



Creative by Nature Art

Snowflakes

Creativity and Patterns that

Connect

LISA LIPSETT

SNOWFLAKES, CREATIVITY AND PATTERNS THAT CONNECT



Lisa Lipsett

Art making with nature can help us experience the living world in inspiring new ways. From watching the unique trajectory of a falling leaf to noticing individual ice crystals on a snowy slope for the first time, taking even a few moments to create with nature helps us to slow down and really see her patterned beauty.

What happens when we take this one step further and impersonate the way nature creates, for example by drawing and painting spontaneously with no plan? Like when a snowflake's intricacies are revealed under magnification, do our unique patterns reveal themselves onto the page, thus affording an opportunity to see and feel anew? Maybe art making based on natural principles then becomes a sacred practice that connects us to all life.

Artful Snowflakes

Pattern contains the nature of nature. Via pattern we see nature at its most wondrous. – Soesu Yanagi

Almost a decade ago when I still lived in central Ontario, the first snowfall would often make me anxious. I never quite adjusted to the six-month hibernation snow imposed on my life and the first snow heralded the arrival of a long confinement. Now that I live on Canada's west coast, snow is such a rarity that I stop whatever I am doing and simply stand in the road to let flakes land on my face and hands. I've come to appreciate these snowy interludes for the treasures they are. Sometimes I even get in the car and drive for hours just to be with snow for a day or two.

Like a vast white canvas, snow now calls out to me for an artful response. I create with snow whenever the opportunity presents itself. From pouring paint on its surface, to moving colour on the page with packed handfuls, tracking flake trajectories with eyes and drawing hands, stomping out patterns, making snow angels, sculpting burrows and beings, rolling or sliding down a hill, snow presents many hands-on opportunities. Late last fall we had a particularly poignant snowfall characterized by giant flakes floating down from the chalky grey sky. I was fascinated with the

pattern in a track and snow crystals





Top: Simon Beck snow art

Above: Kljatov snowflake photograph

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It was at about this time when the internet was abuzz with Russian photographer Alexey Kljatov's gorgeous macro photography of individual snowflakes. We all know that each snowflake is a unique crystal, but I never imagined they could be so beautiful with such delicate structures that each looks like a little ice palace. Kljatov brings them to life with three dimensional vitality. <http://chaoticmind75.blogspot.ru/2013/08/my-technique-for-snowflakes-shooting.html>

As far back as the late 1800s Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley was photographing and sharing images of snowflakes to the amazement of the public <http://snowflakebentley.com> In fact in 1885, using a specially designed microscope coupled with a camera, he became the first person to successfully photograph a snowflake. He enthused, "*under the microscope, I found that snowflakes were miracles of beauty; and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others. Every crystal was a masterpiece of design and no one design was ever repeated.*"

More recently Canadian photographer Don Komarechka has gathered all things snowflake into his book *Sky Crystals* where he documents both science and photography techniques used to learn about them.

Then there is British snow artist Simon Beck who makes and then photographs giant crystal-like geometric shapes in the snow. The Koch snowflake inspires his work, a geometric fractal creation that uses repeated mathematical iterations to generate a crystalline pattern of great complexity and beauty. By working on the scale of a snowy plateau Beck brings the normally unseen fractal nature of flakes into clear view by using his unique form of magnification that yields dramatic results see <https://www.facebook.com/snowart8848>

Fractals are never-ending patterns that are infinitely complex and self-similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an on going feedback loop. Nature is filled with examples of fractal patterns many of which, like snowflakes, are either too small to see unaided or are revealed only when we step way back to look. For instance: trees, rivers, coastlines, mountains, clouds, seashells and hurricanes are all fractals. To get a small taste of their beauty and abundance have a peek at these wonderful satellite images of Earth fractals. <http://paulbourke.net/fractals/googleearth/>

Creativity and Natural Pattern

"We see ourselves mirrored and potentiated in the myriad patterns of leaf and limb, of animal totems, of spirals, the ripples and meanders that carry us downstream. Our own true natural selves are revealed." – Laura Sewell Sight and Sensibility: The Ecopsychology of perception



Patterns in natural painting

By simply letting go to flow, by following what we are attracted to, and by trusting the process, natural patterns and forms emerge that are seen in the art of many cultures the world over, spanning thousands of years of human image-making.

