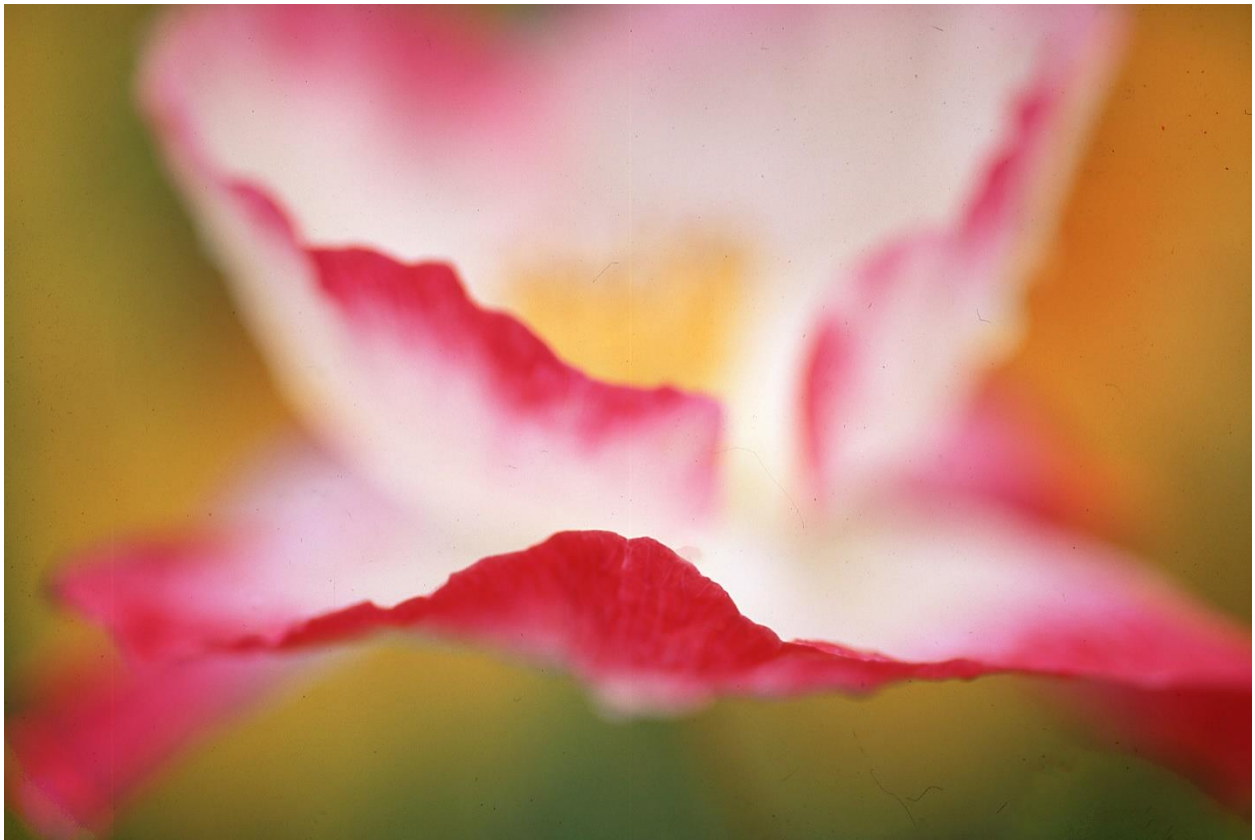


IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

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from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



ENDLESS SPRING

Away back in 1966 a beautiful film, “The Endless Summer,” was released. It told the story of two young surfers who followed summer around the world in search of the perfect wave. One day off Cape St. Francis on the Indian Ocean coast of South Africa, they surfed their dream.

I have never forgotten this beautiful film, which stimulated my dream journey of following the coming of spring around the world. The most I’ve accomplished is five springs in one year – Mexico, the southeastern USA from Florida to North Carolina, New Brunswick, Namaqualand in South Africa, and finally New Zealand. Every spring was magnificently different and every one energized me physically and lifted my spirit, often to the level of an enveloping euphoria, a long-lasting “high.”

How do I photograph this feeling?

It’s not simply a matter of documenting crocus emerging through the snow or expanses of emerging yellow-green leaves transforming a grey-brown forest landscape, events that I anticipate every year. Rather, it’s more like trying to capture the feeling of lightness. So I often find myself choosing to overexpose a little or a lot, usually in my camera, but also subsequently when I process the file. The amount of overexposure depends entirely on feeling, as I’m doing this for myself.

