three solo motorcycle trips of 15 days around South Island. I'll never forget the bike trips. Each time I picked up the motorcycle in Christchurch, studied the sky, then rode out of town in whatever direction promised the most favourable weather. No prior arrangements, no reservations to trap me! Three of the most memorable holidays I've ever had! Here's an image I made early one morning as I rode up the west coast highway of South Island, the second photograph I made just south of Timaru on the east coast.



Speaking of motorcycling, one Australian summer I joined a 10-day BMW tour out of Melbourne and then, a month later, rented a Harley-Davidson so I could attend a Harley-only rally at Wellington, New South Wales. Twenty-six of us rode in formation, stopping along the way at this pub, which offered "Free beer tomorrow." After I parked my bike (far left) I made this photo for memory's sake. (The parking lot has since been paved.)



A few years later I spent several days of Western Australia's spring near Payne's Find, where the landscape was awash with wild flowers. The display rivaled anything I'd seen in Namaqualand (northwest area of South Africa) at the time, but I was surprised to discover many species native to Namaqualand forming part of the floral mix. However, many Namaqualand species have been hybridised, brought into cultivation, and sold as seeds around the world. Seeds of other native species have been transported to and planted in countries where climate and weather patterns are similar. Western Australia proved to be a perfect new wild home for many of these species, especially members of the Asteraceae (the aster or daisy family.)

Western Australia boasts many "strawflowers," which are not present in South Africa. The light, delicate hues, tending to cream and ivory, produce less dramatic, but equally memorable vistas. This region has many more shrubs than Namaqualand, which sometimes presents compositional challenges for photographers. (See two images on the next page.)



