



*A Field Guide
for the
Contemplative Photographer*

Patricia Turner

Cover Photograph

As Above, So Below

Loch Bee, South Uist

Scotland

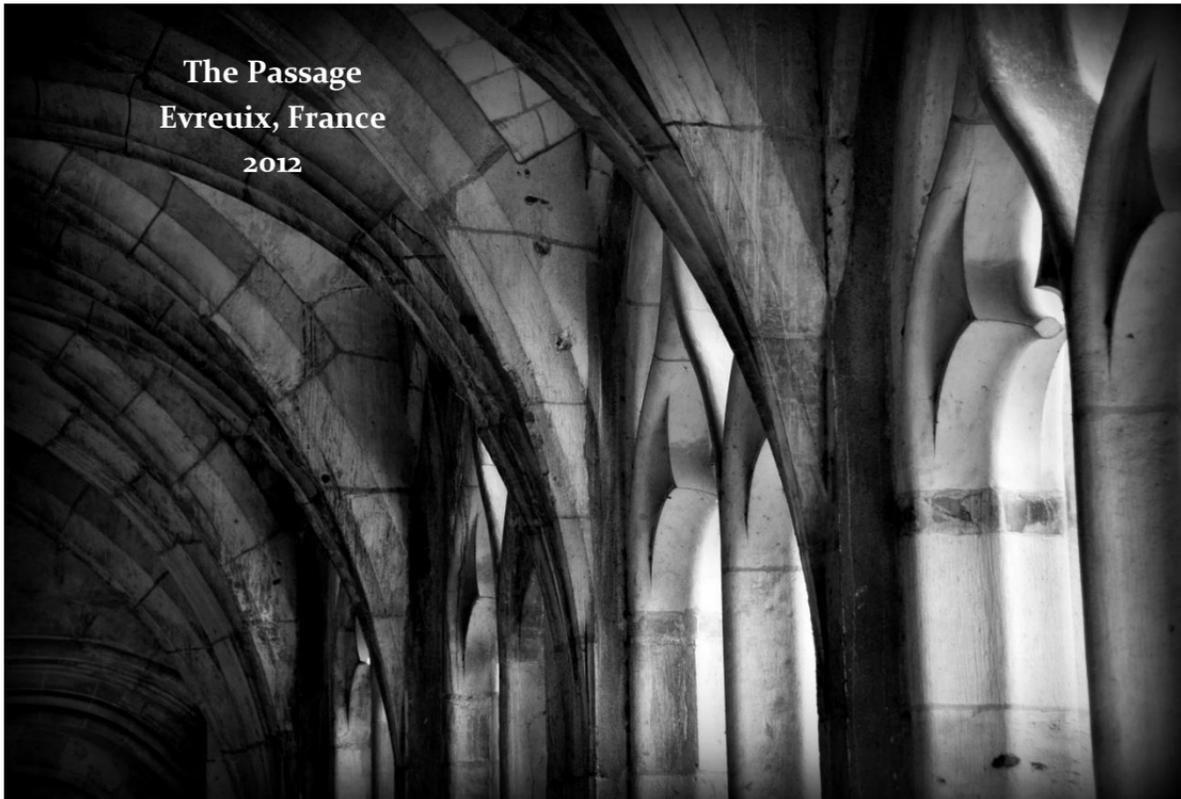
2011

***May the stars light your way
and may you find the
interior road.***

Forward!

A traditional Celtic Blessing

The Passage
Evreux, France
2012



A Field Guide for the

**Contemplative
Photographer**

by

Patricia Turner

2012

“For me the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity...In order to ‘give a meaning’ to the world, one has to feel oneself involved in what one frames through the viewfinder....One must always take photographs with the greatest respect for the subject and for oneself.”

Henri Carier-Bresson

Steps along the Way

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Travels Lightest*

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Wander?*

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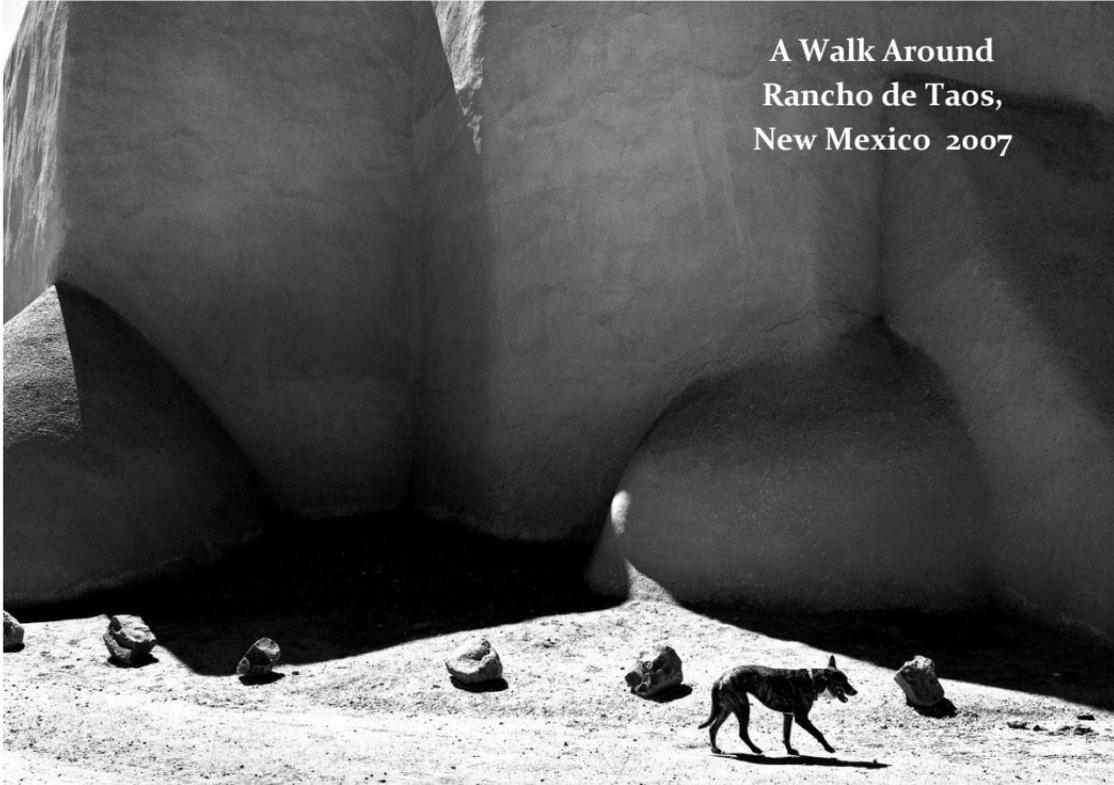
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the Photograph*