However, when I’m endeavouring to photograph the intangible, I’ll consider any technique that might prove useful. Layering, multiple exposure, and camera movement are all among them. No matter what I decide, it’s always a bonus if others experience just a little of what I was feeling.





Whether spring arrives and passes quickly into summer or is an attenuated season that can be savoured over many weeks, as it can here in New Brunswick, it always re-affirms the strong connection between the physical and the psychospiritual. We feel “uplifted.”

In spring, Creation is busy creating! It’s in “overdrive!” As cells divide and multiply, leaves emerge, plants grow and bloom. Even though none of us can hear the cacophony of cell division, our senses of sight and smell are more than sufficient to make us aware of the birthing process and to evoke a sense of wonder.

Growing up in the country, I was constantly exposed to the restorative power of nature in every season, and my awareness did not wane during the years I lived in the downtown core of major cities – New York, Edmonton, and Toronto. I filled my college windows overlooking Broadway with plants and converted the balcony of my last Toronto apartment into a greenhouse, so I could sit among flowers every day of the year. When we plant a garden, however small, we are expressing our belief in tomorrow.

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“When one flower blooms, spring awakens everywhere.”

John O’Donohue

“Nothing seems impossible in spring.”

L.M. Montgomery

LUPINS or LUPINES



The magnificent lupins that bloom in the fields around my house in June have the same sort of relationship with other field plants that foxes have with hares and rabbits. As the fox population increases, the hare population begins to decline due to the increased predation. Fewer hares mean less food for foxes, so the fox population then begins to decline and, as it does, the hares start to increase ... up and down, up and down, forever and ever, amen.

Lupins thrive in somewhat acidic soil, especially where they have little competition from other plants. Often a big reason that there isn't much competition is because the soil lacks nitrogen. Now it just so happens that lupins are very good at "fixing" nitrogen, i.e. extracting it from the air and putting it into the ground. Of course, as soon as nitrogen starts to build up in the soil, the other plants start moving back in to enjoy the picnic and before long they are likely to become so big and thick that they crowd out the little lupin seedlings. Hence fewer lupins, which before long means less nitrogen, and the circle just goes round and round ... foxes and hares, up and down, forever and ever, amen.

At least that's how the lupins and the other field plants behave at my place. Once a thick expanse of lupins begins to decline, it takes about 30 years for the lupins to become just as thick in that area again. I made the photograph on the following page from my front deck just after sunrise one June morning in 1988. Sure enough, it was 2018 before I was able to make a similar picture of the same place. However, the descendants of those 1988 blooms were busy elsewhere in the fields fixing nitrogen, creating stunning displays of their blue, pink, white, and variegated spikes, and keeping me busy with my cameras.



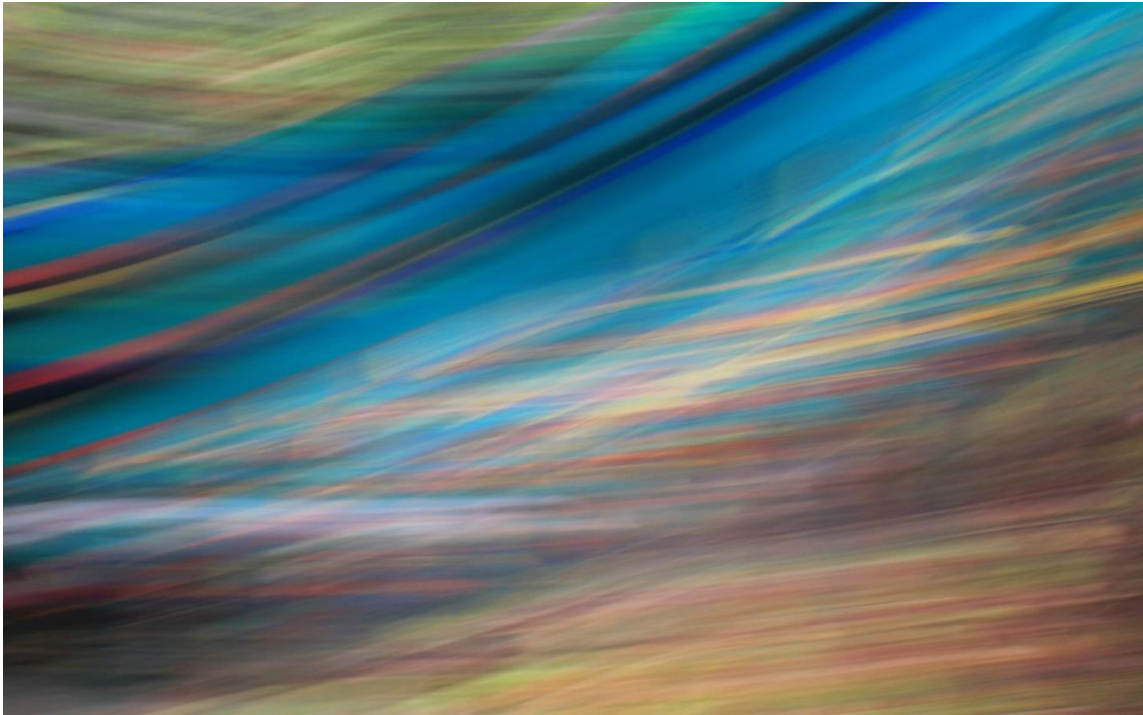
Instead of turning any of the fields around the house into lawns, I mow paths through the fields, paths that wander and lead people on and on. Paths are an invitation to explore and to discover. Last year my friend Ian Varty arrived with his drone late one afternoon in June and made a short video of the paths and some of the lupins. Here's the link.

