

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #8
July 2019

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



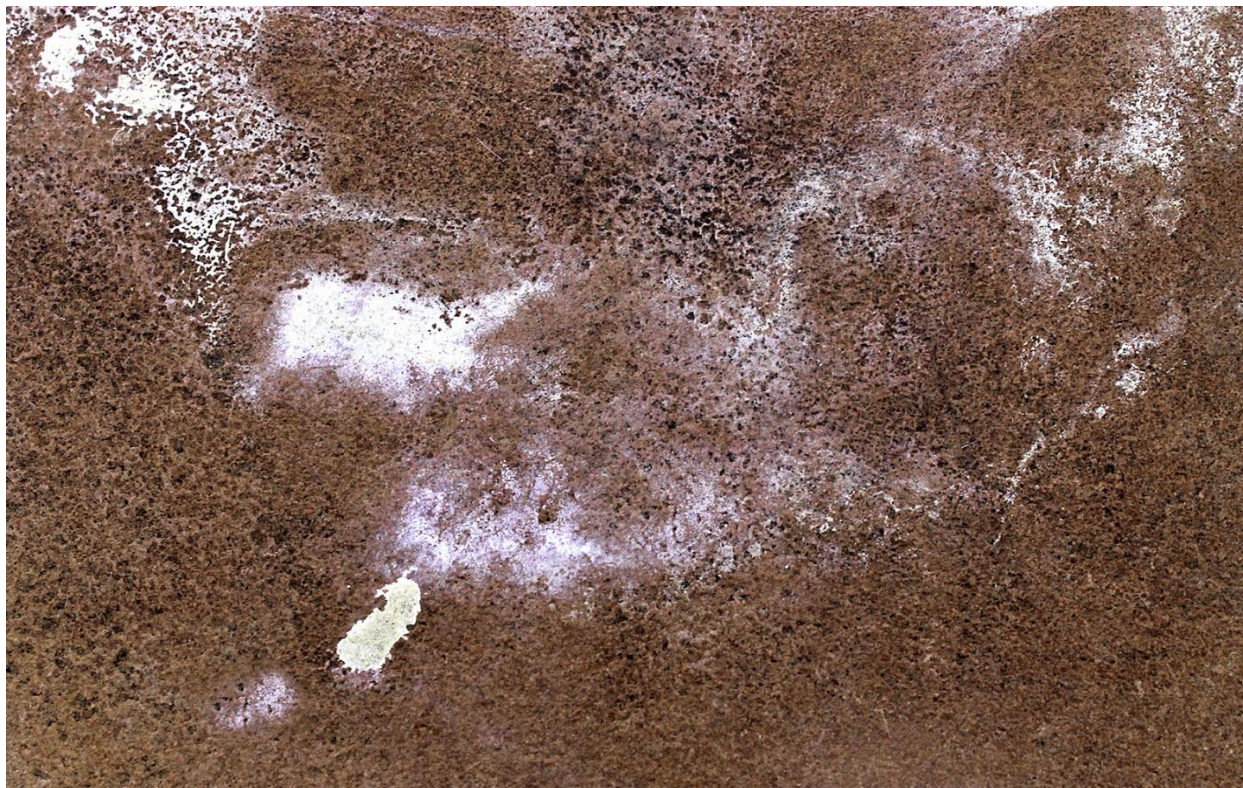
Aerial view of part of Lake Torrens and surrounding desert, South Australia

Few things excite me more than the totally unexpected arrival or recognition of creative opportunities. For example, on the first day of March this year I was sitting in my favourite outdoor reading nook at my second home, the little Kamieskroon Hotel in Namaqualand, browsing through IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS #6, which had just arrived by e-mail. (Yes, I subscribe too.) I was amused by the fact that I had made the first two photographs in the letter within about 10 metres of where I was sitting and that I was admonishing readers that the best place in the world to see and make pictures is wherever you are. So, I thought, "Let's give this spot another go!"

