

# IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

*Periodical Letter #28*

*November 2022*

*from*

**FREEMAN PATTERSON**



*"... and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Genesis 1, verse 2*

Every emergent culture has developed its own Creation myths and this photograph I made of light streaming across the Dead Sea is a visual rendering of the second telling of the Creation story (chapter one) in the book of Genesis. It's the story that begins with great beauty of imagination and then quickly deteriorates into specifying what God did on subsequent days before resting on the seventh, the left-brain structure of the account strongly suggesting that the persons who wrote it down were accustomed to making orderly lists and were probably urban dwellers.

The first telling of the Creation story follows in chapter two, the written account of a version told by earlier people, familiar with the land and deeply sensitive to the moods of nature. There is no checklist of God's daily accomplishments.

The fact that the later version comes first in the Bible is not particularly surprising, because the contents of the first five books (the Pentateuch) are a veritable hodgepodge of two or even three "sources" frequently woven together in one verse or even one sentence. By the end of my first semester in seminary, I had to be able to recognize the strands in every single verse of those five books. Talk about academic pressure! I felt as if somebody was whacking me daily with a baseball bat.

However, my reason for talking about the Creation stories here is because they illustrate something that matters enormously to me when I make photographs – the importance of symbols.

The father of depth psychology, Carl Jung, noted that we don't find symbols, but that our symbols find us. This is why it's so important to make images or to create any form of art for self, as it's only when you "follow your energy" (pay attention to where your unconscious is leading you by means of your passions, dreams, and imagination) that you will end up telling your own story. When you're working for a client or a camera-club competition, somebody else is calling the shots.

Did I choose the subject matter in the photograph on page one? In one sense, "yes," but in a far more important sense "no." In truth, I responded – to a scene breaking before me that powerfully evoked a sense of The Great Mystery. How did I come to be? How did anything come to be? Using my knowledge of design and my camera I was able to give form to what I felt - a sense of awe and wonder.

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**"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."** *Albert Einstein*

**"Awe is the best drug in the world."** *Jason Silva*





## The Month that Canadians Love to Hate

### NOVEMBER

I can never determine whether it's psychological, or visual, or both, but a lot of Canadians pick November as being their least favourite month of the year. However, I am not among them.

Although November presages or actually is the beginning of winter, depending on where you live, I am extremely fond of the desaturated secondary hues that abound in nature in the run-up to everything being covered with a white blanket. Tossed carpets of mixed browns, the extended tonal range of not-quite yellows, imaginings of purple, all punctuated by or interspersed with soft greys and occasional soft warm mists have a contemplative effect on me. After the extroversion of peak autumn colour, the "blast" as it were, I'm ready to give myself back to myself. November is a visit from a welcome friend.

