ctLow Photographer • Jul 5 • 6 min read

Moving Beyond Not Moving Beyond

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Reconciling, nay embracing, old-but-new scenes

I have limitations, just ask you know—everyone around me does. Despite my imagination, I have given my local area a good inspection—and as our pandemic lockdown eases, it doesn't feel safe to me yet to stray very far afield—and I know there is a tremendous photographic potential here, which . . . I have trouble finding.

The good news about that is that I have to think more deeply and work harder in at least two areas:

- finding new scenes in old territory;
- finding new ways of looking at familiar scenes.

I think that's good for me, if slightly uncomfortable.

With two upcoming exhibitions—both now postponed—this is also providing new material for viewing or for purchase.

Brockville City Hall dock lower, dawn

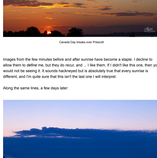
I like this photograph of Brockville's City Hall clock tower as an example. I have photographed it many times before (under the paradigm of "I live in a city and so I photograph in a city"), and will do so again. And while I don't suppose "how to not select" I do try to find new aspects of looking at things, as long as they're good new ways—"new" alone does not satisfy me.

This photograph has several features at which I consciously aimed:

- interesting, beautiful (if I may say) light;
- a new vantage, providing that underpinning of shapes and angles and intersections which few of us ever see (although it's in plain view from the west side of Courthouse Green);

It did require, as with much of my work, getting out of bed early. I do dunk work as well, but less.

The following also sits in plain view, a few minutes walk away, and thanks for indulging me if I do not specify the location; everyone in Brockville sees it from time to time, although (like me) hardly anyone actually ever sees it.



Silver downtown Brockville

I have guessed up the image a bit, but the structure will be instantly recognizable once you ways it.

Now, among other things, this question inserts itself quite regularly, but without bobbing, into my cranium. "How many of the same scene or motif can I do?" I have simply had to get over that. Many artists have a style or theme which stays with them for years, and we accept that, so I have to accept it on myself. I don't know exactly why I relate, but it seems inherent in my nature.

So, the following:

Canada Day skies over Prescott

Images from the few minutes before and after sunrise have become a staple. I decline to allow them to define me, but they do recur, and . . . I like them. If I didn't like this one, then you would not be seeing it. It sounds hackneyed but is absolutely true that every sunrise is different, and I'm quite sure that this isn't the last one I will interpret.

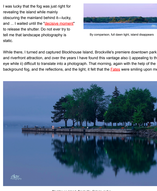
Along the same lines, a few days later:

Dawn, St. Lawrence River, Brockville, Ontario

So it's myself I have to convince that it's all right to keep doing this. No two dawns are ever identical.

That one above, by the way, is more subtle than some others of mine. I am on record as being a fan of Turner and Monet, and I like to see and capture the more delicate artistic nuances. My own tastes are personal and not meant to impose on anyone else; is that, if subdued, it has to be appropriate for that scene—or seem to be that way. As with everything (for me), the concept of "subdued" in isolation won't do it.

The two following, also made on Canada Day around sunrise, differ greatly from the one several images above, made only a few minutes earlier.



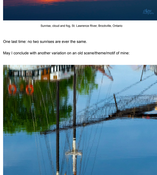
Hulatsuki, St. Lawrence River, Prescott, Ontario

To me, these fall more into the category of "bold" or "interesting" rather than "sublimely beautiful". They also raise a couple of issues, one of which is whether it is acceptable simply to photograph someone else's art (the creator in this case being anonymous). Questions of copyright aside, my answer is yes, but when I do that I require of myself to bring something additional to it. In this case, the "additional" is the framing and juxtaposition of the two structures.

Did you notice that the rear outlook is in shade and the far one in direct sun?

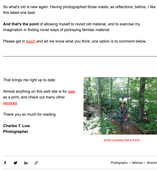
Another issue is "cultural appropriation", and that's complicated. People have constructed many, many of these, far from their ancestral lands of origin. I want to believe well and hope that I do not, but I have to be honest and ask do we think about one of them being constructed angles of worn pieces of cement?

In the following, the "additional" is the way of setting the Ogdensburg background against the installation.



Hulatsuki, from Prescott, against Ogdensburg, NY

Staying with the dawn theme, I'm finding more variations, and am (again) photographing in fog. Old Man Island, across the St. Lawrence River from Brockville, generally blends amorphously into the mainland behind it, but this morning, the fog conferred upon it visual separation.



Old Man Island, NY, in fog

Again, I have chosen a muted presentation.

How does that work for you?

I was lucky that the fog was just right for revealing the island while mainly obscuring the mainland behind it—lucky and . . . I worked with the "tangible journey" to release the shutter. Do not ever try to tell me that landscape photography is easy.

By comparison, full dawn light, island disappears

While there, I turned and captured Brockhouse Island, Brockville's premiere downtown park and riverfront attraction, and over the years I have found this vantage also I appealing to the eye and mind. I like the composition of the photograph, the balance between the fog at the background fog, and the reflections, and the light. It felt that the calm were smiling upon me.

Brockhouse Island, Brockville, Ontario, in fog

And turning the other way:

Sunrise, cloud and fog, St. Lawrence River, Brockville, Ontario

One last time: no two sunrises are ever the same.

May I conclude with another variation on an old scene/theme/motif of mine:

Black Jack, reflected masts, Turner Day, dawn, Brockville Ontario

So what's old is a new again. Having photographed those masts, as reflections, before, I like this latest one best.

And that's the point of allowing myself to revisit old material, and to exercise my imagination in finding novel ways of portraying familiar material.

Please get in touch and let me know what you think; one option is to comment below.

That brings me right up to date.

Almost anything on this web site is for sale as a print, and check out many other services.

Thank you so much for reading.

Charles T. Low
Photographer

photo courtesy Diane Earle

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