

IMAGES, IDEAS and REFLECTIONS

a periodical letter
from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



IMAGES, IDEAS and REFLECTIONS #1

Freeman Patterson

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Recently my friend, the superb photographer Chris Harris, asked me “How are you sharing your images these days besides in workshops?” His question was apt. Chris shares his photographs, especially his recent work, in an excellent monthly newsletter. Even though my cameras are always within easy reach, so I can use one quickly, I have been inserting my pictures only in letters to close friends. After Chris posed his question I realized that, quite frankly, I have been spending more time sending images to a few people than I would be by sharing them with all the friends I’ve made on workshops and the people I’ve met in so many other ways. My e-mail address book is huge, so I should be using it to stay in touch.

“IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS” is my way of endeavouring to rectify the situation. This first issue is an invitation; it gives everyone who receives it the opportunity to continue receiving subsequent issues. [Subscribe](#) I hope to write a letter six times a year, not a newsletter, though I’ll always include a bit of news in each issue, but rather a letter about ideas, feelings, and reflections – on photography, more broadly on art, and always on the ways they relate to our lives.

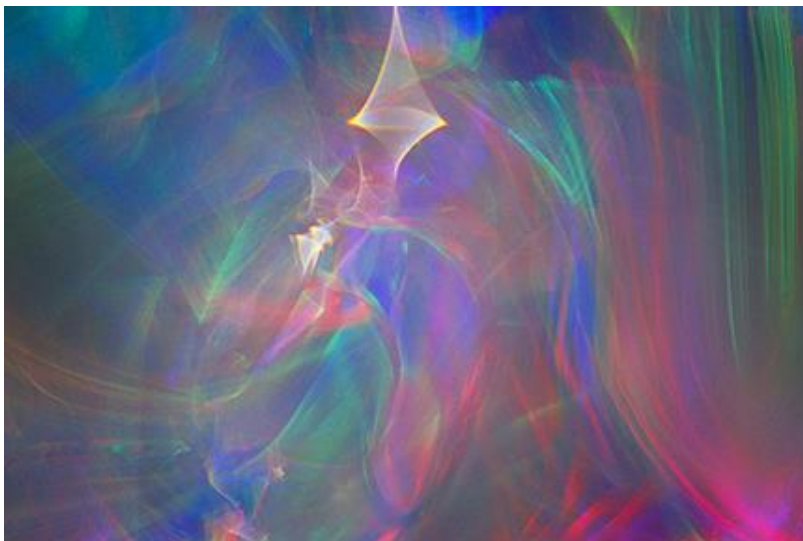
Although I believe deeply in the fundamental importance of craft – about becoming fluent in using the tools of the photographic medium and the principles of visual design – I have also come to believe strongly that the most important artistic questions are about our motivations and passions, about “why we do it” not about “how to do it.” So, most of all I’ll be reflecting – with both pictures and words, including the words of others – on ways we use photography to tell our life stories.

Photographs, like music, are for everybody – not just for other photographers – so I hope that those of you who aren’t photographers will value seeing my pictures and reading my words, just as those of you who don’t compose music enjoy listening to everything from opera to hip hop.

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**“It began in mystery and it will end in mystery –
and what a rare and beautiful country lies in between.”**

Diane Ackerman



A month ago I was camping with a small group in the extreme northwest corner of South Africa, the mountainous southern flank of the great Namib Desert. I have been going there for many years, climbing around and through the massive heaps of gigantic boulders, wandering alone down isolated valleys where the plants and animals may never before have witnessed a human presence, and every night sleeping on a rock under a sky shimmering with a quadrillion stars.

A few days ago I received these words from a friend who joined me this year: **"I feel so complete I can't describe it. I looked at my photos and wanted to cry at the beauty of the places we have been. I experienced complete silence with the stars, especially during my first night sleeping alone outside. I saw the brightest shooting star I have ever seen in my life. It makes a person feel at one with the cosmos, not insignificant but significantly part of something infinite."** My friend is confirming "the mystery," the fact that being "in Nature" can cause a person to know in her very bones that she is "of Nature," while at the same time realizing that Creation is beyond anything she can possibly comprehend. My friend is also describing the most intense kind of belonging, which along with sheer wonder, brings (to use the Biblical phrase) "peace that passes all understanding."

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"The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavour in art and science.... To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that the mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness.... To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the structure of all that there is."

Albert Einstein



Creation creates – all the time, non-stop, forever and ever! You and I are living products of the process and, therefore, simply “loaded with the goods,” imbued with the ability to create in so many ways that, if we accept who we really are, we will never stop surprising ourselves with our creativity.

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“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous!

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.

We are meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we’re liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

*Marianne Williamson, from her 1992 book, Return to Love;
quoted by Nelson Mandela in his inauguration speech*



Spring, which is especially about creativity, is my favourite season. Everything good seems possible. I always feel liberated and enormously energized, spend days cleaning up all the debris that winter invariably leaves behind, planting and mulching in my huge rhododendron and azalea garden, and using my camera constantly. Making pictures comes just as naturally as everything else. My images, whether documentary or impressionistic, are as much symbols of my feeling as they are descriptions of the subject matter. Here are a few made within a short distance of my house.