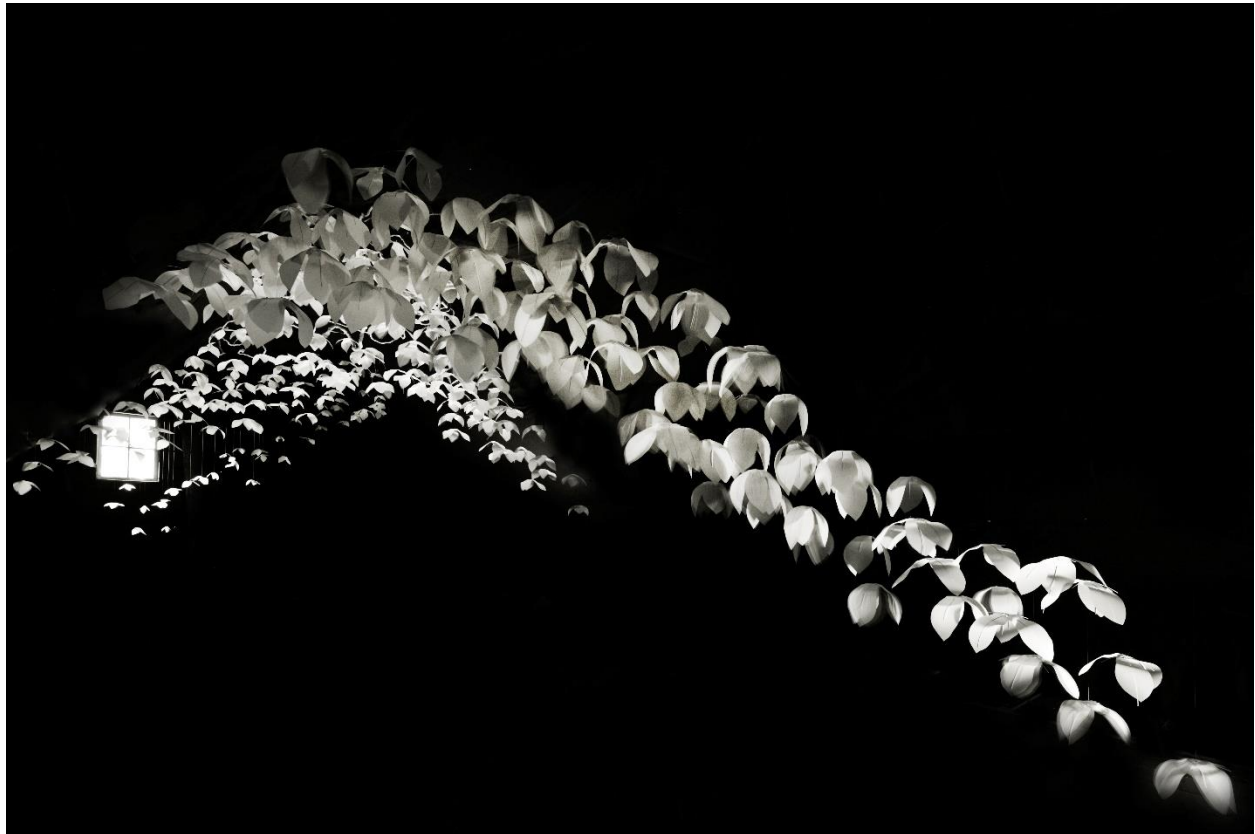
WORKSHOPS and ARTIST'S RETREATS, 2024

Complete information for my 2024 workshops in St. Martin's, N.B. with André Gallant (my teaching partner since 1996,) INSCAPE with David Maginley and Margery Nea (also in St. Martin's,) as well as the artist's retreats that I facilitate separately at Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts in Kingsbrae Garden, St. Andrew's, N.B., has been posted on my web site www.freemanpatterson.com. I'm delighted that registrations are already coming in.

The smaller workshops that André leads on his own in Saint John, N.B. and Lunenburg, N.S. are also listed on my web site.

I'd like to mention that my friend, photographer Charles Needle, may have a few spots left on his late May photographic tour of several of the great gardens of southern England. For full details see <https://charlesneedlephoto.com/private-public-gardens-of-southern-england-2024/>.

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"Breath," a huge, partly-completed installation by New Brunswick artist Ann Manuel (photo by Ann)

When we are born, we breath "in" for the first time. When we die, we breathe "out" for the last time. Between our first breath and our last we experience life.

This yet-to-be completed installation, scheduled originally for the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, has been meticulously assembled by Ann in the spacious loft of a barn near St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea due to the museum's extended temporary closure. Ann despaired of it ever finding an exhibition home and felt that exploring it in a film might be her only option. The good news for Ann and the public is that recently the Beaverbrook Art

Gallery in Fredericton, NB, a magnificent, major art venue, has accepted it for exhibition beginning late in 2024.

However, it has been my good fortune to feel the power of Ann Manuel's creation during five visits, when Ann graciously opened the loft to the participants in the 2022 and 2023 artists retreats that I facilitated at Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts (KIRA) in the 27-acre Kingsbrae Garden in St. Andrew's. A major goal of these retreats is for photographers and other visual artists to meet and learn from each other. (There are more than 20 artists working in St. Andrews and vicinity.)



(photo by Ann Manuel)

