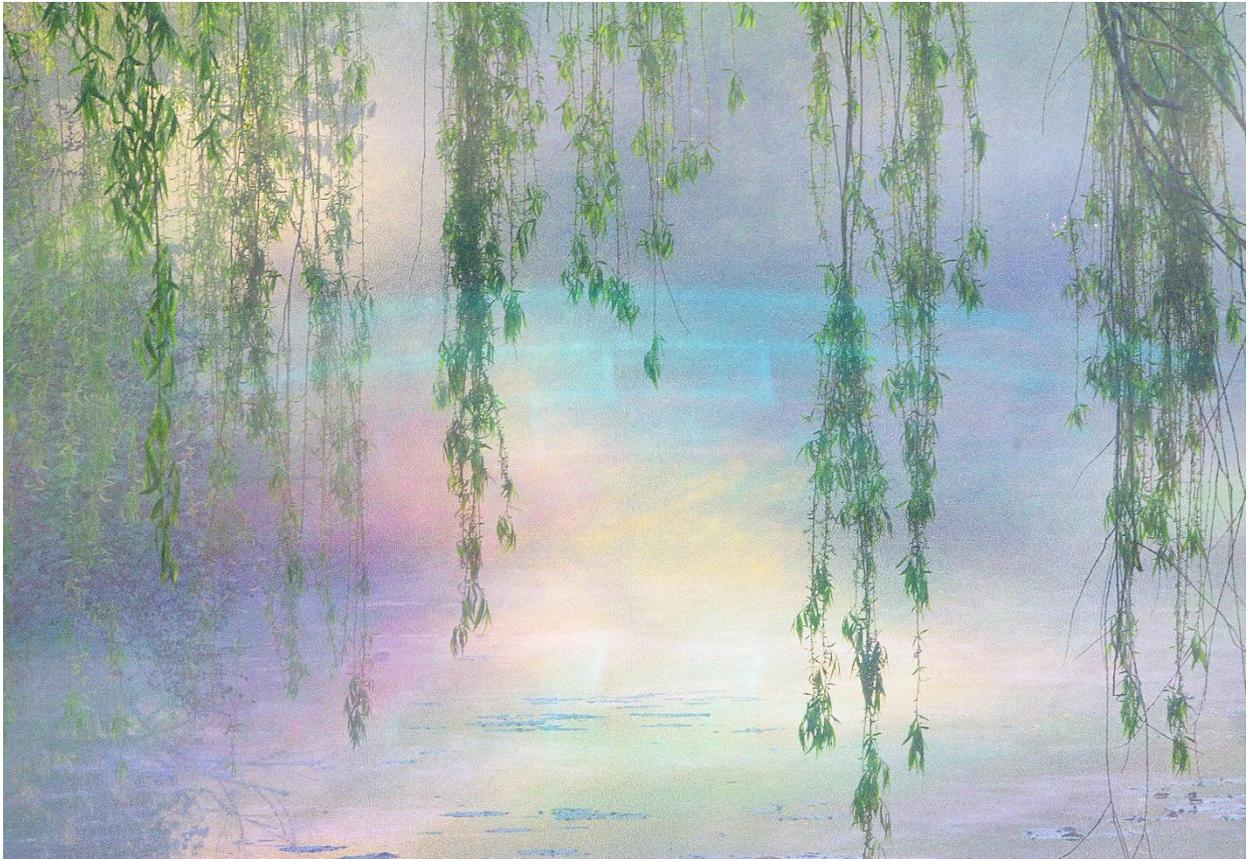


IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #18
March 2021

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



Dans le jardin de Claude Monet/ In the garden of Claude Monet

If you live in some of the warmer parts of the northern hemisphere or in the southern hemisphere, which quite a few people who receive this letter do, the image on the opening page is not out-of-season. As you all know, I've not been south this winter, but longed to be. And, even though I've been a pesco-vegetarian for years at home, I am now desperate for a Namaqualand lamb chop. (I've watched committed vegans rip off all their principles as the succulent aroma drifts by and sin more nakedly than they have in their entire lives.)

However, I'm not trying to be either seasonal or culinary, just visual. The desaturated hues combined with a reduced tonal range (in my spring image on page one and my late summer photograph on page three) affect me viscerally. I don't know why, which is fine; the answer will become apparent one day if I keep working away whenever I feel the urge.

