

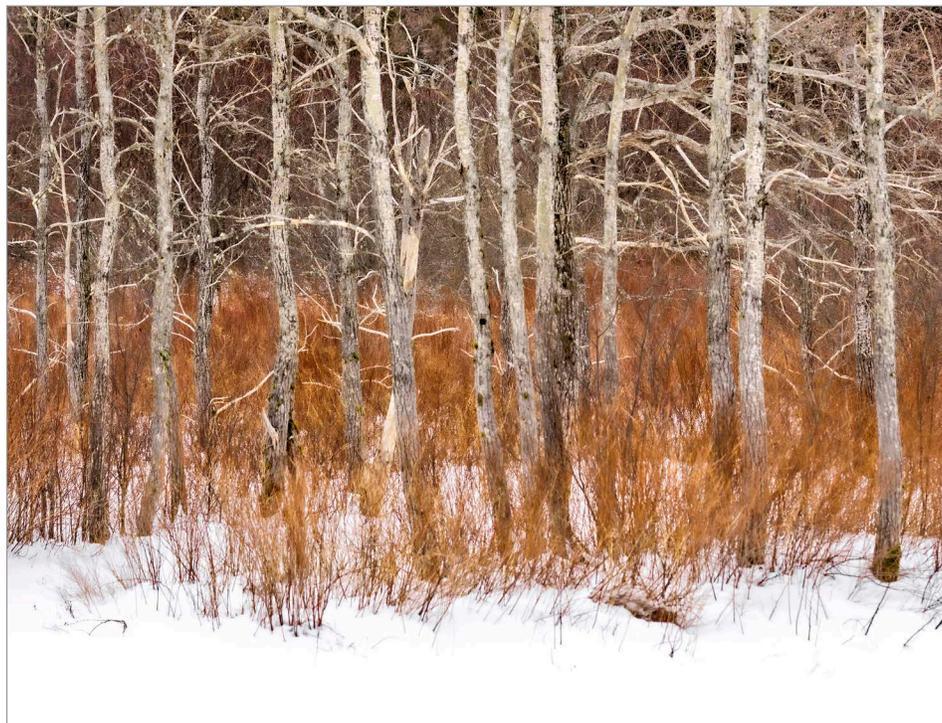
Question: Are you struggling to find inspiration during the pandemic?

Another COVID spike. Another lockdown. Another anxious month. Dutifully sticking close to home, trudging along local trails for daily exercise. Navel-gazing. Feeling uninspired.

Sound familiar? Did your camera, like mine, collect dust last year?

Once upon a time (i.e. 15 months ago) the solution would have been to hop in the car or book a flight, take the camera somewhere new in search of visual excitement. But now we can't. And, as the pandemic drags on and travel restrictions persist, we find ourselves wondering if we will ever feel photographically inspired again.

Well, after many months of uninspired trudging and navel-gazing, it finally dawned on me that I was taking entirely the wrong approach to COVID lockdowns. I had been assuming that photographic inspiration came from "out there" somewhere, when in fact, like so many of life's important things, it actually comes from *within*.



Interconnected. COVID social distancing requirements undoubtedly shaped my interpretation of the bare tree branches, seeming to reach out and connect with their neighbours.

“Don’t waste time waiting for inspiration. Begin, and inspiration will find you.”

~ H. Jackson Brown Jr. ~

It turns out that the best means of sparking visual inspiration is simply to pick up the camera and make a picture. And then make another picture. Maybe set yourself a photographic challenge, either a single image or a multi-image or multi-media project, and get to work. Before long you'll find yourself feeling inspired, almost despite yourself. Here are a few ideas and examples to get you started...

1. Create an image that shows how you feel – anxious, isolated, frustrated, or contentedly alone – but *without* including a person in the picture.



Self Portrait, Uprooted

I made this image in my studio in April 2020, during the first COVID lockdown, using a dead rosebush root I found in a ditch near my house, a small stone, a piece of satin fabric, foamboard for a backdrop, and some primitive studio lights.