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Seven *Reflecting, letting go and
Moving On*

“Photography takes a moment in time, altering life by holding it still.” - Dorothea Lange

A Walk Around
Rancho de Taos,
New Mexico 2007



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They Travel Best
Who Travels Lightest

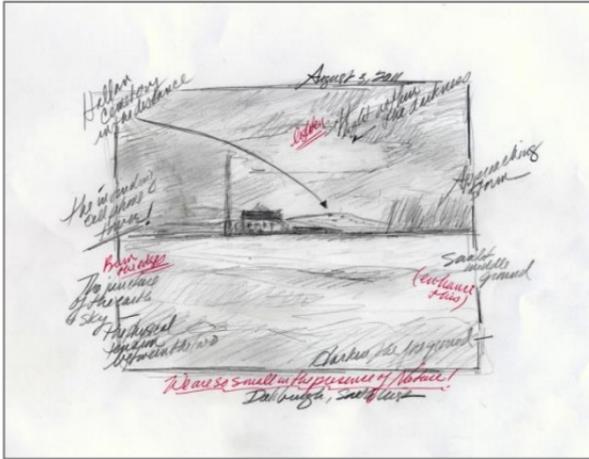
Preparing for your Journey

Equipping the Body.....

"Simplify, Simplify, Simplify" - Thoreau

It always amuses me when I see some photographers in the field weighted down with equipment. Heavy tripods, huge lenses and expensive cameras are not necessary for the contemplative photographer; an open heart, unfretted mind and infinite patience are. The following list is a suggestion. You will modify and personalize it as you go along.

- a camera
- a sketchbook/journal
- pencils
- hat and sunscreen
- good walking shoes
- a sturdy walking stick
- a map for reference
- light backpack
- cardboard viewfinder
- small blanket or cushion
- water and snacks
- light rain gear
- this field guide
- an open mind & trusting heart



Field Journal Sketch for "The Approaching Storm"

Sketching the landscape is not absolutely necessary but I find it quiets my mind and slows me down. It focuses my attention on the essential elements of the landscape and I can write notes directly on the image.

*"With an eye made quiet by the power of harmony,
And the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things."*

William Wordsworth

Equipping the Mind.....

Probably more important than what you carry on your back is what you carry in your heart. There are two ways you can approach photography. One is, to my mind, an aggressive, almost predatory way. You “shoot” your subject...you “take” photographs...we use telephoto lenses to get close to a subject without their knowledge. It is photographer as voyeur, as hunter. (I’ll speak more about this a bit later.) The other way is to engage in a dialogue that respects your subject. Wild life photographer, Nick Brandt is a perfect example. He makes his beautiful, intimate portraits of African animals with a portrait lens, not a high power telephoto lens, and hours of patient waiting until the animal feels comfortable with his presence. He doesn’t hunt his subject from a distance; he comes to know them up close and very personally. A contemplative photographer understands that photography is a two way street and waits for the landscape to invite them in. I try to practice the 4 Be’s,,, *Be still, be present, be patient and be persistent.*