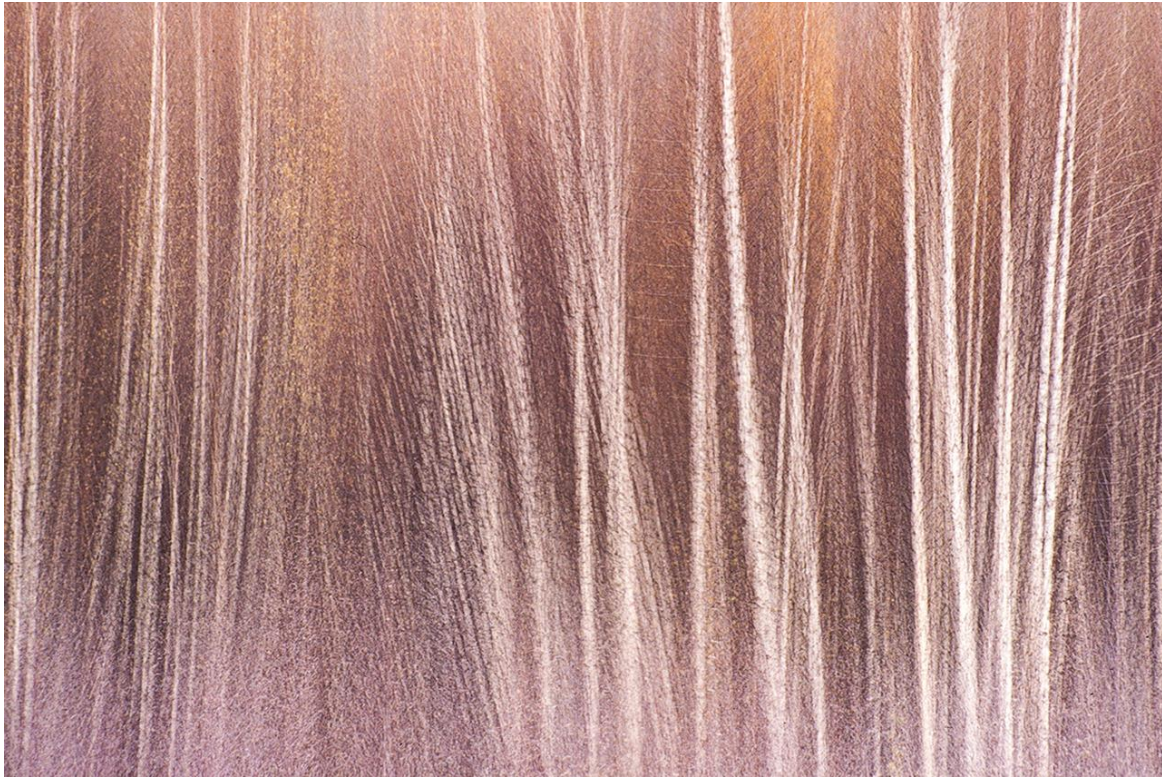


An easy chair, made for reading, sits beside my kitchen hutch, which is usually the repository for a new book and three or four old ones, and by November the rotation increases, as does my note-taking. The Canadian November is made for cogitation.

November is also a good time to do a brutal edit of all the photographs I've made during the year so far. My basic question is "Will I ever use this image for anything?" Editing is very much like pruning my roses, which thrive on brutality and reward my sadism with extraordinary colour and fragrance come spring. To compare, what's left of my year's pictures stimulate my imagination in a way that no suitcase full of them ever could, and I'm more likely to experiment with some of them in Photoshop in the hope that I can express what I felt even more effectively.

So, here's to November in Canada!







## BOOKS and VIDEO

I very much appreciate the notes and letters I've received from readers about books and/or videos that they feel may interest me or other readers. Recently Dianna Fortnum recommended a short YouTube video, The Divided Brain by Ian McGilchrist, and I'd like to second her recommendation. She also alerted me to THE DAWN OF EVERYTHING: A New History of Humanity by David Graber (anthropologist) and David Wengrow (archaeologist.) If the title intrigues you as much as it did me, then search Amazon, other on-line book sellers, or your browser for details. Anyway, I bought the book (681 pages with index, etc.) and have begun the journey; Dianna had nearly finished hers when I last heard from her. If you want a book you can settle in with for the winter, this is clearly a good candidate.

At the beginning of October I completed James Hollis' 16<sup>th</sup> book, LIVING BETWEEN WORLDS: Finding Personal Resilience in Changing times, which I found deeply exciting and enormously useful for both self-examination and talking about the source of art. Also, several persons have recommended Hollis' preceding book, LIVING AN EXAMINED LIFE: Wisdom for the Second Half of the Journey. The first Hollis book I read (his third) was UNDER SATURN'S SHADOW: The Wounding and Healing of Men, which I recommended to a couple of people on this year's INSCAPE workshop. This book was so relevant and so helpful to me when I first read it (many years ago) that I felt a huge window had opened for me and I was breathing incredibly fresh air. Every man should read it and, for that matter, so should every woman. I have never been without a copy since.

