

**Inside the Artist -  
Kelley Taft  
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**Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.**

I see life and art as not being separate. Many forces, both internal and external, have shaped my way of seeing things and of being and acting in the world. I grew up on a dairy farm. We worked and were outside a lot, taking care of the animals and tending to fieldwork and to our garden. Our "outside time" was not recreational, it was just part of our family farm life. The farm cultivated in me a love for and curiosity about the natural world. I had no sense of appreciation for that until adulthood. This has been one of the strong influences in my life and in my photography.

I have enjoyed and been interested in photography since my teenage years. Though photography is what people get to see of my art, I like to think that art is part of all that I do; from cooking and gardening to needle-felting and soap making, I don't separate it out. I am sure you have heard terms like "the art of conversation" and "the art of listening". There is, or can be, artistry in everything.

When my daughter, Sydney was six, I started my business, The Ripple Effect. I had been happily engaged in parenting and homeschooling and I had started to feel that there was something else that I needed to share, to put out into the world, while maintaining my family as my primary focus. Once the idea occurred to me, things happened pretty organically. I started making and selling cards featuring my photographs at the Waterbury Farmers' Market and at a few local stores. After six years of being a farmers' market vendor and having a lot of really enjoyable contact with our local community, it was time to switch gears. I am still engaged with photography and sell cards at Evergreen Gardens, The Waterbury Pharmacy, and (soon!) the Stowe Street Cafe in Waterbury as well as at the Hunger Mountain Co-op in Montpelier. I also do a few events like the Waterbury Arts Fest in July and the Waterbury Holiday Artisans' Boutique in December. I love that these events keep me in contact with the wonderful people in our community and with other local artists.

**What is the medium you most like to work with/in? What draws you to this medium? What do you like about your materials?**

Photography. In my daily life I do and see lots of things and I like having the ability to capture images and ideas with the camera and then pass them on to others. In getting ready to do my current show at the White Meetinghouse, I was poring over my photography books and I came across this quote by photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson:

I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds - the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world we must communicate.

I chose "The Act of Living" as the title of my current show at The White Meetinghouse because taking or viewing a photograph is connecting what is inside us with the outside world, bringing the two together. Looking at how we are affected by and affecting others through the photograph is what I want to encourage.



Most of my photography is nature-oriented, focused on the natural world. While I don't define my work that way, to look at it as a whole, it is what predominantly shows up. I'm drawn to beauty and believe it is essential in life. We all have different definitions of what this means and how it feeds us, both consciously and unconsciously. If I think about walking through a dump or through a botanical garden, there is a different psychology that happens for me in each of these experiences. I think our chemistry is affected by what we see and what we take in with our other senses. This is part of my current thinking. I believe everything we experience and how we experience it matters. Everyone has creativity and uniqueness and there are a multitude of ways for gifts to be shared. I believe that I have something to offer and share; that's why I put my art out there. While I do have the intention of making a positive impact, I am not defining meaning for other people with what I present - I am releasing it into the world with the belief and the trust that people will take what they need.

I don't do too much editing of my photographs. If I am doing edits, I mostly am adjusting color. Color is what I work with the most. When editing a photograph, I can make subtle modifications or create a completely different feeling from the one conveyed by the original image (like when I use a "soften" edit). This is part of the artistry piece. While I do like and sometimes play with black and white, the result never feels quite right. Because I am so oriented to color, when I work in black and white, I feel like something is missing. I see a lot of black and white

photos as more serious. The contrast is so clear and it seems to create a different emotional state. I enjoy and value black and white, but making that kind of work is not really my thing, at least not right now.

I rarely have thoughts about meaning while taking a photograph. I am attracted to what the image presents to me and for the most part, my thinking is bypassed. Afterwards, the meaning comes as a feeling which I can then translate into thoughts and words. Last summer we were returning from a memorial service in Maine and we stopped at a waterfall off the Kancamagus Highway. It was an intense time for me and I was emotionally drained. I had my camera on me and as I walked to the bathroom I felt pulled in the direction of a patch of weeds. There in the midst of the weeds was an Indian Paintbrush with a fern in the background. That was a moment of grace for me, a true gift. I love that photograph visually and for the feeling it creates. It was a bolster for me at the time and every time I see it, I am so grateful for the image showing up at the time it did.



**What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?**

My work is a reflection of me, like a diary or an autobiography. When I review all the images on my hard-drive, I see that what I take pictures of is reflective of where I am in my life at the time.

I have taken lots of pictures of my daughter, so many that I kind of burned her out for a while. Now that she is older (13), I do still document her ages and stages, but she is more independent now and it is natural and healthy, for both of us, for me to be focusing my lens on something other than her.

I am inspired by the various forms of creative expression that I am exposed to and by people living in a fully engaged way.

A strong influence is witnessing what feel to me like everyday miracles.