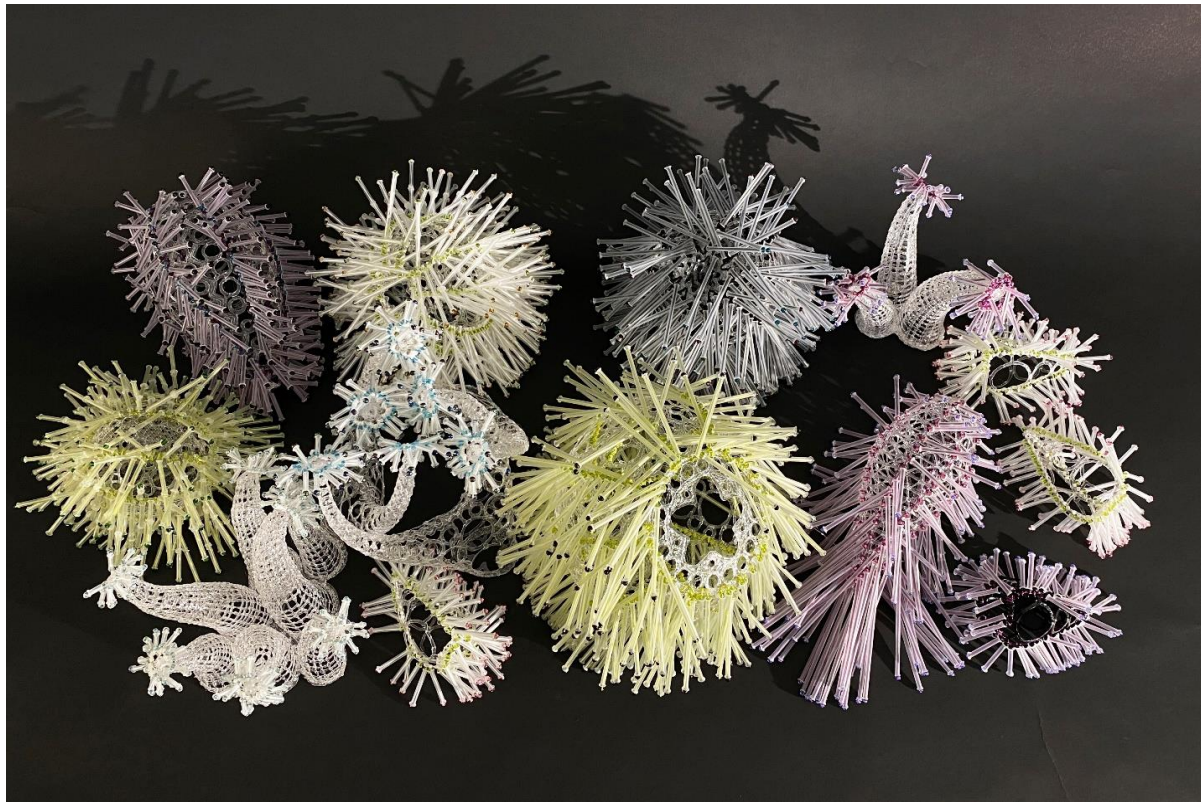


Ann Manuel and "Breath" (photo by FP)

For a more complete story about "Breath" and more photographs, go to [Inside an old barn on a dirt road in N.B., an artist creates a ...https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/art-new-brunswick-museum](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/art-new-brunswick-museum). And, for more about Ann, check out www.annmanuel.ca.

Also, the retreat groups often visit the small, wonderfully cluttered, and very inspiring studio of Alanna Baird www.tinfish.ca, who lives in St. Andrew's at the edge of the Bay of Fundy. Alanna combs the intertidal zone, often collecting, but always drawing inspiration from the shells, stones, seaweeds, and human debris of every sort that she finds there.

Working with plastic, tin, and other materials with sculptural potential, she creates sculptures large enough to stand in large, open, public venues to others small enough to hang as tiny neck pendants. Alanna is a skilled craftperson, who is always experimenting, always learning. She knows how to give her imaginings meaningful visual form. (Ann Manuel often speaks of how helpful Alanna has been to her in overcoming some craft difficulties she encountered in creating "Breath.")



"Sea Creatures" (art and photo by Alanna Baird)

Alanna writes, "An invasion of plastics - Sea Creatures created from plastics, both new and recycled, litter the floor of the sea. Using a hand held 3D printing pen I have created structures using PETG plastic and then added beaded embellishments using recycled plastic acupuncture needle sleeves and glass beads. My sculpturally approached artistic practice is primarily explorations into materials while speaking towards environmental issues. Our shoreline connects us, our ocean is critical to our survival as a species."