The floor of the little patio in which I was sitting was constructed with local flagstones and, as I looked down at them, I pretended that I was looking down at an Earthscape from about 10,000 metres – my height when I made the aerial photograph on the preceding page – and suddenly all the flagstones were transformed. That's all it took!

Within moments I was imagining myself "flying" over the stones, even though my camera lens was set for close-up compositions. I've learned over the years that moving very close to subject matter rarely makes it easier to find or create a simpler design, because moving closer magnifies detail. However, no matter how large or how small the area I'm including in the image, I can parse most compositions into one to six shapes. In other words, it's as easy to create a simple composition from an airplane window as it is on one's hands and knees 30 cm. above part of a flagstone. Although moving closer doesn't make seeing and composing easier, it often opens new worlds for us.

Over the next week I made hundreds of images of small sections of the flagstones that, literally, were right under my feet. Below is one that reminds me of parts of the Sahara desert seen from the air. You can view a few more of my favourites by hitting [FLAGSTONES](#). Personally, I enjoy images like these most of all when I don't give them a label, but simply regard them as pure abstracts.



“The less there is to look at, the more important it is that we look at it closely and carefully. This is critical to abstract art. Small differences make all the difference.”

Kirk Varnedoe, Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock

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About six weeks later I experienced another unexpected arrival or recognition of creative opportunities! One evening after enjoying a couple of hours of early evening photography in Claude Monet’s garden (sans les touristes), I was sharing a meal in Giverny, France, with (Dr.) Stewart and Julie Hamilton of Canmore, Alberta. Conversations with the Hamiltons, whether light or serious, are always satisfying, and on this particular evening I asked Stewart, “Is it true that the brain only gets rid of its waste when we sleep?” “Essentially YES!” he replied and then, for me at least, the conversation really took off, as he fired questions and amazing facts at me about the benefits of sleep and recommended that I read a recent book on the subject, **WHY WE SLEEP: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams** by Dr. Matthew Walker, a professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California (Berkeley), the director of its Sleep and Neuroimaging Lab, and a former professor of psychiatry at Harvard.

I thought I knew quite a bit about the importance of getting eight hours of sleep every 24, as I had taught myself how to fall asleep quickly years ago and, for nearly 50 years, have had an afternoon nap of at least one hour virtually every single day – no matter where I am or what I’m doing. Workshop participants, for example, know why I always disappear after lunch. However, I had barely begun reading the book before I said to myself (in the vernacular), “You don’t know nothin’ about sleep!”

I have finished the book now and I will be frank; **If you read only one book this year, make it this one. You will never regret it!** Here are the first two-and-a-half paragraphs from the conclusion:

“Within the space of a few hundred years, human beings have abandoned their biologically mandated need for adequate sleep – one that evolution spent 3,400,000 perfecting in service of life-support functions. As a result, the decimation of sleep throughout industrialized nations is having a catastrophic impact on our health, our life expectancy, our safety, our productivity, and the education of our children.

This silent sleep loss epidemic is the greatest public health challenge we face in the twenty-first century in developed nations. If we wish to avoid the suffocating noose of sleep neglect, the premature death it inflicts, and the sickening health it invites, a radical shift in our personal, cultural, professional, and societal appreciation of sleep must occur.

I believe it is time for us to reclaim our right to a full night of sleep, without embarrassment or the damaging stigma of laziness. In doing so, we can be reunited with that most powerful elixir of wellness and vitality, dispensed through every biological pathway. ...”

Here are a few excerpts from throughout the book:

“After ten days of just seven hours sleep [per day], the brain is as dysfunctional as it would be going without sleep for 24 hours.”

“The human mind cannot accurately sense how sleep-deprived it is when it is sleep-deprived.”

“The less you sleep the more you are likely to eat. ... Inadequate sleep is the perfect recipe for obesity.”