Small Church, Big Sky -
Eriskay, Scotland 2005



The Way In - St. John,
USVI - 2012



*Wither Shall You
Wander?*

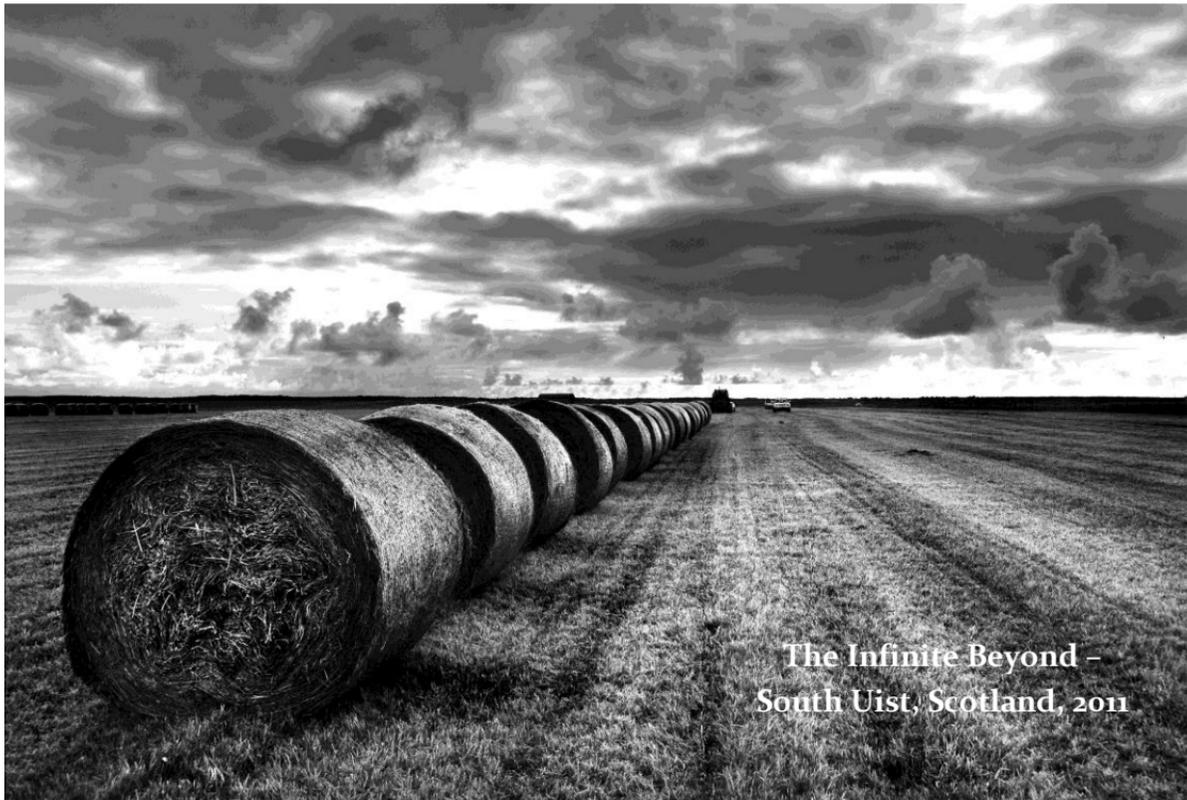
***“Not everyone who wanders is
lost.” - Tolkien***

How you decide on where to photograph can be a complex process of reflection and planning or a serendipitous encounter. It really doesn't matter. It is what you do once you are there that counts. I like to practice "shunpiking", exploring the least traveled roads.

*"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all
the difference." – Robert Frost*

I take maps with me but consult them only as a last resort. Mainly I just follow my heart's GPS. It has never steered me wrong.

Getting lost has its advantages too. I stop to talk to people, to get directions, and to learn more about the area I'm in. People who live there know more than the maps do and I've found some amazing places in the process of getting lost!

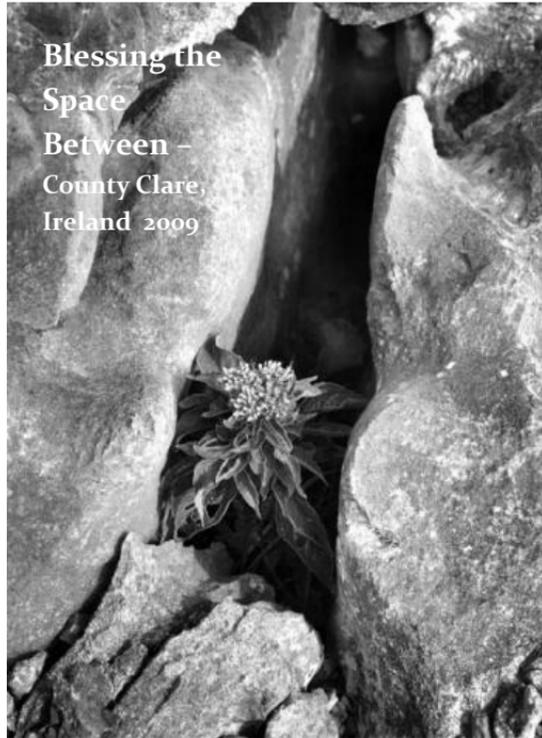


The Infinite Beyond -
South Uist, Scotland, 2011

A Few Tips For When You Get There

- Talk to people. Stop into a pub or a farm stand. Ask about the “hidden” places, the “thin” places...they’ll know what you are talking about.
- Travel guides and maps will only tell you about the most commonly visited places. These are fine but seek out the less commonly visited sights...become a “shunpiker”.
- Keep notes in your journal on locations. It’s sometimes difficult to find your way back especially if you stumbled upon the site. Some new cameras have a GPS locator or use your cell phone. If it’s a really special place, you’ll want to go back.
- Be spontaneous! Don’t plan your time too strictly. Be open to chance.
- Don’t be discouraged by “bad” weather. Rainy days can be quite lovely.
- Stay for a while; don’t be in a hurry to move on.
- Don’t be shy and always ask permission before you go wandering on people’s property. They may even ask you in for tea!

“I’m waiting, I’m listening. I go to those places and get myself ready through meditation. Through being quiet and willing to wait, I can begin to see....the essence of the subject in front of me.” – Minor White