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**"... whenever we stop growing, enquiring, exploring, our psyche pathologizes as depression, or we self-medicate or look for new ways to divert ourselves....**

**We continue to walk in shoes too small for ourselves ..."** *James Hollis*









## COMPOSITION

Talking about composition makes no sense unless you indicate what you are composing – a picture, a sentence, or a vegetable stew, for example. In other words, you have to know the building blocks or ingredients you’re going to need to create in that medium.

This may seem easy with vegetable stew, until you start to consider the big question about which vegetables and how many of each. Then, it dawns on you that using a broth and various herbs may improve the flavour. When you identify the main ingredients or building blocks – veggies, liquid, seasoning – you realize what you thought would be a simple exercise has turned into a potentially massive challenge. That’s the point when you take refuge in the simplest solution and say, “Oh hell, I’ll just use what I have.”

And, that is a great place to be, because you may be forced to be imaginative, daring, inventive in your use of just a few ingredients.

It’s much the same with making pictures. I’ve said a thousand times that the best place in the entire world to see and to make photographs is wherever you are. Why? Because you are forced to do something you normally don’t – observe acutely what’s all around you.

When you are composing a picture, a photograph for example, you have to identify the main building blocks, the ingredients, as it were. The two biggies are LINE and SHAPE (not FORM, which implies depth and is a term used in three-dimensional design, such as sculpture.) Line and shape are to composing a photograph what a noun and a verb are to composing a sentence; they are absolutely basic in every case, except for those few in which an image is composed entirely of TEXTURE (the illusion of a weave or fabric on a flat surface.)

Understanding how basic line and shape are soon makes you realize that there are two kinds of lines – straight and curving – and that they make you feel differently or deliver a different message. Also, this is the time when (hopefully) you begin to abstract shapes – to realize that the rock at which you are aiming your lens can be a variety of shapes – a circle from one viewpoint, an oval from another and, amazingly, a rectangle from another. So, as with a vegetable stew, you find yourself using your imagination to come up with a way to present (arrange, compose) a familiar object or scene that excites both you and viewers. “Same old, same old” is not on the menu!

So what are the principles (important guidelines) of composition that you may want to consider when you observe the building blocks that are inherent to subject matter you’ve chosen? It all depends on what you want to convey with your stew, sorry, your photograph.

Think of your daily life. Sometimes you attempt to be as orderly as possible in order to achieve a particular goal, while at other times you welcome a high degree of disorder, even chaos – a good party, for example. Now apply this to composing photographs. There’s no right degree of order or chaos; you choose what you need to deliver your message or to evoke a certain feeling response.

Four of the most important principles of composition are 1/ balance (to create order) or imbalance (to relieve order,) 2/ rhythm (or arhythm,) 3/ proportion, and 4/ dominance. On the next page I’ll illustrate and discuss one of these – balance/imbalance.



## BALANCE/ IMBALANCE

Balance produces order. There are two kinds of balance – formal and informal, and formal balance can be divided into symmetrical and asymmetrical balance. This Arctic landscape depends on formal symmetrical balance, as the bottom half of the photograph is a mirror image of the top half. However, I would not have created this composition without the presence of the iceberg (centre left,) which relieves the extremely strong sense of order by providing imbalance.



The following composition (next page,) which I made on a beach along the Atlantic coast of Namaqualand (South Africa,) demonstrates the order-producing effect of asymmetrical balance. The two large triangles of white sand on either side of the long strand of kelp are not identical, but they are of relatively the same visual weight or importance.

The second image on the next page, made in early spring from the loft window near my desk-top computer, is an example of using informal balance to achieve an underlying order. In this case, I moved the lens left, right, up and down, while zooming in and out, until all the lines of the tree branches and the spaces between them “felt right,” that is the composition didn’t feel too heavy on the top or the bottom or on either side.

My transplant surgeon had only one protocol: “Listen to your body and use common sense.” To adapt this slightly for working with all aspects of composition, including balance, “Pay attention to your feelings and use your best judgement.”