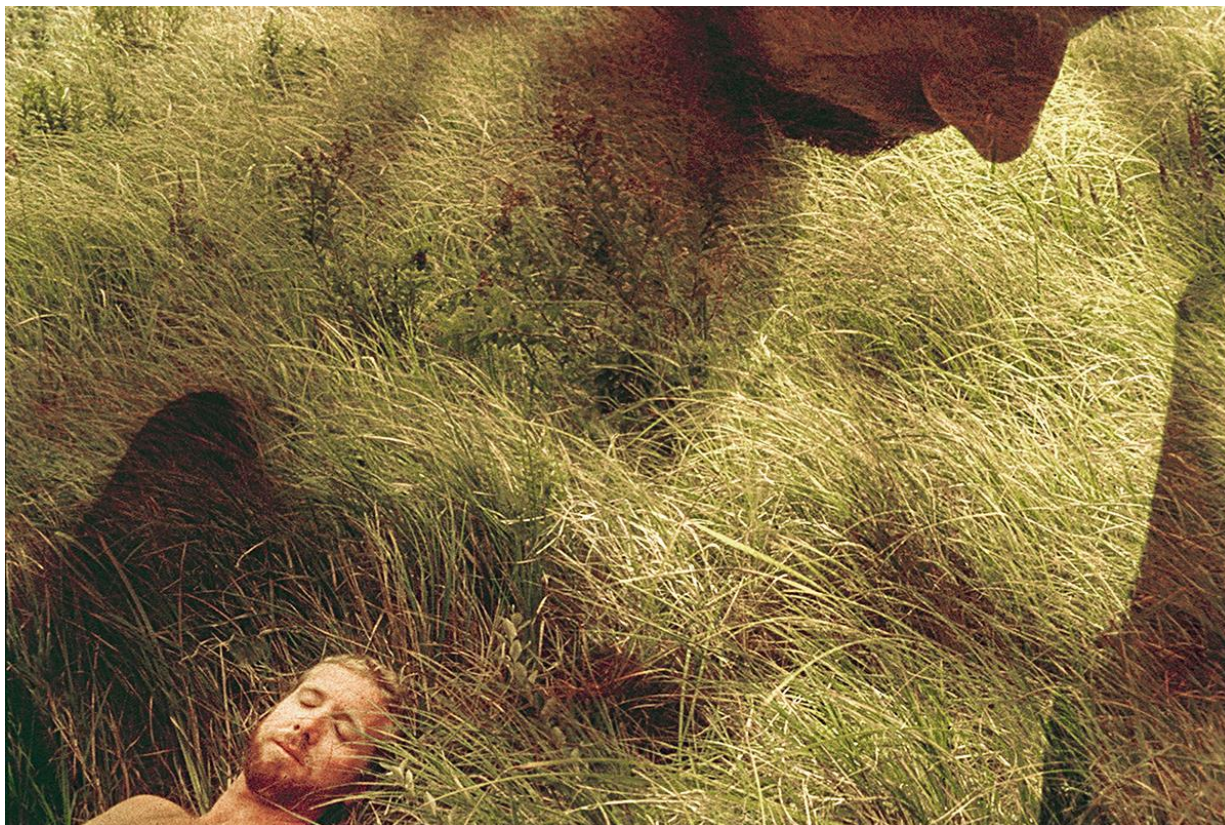
“The scientific evidence linking sleep disruption and cancer is now so damning that the World Health Organization has officially classified nighttime shift work as a possible carcinogen.”

“Reading on an iPad before going to bed has a huge effect on both the quantity and quality of sleep. LED light is the culprit. Its effect lasts several days.”

“Natural sleep is one of the most powerful boosters of the immune system ... Older adults who take sleeping pills have much higher rates of infection than those who don’t ... increased rate of car accidents and falls at night, heart disease and stroke ... and were 30 to 40% more likely to develop cancer within the two-and-a-half years of a major study.” (Several major research studies discussed in the book show lack of sleep to be a primary cause of Alzheimer’s disease, cancer, diabetes, depression, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, immune dysfunction, and an aged physical appearance.)

