

IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #38
August 2024

from
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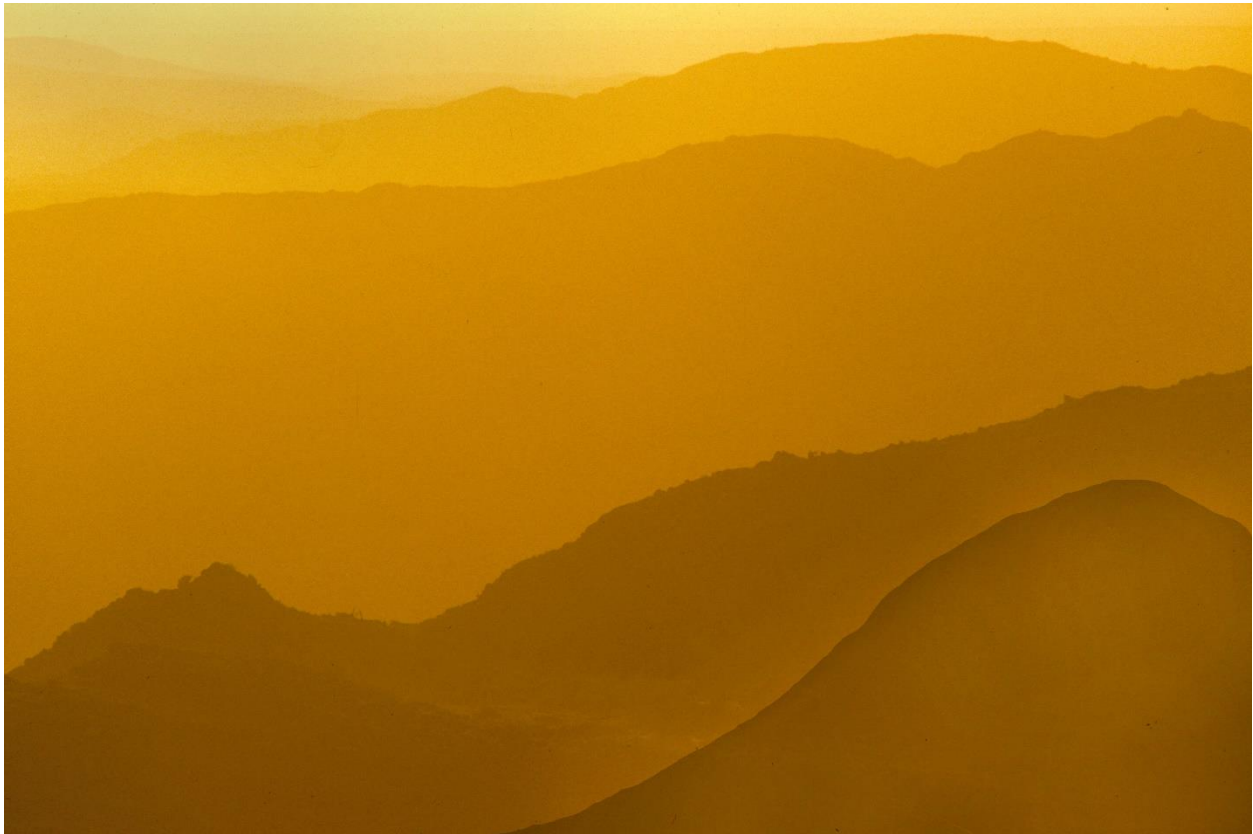


Coastal Dunes, Namaqualand

When this letter arrives in your mailbox, I'll be fast asleep somewhere over Africa, winging my way to Cape Town. This is my 50th visit to Africa and my 46th to Namaqualand, a loosely-defined region in the northwest corner of South Africa, which I think of as my second home.

The little boy running barefoot through the hayfields of southern New Brunswick so many years ago could not possibly have imagined what lay in his beyond and the child who still lives within him never ceases to marvel at the wonder of it all.

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Die Kamiesberge/ The Kamies Mountains, Namaqualand

“Every human being is involved with two worlds; the world they carry within them and the world that is out there. All thinking, all writing, all action, all creation and all destruction is about that bridge between the two worlds. All thought is about putting a face on that experience.” *John O’Donohue*

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About a month before I leave for Namaqualand, an occasional Afrikaans word or phrase always creeps into my English or French conversations. It’s as if my Unconscious is preparing me for arrival! Even though nearly everybody who lives there speaks some English, I like to greet anybody I meet along a country road in their first language and to carry on a bit of a conversation. (South Africa has 11 official languages and most people speak two or more.)

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After the mildest winter with the least snow since I moved back to New Brunswick in 1972 my rhododendrons and azaleas, the first few of which I planted in 2006, peaked about 10 days earlier than in any previous year. However, the earliest varieties also opened earlier than usual, so the season is lasting about the same length of time, the very latest variety blooming about the first of August.

The bloom was so sensational at peak that I rose most mornings before 4:30 a.m. in order to be photographing in the garden by 5:15. It was full daylight by then, but I always had an hour of soft, indirect light before the sun rose above the forest to the east. Most of the time I prefer this even lighting to the strong contrasts produced by full sunlight, but sometimes for a few minutes spotlighting and backlighting provide visual drama. Here's an image of azaleas – the first glimpse of the four acres you'll see when you reach the top of my half-kilometre driveway – and then a photo of a rhododendron in a newer area of the garden.



