

salon

Finding presence



Nancy Bauer
state of the art

If every artist had to work as hard and under such difficult conditions as do Yolande and Lee Horus Clark, precious little art would be made.

Their exhibit at Gallery 78 in Fredericton, *Effigy: One Hundred Figures and the Buddha*, of standing men and hermaphrodites and sitting women and Buddhas, is remarkable. Pinned on one of the gallery's walls are startling photos of the 10-day anagama process. In them, looking like something out of *The Lord of the Rings*, a man covered in strange gear stands in front of an ancient-appearing kiln, fire everywhere.

"Woodfiring is our path and our passion; it is a spiritual calling and the focus of our life," write the Clarks. For these sculptures, they dug the clay themselves from a nearby stream. A photocopied description tells us that some of the figures entered the kiln "as bare clay, and some are glazed with shino – a simple feldspar glaze, whose mystical ability to shift and shimmer, always enigmatic and infinitely responsive to heat and ash, has captured artists since its development in 16th-century Japan."

I'd seen photographs of the sculptures and read about the Clarks' strenuous creative process so went to the exhibit with a hunch that I would want one. And I did, several in fact, but settled for *Perfect Wisdom and the Vow*, a simple Buddha-like figure made of porcelain with shino glaze. I could even picture where it would go in my already overcrowded house: on the dining table, as my meal-time companion.

When the summer poetry issue of the Fiddlehead arrived, I discovered another supper companion – a poem. Witty, profound, thought-provoking – perfect. In *Snowball Earth* Don McKay ponders the theory that our globe was covered in ice for a 100 million years. "... Let all who dwell on the blue-green planet celebrate the mother magna churning at its heart, the home fires that kept burning and at length undid that cold Precambrian spell."

Katia Grubisic's prologue to an interview with poet Jorie Graham made me smile because it was so exuberantly written, so full of young chutzpah: charming. She writes about Graham's poetry, "The velocity of telescopic metaphors, the reckless leaps from lyric to narrative to dialogic, the surgical diction ..." I was intrigued with her use of "apophatic assessment," but even my OED didn't have the meaning of the first word. Scratching around, I figured out that it has something to do with the irony of denying what the poem seems to be describing. It must be a negative description – what the thing being described isn't.

Anne Compton made an excellent companion. In her poem *The Past* she gave me a lovely image, "... the jar of lilacs, scent-heavy and lolling over the rim/as if they had

all the time in the world?"

I had tried newspapers as dinner escorts, but they're awkward to read while maneuvering a knife and fork. My three morning papers do make good bedtime reading, spread over the sheets.

I'm at last fulfilling my dream of making a Japanese garden in our back woods. My trusty sidekick Joe has done the heavy work, leaving me the fun of planning and arranging. I've had a stone lantern (concrete, actually) for so many years

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that it's now weathered, as it's supposed to be. In the winter it sticks up out of the snow and sometimes wears a snow hat. My husband collected pieces of slate for one of his projects, I forget which, but I am using them for stepping stones. I have to figure out how to manage the water without too much expense. Making a Japanese garden is a project of many lifetimes. I'll tell my kids to sell the house only to a buyer who promises to continue the project.

I'm writing an essay/memoir for myself, trying to figure out my perception of God. I've written here before about the difficulty that arose 40 years ago when feminists raised our consciousness of the maleness of the pronoun "he." Up until then, I and others were content to consider "he" as sometimes referring to a generic human or a generic god. But once I was made aware, I could never go home again. What pronoun do you use for God? "It" doesn't work although for "presence," the concept I'm developing, that pronoun works fine.

Not many people think of God as a crabby old man with a beard, the strawman that proselytizing atheists like to knock down. Even if we don't believe in him (see what I mean?) we don't imagine the concept as a man or a woman and certainly not as a hermaphrodite. Whatever it is, it did speak to Moses from the burning bush and speaks to the Clarks from the mouth of the kiln and to Don McKay from the mother magma at the centre of the world. §

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'I can't go in there - I'm hideous'

by Colin Smith



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salon questionnaire



NICOLE WOLF

Nicole Wolf

Photographer returns to her Grand Manan home to premiere 'Sea of Faces,' a tribute to those who live and breathe by the ocean

Q Age?

