

ctLow, Photographer 🏠 · Sep 22 · 8 min read



Photography - Late Summer 2019

Updated: Sep 25

Entering Autumn in a Photographer's Life

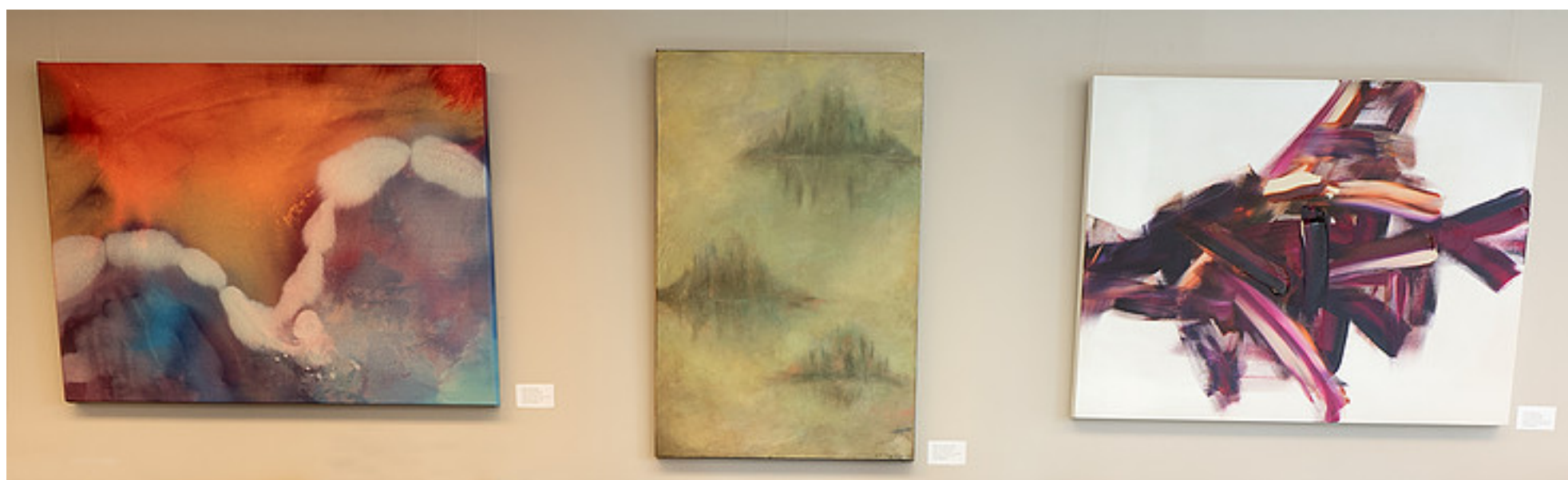
Hello, kind people. Thank you all most sincerely for being here.

It has felt great getting back to work after the many fabulous distractions of our short Eastern Ontario summer season.

ctlow

I have a book of photographs I'm working on, so whatever you do, *do not finish your Christmas shopping* - the book should be available in plenty of time.

A current exhibition, *Abstraction in the 1000 Islands*, at the Brockville Public [Library](#), includes a work of mine as one of eleven. The pieces went up early in the month, and apparently it hangs through November, but I suggest going *today*; otherwise you risk forgetting (and you know how your memory is getting).



Some of the works at Abstraction in the 1000 Islands

Yesterday was the official opening. Most of the artists were there. They and the many visitors, quite a few of whom stayed for a long time, gave every indication of enjoying

visitors, quite a few of whom stayed for a long time, gave every indication of enjoying the event. I've got to say that the discussions and observations, the questions and answers, about these varied works, were truly quite fascinating. Thanks to [Brockville's](#) own very talented artist Fraser [Radford](#) for curating this show.

I've been intrigued by the simple concept that we take a tiny amount of the available space (in our home, at work ... on Earth), and put art in it, often framed, and that matters to us as humans, as it has for thousands of years if not longer.

I used to think that the oldest known art was at [Lascaux](#) (around 17,000 years old), but that turns out to be [incorrect](#) (38,000 years old).

So for the many among us who remain puzzled by all the buzz, you can now know that humans and art have co-existed for a long time; it's part of who we are, collectively if not individually.

Anyway, here we all were at this art-exhibit opening, probably in some measure a self-selecting group, talking about not just art, but about art which intentionally does not represent any identifiable objects. One truly engrossing topic was [synesthesia](#). It was overall an amazing experience, and I would be thrilled to have any of those works on my wall.

And they are all for sale!

Photography

Meantime, I have ramped up the effort.

Photo-walk. I do these from time to time at reasonable prices, and students have been very pleased, which of course I find gratifying. This student knows a private rural property on which we had permission to photograph. I suggested an early-day light, and we were in fact starting out just after sunrise. (Earlier would have been better, but ... under the circumstances that was too early.) At first I said that I would leave my photo-gear in the car, but that met with objections, so seeing as it was just one student, I lugged along one camera (and a spare battery - always!). Most of our time, about a two-hour amble, did focus on the student, but then yes, I did make a few of my own photographs.