In 2013, Alanna won the prestigious Kingsbrae National Sculpture Competition. Her winning piece, "Salmon Vortex," is a vibrant sculpture of three salmon made from recycled roof copper. Salmon Vortex remains on display in the Kingsbrae Sculpture Garden, where more than a few photographers have brought their personal imagination to documenting it.

On our fifth night together at KIRA another artist joined the third 2023 retreat group for dinner – Lucinda Flemer, who conceived of and created Kingsbrae Garden and Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts. Animated conversation carried on for two-and-a-half hours, ceasing only when Kingsbrae's business manager showed up to drive Lucinda home.

On our final night our superb chef Pam Shaw served each of us a rounded tower of chocolate mousse with a sprig of mint emerging from the peak. Mine was accompanied by a small candelabra of lighted birthday candles, even though my birthday had been nearly a month earlier. That's Pam and that's KIRA, which make the point, I feel, that a good retreat is not necessarily a time for quiet contemplation, but may well be an opportunity for sharing and growth in ways that our daily schedules make difficult, even impossible.

Personally, I see myself as a facilitator for these small groups, always six persons and myself, more than as an instructor. Although some discussion of techniques and other how-to-do-it matters inevitably takes place, we always endeavour to go deeper – into the "why."

When a photographer or other artist reviews the body of work she/he has built up over a period of years, looking for what has remained constant in both subject matter and approach and what has changed and how quickly, the artist will learn a great deal about herself/himself. The constants and the changes are symbols; they "stand for" the artist, because only she or he has made them.

This is especially true, for example, when you are creating images for yourself, not for a client or a competition, and it's overwhelmingly true when you are following your energy, exploring repeatedly subject matter that "will not let you go." Listen to what David Bowie has to say in this very short video https://youtu.be/cNbnef_eXBM?si=UFhUVN9fp-d3-Gho

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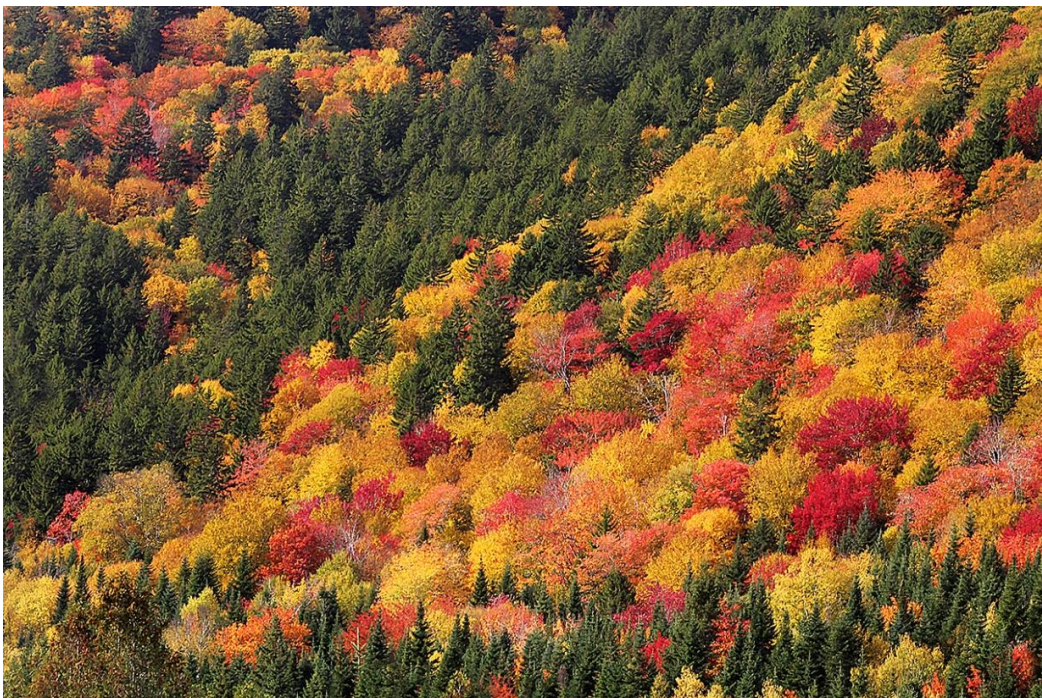
André Gallant and I have been teaching workshops in Photography and Visual Design together since 1996. In these workshops we concentrate on fundamentals, such as the building blocks of visual design and the principles (never rules) of arrangement or composition. We explore various techniques that photographers may use to document both their subject matter and their responses to that subject matter. And, we strongly encourage participants to photograph for themselves, to follow subject matter and approaches that matter to them.