A 37.

Q Provenance?

A I am originally from the island of Grand Manan. I moved to the United States for university in 1991. I pursued my MFA at Columbia College in Chicago. Now I live in Washington, D.C., where I own and operate a photography and design studio called SOTA Dzine.

Q Why photography?

A I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in art but, at the time, photography was not on my radar. I took one beginner-level darkroom class and was hooked. I changed my major and the rest is history.

Q What was your breakthrough moment?

A When I was in grad school my first review was brutal. My professor looked at my work and said that it had no depth, no substance and that I needed to find my story. He said to never produce work because you have to or for money – do what you love and the success will come from that. In my career thus far I have tried to be very intentional about where my work comes from – that it is authentic and purposeful, and that I always am connected to what I produce.

Q What would you be if you weren't a photographer?

A I can't imagine doing anything else in my life, especially now. I have reached a point where I am recognizing that I am a storyteller and if I did not have a camera in my hand, I would not be able to tell those stories.

Q What are you working on next?

A I have been travelling to Haiti photographing for a non-profit group called New Reality International. Haiti changed my life and led to another dimension in my work. I am returning Sept. 2 to continue with my project *Up from Under*. I have also been asked recently to photograph for an organization called Women for Women International. This is another non-profit group situated in eight different countries – Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Congo, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and Bosnia. The group helps women who are victims of violence rehabilitate their lives and provide funding for small businesses. I will be travelling to these eight countries in the next year to photograph these women and tell their stories.

Q What place on Earth inspires you?

A I am inspired by people, from the tiniest of towns to the grandest of cities. I have travelled all over the world and wherever there is a sense of community, wherever people gather, live life, laugh and love, this is where I want to be.

Q What place in New Brunswick inspires you?

A Grand Manan, my island home. My current project, *Sea of Faces*, is a tribute to the islanders and is an homage to their lives. I love where I am from, a close-knit community of people who live and breathe by the ocean. The sea, mapped on their faces, shares in a reverence for tradition and a way of life.

Q Your favourite hero of fiction?

A Raskolnikov. He was a protagonist while at the same time a great moralist. He was conflicted, which shows he had flaws. It's something that we all can relate to.

Q What is your greatest extravagance?

A I love to travel.

Q What is your greatest fear?

A I try not to live in fear. Fear limits the possibilities of your own imagination and I try to never limit myself.

Q Greatest joy?

A My family and my unwavering connection to home.

Q Your favourite photograph on Earth?

A It is difficult to pick one. I have been haunted by Sebastiao Salgado's work.

Q Your favourite photograph by a New Brunswick artist?

A I love the work of Jorgen Klausen.

Q What are you reading?

A *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss.

Q What's on your iPod?

A Music you wouldn't know.

Q What talent would you like to have?

A The skill to be a tightrope walker.

Q What is the greatest public misconception about photography?

A I believe that talent is innate and not learned. Art, in any form, comes from within, not from being able to understand the mechanics behind the medium.

Q Your most treasured possession?

A My grandmother's wedding ring.

Q What is your motto?

A Today is good, today was fun, tomorrow is another one.

Q How would you like to die?

A "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not to harm you, to give you a hope and a future." §

Editor's note: 'Sea of Faces,' a photographic exhibit by Nicole Wolf, opens Sunday at 2 p.m. at The Grand Manan Art Gallery, 21 Cedar St., in Castalia. The 24 portraits comprising the show tell the tale of a community that is ruled by the sea. It runs until Sept. 10. In conjunction with the 'Sea of Faces' opening will be a 30-minute documentary film presentation by videographer Jason Monroe. The film is an intimate tribute to Wolf's grandfather and island icon 'Smiles' Green.