We marvelled at the bark on what we believe to be an old Paper Birch, and wrestled with how to translate our awe at this tree, in its environment, into a photograph. Hint: just lining up your camera and releasing the shutter will not work.





Is this what happens to a Paper Birch in its old age?

We also found a large stand of mushrooms. (Do mushrooms "stand"?) I think that the image which appeals to me most on a visceral level is the following one.





Coneflower

Three themes emerged that morning, and this is always a bit of an organic, impromptu process, and it is also true that I return to these tenets quite regularly, and believe that aspiring photographers would find it useful to follow suit:

1. **light** - this absolutely deserves so much more [attention](#) than we give it if we wish to produce images beyond the mundane;
2. **background** - this absolutely deserves so much more [attention](#) than we give it if we wish to produce images beyond the mundane;
3. **brain** - I have one so will not say the same thing for a third time, but it boils down to this: we see with our *brains*, not our (data-collecting) *eyes*, and the brain goes to amazing lengths to construct a picture for us which we find useful, but - and this is a big "but" (and I cannot lie) - that effect pretty well disappears when making a photograph. So whatever it was about the scene which appealed to us will most likely *not* translate automatically into a photograph, and we have to understand something about that in order to create an image which conveys the desired impact. This is a big, big topic, which absolutely deserves so much more [attention](#) than we give it if we wish to produce images beyond the mundane (whoops!).

For those with a deeper interest, note the three underlined links, above, for those three points. I discussed them all with my student - it isn't all f-numbers and ISOs and shutter speeds and exposure compensation and focal lengths (although we clearly need to know about all of those things too).

The outing also emphasized for me again the importance of just getting out with my camera. I sometimes have a project and sometimes do not, but even when I do then I often get something unforeseen. None of that can happen by sitting in the studio, waiting for inspiration to strike. So I am very thankful to my student for asking for the session. Neither of us would have been there without the other.

Please get in [touch](#) and we can arrange our own [photo-walk](#). You will love it.

Gatineau Park. Simply to see what I could see, and because it is fabulous and does not require traipsing off to the nether ends of the Earth, I set off one morning to hike around the [park](#).

I found very little. It may sound heretical because i) the park is undeniably beautiful but ii) not for my camera. I understand of course that many photographers have made wonderful images there, but for me, it is i) a forest, so while standing on a trail in a forest, it's hard to capture the sweep of the scene (because a camera sees it differently than the brain), and ii) I found details but there are details anywhere.





It was lovely, honestly, and that day I could not make the camera love it. Note that it was not yet 8:00 a.m., and the light was already proving troublesome.

Also, the parkways inside the park open at 8:00 a.m., so that's too late for my favourite light, and close a half-hour after sunset so I would have to leave too early for my second-favourite light.

Arriving around 7:00 a.m. (but not on an "interior parkway"), I hiked around the Sugarbush Trail at the primary Visitor's Centre - nice, but I'm looking for more than "nice".



A lovely photo, if I may say, of pretty blue flowers; but did I have to travel to the Gatineau Park for little blue flowers?


I drove to the Wolf Trail at Meech Lake, where I surprisingly did not make any progress on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ("notwithstanding" that we do require some progress!). (Most Canadians will understand those references - apologies to everyone else.) Once there, I recognized the trail as the "very difficult" one (according to the map) that I had hiked some years ago, and decided that, as I was all alone, no other hikers in evidence, that would be a bad idea. The nice man at the Visitor's Centre had assured me that "very difficult" did not mean actual mountains, but ... I have a good three decades on him. The beach was closed for the season, and all around me the beautiful lake was i) in much too contrasty a light, and ii) relatively featureless to the camera, with water and a rim of trees, fairly homogenous, in every direction. Now ... my *brain* liked it, but that's irrelevant.

I realized that I should have read the map more carefully, because a green trail does not mean "easy" as it does on a ski-slope; it means that it's a dedicated hiking trail (no bikes or horses!).

So, I chose Lac Pink, which has a green trail all around it, without a difficulty-level specified, although the *connecting* trail is "difficult" (but not "very"). The light for overviews of the lake was simply unacceptable to me, by now in the late morning under full sun.

I did release the shutter a few times as I circumnavigated the lake, but I did not "get" anything.





Lac Pink (which is green) - really nice and I'm breaking a "rule" by showing an image I can't warm up to, for illustration.

The Pink Lake Trail is very up and down. The Park has provided stairs, by which I mean hundreds and hundreds of steps, up, up, up a long way, then down, then up again, then down, repeat until your legs fall off. (There were other hikers, but few going quickly!) From the bottom of most of the sets of steps, you cannot see the top, because they take right angles and disappear into the woods; I cannot tell you how many times I thought I was at the top, arrived at a right angle, and said out loud to myself and the chipmunks, "Oh, c'mon!"

Also, I was carrying a heavy knapsack, with two cameras, four lenses, batteries and filters, and a tripod, of the "travel" but "substantial" variety, and ...

... you could rightly wonder why I did that.

I did that because I wasn't there to enjoy the hike, although I did overall enjoy the hike (after reattaching my legs). I wasn't there to enjoy the scenery, although I did enjoy the scenery.

