

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #26*  
*July 2022*

*from*  
**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*Arctotis spp. and other wild flowers blooming near Concordia, Northern Cape, South Africa*



It's July and, if you live in Northern or Western Cape province of South Africa, you'll soon be able to see scenes like the photograph on the previous page. The beginning of the spring season depends on winter rains, but most years it begins in late July or early August. How long the season lasts depends on subsequent rainfall, which tends to come in the form of showers, often quite widely dispersed, so when you pass through an area with little bloom you can be hopeful that just ahead you'll encounter vast stretches of rainbow colour.

Namaqualand, which means land of the Nama people, is a now loose term that includes much of Northern Cape and some of Western Cape, so loose in fact that in fabulous flower years the area expands considerably and in less spectacular years contracts somewhat, as residents on the fringe have less to crow about.

I've been to Namaqualand well over 40 times, 26 of them in August and September when I taught workshops with Colla Swart, owner of the little Kamieskroon Hotel, until she and her husband turned it over to their daughter and her husband, Maryna and Helmut Kohrs. Namaqualand is a second home to me and the Swarts and Kohrs like a second family.

Covid interrupted my annual visits, but I hope to return for at least a month during the Namaqualand summer (Canadian winter) in 2023, as I am deeply homesick.



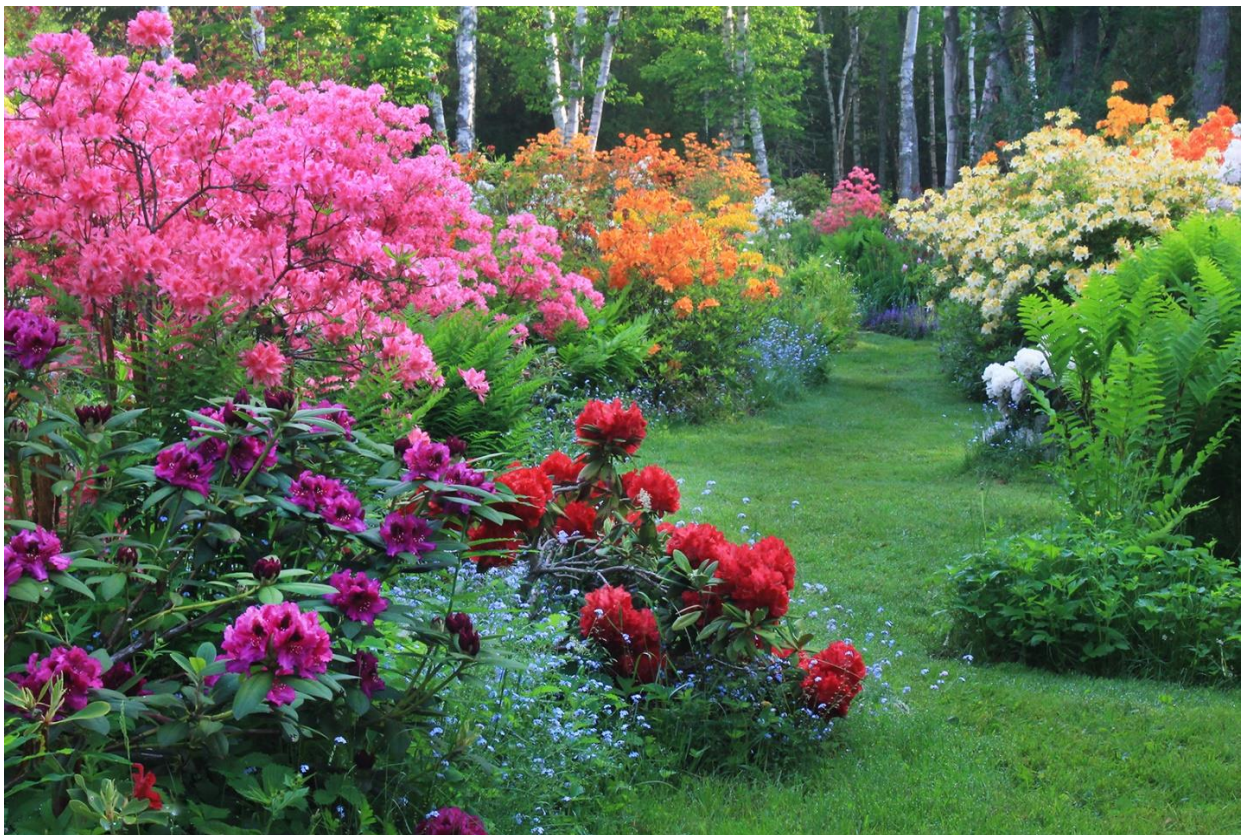
To see more images please click [NAMAQUALAND in BLOOM](#) or plan a visit, experience this remarkable spring, and make photographs for yourself. Explore the unpaved secondary and farm roads, and don't be afraid of becoming temporarily lost. You'll always find your way back to the tar road, the N7 highway that runs all the way north to Namibia.