## WORKSHOPS 2023

By the time you receive this letter both the schedule and details of my 2023 workshops should be on my web site [www.freemanpatterson.com](http://www.freemanpatterson.com), and you will be able to register for one, if you are interested. Many of the dates are relatively the same as this year, but INSCAPE has been moved from the first week of September to the last week of June. (You may be interested to know that the 2021 INSCAPE participants continue to meet every month by ZOOM for two to three hours.)

### St. MARTIN'S, New Brunswick

**INSCAPE with David Maginley, Margery Nea, and Freeman Patterson**

*12 participants maximum*

June 25 – July 1

**PHOTOGRAPHY and VISUAL DESIGN with André Gallant and Freeman Patterson**

*12 participants maximum*

September 3-9

September 24-30

October 8-14

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### St. ANDREW'S, New Brunswick

**ARTISTS' RETREAT with Freeman Patterson**

*Six participants maximum*

July 5 – July 10

October 17 – 22

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### SHAMPER'S BLUFF, New Brunswick

**One-Day Individually Crafted Workshops**

*One to three participants*

Openings are currently available in May, July, September, and October

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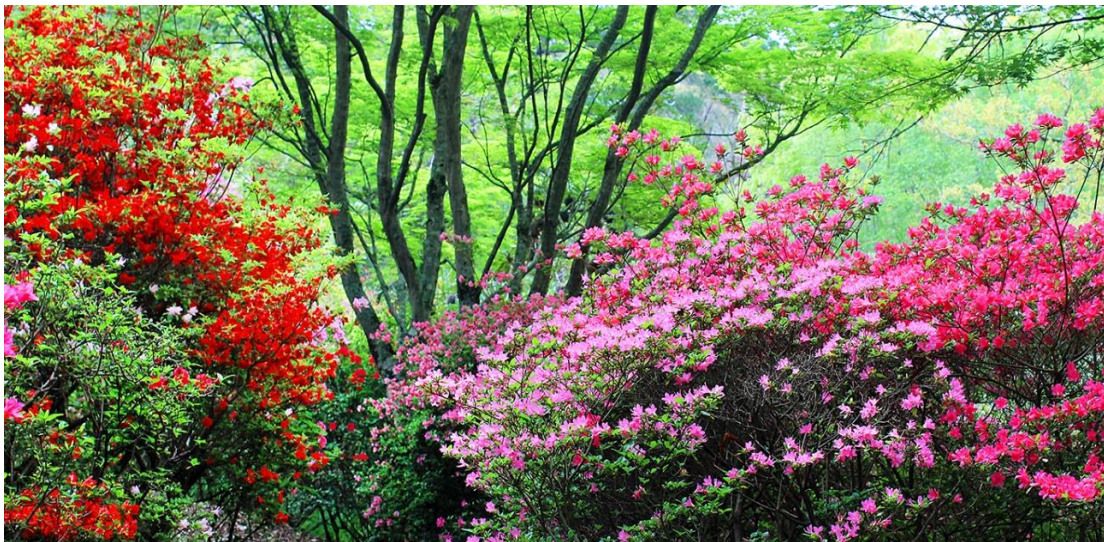
*The departure date for all workshops in St. Martin's and St. Andrew's is the day following the final day.*



**My many friends in New Zealand and Australia are now enjoying full-blown spring and those in South Africa are well into summer. As much as I enjoy the Canadian November, I must admit that I also long to be with you. All the rhododendrons and azaleas in the towns of Australia's Blue Mountains are calling me to come and from the tip of New Zealand's North Island to the bottom of South Island, they are doing the same. This is one of many times every year that I'd love to be in two or even three places at once.**



*My friends Sue and Robyn visiting Leura in Australia's Blue Mountains, November 2018*





## TESS Celebrates Her First Birthday



*Tess with a Labradoodle playmate, Linker (photo by Gregoire Crevier)*



**Meilleurs vœux à tous!**

**Beste wense, almal!**

**Best wishes to all!**

**FREEMAN**

[freemanpatterson2@gmail.com](mailto:freemanpatterson2@gmail.com)

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