I was there for photography; I have chosen to work at this. And you can bet your bottom dollar that the equipment I would need, to make my unexpected but once-in-a-lifetime photograph, would be stowed safely in the trunk of the car, an hour's walk from my current location.

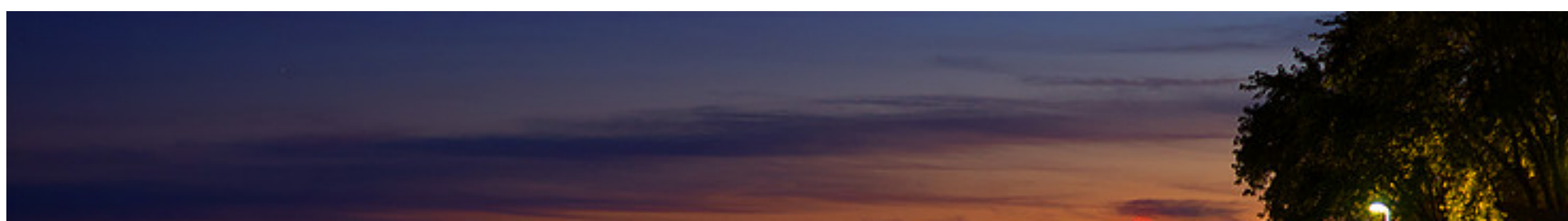
So my optional suffering was ... mandatory.

I ended up using nothing but one camera and one lens and no tripod, but I could only have known that after the fact.

All of that said, I intend to return. The Autumnal colour-change will be spectacular. I think that it will be magical in Winter.

BAPC - Instead of the semi-monthly meeting of the Brockville Area Photo [Club](#), the exec held what I call a photo-prowl. The idea was simply to all meet downtown before sunset, take off and see what happened.

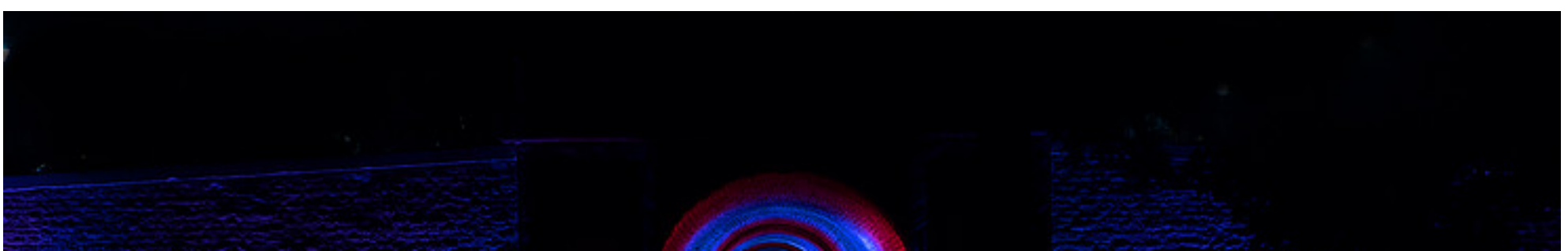
Things happened! I was helping another photographer with a thorny technical problem when I realized that he had found a scene which I had missed.

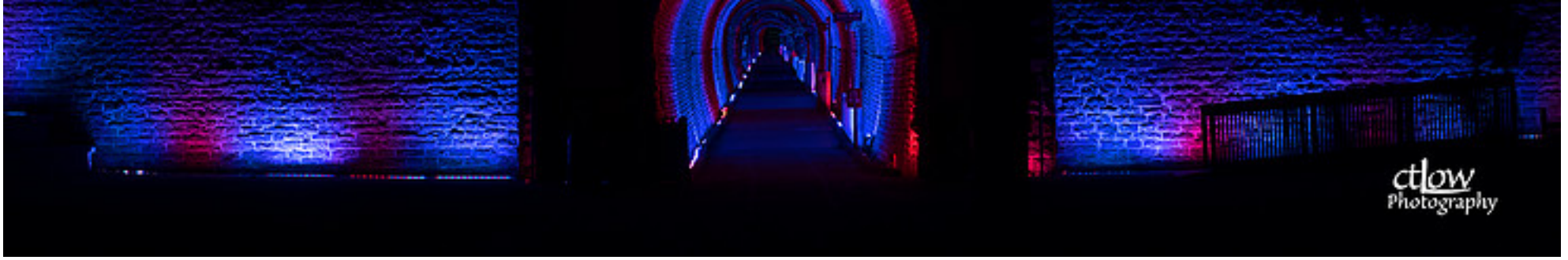




Sunset from Blockhouse Island

I and many other more imaginative photographers have "worked the tunnel" - Brockville's recently refurbished historic [railway](#) tunnel, very popular with locals and visitors. So it's getting hard to find something new in it.





Brockville Railway Tunnel

Finally, others do well with our city hall, but the building and I do not get along (photographically). But one gambit, when stymied, is just to look up.



Brockville City Hall Clock Tower

All told: happy! It was a great idea - kudos to the organizers.