Here at Shamber's Bluff, New Brunswick, spring, which is a long run-up to the Canadian summer, teased my imagination, but fulfilled every promise with wild and cultivated flowers in abundance.

Before the frost was out of the ground my neighbour, friend, and part-time employee Joel and I finished the preparation for adding another 70 widely-spaced rhododendrons to my open woodland garden. Then we planted them, which brings the total number to about 1800 rhododendrons and azaleas. During the planting and since I've walked many times in my imagination among the huge mature plants, laden with blossoms. Fully half of the pleasure of gardening comes from everything you imagine.

Talking with several people who receive IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS, I discovered that about half of you somehow missed the link in the last issue to Ian Varty's three-minute video of my rhododendron-and-azalea garden (the more mature half,) made in June last year. So, here's a still image of my garden this time to catch your attention and then comes the link. Turn up your sound, as there's musical accompaniment.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-cQ7bVUrHQ>

## BOOKS

In my last letter I discussed Tom Harpur's Water Into Wine and his assertion of the importance of remythologizing the Christian gospels and the entire texts of all three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in order to garner their spiritual depth and value.

I always have books stacked on my kitchen hutch beside a very comfortable chair and, no sooner had I put down Harpur than I picked up (for the second time) Don Murray's THE BIBLE BEYOND RELIGION: Witness to the Evolution of Consciousness. Don Murray is a friend who sent me a personal copy of this, his fourth book, a year ago, but when I opened it this time I found that I couldn't put it down. More than a few times in my life a book has arrived before I am fully ready to read it, as if the book (or its author) is waiting for me to catch up with the contents, anticipating (or at least, hoping) that I will grow enough to experience the excitement that occurs when confronted with something of great personal relevance, i.e. something that "really matters."

Although I had no intention of discussing spirituality, religion in general, or specific religions again in this letter, after rereading Don's book and adding numerous "post its" to the pages I felt that simply continuing the discussion from my last letter made sense. So, to quote Don Murray ...

*"In my view the Bible is the best witness Western civilization has to the evolution of human consciousness. From Genesis to Revelation it tells the story of a people learning how to be human. That's my fast answer; this book is my longer answer.*

*I write for those with little or no knowledge of the Bible but who are interested in knowing something of a tradition that has shaped the Western world and brought us to our present time. It is also for those with considerable biblical knowledge who are looking for a different perspective to better understand its wisdom and relevance for today."*

This is a highly readable book with each chapter composed of many short units, each focussed on essential aspects of Biblical myths. You can read at a normal pace or consider one unit at a time. The following example is from one of the units devoted to the Garden of Eden: *"Eve eating the forbidden fruit is a very picturesque image of our awakening. Eve is every two-year-old saying 'no,' discovering that she/he has an independent will. The terrible twos are the positive signal that this child is on the way to becoming a conscious, creative, responsible human being. ... Understanding the story as the dawning of human consciousness makes everything else fall into place."*

Don's book is available in both print and digital formats from Amazon, Indigo, etc.

I should add that Don and his partner/wife Emily Kierstead (both United Church of Canada ministers) were resource persons at one of the INSCAPE workshops that David Maginley and I facilitate every year in New Brunswick.

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**"Life is repeatedly a matter of leaving home and moving on."**

*Don Murray*

When I put Don's book down, I picked up my Kindle, which I also keep on my kitchen hutch unless I'm travelling, and discovered that I'd never got around to reading Richard M. Bucke's COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS, first published in 1901, the year before this Canadian psychiatrist and close friend of Walt Whitman slipped on a patch of ice and died.

I found Bucke's rather wooden style and his use of the patriarchal language of his time quite off-putting – always “man” and “mankind” for “person” and “human being” – but his insights into the evolution of consciousness kept luring me on and suddenly I hit “pay dirt.” For me, this was a discussion of the recent evolution of COLOUR perception in human beings.