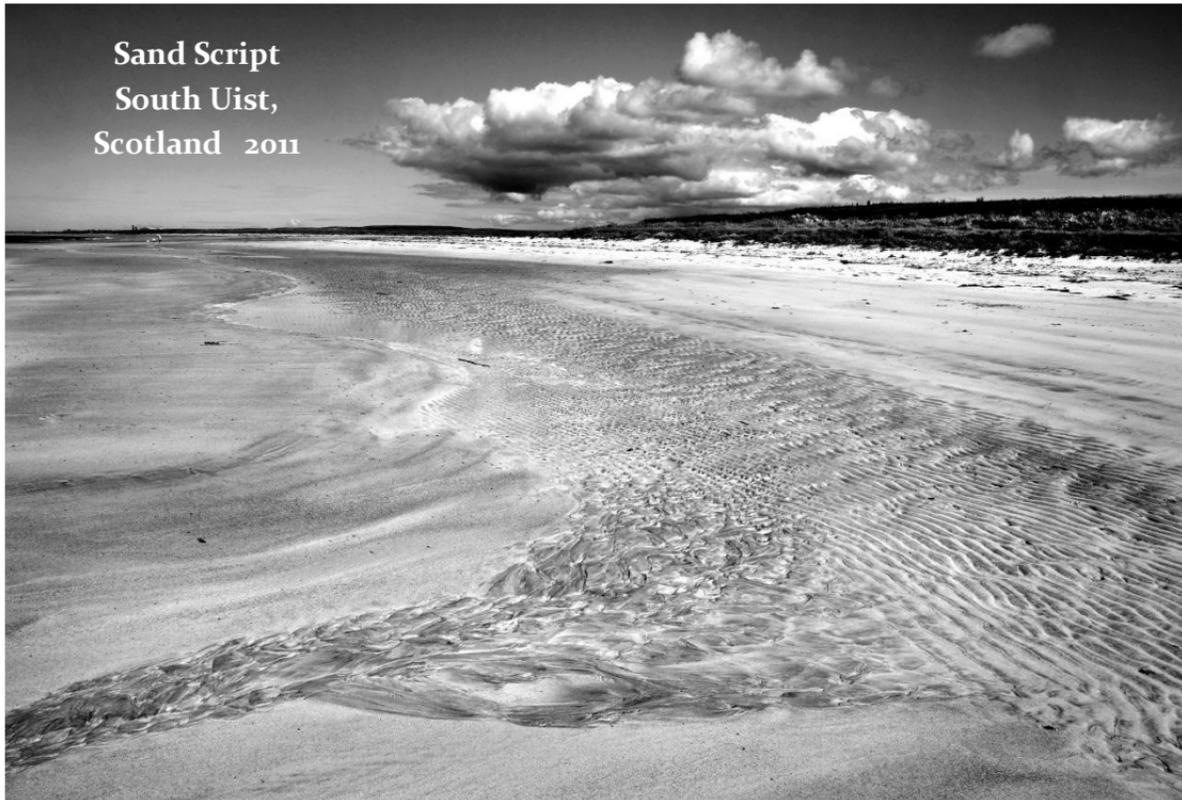
Visual Listening

Communing with the Landscape

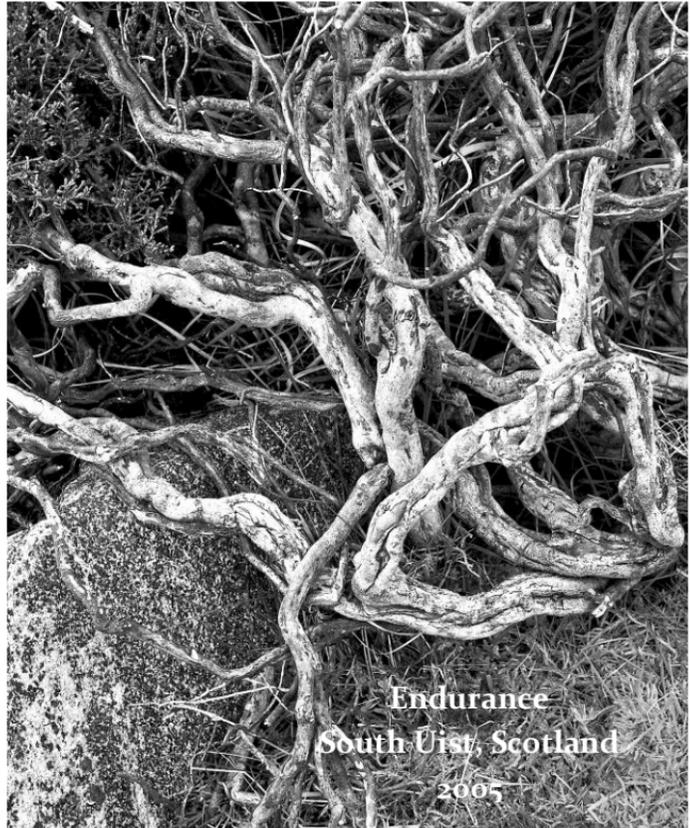
The Contemplative Eye

- Sees beauty in the commonplace
- Looks for the subtle language of pattern and texture
- Seeks out the metaphoric capabilities of the landscape
- Develops a personal symbol system
- Is unhurried and patient
- Looks beneath the surface qualities to reveal the hidden layers of meaning
- Revels in the interplay of light and shadow

Sand Script
South Uist,
Scotland 2011



For those new to the ways of contemplative photography, this can be the most difficult step. Take out your blanket and sit, be still, clear your mind, and breathe in the landscape. Let your eyes wander; don't focus in on any particular spot. You are listening for the subtle message of what's before you. This can take time, from 15 minutes to more than an hour. If you feel yourself getting restless, take a deep breath, close your eyes and start again.