Shooting for yourself, creating truly personal work, is what I've been encouraging photographers and creators in other media to do in virtually all of the Zoom presentations I've made this winter, in fact for years in all sorts of workshops. It couldn't matter less if nobody "likes" what you're doing, as ego gratification is not the purpose of art.

Art begins somewhere in your unconscious – in your imagination and your dreams.

You use craft – photographic tools and techniques, for example, and the building blocks of visual design and the principles (not rules) of arrangement or composition – to convey your imagining and your dreaming. So, the greater your knowledge of craft, the greater the likelihood of expressing your feelings and ideas effectively. However, being well informed in the tools and techniques of the photographic medium and of visual design never guarantees that you'll produce anything of value. It's exactly like language; you may be highly fluent in one or more languages, but have little of value to say. Craft does not produce art.

Children's art often demonstrates this. Even though it is often poorly executed, it may still convey great feeling, because a child is endeavouring to convey what's real – how she or he feels about mommy and daddy, about having to go to school, or about being happy or abused. I remember, when I was still in university and working one summer as a counsellor in a city day-camp for children, noting that an undersized, wise-beyond-his-years little boy always chose black crayons for drawing, but it was only when he began and continued to draw big black "wonky" electric fans that I became worried. They always conveyed the feeling of being "sucked in."

A child's black electric fans, desaturated hues combined with a flattened range of tones, the placement of the horizon extremely high or low in a landscape image, when consistently repeated, are obvious symbols. And, they are just as potentially valuable (especially to the person who creates them) as the people, objects, and situations in your dreams, all of which are symbolic expressions of you and of nobody else.

This is why it is vital for anybody working with film, digital capture, paints, acrylics, fabric, clay, metal and, indeed, with plants and soil to create for herself or himself. In the process of endeavouring to improve your craft through membership in a camera club, a workshop on weaving, or an on-line course or presentation in any medium, learn but don't copy for longer than necessary. Explore what moves you. Be who you are. Tell your own story.

"Always remember that you are unique. Just like everyone else."

Margaret Mead



To reiterate, fine craft (as distinguished from art) is visual creation based fundamentally on “fluency” in visual design and the superb use of the tools and techniques of a particular medium, which are essential for creating works that are often both functional and beautiful.

Camera-club judges, for example, are primarily concerned with craft – composition in particular. Their first task, of course, is to determine what the maker of the photograph intended to express, convey, or document. Then they can evaluate the design of an image in terms of the creator’s goals and assess more effectively how she/he used the chosen tools and techniques, and they will be in a position to make comments on the craft that will be relevant. Hopefully, judges will refrain from playing psychologist and commenting on the value of the creator’s intent or goal, no matter how negatively they may feel about it, as the maker of the image chose both the subject matter and the approach, not the judges (except for assigned subjects or concepts, of course).

To paraphrase Howard McConeghey, “Art is the visible expression of an invisible psychic image, has an emotional imperative and, unlike fine craft, never requires rational confirmation or approval.” As I’ve already mentioned, children’s art that is completely spontaneous (not influenced in any way by adults) may be poor craft, but still make a strong psychic statement. You can feel what they’re feeling.

“Create with the heart; build with the mind.”

Criss Jami

“For me, it is all about the act of making. I like the idea that something doesn’t exist, and then you put some time and effort into it, and it does. I like how you can create new things, sometimes almost from scratch. I like what happens as you draw a needle and thread through fabric, or pull a paintbrush across a piece of paper.” *Jana Pruden*



“Artistic seeing is an emotional response to the image. There is no scientific or systematic measurement. In teaching rules of proportion or design we neglect the fact that our images are shaped by forces beyond our will. We can develop such insight if we are willing to let go of ego control, if we are willing to be moved by the angel of reality, the angelic in the ordinary.” *Howard McConeghey*

“Imagination is an organ of knowledge just as real as the physical sense organs of the body.” *Howard McConeghey*

FINE-ART PHOTOGRAPHY

I've always felt uncomfortable with the term "fine-art photography," which is still in vogue. It suggests to me an insecurity, a feeling that people need to be convinced that photography can be a medium of artistic expression. Perhaps it's a hangover from the early days of photography when for a time the medium was regularly regarded as "copying physical reality" or having a limited expressive range compared with painting. Those days have long passed and photographers can get rid of their insecurity and the use of this unnecessary label. I'm speaking, of course, about photographers who are using their tools with deep care and thoughtfulness, who are "making," not "taking" pictures.