And yes, Matthew Walker concludes the book with **“Twelve Tips for Healthy Sleep.”**

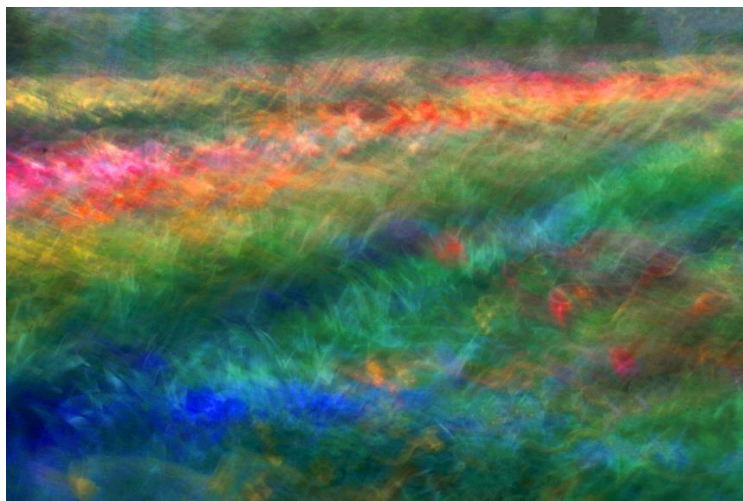
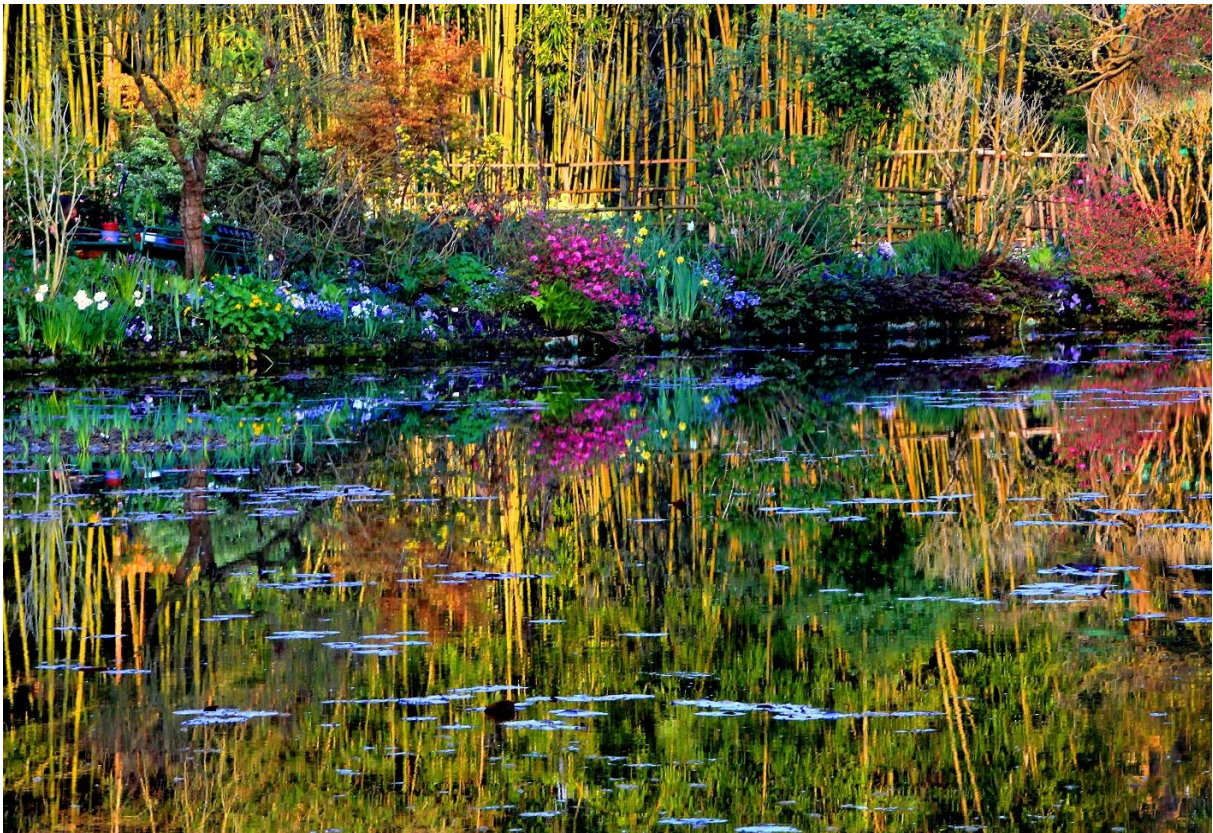
“Thank you!” Stewart Hamilton.