<https://www.youtube.com/wa0tch?v=XJKjYDJHh5A>

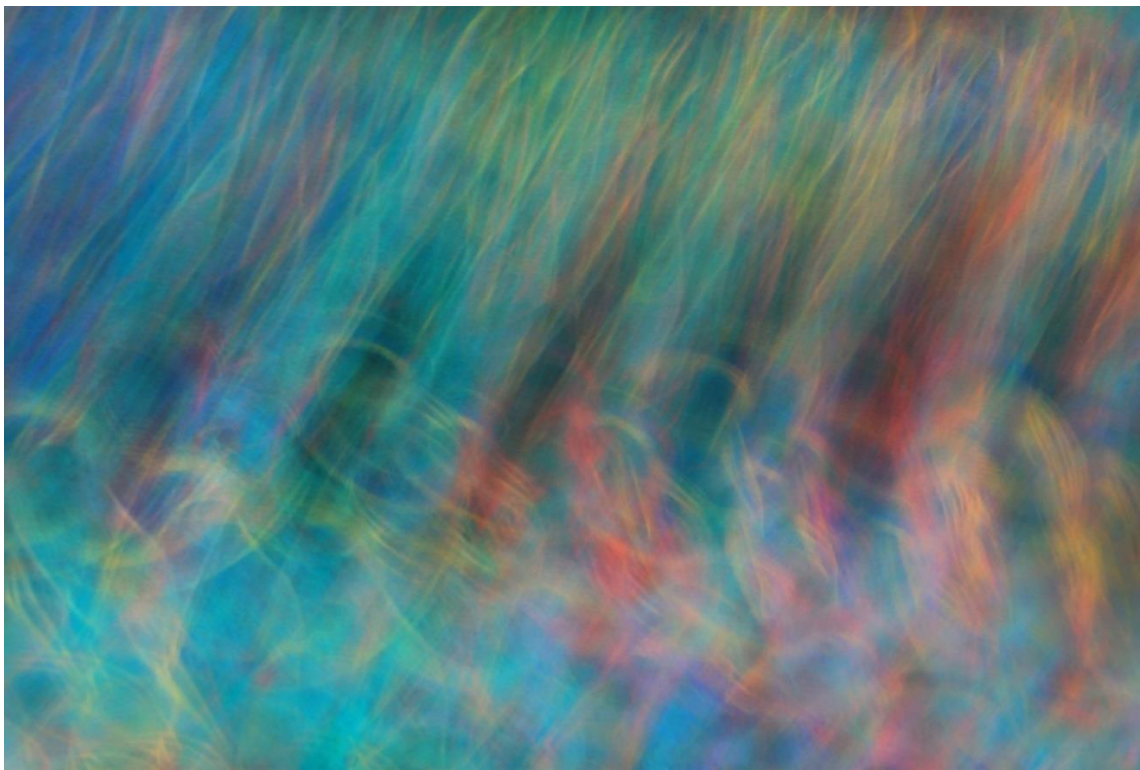


MY HAMMOCK

(Yes, Canadians, it's that time of year)



Swinging in my hammock



Tumbling out of my hammock

The VITAL IMPORTANCE OF CRAFT and DESIGN

Art begins somewhere in the unconscious – in our passions, our imaginings, our reveries, and our dreams. Craft gives them form or brings them to life. It makes it intelligible to our senses and to our minds.