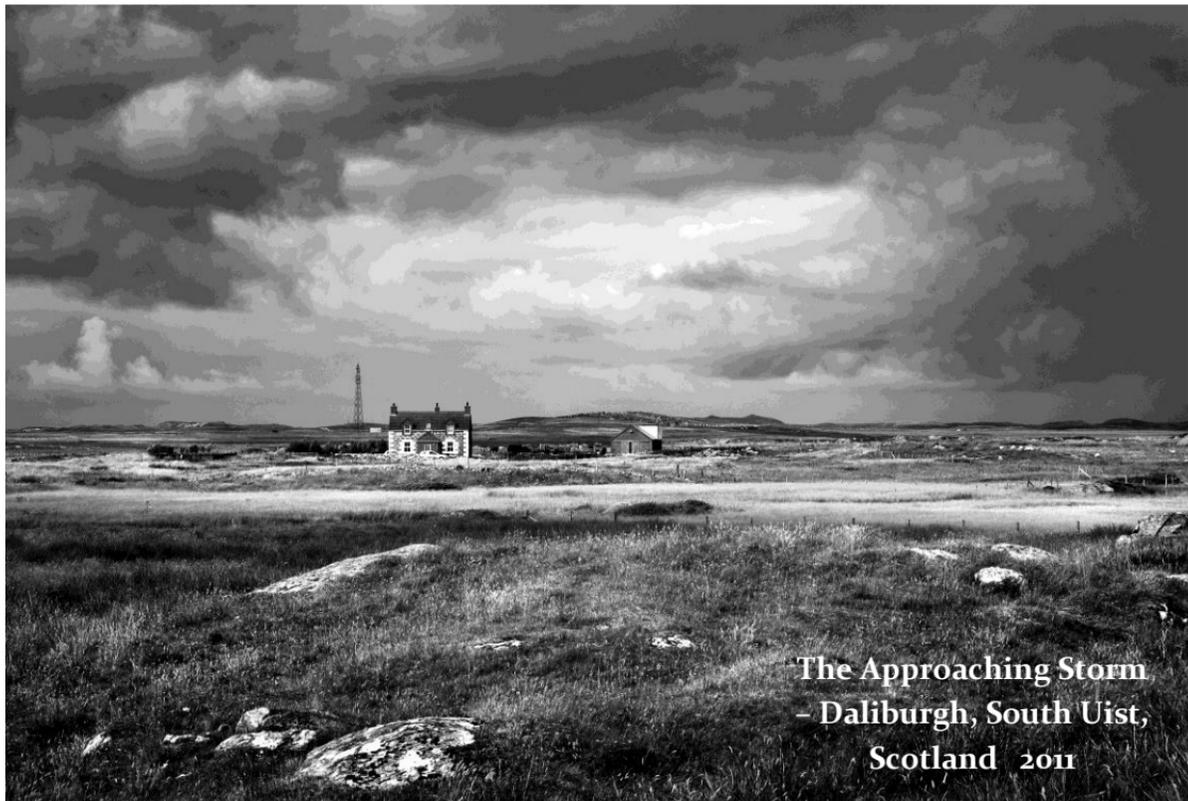


A Contemplative Photographer's Thought Flow

APPROACHING: As you sit in the landscape, try to engage with what is in front of you. Listen for the wisdom the landscape is trying to impart to you. Journal your thoughts and be patient. Look for the metaphors; sense the emotion of the landscape; asks your questions and wait for the answers. The landscape will let you know when it is time to begin making photographs.

ENGAGING: What in the landscape draws your attention? Does it require you to move closer or step back? Use your view finder to try out different compositions. When you find one that suits you, make a sketch of it to simplify the essential elements. Make a series of “photographic sketches”.

REFLECTING: Play back your photographs. Do any of them illustrate the feelings you have for the landscape? Do you need to continue the dialogue with the land? Be persistent. Sometimes you need to return...again and again before you capture the essence of the place...before you reach that “moment of equilibrium” (Alfred Stiegliz)



The Approaching Storm
- Daliburgh, South Uist,
Scotland 2011

IV

*Forging the
Connections*

Exploring the Metaphors

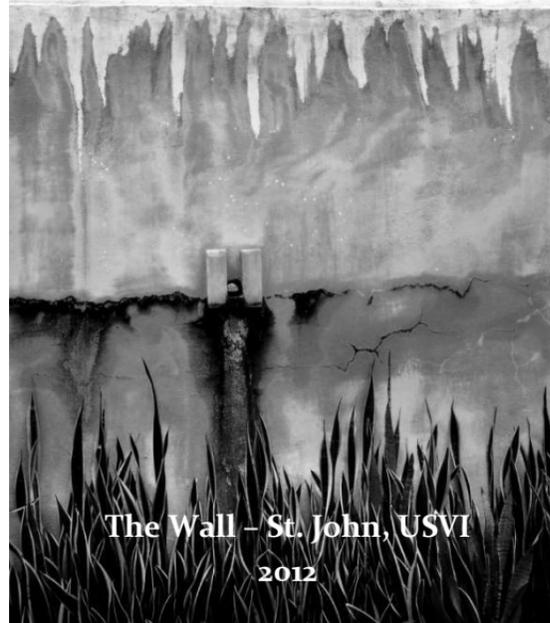
Contemplative Photography is based on the assumption that the landscape has intense metaphoric capabilities or as John O'Donohue says,

“The outer landscape becomes a metaphor for the unknown inner landscape.”

The essential tasks of every contemplative photographer are seeking out and resonating with those metaphors. Some places to search for your metaphors:

- Shadows
- The play of light on objects
- contrasts of texture
- juxtapositions
- color
- man-made elements
- open windows and doors
- architectural features
- people in the landscape
- weather effects
- animals in the landscape
- trees, especially unusual ones in unexpected places
- plants and flowers
- water-still and moving
- reflections

Metaphors are the bread and butter of the contemplative photographer but they are also intensely personal. Don't be surprised if people don't see what you do or even question the validity of your interpretation. Not everyone is of the mind set to experience the world in a metaphoric way and that is as it should be. All that matters is what **you** see in the image...what special meaning it has for **you**. You will find that the more you look for these metaphors the more adept you will become in ferreting out the essential truths hidden there.