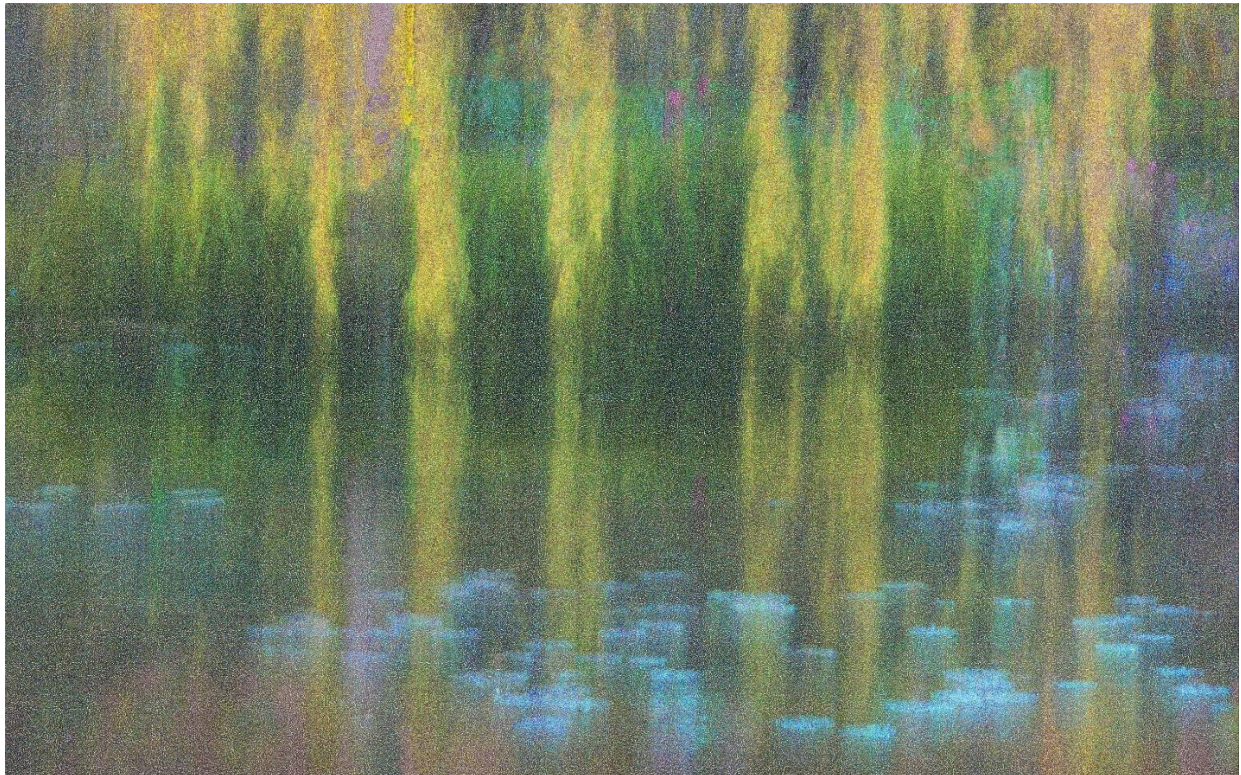


“After a couple of hours of snoring that I thought was the 1812 Overture playing over and over again on her device, she sat up and exclaimed, ‘Will I never fall asleep!’ To this I replied, ‘Oh I wouldn’t worry about it, dear, but there’s the rest of the country to think about.’”