Most visual artists, photographers included, should always be aiming for greater fluency (scope and ease of use) in two things: 1/ visual design, and 2/ tools and techniques.

Visual design has building blocks, just like language has parts of speech. The two basic visual blocks are LINE and SHAPE; they are like a NOUN and a VERB in every language. Put a noun and verb together and you make a statement or ask a question? *Colette sings. Ann writes. May I?*

The arrangement and sizing of the building blocks (visual) or the arrangement and emphasis of the parts of speech (speaking and writing), we call composition.

Absolutely fundamental to good composition is the ability to abstract, to see the subject matter, not as a field, a forest, and sky, but instantly as essentially three rectangles. If you want to emphasize the sky, tilt your camera up, if it's the field, then tilt it down, if it's the forest, then move closer to it or use a longer focal-length. (This is also called basic blocking of the picture space.)

Nearly everybody has a cell phone that includes a camera, but I've noticed that only a few people pay any attention to careful composition when they are using it. For instance, even though they want to photograph the forest, many will hold the phone vertically and point straight ahead, not seeing the three rectangles inherent in the scene and checking to see if they look better in the horizontal format. The composition ends up being a forest sandwich, a slice or narrow rectangle of trees in the middle squeezed between two huge rectangles. Simply switching to the horizontal format would show far more forest.

By the way, I've come to realize that almost any scene or situation, no matter how complex, can be quickly "abstracted" into or "seen" as one to six shapes. Only on rare occasions do my compositions contain more.

To reiterate, aim for fluency in your chosen medium. For example, you'll always be able to enlarge your vocabulary (words or building blocks) and improve your composition (arrangement of the parts of speech or building blocks;) it's a wonderful life-time challenge. In the process, you may discover that learning a second or third language or engaging in a second or third art medium improves your fluency in your first. My teaching partner for the St. Martin's New Brunswick workshops in Photography and Visual Design, André Gallant, has become a very good painter in the last few years (highly non-representational images,) and an avid gardener, where his skill in composition is seldom rivalled. I love what he creates in both these media as well as his superb photographic images.

Like André, I love gardening. As both of us garden for ourselves, we express some important aspects of ourselves and tell our life stories in the process. The same with the photographs we create. So far, unlike André, I haven't taken up painting, but I devote a great deal of time to reading and writing, often analysing why a sentence or a paragraph is so descriptive or evokes a situation or a feeling so effectively.

KIRA ARTISTS' RETREATS

Kingsbrae International Residency for the Arts, St. Andrew's, New Brunswick



Because of the interest, I have been able to add a third KIRA retreat for 2023 (end of July.) In addition to the specific information that's on my web site www.freemanpatterson.com under Workshops, I'd like to provide some background and write a little more about these retreats.

I've felt for a long while that as vital as fluency in visual design and photographic craft (tools and techniques) is to effective communication and expression in the medium, something important was lacking in many conversations. Eventually I realized that we photographers are forever asking "how to do it," i.e. asking important craft questions, but rarely asking "why I do it," which is to go to a different place – to where art is born.

Also, I noticed that many photographers have little meaningful contact with artists working in other visual media, such as painting, drawing, sculpture, etc. and equally that these visual artists often tend to devalue photography because they know very little about it. After all, they realize that anybody can "take" a picture, that everybody does, and that, let's be frank, most of the pictures are just quick, often careless records. Even though serious photographers learn much from each other, all too often there's no cross-pollination between

photographic artists, fabric artists, artists who paint, artists who sculpt, artists who garden (or garden and paint, like Monet.)

So, I wanted to start bridging the art gap – encouraging photographers to look behind “how to do it” (craft) and to start examining their passions, their imaginings, and their dreams and to bring other artists into the conversations.

The retreats are very much a work-in-progress and perhaps they always will be, but feedback I solicited from participants in two of last year’s retreats provided me with valuable suggestions for improvements. Although some didn’t want me to change anything, others specified exactly what they’d like to see dropped and/or added, which included everything from altering a couple of my presentations, to providing more opportunities for participants to see and discuss each other’s work, to variations in the breakfast menu, which resulted in a buffet that also makes life easier for the KIRA staff. Everybody applauded our chef, who prepares our box lunches, which most of consume on KIRA’s large wrap-around veranda, and the long, memorable dinners we share in the KIRA dining room.