The Wall – St. John, USVI

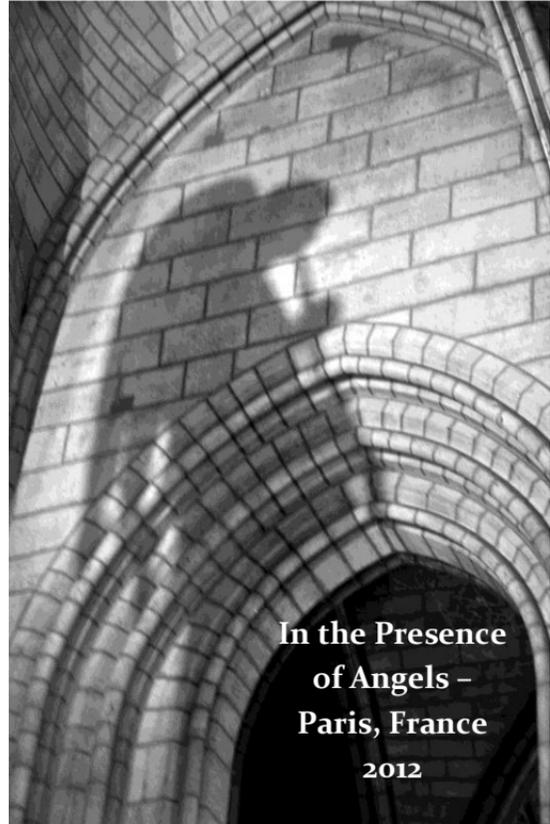
2012

V

*Making
(and re-making)
the Photograph*

Changing Our Lenses

One thing you must keep in mind is Contemplative Photography is as much about how you approach the process as the image itself. It requires that we change the fundamental way we look at the picture making process. Traditional photography puts its emphasis on technique and subject matter. Contemplative Photography emphasizes the individual's response to what they see...the interpretation of the landscape through the lens of our heart.



**In the Presence
of Angels –
Paris, France
2012**

- Images are taken
- Concern for control
- Photography as aggression
- The camera as a weapon – “point & shoot”
- Subject as object
- An attitude of judgment
- Photographer is “detached”

The Old Lens

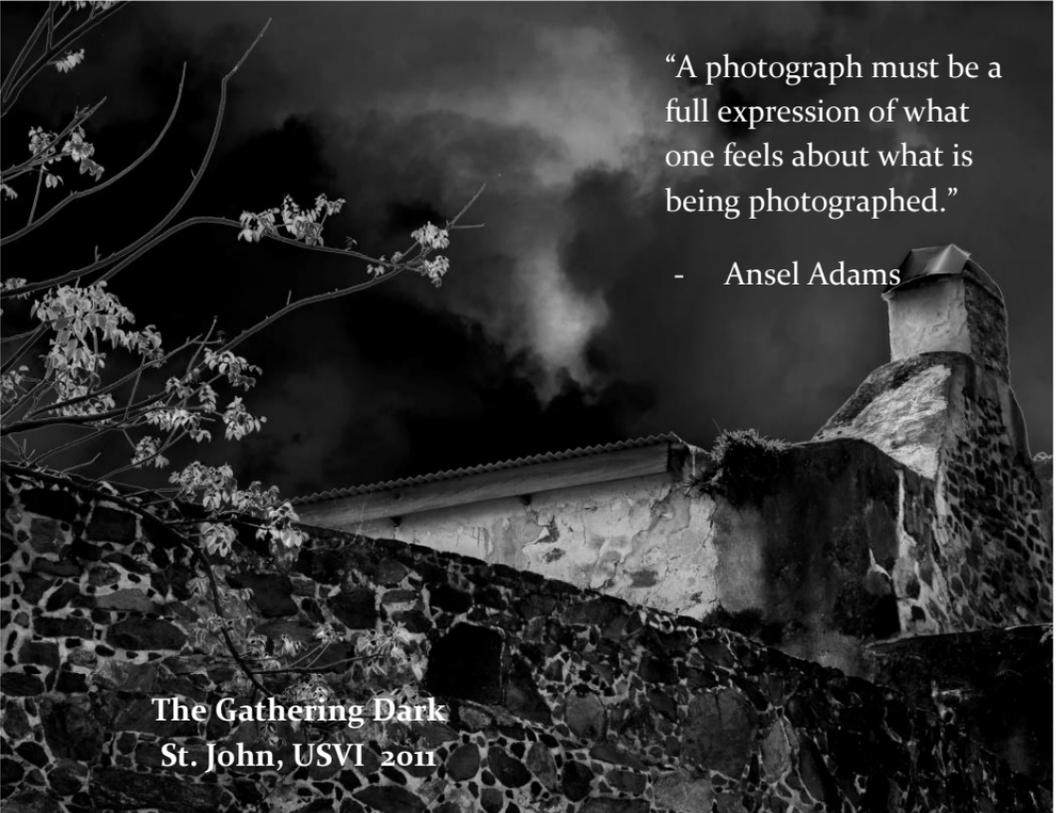
Versus

- Images received
- Openness to surprise
- Photography as an act of respect
- The camera as a translator
- Subject as co-creator
- An attitude of wonder
- Photographer forms an “inter-connection”

The New Lens



After you have created your photograph there is always the issue of what to do with it. Do you leave it alone or do you manipulate it in the digital darkroom? Do you keep the image in color, go to a monochrome image or do you use spot color for emphasis? It all comes down to what you hope to convey in the photograph and you might not know that until long after it is made; after you have had time to sit with the image and reflect on its meaning to you. This is the “contemplative” part of the process and it takes time.