Nobody talks about fine-art sculpture, fine-art weaving, fine-art painting, or fine-art music although all are recognized as media through which a person can express his/her journeys into the imaginal realm. People who work in these media create their works and then enjoy or market them without affixing the "fine-art label." They are expending thought, time, and energy on their creations and they know it in their bones; they feel no need to convince others.

However, when somebody refers to himself/herself or somebody else as an "artist," I invariably enquire about the medium, which is usually painting, but a painter is not necessarily an artist any more than a photographer, a ceramicist, a gardener, a dancer, or a sculptor. The medium does not make an artist out of anybody.

It's also worth remembering, I feel, that an artist isn't always producing art. All the painters I know are regularly studying and experimenting with craft, just like somebody learning a language is always endeavouring to gain vocabulary, comprehension, and ease of delivery.

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After you have browsed through the rest of this letter, you may want to view a few of my recent experiments in [MONTAGE/ LAYERING](#). While I am happy with some of them, others don't convey real feeling for me, although I won't reveal which and possibly influence your response. I find it useful to reflect on both the creations that "work" for me and those that don't and ask "why?" in both cases. (By the way, the images on pp. 1 and 3 of this letter are also montages.)

However, I'm also endeavouring to see what's around me every day, which means all the accoutrements of winter. If you'd like to have a peak at a few of these photographs, hit [WINTER](#).



Recently I received a beautiful card from Mary Doering, a Massachusetts mixed-media artist, containing a poem and a quotation that I want to share with you. Like the card, Mary's two prints that hang on either side of my kitchen sink (where I can see them easily), tell you a great deal about Mary.

**“And the people stayed home.
And read books, and listened and rested,
and exercised, and made art and played games,
and learned new ways of being, and were still.
And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some
prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows
And the people began to think differently.**

**And the people healed. And, in the absence of
people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and
heartless ways, the earth began to heal.**

**And when the danger passed,
and people joined together again,
they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and
dreamed new images and created new ways to live
and heal the earth, as they had been healed.”**

Kitty O'Meara

.....

**“Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.
Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”**

Howard Thurman



This pandemic “winter of our discontent” has proven to be paradoxical. None of us wanted this ordeal, even if we have remained completely healthy. Yet, lots of good things have come from having had to stay at home. Among them has been the discovery of two incredibly beautiful films, “HUMAN” and “MY OCTOPUS TEACHER,” both referred to me by friends and easily accessible on line.

I’d also like to draw your attention to www.earthisourwitness.com, produced by Parimal Deshpande and hosted by him and the internationally-renowned photographer, Art Wolfe, both from Seattle. This is a series of stimulating conversations with photographers from around the world, selected by Art and centred on some of their images. The series is a work-in-progress; you can view those already filmed and there are more to come. Don’t miss the compelling conversation with Wade Davis, the Canadian anthropologist and photographer, who was explorer-in-residence at National Geographic for several years. (My conversation on SYMBOLS and MEANING will be recorded March 2. View live on <http://www.facebook.com/earthisourwitness>, on <http://www.instagram.com/earthisourwitness>, and live or for up to a year on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/EARTHISOURWITNESS>.)

I’m pleased to be featured in the March issue of the quarterly ICM Photography Magazine (digital and hard copy), which is available through the website as well as on Instagram and Facebook. I illustrate and discuss some of the topics that I covered in edition #16 of this letter, though from a somewhat different perspective.

Although ZOOM presentations and on-line workshops don’t measure up to on-site workshops for me, it’s been great to share images and have conversations on line with people all around the world. I’ve even had the privilege of presenting “Les Deux Jardins de Claude Monet/ The Two Gardens of Claude Monet” to Fundy Gardeners, the large garden club to which I belong, and in the process to discuss how Monet was as much an artist in gardening as in painting. (I also used the opportunity to give tips on “how to make better photographs of gardens and flowers.”)