The “uprooted” part of the title refers not only to the rosebush, but also to the fact that I was in the midst of moving house when the pandemic struck.

2. Find an ordinary subject (or, for a greater challenge, choose an ugly, boring or metaphorical one) and create a picture that makes it look attractive or interesting. *Interconnected*, on the previous page, was one of many small landscape images I made close to home during the past year that attempts to show beauty in patches of bog and straggly woodland.
3. Find a subject in your neighbourhood and create a project that explores it every day for a week (month, year) in different light and weather conditions.

After all, while it's true that travel offers instant inspiration from visual novelty, the kind of visual *insight* required for truly inspired and meaningful photographs comes only with familiarity and deeper connection. You can use the pandemic to forge that connection.

Assemble the resulting images into a book, a poster, a web gallery, or an AV show. Your project might be a justification for buying a new lens, learning a new piece of software (as I did with my quarantine project, next page), researching a topic of interest related to your subject, and honing your curatorial skills to put the project together.

“The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

~ (attrib.) Marcel Proust ~



Counting My Blessings. This book project documents my two-week COVID quarantine in January 2021, when I photographed the same scene from my wharf every day to show the variations and progressions of mood during a 14-day period. The result was enlightening – as was the postscript to the story (four pages at the end of the book) two months later!

Get your (free PDF) copy [HERE](#)

- As a last resort, if you are still despondent about photographing your local environment, try mining your photo archives for masterpieces you may have overlooked earlier. Often, when seen from a fresh perspective or tackled with more seasoned processing skills, it's possible to breathe new life into old or forgotten images. Going through your archives also allows you to re-live the excitement, learn from mistakes, and start planning your post-COVID travel adventures – or even a life-changing move so you're not stuck somewhere soul-destroying when the next pandemic strikes!



Poles Apart. I came across this image a few weeks ago in my 2013 archives, unprocessed and forgotten. It transported me back to a stormy July evening in Toronto on top of a hospital parking garage during a turbulent time in my life. This image and the story behind it are featured in my new presentation "Behind the Scenes: the Making of a Photograph" (details next page).

"Waiting for inspiration is like standing at the airport waiting for a train."

~ Leigh Michaels ~

Recommended Resources to Inspire You

Adapt: a thoughtful video by U.K. photographer Glyn Dewis that inspires us to make the best of COVID's bad situation. Watch it [HERE](#)



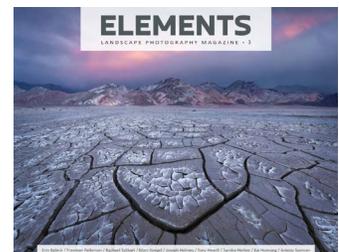
One Wave: this inspiring 2020-21 exhibition and book by Newfoundland photographer Ned Pratt offers a unique view of his home province that contrasts refreshingly with the tourism portraits we've become familiar with. The book's essays provide valuable background and insights into this body of work.



Take a virtual tour of the exhibition at the AGNS [HERE](#)

Buy the book (worth every penny!) from the AGNS [HERE](#)

Elements: a new digital photography magazine that features inspiring images, interviews and articles by some of today's premier landscape photographers. Curated and published in Vancouver, B.C. by Olaf Sztaba and Steven Friedman.



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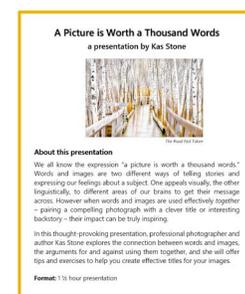
Announcing my presentation lineup for 2021-22: these presentations are available for camera clubs and arts groups next season via online platforms. Details and bookings [HERE](#)



Behind the Scenes: the making of a photograph



Winter Photography



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

Image Galleries & Prints: Images in this newsletter are available as numbered-edition archival prints. See galleries of my images or order prints [HERE](#)