You can tell I like flowers. Well, it's actually plants. I've always felt as closely connected to the plant world as to the animal. When I don't have plants around me, I feel something vital is lacking, an important relationship is missing. I'm sure it goes back to my childhood, to growing up on a farm and constantly being out in the fields and forests where the connection between plants and animals was a given, the interdependence so obvious that nobody ever felt the need to point it out to me. On the whole, growing plants is the same as raising animals (or children, for that matter) – you observe, you pay attention. You feed and water a kid; you feed and water a plant. And, to help them be really healthy, you trust them both to know what they are doing and let them make mistakes. A plant or an animal learns to adapt not nearly so much by being taught as by living. You'll notice that wild plants and animals do a good job for the most part, unless we humans interfere.

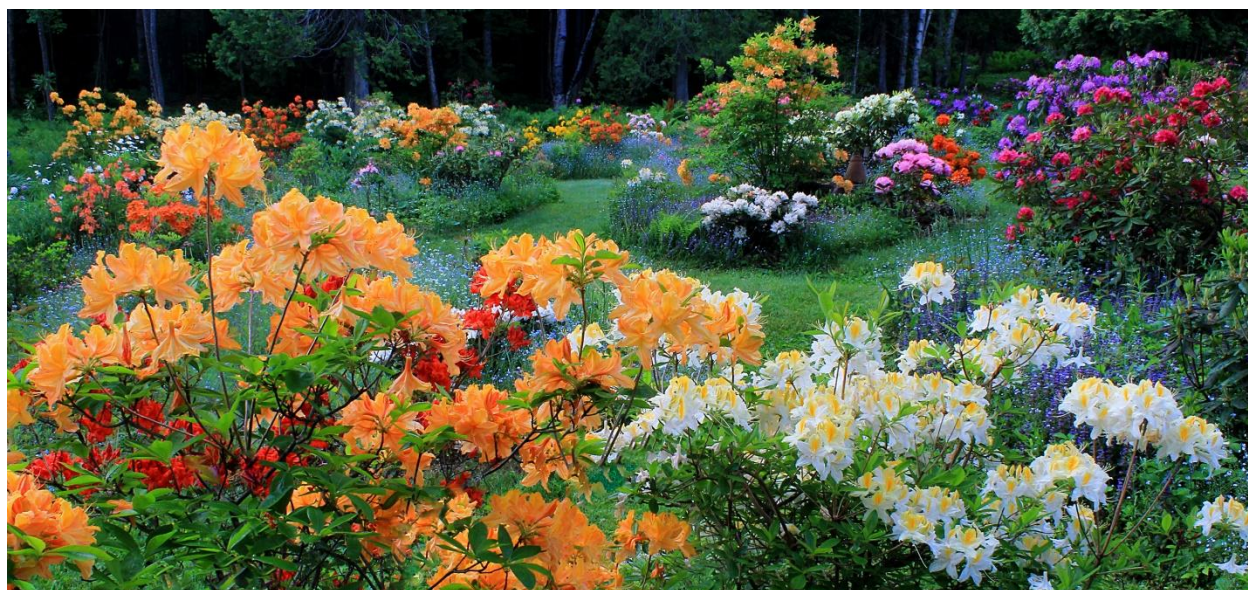
I have particular respect for trees, most of whom have to spend their entire lives where they were born – whether they like the place or not. Some trees enjoy enormous wealth, others are born into poverty, but they all seem to do the best they can with what they have. I have met many trees that are ill, but I have yet to meet one that is depressed. And, I love observing a forest as a community, which is something I can do here at Shampers Bluff. It is amazing how everybody gets along – the plants, the fungi, the animals, the birds and, for that matter, the streams and the rocks. Talk about holistic!

When it comes to gardening, a major creative activity for me, I endeavour to honour this interdependency. Often I'll create a small garden, like the one pictured above, as a surprise or an accent in the woods. It's composed of just a few impatiens plants that I situated in the rotting trunk of a fallen spruce. Nature took care of everything else.

COMING UP

Early in May I'll be flying to Virginia to visit my old friend and photographer Joe Miller, who is hosting in his gallery an annual exhibition of abstract photographs made by his students, and to give a public evening presentation on creativity. Three days after returning home, I'll board the ferry that crosses the Bay of Fundy between Saint John and Digby, Nova Scotia, to present "The Flora and Ecology of Namaqualand" in the King's Theatre in Annapolis Royal for the annual conference and sale of The Rare and Unusual Plant Society. I've been working on this program for several months, as I've had to review tens of thousands of slides (25 flower seasons in Namaqualand), choose the ones I want, have Kim (my secretary) scan them, and then run them through Photoshop before adding the images to my digital library. (Details for both events are on my web site, www.freemanpatterson.com.)

For the rest of May and all of June I'll be planted on Shamper's Bluff, as this is the peak flowering of my azaleas and rhododendrons, now around 1100 plants from very young to mature.



Workshops begin in July and continue through mid-October, **three on visual design and photography with André Gallant**, my teaching partner of 23 years, and **two INSCAPE workshops on consciousness and creativity with David Maginley**, (www.davidmaginley.com) our third year together. (Details for both are on my web site and openings are available on the August 26 – September 1 workshop with André Gallant and both INSCAPE workshops.) As well, I'll be hosting one-day workshops (for up to three persons) at my home on Shamper's Bluff and, in September, returning to Nova Scotia for a privately-arranged workshop in Pubnico.

Around October 20 I'm off to Australia again, this time for another privately-arranged workshop, also fully booked, and other programming in November. These events, which will be centred in the Blue Mountains area west of Sydney, have been arranged by my good friend, Sue Lightfoot. I'm delighted to be visiting Sue and really looking forward to enjoying a second spring this year in November.

Yes, I already have various plans for 2019; some are firm, others tentative. I'll be able to start telling you about these in the next issue.

Good wishes, EVERYBODY!
FREEMAN

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