At present I’m arranging studio visits with various non-photographic artists in the St. Andrew’s area or asking them to join us at KIRA to talk about their work and what motivates them. (These conversations often take place for two or three hours in the late afternoon, when somebody invariably shows us with a bottle of wine.) With some exceptions the artists whom we visit and who visit us change for each workshop.

Although we are living on the edge of the huge Kingsbrae garden and have access to it 24 hours a day, personally, I don’t give a hoot what a participant may choose to photograph, sketch, or paint. That’s the artist’s business. But, both I and the other participants endeavour to help each other by questioning and reflecting on their creations – either on a one-to-one basis or in group viewing and discussion.

Many participants (and I’m one of them) spend a good deal of time in Kingsbrae’s huge sculpture garden and with the sculptures scattered elsewhere along garden paths or carefully positioned on the banks of small lakes. The two photographs I’ve included here are a small sample. To see a greater range, click [SCULPTURES at KINGSBRAE](#).



IT'S A TRIP!!!

On the day she turned 87, my mother said to me, "I can't believe I've lived so long." Implicit in her remark was more than surprise, it was experiencing a sense of pleasure and peace that she had not anticipated. That was in March; she died in the middle of December, three months short of her 88th birthday.

As many of you know, I'm 85 now and hoping to make 86. But, if I don't or if I live to be a positive antique (there's been some real longevity on my father's side of the family,) I'm extremely grateful for having had the privilege of growing old. In fact, I'll go so far as saying that the 80s have been the most satisfying years of my life, which is not to suggest that they have been without times of physical and emotional trauma. However, most of the time, everything is seasoned as delicately or robustly as the dish or situation requires.

There is a certain "frisson," an excitement or thrill, about skating on thin ice, about knowing that one of these days the ice is going to crack, but also knowing that until it does I'm going to do all the leaps, swirls, and pirouettes of which I'm capable. Let me explain.

Of the six people I know between 90 and 105, one constantly talks about her dreams and is always planning for the future. Having an example like that, a role model really, is a gift. However, many friends have already passed on and others, alas, seem to be sitting around waiting to go. They stopped exercising and they stopped learning, two of the most significant things they could have done to extend their years of privilege.

For me, it is deeply saddening to be with somebody I once knew as a force of nature or a compelling intellect now able to traverse only a few metres with a walker because she gave up walking, or with somebody who no longer has a social life because he resisted learning how to use a computer, tablet, or mobile phone. They didn't accept the fact that the world is always changing, and updating their coping skills is an essential life activity. Now, there's nothing they can do about the situation. It's too late. That's really sad and I don't want to find myself in that position, which is why I'm all for leaps and swirls – e.g., gardening, reading about quantum physics and depth psychology (and a new Donna Leon mystery now and then,) continuing to improve my French and my ability to see the world around me, and writing this letter to a grand bunch of friends, many of whom I've never met in person.

On the day that you and I were conceived (and on that day alone,) untold millions of our father's sperm rushed to meet our mother's egg. Unless we're a twin, only one sperm made it; all the rest died and were discarded by nature. So, we won the only prize in the first lottery in which we ever were entered – at odds that exceed those of Lotto Max or Powerball.

That prize was the gift of life!

It seems to me that the best way to say "thank you" for this incredible gift, however long we possess it, is to live it as fully as we possibly can and, for those of us who are privileged to have "a long run," to hope and to try to cross the finish line still smiling.

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"The excitement of learning separates youth from old age."

Roslyn S. Yalow

“Every garden and every gardener is a work in progress. And, no matter how tiny or grand, how colourful or restrained, how wild or cultivated, the garden is a metaphor for the gardener. When you invite somebody into your garden, you are inviting them to meet you.

Because every garden is a place of dreams and every gardener is a dreamer, we should find nothing strange and much that is symbolic in both our own and other gardens. Are the paths straight, or do they curve and wander? What colours appear constantly? Does the gardener worry about ripping out every last weed?

When we want to learn something important about ourselves, it’s a good idea to go into our garden, because we’ll find that we’ve planted a lot of the answers there.”

From the Preface to The Garden, 2003, by Freeman Patterson

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“Gardening is cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes.”

courtesy Pinterest

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Openings available on these workshops:

***Photography and Visual Design* with André Gallant (St. Martins,) Sept. 3-9 and Oct. 8-14
Artists’ Retreat (St. Andrew’s,) July 27-Aug.1**

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Meilleurs vœux à tous!

Beste wense, almal!

Best wishes, everybody!

FREEMAN

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