Tanner O’Grady

Teaching and photographing in Monet's garden always presents me with a delightful dilemma. Do I document the beauty of the garden or do I document my emotional response? This time I had decided in advance to concern myself more with the latter, but I ended up making many images in which I felt the honest thing to do was essentially nothing – in other words, to show an aspect of the garden exactly as it appeared, to let it show its own uninterpreted beauty. So, as on previous occasions, I forgot the dilemma that never really existed anyway and endeavoured to document both the garden's beauty and my personal response. Here are a couple of examples of both approaches.





“Gardening is not a rational act.”

Margaret Atwood

For me, photographing a garden isn't a rational act either. Morning after morning in June I'm out in my rhododendron-and-azalea garden no later than six o'clock. I have a half hour of soft light that brings out the glowing colours. Then, a shaft of sunlight bursts through the leafy forest backdrop, highlighting a shrub or sweeping along a stretch of blue and white forget-me-nots – a sudden transition from quiet joy to exuberance! Two hours later I float back to the house and become aware that I am hungry.





I'm delighted that INSCAPE, the annual workshop that David Maginley and I facilitate in St. Martin's, N.B. is again fully booked. You may have caught David's recent interview with Anna-Maria Tremonti on CBC's public affairs program "The Current." When I enquired, David reported that the response has been "overwhelming!" I'm not surprised. The strong sales of his book **BEYOND SURVIVING: Cancer and Your Spiritual Journey** continue, especially as he is invited to make more and more presentations to a broad range of interested groups – medical, educational, social, religious – in Canada and abroad.

I'm equally pleased that the St. Martin's workshops with my long-time photographic teaching partner, André Gallant, are also fully booked. With rare exceptions I've always worked with a teaching partner, somebody who broadens the instructional base and can provide "second opinions." Forty-seven years have passed since I first offered week-long workshops in New Brunswick, and yet after all these years of teaching (in Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Israel, Australia, the United States, and France), I find myself as excited as ever at the prospect of sharing a creative experience with (usually) 12 participants and my co-instructor.

Over the years my teaching has increasingly centred on clear seeing, on recognizing the building blocks of visual design, and on ways of arranging them in picture space. I consider this knowledge fundamental for everybody working in a visual art medium. Yet, too often in my opinion, workshops focus primarily on tools and techniques, which are of limited value without a solid grounding in design.

Many photographic techniques can be taught effectively on line. This instruction is usually much less expensive than a workshop, although it seldom compares with a workshop for deep learning – especially in design and creative expression. Communicating with body language, with frank and honest discussion of images, with deep sighs and gut-wrenching laughter adds a dimension of depth that a screen/monitor and even Skype cannot approach.

Although I am hoping to return to Namaqualand in February, for a variety of reasons the Kamieskroon Hotel and I have decided **NOT** to offer a wilderness camping tour for 2020. However, I may soon be announcing workshops in other countries on my web site www.freemanpatterson.com, but definitely two in Israel in January 2020.

After my last letter I had forthright and useful discussions with a couple of readers about the value of RAW files versus JPEGs, not only concerning the technical superiority of RAW, but also about the kinds of presentation that photographers choose and how that should influence the decisions they make about file choices. Others wrote about book recommendations, Namaqualand flowers, or a particular image. Thank you, thank you for your thoughts! Et merci, merci pour vos lettres en français aussi!

Good wishes to all, bons souhaits à vous tous! FREEMAN



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