For years I've believed that colour blindness does not exist, but that so-called colour-blind people are atavistic or visual throwbacks to an earlier time. Merriam Webster defines atavism as “recurrence in an organism of a trait or character typical of an ancestral form, usually due to genetic recombination.”

To provide a clear example of the way our consciousness is always evolving, Burke examined ancient languages from all parts of the world and discovered that about 15 or 20 thousand years ago, primitive Aryans were conscious of only one colour (i.e. no colour contrast), so they saw no difference in colour between a blue sky, green plants, brown soil, and the sunset hues. In other words, they differentiated lines and shapes by tonal contrast (differences in brightness,) as many mammals still do. He adds that there are no names of colour in primitive Indo-European speech and, apparently, no Sanscrit root whose meaning involved colour.

Oral traditions indicate that red and black (the absence of colour as we know it today) were apparently recognized before writing, but when the Rig Veda was composed (circa 1500 BCE) red, yellow, and black were recognized as different shades. Later, white (again, the absence of colour as we know it) and green were added.

Throughout the ten thousand lines of the Rig Veda (largely occupied with descriptions of the sky and all its features,) the Homeric poems (The Iliad and The Odyssey,) and the Bible the colour of the sky is never mentioned, so apparently it was not recognized, yet the Bible alone contains more than 430 references to the sky and heaven. Languages strongly indicate that blue and finally violet were the last colours that humans have come to perceive, because we talk about what we see!

The trajectory of human visual perception from red through the other colours to violet makes perfect sense from the standpoint of physics, as the power of the red rays of light to excite vision is several thousand times greater than that of the violet rays.

All of this is very interesting to me for a very personal reason as well. For many years I have maintained that my teaching partner, André Gallant, has the most highly-developed colour sense of anybody I know and that he manifests it in his photographs, his garden, and the way he decorates his house. André is extremely aware of the hue, tonality, and saturation of colours and has an incredible sense of proportion when it comes to combining them.

André and his late husband, Parker, loved gardening together on their property in the city of Saint John. When Parker passed away from cancer in October 2020, André's gardening took on a special intensity – a way of honouring Parker and of grieving. André has named this beautiful space “Parker's Garden,” and I asked him for some of his images (next page) so you can see just how far the human evolution of colour perception has come.





*Parker's Garden - June Inspiration*

## WORKSHOPS

I have always loved the sharing of the workshop experience and still do. Near the end of October, when the last one for 2022 has concluded, I will have completed 50 consecutive years of facilitating/teaching workshops in photography and visual design. *C'est impossible!*

As I look back at the gradual changes in workshop content, I realize that without neglecting tools and techniques, my emphasis has moved to the other major aspect of the craft – visual design (the building blocks of pictures and the important principles for arranging them in the picture space, also known as composition). Of course, these are equally relevant for painters, people creating with fabrics, and those working in most other visual media.

However, the biggest recent change has been to help workshop participants shift away from a constant concern about “how to do it” to the more fundamental question of “why we do it.” More than ever before, I strongly encourage participants to pay attention to their imaginings, their dreams, and their passions – to follow their energy, as it were.

Whenever you follow your energy or “do what turns you on,” you begin to create for yourself and in the process tell your life story. Why? Because the subject matter you choose and the ways you work with it are symbolic. They represent you.

Excellence in craft does not produce art any more than fluency in language means a person has something of value to say. However, fluency in a language or a visual medium enables you to express yourself more effectively.

Last year I facilitated my first artists’ retreat – an opportunity for creative self-expression - at KIRA (Kingsbrae International Residency or the Arts) at the 11-hectare/27-acre Kingsbrae Garden in St. Andrew’s, New Brunswick. This year I’ll be there for three retreats. You can read about these on my web site [www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com) and also visit [www.kingsbraegarden.com](http://www.kingsbraegarden.com) and check KIRA. We will have access to the gardens around the clock and, of course, to the entire seaside town.

Every aspect of these retreats is optional. In fact, last year one participant did not make a single photograph the entire time, but he participated avidly in every discussion and wrote an arresting poem for our final day.

I also want to mention last year’s INSCAPE workshop, as the participants formed a strong emotional bond and have continued to meet monthly on Zoom for at least two hours. Our friendships have grown even stronger as a result and, really, the workshop just goes on. INSCAPE is invariably a highlight of my year. A couple of spots are still available for 2022.