Much of this material could be taught on line, but neither of us is interested, because we always find that by far the greatest rewards for both the workshop participants and for us comes with being together. It matters that it's easy to ask questions and to have discussions in the classroom and in the field. It matters that participants share space for downloading, editing, and processing their picture files, learning from each other in the process. It matters that we live together in a huge, beautiful old inn, where we eat together, one table or section of a table frequently erupting in hilarious laughter. (Also, our host Lynette pulls out all the stops to produce delicious, nutritious meals.)



St. Martin's County Inn (photo by André Gallant)

Next year, for the first time, we're changing our Autumn workshop simply because it's autumn. Every morning will be devoted **entirely** to making pictures and to field instruction. After lunch there will be classroom instructional programming and evaluation of images.



near St. Martin's

Also, the week-long workshop in consciousness and spirituality, INSCAPE (for Inner Landscape) takes place at the St. Martin's Country Inn. This workshop has been a highlight of my year for nearly a decade and among the first five registrants for 2024 are two persons who will be participating for the third time. Several others have returned twice.

No two INSCAPEs are ever the same, because of the participants and because everything is optional. The presentations given by David Maginley (exploring consciousness,) Margery Nea (dreaming, dreamwork, dream symbols, and the relevance of dreaming to our daily lives,) myself (creativity and the parallels between symbols in our art and symbols in our dreams), and usually the thoughts of sculptor Marie-Hélène, a sister of the Order of Notre Dame d'Acadie (how her artistic life and her religious life became one,) seem invariably to stimulate open, intense discussion and the sharing of personal stories.

We talk about where we live, how we hurt, and how we celebrate – honouring both feelings and ideas. However, if anybody feels uncomfortable, overwhelmed, or uninterested, she or he can simply leave and go for a walk on the beach, which everybody else understands.

(For more information on David and Margery, please see my web site, as well as www.davidmaginly.com and type Margery Woodsen Nea, Richmond, VA, into your browser.)

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When I have the opportunity during the retreats and workshops, I make photographs too. Nothing calls me more often than a huge sculpture in Kingsbrae Garden of 11 women in very straight, separate, thin sheets of metal. In my mind's eye the figures seem to be wandering ghosts, stripped of personhood, like many abused women. "Phantoms" is one of my attempts to convey that feeling.



"Art is the expression of reality, not the reproduction of reality."

Henry Moore

Last year at this time, two Israeli friends and I were finalizing our plans for a two-week guided photographic and cultural tour of southern Israel and southern Jordan (Petra and Wadi Rum) for January 2023. Most of the participants were from Canada and nearly everybody had been on workshops with me in the past. That memorable trip would not be possible now.

On that trip and on previous occasions I witnessed easy camaraderie and friendships developing between Muslims and Jews and Christians, as dogmatic monotheistic religion was never part of the mix. We all go through the same routine when we get up in the morning, because we're all human beings. Fundamentally, our needs are the same, wherever we live.

I remember so well the day in Wadi Rum (in southern Jordan) when our five Bedouin guides (all Muslim) dropped in the sand for prayer at a regular hour, then after rising quickly to prepare a sumptuous lunch for us, began chanting, clapping hands, and line-dancing in the sand. Probably because I'd been wearing a keffiyeh all week, one of them shouted out, "Come on Freeman, you're Bedouin now."