This year's INSCAPE workshop followed upon the rhododendron spectacle and in its way was both as intense and as intensely beautiful. The participants formed an almost even split between newcomers and "repeaters," one person with us for the fourth time. The vocational or career mix was stunning – a research chemist, a retired dentist, a retired accountant, a theologian, a therapist, two doctors, a quantum physicist, two visual artists (one a photographer, one also a writer) and, and Already I've received three strong indications of interest for next year's INSCAPE, which will take place during the last full week of June. (Details on my website in October or early November.)

Meanwhile, back at Shampers Bluff, Joel MacPherson, my "main man" in the garden since Joanne Nutter had to step back five years ago, had an evening of music planned. Joel and a few of the friends that he regularly "jams" with turned up one night when the rhodos and azaleas were at peak, plopped down on a grassy path and made beautiful sound until fireflies were illuminating the night. For me, it was a private concert and a very special one.

However, the back of the garden slopes down to a small bog filled with tall cinnamon ferns, forming a natural sheltered amphitheatre that can accommodate up to 100 people, a place I've long thought would be a perfect venue for small musical events. Joel thought so too and invited his musical "hippies and hobos, freaks and friends" plus another 70 people to make music, listen to music, and to dance on a flat spot near the bog when I was at INSCAPE.

Even though I missed it all, I could not have been happier!

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BOOKS

From time to time my friend Margery Nea gives me books, among them are authors such as the American poet Mary Oliver and the Irish poet, priest, and philosopher John O'Donohue, who died about a year apart in the early 2000s.

There is a deep connection between them. Both Oliver and O'Donohue drew their inspiration from the natural world and both had a rare capacity for expressing it.

One of Margery's most recent gifts was O'Donohue's "Walking In Wonder." To quote from the front cover flap, this is "a poignant and beautiful collection of conversations and presentations from O'Donohue's work with close friend and former broadcaster, John Quinn." I am reading the book slowly and re-reading as I proceed. Here are a couple of excerpts.

"So is there a place where our vanished days secretly gather? I think there is, and I believe the name of that place is memory. Memory to me is one of the great sources, one of the great treasure houses, of wonder. You look at humans walking around on streets, in house, in churches, out in fields, and you realize that each one of these creatures is carrying within herself or himself a whole harvest of lived experience. You can actually go back within yourself to great things that have happened to you and enjoy them and allow them to shelter and bless you again.

"Memory is now attributed to computers, but computers do not have memory – they have hijacked the notion. Memory now seems to be focused almost exclusively on past woundedness and hurt, some of it induced, some of it real. It's sad that people don't use their

good memories and revisit again and again the harvest of memory that is within them, and live out of the richness of that harvest rather than out of the poverty of their woundedness."

"Friendship in particular should be a wonderful kind of togetherness where each of the friends encourages and liberates each other into the fullness of their own potential. Friends often become very habitual with each other and they limit the potential of their friendship. If you feel with your friend that you are called to the outer frontiers, then the friendship is in a state of growth, and it also has a bit of danger in it and a risk; and without the risk in the world of the soul, nothing really grows."

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(Then, this short excerpt from Mary Oliver's poem, "Mysteries, Yes")

*Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous
to be understood.*

*How grass can be nourishing in the
mouths of the lambs
How rivers and stones are forever
in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream of rising
How two hands touch and the bonds will
never be broken.*

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These things together – returning to South Africa, speaking of books, and reading O’Donohue’s “You can actually go back within yourself to great things that have happened to you and enjoy them and allow them to shelter and bless you again” – bring vivid recall of one of the most challenging, exciting, and satisfying assignments of my career – working with the renowned South African sculptor Dylan Lewis on Forces of Nature, the large coffee-table book that accompanied his 2006 exhibition at London’s Tate Gallery.

Although I was one of five photographers engaged in the project, Dylan also asked me to write the Foreword for the book, part of which I’ve excerpted below, as it will both introduce him to you and to my photographs.

“Dylan Lewis’s sculpting begins neither in his studio nor in his head. Rather, it begins, or began, aeons ago in the mysteries of ancient events far beyond our ever knowing. It began in the cataclysmic times when our planet was forming – in the roiling, turbulent blast furnaces that created ores, refined metals, and produced other minerals of every sort.

“Like us all, Lewis apprenticed at the forges and foundries of Creation, and he renews his sense of profound awe and wonder in the wild places to which he regularly returns. In wilderness, Lewis remembers; he regains ‘access to his soul,’ freely acknowledging the archival energies of the collective unconscious in which we all participate, but of which most of us are only dimly aware.

“In many of his sculptures – especially the cats – Lewis has carefully replicated living creatures anatomically, but the primary communication is one of great emotional perception. Observing the leopard’s powerful stretch, we may experience a rush of formidable sexual energy. Contemplating a lion with amputated limbs, we recognize the profound physical effects of polluting Earth’s atmosphere, and we acknowledge our wounded selves. At times like these, we are Earth aware, contemplating ourselves – the only species given the privilege.”











My assignment was to provide Dylan and the editors with a range of images of each sculpture that Dylan asked me to photograph. For the most part I used maquettes (small bronze or plaster replicas) of the large sculptures to make the images, even when the figure appears large.

Not all of the photographs included here were used in the book, but two appear as double-page spreads. Which two would you have chosen?

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Off to a five-day workshop/artists' retreat at KINGBRAE INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCY FOR THE ARTS in St. Andrews, New Brunswick and then ... [UP, UP, and AWAY!!!](#)

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Goeie wense, Almal

Bons voeux à Tous

Good wishes, Everybody

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