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**“All the breaks you need in life wait within your imagination, Imagination is the workshop of your mind, capable of turning mind energy into accomplishment...”**

*Napoleon Hill*

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**“Life is not about finding yourself; life is about creating yourself.”**

*George Bernard Shaw*



Seen from my front deck on a RECENT MORNING



*5:35 a.m.*



*6:05 a.m.*



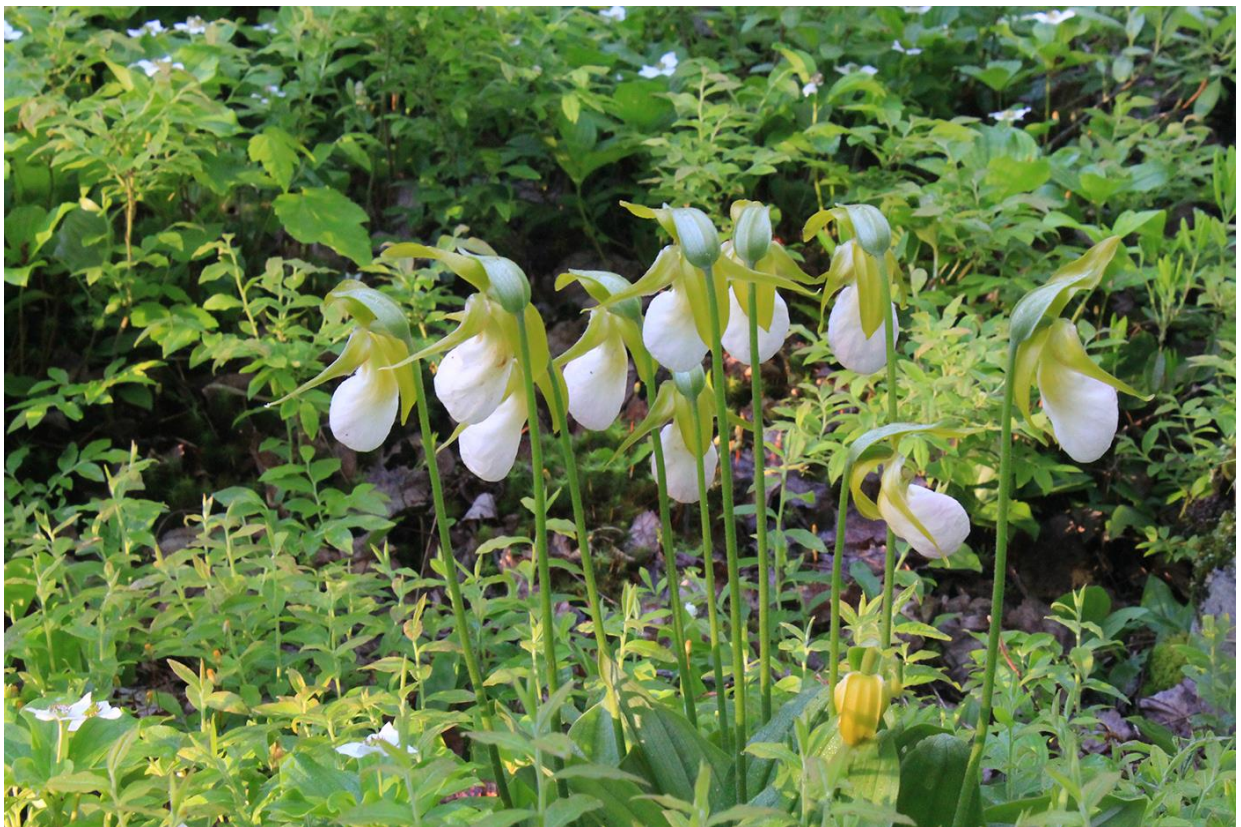
**Another RECENT MORNING from my front deck**  
*Belleisle Bay of the St. John River*



You're quite right! I don't need to go anywhere to capture beautiful scenes. But, in order to capture them well I have to be able to move instantly past my emotional response to the subject matter to abstracting the fundamental design of the scene or situation, i.e. to recognizing the important lines and shapes and making decisions about how I'm going to use or alter them. Note in the second image on the preceding page that the strong dark horizontal line is below the centre and in the third photograph the green horizontal line is above the centre.

I wasn't following a "rule" when I made my decisions, but my feelings. I felt the greatest sense of ease with these placements and with the long rectangular shapes that resulted. I carefully tilted my camera up or down until I felt I had the very best positioning.