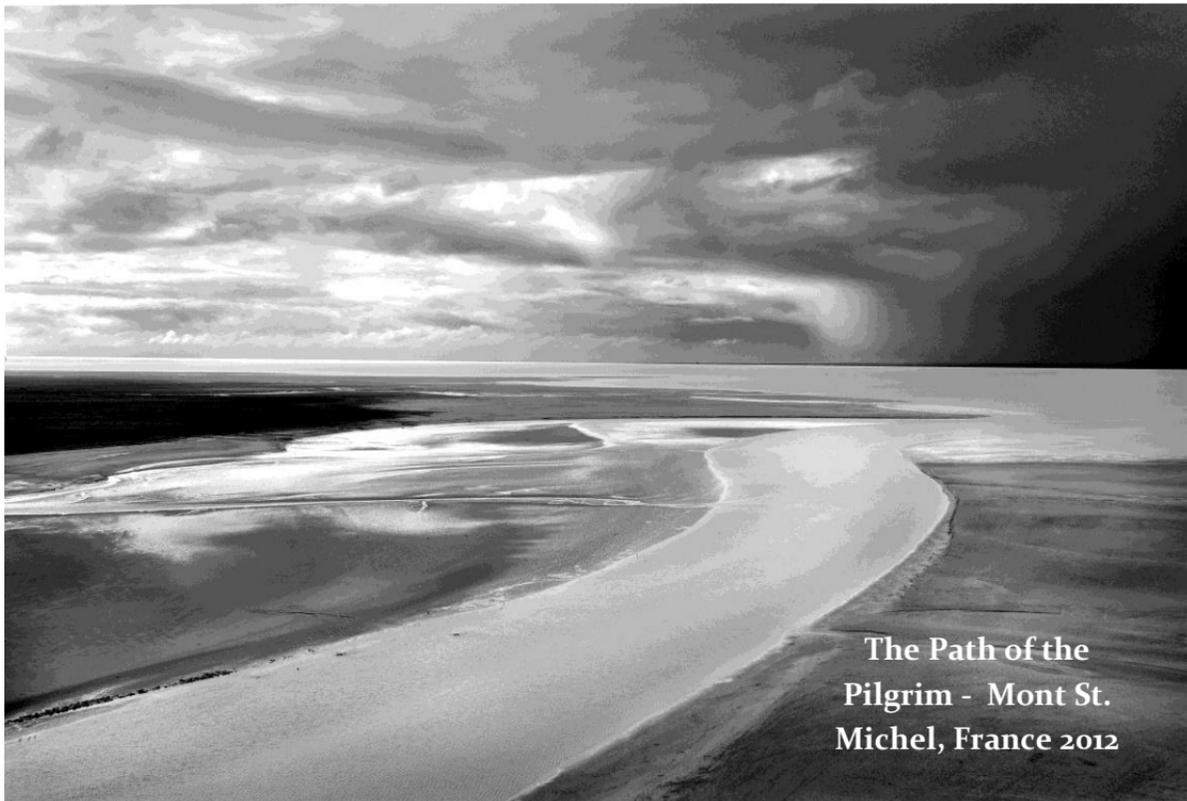
“A photograph must be a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed.”

- Ansel Adams

The Gathering Dark
St. John, USVI 2011

You're not making Postcards!

The photograph on the previous page was made at the ruins of the Annaberg Sugar Plantation on St. John in the US Virgin Islands. My visit to the site had a powerful impact on me which was only heightened when I later learned of the mass suicides of slaves imprisoned there in the 18th century. I knew I had to do something different with the images I had made so I relied heavily on Photoshop techniques to create the foreboding and dark images. Don't be concerned with creating just "pretty" pictures...you can buy postcards anywhere. The job of the Contemplative Photographer is to create poignant, moving and personally meaningful images...use whatever you need to get there!



The Path of the
Pilgrim - Mont St.
Michel, France 2012

VI

Continuing the Dialogue

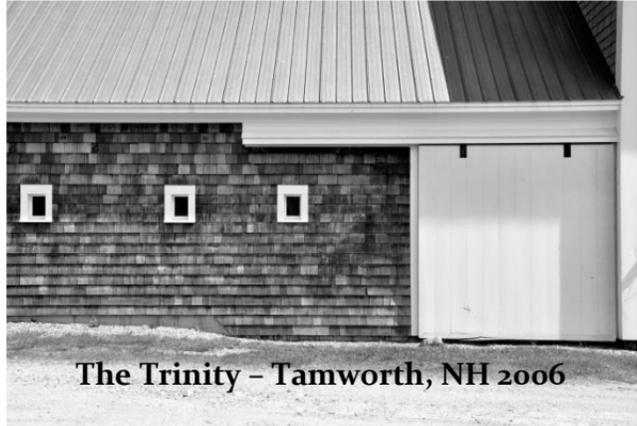
“The photographer projects himself into everything he sees, identifying himself with everything in order to know it and to feel it better.”- Minor White

The Steeple Beyond
Tamworth, NH 2008



One very important characteristic of the contemplative photographer is the willingness to return, again and again to a location; the willingness to continue the dialogue with the landscape. The image on the left was one of dozens I made over many years in the small rural village of Tamworth, New Hampshire. It eventually became the series “Rural Geometry” but it took many visits for me to hear what the landscape wished to tell me.

When I first began to photograph in the village, I simply wandered within a small area, letting my intuitive side direct my lens. It was later; when I looked at the series of images did I see a “voice” speaking to me in visual terms. It impelled me to return, to continue our conversation, and each time it had something else to say. I am pleased to say that we are still engaged in that conversation.