Simple things that are all around us; from a plant to a chicken's beak. I think a lot about noticing; when I am noticing I am being mindful and allowing myself a fuller experience of life. When I take photographs, I then have the images as a record of what I've noticed. Photography is a way to see and then to recall. There is a quote from Albert Einstein that I like to remember:

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.



While choosing images for the show, I realized that there were themes around what is inspiring for me.

Grace – I am aware that there is grace in my life. Not showy, spectacular or particularly noticeable, but when I feel it, it is overwhelming in a positive way. I am grateful for the effect photography has on me. I then share it with the knowledge it can do the same for others.

Pattern - I find myself noticing patterns in nature and in the ways people live and relate to one another.

Story – My photographic images each have a story and a meaning for me that may be similar to or very far from the meaning that another person makes. This opportunity is a great one as it allows for stories and connections to be explored.

Clear vs. Abstract – Some images are clear, while others are more abstract. In looking at and selecting from my images, I realized that this is a strong metaphor for what sometimes happens in life. The path can be clear and well defined or it can be less clear and more abstract. This is the place to practice trust and to grow by standing still and looking/listening and letting things step toward you. In looking at my more abstract images, I realize that it is sometimes uncomfortable for me and I have to force myself to keep looking, to not run away, but rather stay with it.

Restoration – I have an image of an old Ford truck that had been restored but was still aged-looking. Trucks are not my usual theme or attraction and it did not feel like my work when I developed it. But as I looked at it, it made me think about what part of ourselves we need to restore and give attention to. My husband and I share a passion for house restoration. We've done it most of our 20 years together. So I look at lots of real estate listings!

Sanctuary – Some images provide this for me when I am captivated by

and connecting with them.

Impression/Expression - The impression is what comes in and relates to my experience within. The expression is sending the image back out into the world.

Stillness and Tranquility – I feel these both show up in my work. I believe we attract to us in our art forms things that are either already within us or things we want to pull into ourselves. There is a lot of water in my photography. I named my business *The Ripple Effect* and in my collection of images, there are a lot of visual depictions of that metaphor. I can find a water metaphor for just about every experience in life. Observing a mountain stream reminds me to “go with the flow”, to move with instead of against the flow of life, around obstacles rather than into them.



#### What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?

I highly recommend Betsy Fram's blog, *Eye of the Needle*. I love it and I often read other blogs/information she links to. I receive a fun and interesting monthly newsletter from Bill O'Hanlon, a psychotherapist and writer whose work is oriented in possibilities and solutions. I am a former social worker and took trainings from him during my graduate studies in the 1990's. My graduate study was mostly oriented around his work and the teachings of my then clinical supervisor and now dear friend Marilyn Bronzi. What I learned and was exposed to during this time became the foundation for my subsequent psychotherapy practice and continues to strongly influence how I think and act. I remember reading about the ripple effect in one of Bill's books - that concept has permeated my thinking and approach to life.

I've been poring over different photography books and have been enjoying the cascade of thoughts and ideas that have been stimulated as a result. I am not a technology-oriented person and tech is not my focus. I have never wanted to be thinking technically when capturing images; I wanted my mind to be less involved than my heart so I resisted rules and technology for a long time. I am coming to the point where I can now see the value in learning some of the language and technique and am willing to think about doing things in different ways. I'm trying to push myself to learn more in that regard and I am making baby steps towards learning new things on the tech side. I believe that it

will allow me to learn and grow. Whether or not I do anything very differently in the end, I know it is important to stretch and grow and to expose myself to new ideas and methods. I have had to overcome my thinking in order to do this.

I have long been inspired and influenced by the writing and poetry of David Whyte, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Mary Oliver. I also love the work of Craftsbury poet Julia Shipley. Other books I am reading now include *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers* by Henri Cartier-Bresson; *The Tao of Photography: Seeing Beyond Seeing* by Philippe L. Gross and S.I. Shapiro; *Making Love With Light: Contemplating Nature with Words and Photographs* by John Daido Looi; and *Wild Comfort: The Solace of Nature* by Kathleen Dean Moore.

In the morning before starting my day, I read a page from *Everyday Mind: 366 Reflections on the Buddhist Path*, edited by Jean Smith, and a page from *The Awe-Manac: A Daily Dose of Wonder* by Jill Badonsky.

This morning as I was waking up, the words Indra's net came into my mind. I couldn't remember the metaphor and really wanted to know why these words were coming to me so I looked it up. The story is from Hindu mythology and relates to the jeweled net, infinite in dimension, of the god Indra. The net contained a polished jewel at each vertex and each jewel reflected all of the other jewels. I found this, from Indra's Jeweled Net on the website [the-wanderling.com](http://the-wanderling.com):

"The moral of Indra's net is that the compassionate and the constructive interventions a person makes or does can produce a ripple effect of beneficial action that will reverberate throughout the universe or until it plays out. By the same token you cannot damage one strand of the web without damaging the others or setting off a cascade effect of destruction."