It's very difficult for me to express the joy I felt as I joined the line, began rhythmically clapping my hands, and chanting the Arabic sounds and words in unison. (Here's a photograph I made of the line dancers – before I was "called.")



In my March letter, I wrote at length about our time in Wadi Rum and some of what I wrote then bears repeating in this horrible time. Israelis are now traumatized, deeply fearful, and feeling isolated. Innocent Palestinians, whose elected government, Hamas, turned itself into a permanent controlling force, are being killed, injured, and suffering as never before.

Next door is Jordan, but none of us would want to take the same route through southern Israel today that we took in January into this Muslim nation. Here is what I wrote.

"Susan, Danny (my Israeli friends,) and I visited Wadi Rum together for the first time early in 2020 and in that short visit both the desert scenery and our two Bedouin guides, Ahmad and Falah, had a profound impact on us. I knew then that I had to return. And so we went back – accompanied by our 17 friends and fellow travellers – and were welcomed and treated throughout our stay at Rum Planet Camp with enormous generosity both as a group and as individuals. Several days later I hugged Ahmad, Falah, and my new friends, wiped away my tears, and boarded our bus. I felt I was leaving home, knowing how unlikely it is that I will ever return. I cannot describe to you what I was feeling, only indicate its enormity and depth. I will never forget these friends. (*Ahmad and Falah are on the left in the previous picture.*)

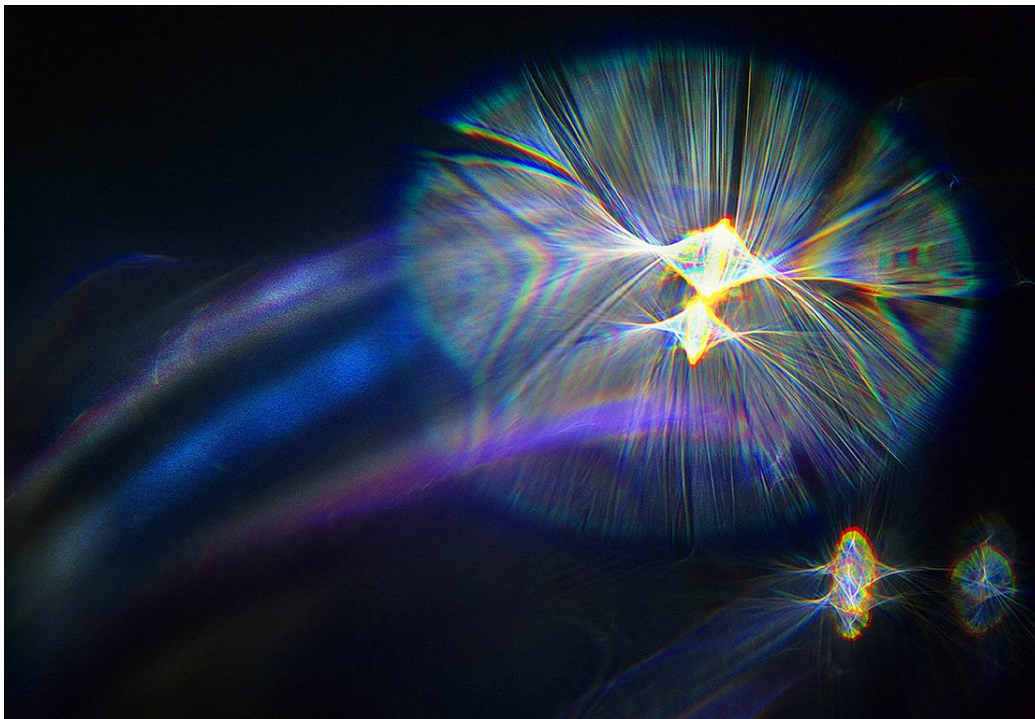
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May PEACE triumph

Que la paix triomphe

Mag VREDE seëvier

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www.freemanpatterson.com [SUBSCRIBE \(for free\)](#) freemanpatterson23@gmail.com