The Trinity - Tamworth, NH 2006

“When Dorothea Lange urges her colleagues to concentrate on “the familiar”, it is with the understanding that the familiar...will thereby become mysterious.” - Susan Sontag

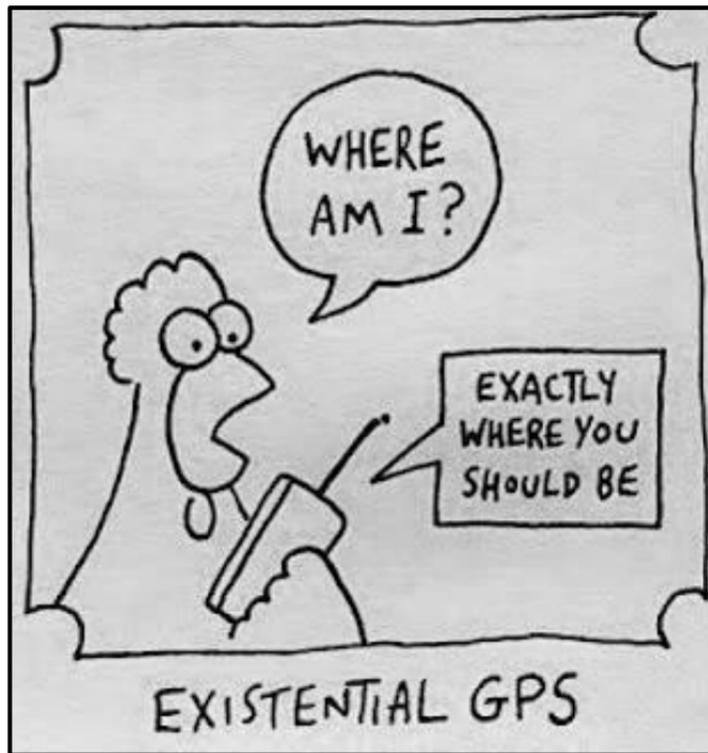
VII

*Reflecting, Letting
Go and Moving On*

In the end, what distinguishes contemplative photography from any other kind of photography is the continuing reflection on the images one makes. Minor White calls photographs “functions” and not “objects”. They are just stepping stones and we move from one to another. For me, it has been what sustains my interest in the medium. Each image I make is just another building block in the citadel of self-understanding



I work on year by year to construct. However, I try not to become too attached to any one photograph or series. I know there is always a time to let go and move on. All art is like that and photography is no exception. With contemplative photography, each new image is just a small step in the journey. That journey will, in time, take me to where I need to be if I make sure I follow my heart's GPS and not listen to the inner critic which always tries to derail my efforts. You should regard this little book as just a starting point on your personal journey as a contemplative photographer. You will, without doubt, create your own path. There are many roads you can follow as you pursue this fascinating medium and they are all the "right" road. The only thing that matters is that you begin the journey. Think of yourself as a kind of perpetual pilgrim...take only what you need and keep your heart open. You'll be amazed where you end up!



*Where
are
You?*

My Thoughts...

You can see more of Turner's photographs by
visiting her website:

www.patriciaturnerphotography.com

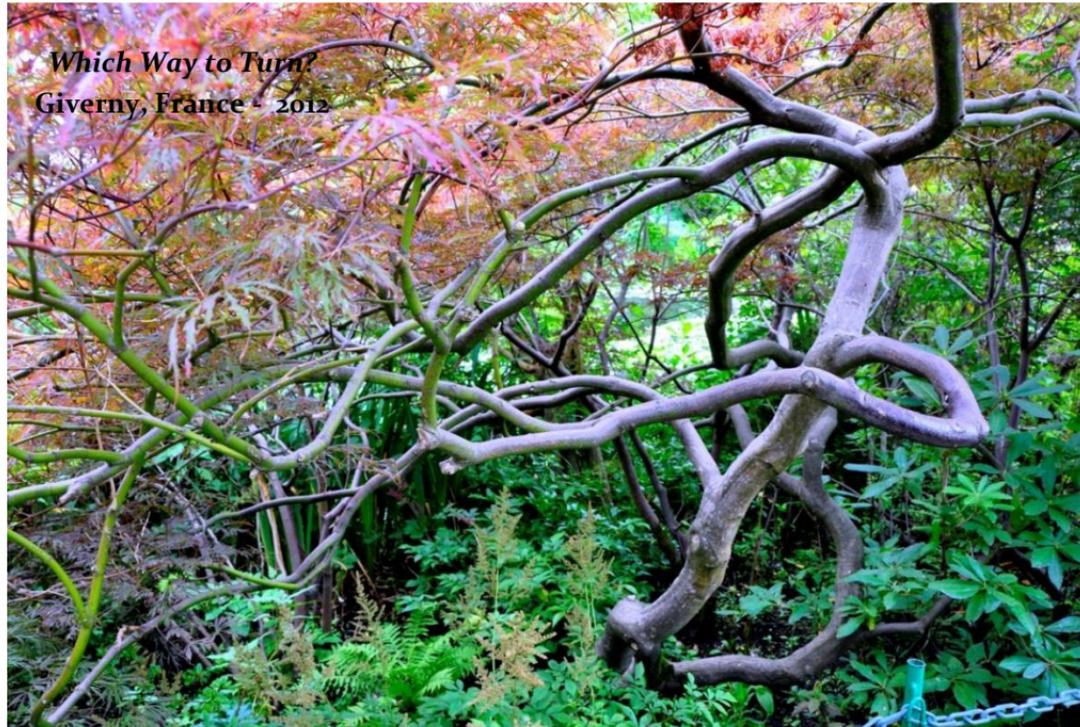
Join the conversation about
Contemplative Photography by visiting
her blog:

Aphotographicsage.blogspot.com

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“Contemplative Photography forges a connection between the exterior world around us and the interior world of the human heart. One’s ideas of both will never be quite the same”. - Turner