My weekly 90-minute conversations with Laura Mazerolle, my French teacher, have been curtailed this winter, not just because of Covid-19, but also because Laura encountered some health issues. I’ve missed these times tremendously, as our conversations over “tisanes” are always enjoyable learning experiences for me. We laugh a lot, frequently at me. I’ve compensated by writing as many letters in French as possible, by listening to Radio Canada 1 and 2 (both French language), and by chatting with my friend Maurice Henri, a superb photographer from Moncton, New Brunswick, during his occasional visits. It’s quite reciprocal – he improves his English and I improve my French.

One thing I’ve learned about acquiring another language in my dotage is that “total immersion” may not always be as effective a learning method for adults as it is for children. My fluency in English was actually something of a barrier during my second three-week session at Centre Linguistique de Jonquière in Quebec where, if you had to sneeze, you had to do it in French. Every now and then when I couldn’t grasp a point of grammar, sentence structure, or word usage, I’d ask (in French) for an alternative explanation. If I couldn’t grasp the restatement, my prof and the class had to move on and I’d lose the opportunity. However, if the prof had been permitted to speak just one sentence or phrase in English, I’d have understood. So, later when I began to work with Laura, I asked if she would provide a brief explanation in English when a point utterly escaped me. She readily agreed and this has made the most enormous difference!

I should add that Afrikaans grammar, which I picked up in Namaqualand along with some vocabulary, is infinitely easier to learn than both French and English grammar. I remember the day when my friend Colla Swart remarked, “Ons kan nie meer oor Freeman in Afrikaans skinder nie,” which means “We can’t gossip about Freeman in Afrikaans any more.” Afrikaans, which is derived from Dutch and thus from German, is the world’s most recent modern language.

Speaking of Namaqualand again, the reason the lamb is beyond delicious is that the sheep graze on wild rosemary and other native aromatic herbs. It’s magnificently pre-seasoned!

And then, there are Israeli breakfasts! Nothing matches them in my experience. Oh, I'm sure you can go to a supermarket in Israel and buy your choice of boxed cereals, over-processed granolas, and assorted yuk, but I've never, ever been served anything but delicious, supremely healthy choices – fresh hummus, local white cheeses, two or three salads, extra-sweet peppers (raw or cooked), eggs in various ways but never fried in grease, labneh, fruit, and a choice of fresh breads, for example, with olive oil used wherever it contributes to nutrition and presentation. Here are a couple of “grab shots” I made of a corner of the buffet one morning at one of the 2020 workshops in Paran. (Thanks, Yinon!)



The pandemic has cut the cost of my travelling by 100%, but I've made extensive journeys through my photographs. One trip to New Zealand (2007) was with my dear friend Olga Cruz, who immigrated to New York from Columbia in her 20s unable to speak any English, but was scrubbing in an operating theatre the following morning at a hospital in Long Island.

Olga lived on a nurse's salary all her working life, indulging in her two great passions – opera and travel. She missed Aida or La Traviata at "the Met" only if she were in Egypt, South Africa, or elsewhere. And, when Olga could no longer travel, she did what many of us have done this year, she travelled through her photographs. She called them her memories. Here's a photo I made of Olga in Ophir, New Zealand, on our five-week trip together. Most days we set off with no plans whatever, just wandered and made pictures until by two or four or six p.m. we arrived somewhere that seemed a good place to stop for the night. Olga and I created a lot of memories that year. This is one of mine.



"To be astonished is one of the surest ways of not growing old too quickly."

Colette

"I am far too busy enjoying life to be limited by acting my age."

Íada Jónasdóttir Herman

"The secret of a good old age is simply an honourable pact with solitude."

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Knowing that spring has arrived, is arriving, or will be arriving for nearly everybody before my next letter, I simply have to end this one with an image that I showed many letters ago – a large flush of daffodils in the field below my house. My friend and neighbour Joanne Nutter and I planted about 5000 well over a decade ago and they have come to amaze us every year since. Usually the golden forsythia reaches the peak of its bloom about the same time and, shortly after, a river of marsh marigolds (actually large buttercups) flows through the broad, sloping meadow. Spring, HOORAY!!!



We are and always have been in outer space.” *Annaka Harris*

“There’s as many atoms in a single molecule of your DNA as there are stars in the typical galaxy. We are, each of us, a little universe.” *Neil deGrasse Tyson*

Imaginer, rêver, créer! Stel jou voor, droom, skep! Imagine, dream, create!

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