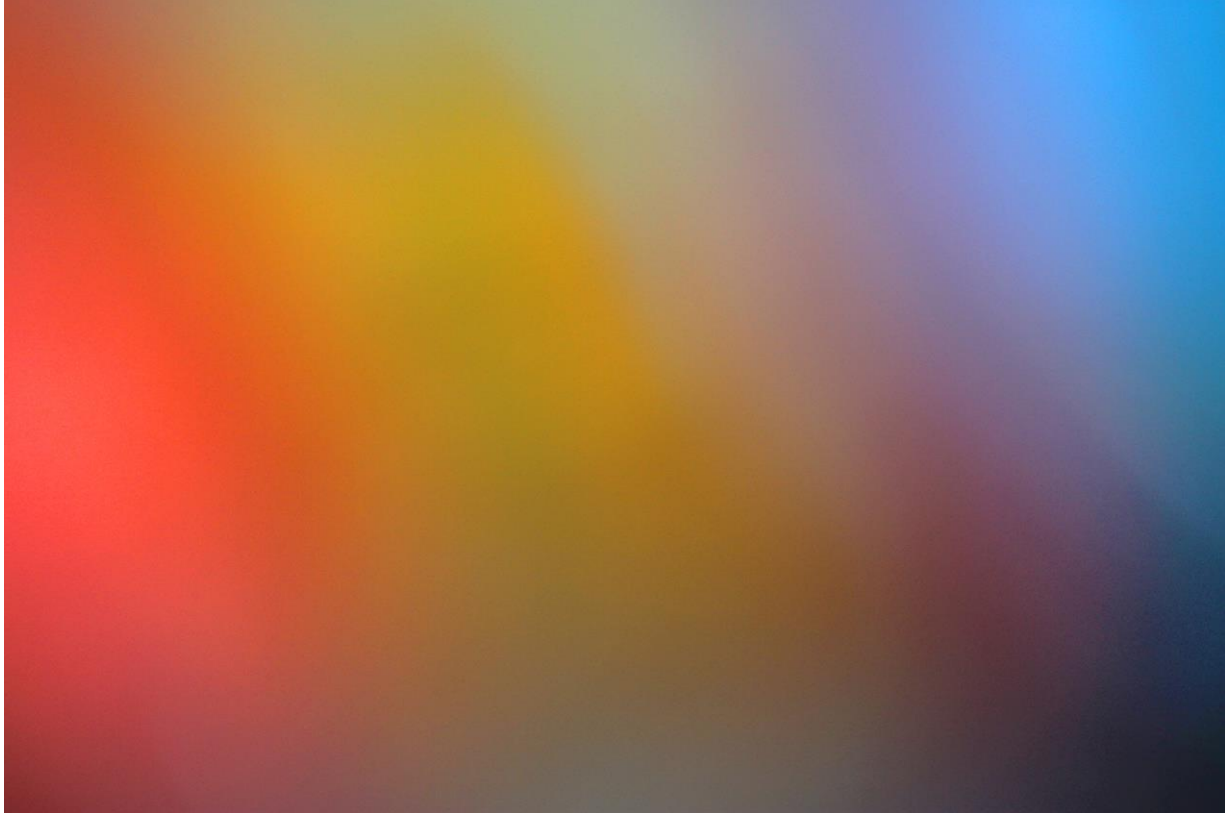
It's useful to remember that wherever you are you can learn to "abstract" well, i.e. to recognise the basic building blocks in any scene or situation from a microscopic object to a grand Earthscape. The subject matter that has attracted you exists as many potential images. Your challenge is to make the design decisions that make tangible or "real" the pictures that evoke and convey your personal response. Subject matter never "does the job" all by itself.



When I spotted this beautiful clump of white Lady's Slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*) in open woodland near my house in early June, I did a deep intake of breath, paused for a very long moment, and then abstracted the scene to make this image. The photograph is composed of three very loose rectangles – a green one in the top and bottom thirds and a black one punctuated with the large white dots occupying the middle third of the space.



It's easy to practise abstracting. Here's a photograph of a coloured bowl on my kitchen table. I threw everything out of focus to eliminate detail and make the three basic shapes (formed by colour contrast) stand out clearly. After tilting the camera slightly up and down, I decided to leave the small fourth vague shape of darkish tone in the lower right corner.



**“To abstract is to draw out the essence of a matter. To abstract in art is to separate certain fundamentals from irrelevant material which surrounds them.”**

*Ben Shahn*

Meilleurs vœux pour la saison, où que vous viviez!

Beste wense vir die seisoen waar jy ook al woon!

Best wishes for the season wherever you live!

**FREEMAN**

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