Painting with Snow



So I bet you wonder what fractal patterns have to do with creative art? This is where things get really interesting. When we move from creating *with* nature and instead create *like* nature, (by this I mean spontaneously, in the moment with no plan, by simply following what attracts), we enter the realm of sacred art where both universal and our own natural patterns are revealed.

In her book *Sacred Ground to Sacred Space* Rowena Pattee Kryder characterizes sacred art by the universal presence of numerous patterns and forms: subatomic, atomic, crystalline, plant, animal and morphotypes (complex symbiotic forms). She writes about light based forms: the point, the rod, cylinder or column, the branch fishbone or ribbed form, the triangle or pyramid, the radial or cross, the right-angled web, lattice or grid; the forms that subtle energies take: the laminar flow or chaos, the spindle or spiral, the wave, S-curve, zigzag, chevron, the step or progression, the sphere, circle or oval, and the loop, knot or weave; and sacred totemic animal forms that embody spiritual qualities.

By simply letting go to flow, by following what we are attracted to, and by trusting the process, natural patterns and forms emerge that are seen in the art of many cultures the world over, spanning thousands of years of human image-making. These forms and patterns can also be seen in children's spontaneous artwork in addition to being the forms and patterns that comprise the living world.

When I began a painting practice in 1997 I painted spontaneously for almost 3 months then I laid all my artwork out in a circle to better see patterns. I wanted an overview. As I carried on with my practice that year it became clear that I was both feeling and painting the stages in a metamorphic cycle, something I may not have been fully aware of if I hadn't gotten an overview (see my *Beauty Muse* book to learn more). Indeed I experienced first hand through spontaneous creative art what science writer Philip Ball observes to be true about nature: "*nature's language may be spontaneous, but it is not arbitrary*". The Self-Made Tapestry: Pattern Formation in Nature,

Discovering this merging of scientific fact with artful expression brought me wonder, joy and a profound humility - all the spiritual rewards of an ongoing nature-based art practice. I believe we are inherently attracted to the beauty of nature's patterns, though at times we must alter our view in order to really see. Whether this means looking deeper, using all our senses, bringing the unseen to light through magnification or creativity, or looking at change over time, when we see the pattern of things we feel reverence and

awe. Gregory Bateson calls this the pattern that connects - the life force energy of all beings made visible, made tangible.

Our appreciation is further deepened when we see these patterns in our own drawings and paintings. Over time we emerge with a refreshed sense

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of our own patterned nature. The beauty of natural pattern becomes more of what we see in daily moments. We no longer stand afar, instead we know how to take our place in the natural order and feel our vital roots as creatures and creators.

An Artful Snow Encounter: Try Snowflake Art

There are unlimited ways to co-create with snow as both material and inspiration. This video entitled Snowflake Art <http://vimeo.com/111952884> demonstrates how to track and create with individual flakes as they fall. Depending on the circumstances you can do this outside while flakes fall on your page or on a particularly cold day, you can observe and create beside a window as the snow drama unfolds on the other side of the glass. No special tools are needed to give this a go, just some pens, paint, paper and a sense of adventure.

An exploration of your own patterns can flow naturally out of a snowflake encounter, or can begin as an intention to paint 2-3 times per week for 30 minutes, simply following what attracts your attention. Maybe set the task of dreaming into the snow surface out your door or on the page. What lies beneath? What lies within? What do you see when you step back and take a larger view?

Resources:

Sky Crystals: Unraveling the Mystery of Snowflakes- Don Komarechka

Beauty Muse: Painting in Communion with Nature- Lisa Lipsett

Lisa Lipsett's work focuses on the transformative potential of hands-on art with Earth in mind. Visit LisaLipsett.com and creativebynature.org to learn more about Creative by Nature Art resources, articles, blog, classes and paintings.

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