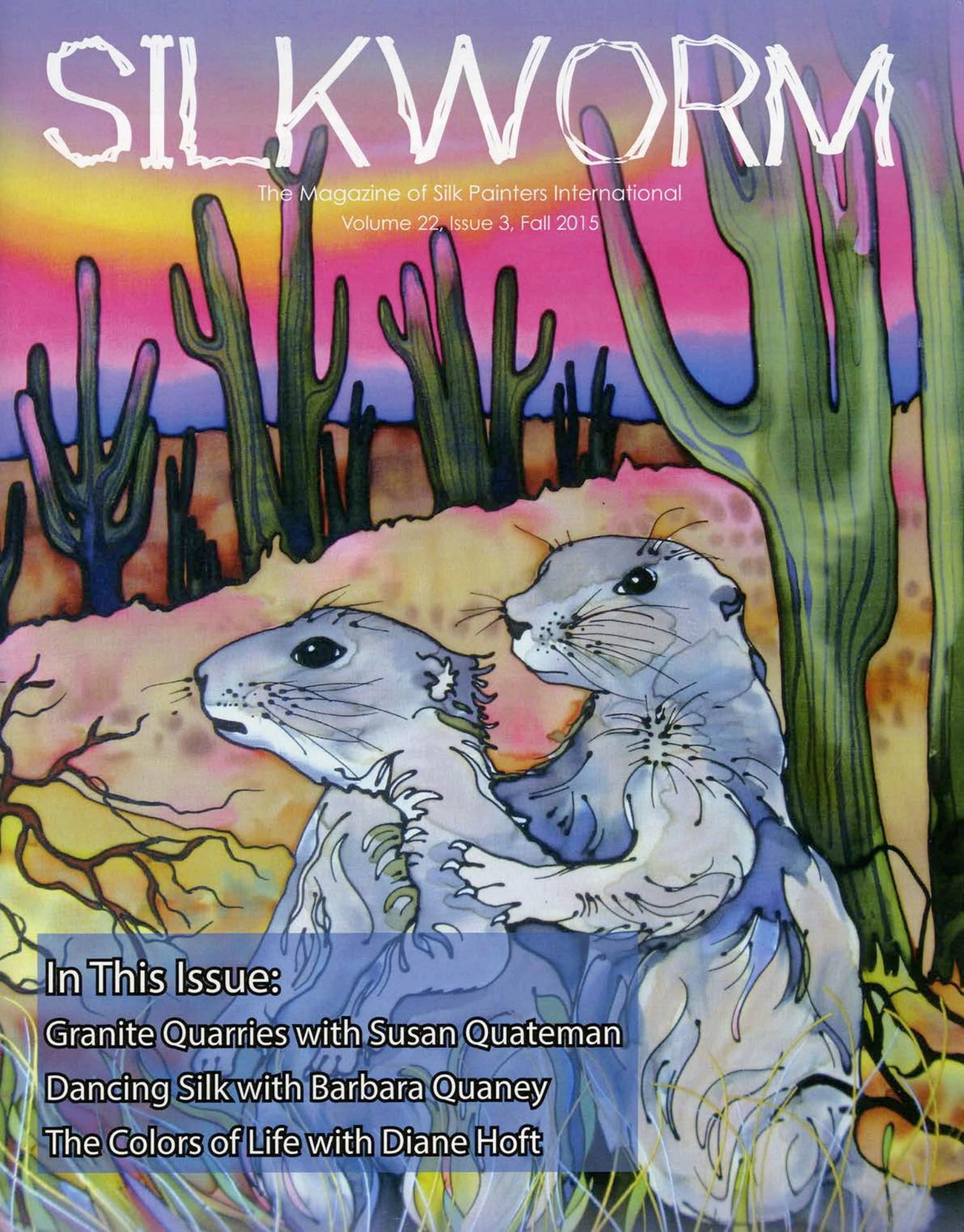


SILKWORM

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Silk Painting, Photography and the Granite Quarries of Cape Ann, MA.

By
Susan Quateman



Les Bartlett deep in a quarry

My fascination with the quarries of Cape Ann, a granite-rooted peninsula 30 miles northeast of Boston, MA, began eight years ago. That was when I first saw the quarry photography of Leslie D. Bartlett at his Cape Ann Museum exhibit. (see pg.13) Les is a visual artist whose work is influenced by two unique arcs. The first arc was below the proscenium of the Magic Show at the Cabot Theatre in Beverly, MA, where he worked every Sunday as a juggler, puppeteer and photographer. Fifteen years ago he discovered another important arc: the Keystone Bridge in Rockport, MA, which ushered him into the world of granite quarries that have been reclaimed by nature, and speak a hidden language of the lives and struggles of now departed quarry workers. This world of light and granite, of presence defined by absence, was captured in his Cape Ann Museum exhibit that I visited in 2007. I was puzzled and intrigued by his work. Could quarry walls really look like that? In retrospect, this exhibit laid the groundwork for my own entrancement and silk meditation on the quarry landscape of Cape Ann.

I was introduced to Les in 2010, and asked him to photograph, and print onto a weatherproof satin fabric, three silk paintings that memorialized a 95-year-old friend. I had designed the print to suspend from a tree in my garden for a local outdoor art show, Art Grows Here. As a landscape designer and environmental planner, I knew that it was very important to document my work. Every time I visited Les's studio, in a renovated church, with my latest silk scarf to be photographed, I marveled at his large-scale quarry photographs, hanging from the upper balcony. The photos were more like paintings of quarry rocks and nature intertwined, with astonishing texture, hues, and piercing light or deep shadows. The images, combined with my own love of both nature and industrial history, catapulted me into asking Les to take me to see for myself the quarries of Rockport and Gloucester.

We walked along quarry paths situated at least 50 feet above sea level at Halibut Point State Park in Rockport and in Dogtown, a wilderness preserve and quarry landscape

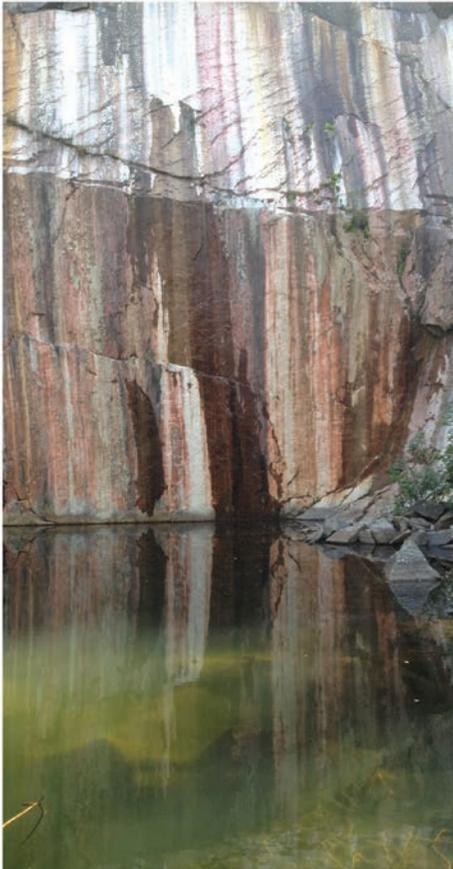
in Gloucester, and talked of the quarry archaeology, social history, of the ghostly leavings of a past industry that had been so economically important for Cape Ann until 1930. I loved the quiet way nature had reclaimed this landscape, which had once been full of the sounds of quarry workers shouting, dynamite blasting granite rocks, and oxen pulling giant slabs of granite to awaiting sloops anchored beside the breakwater.

The history of Cape Ann granite began 400 million years ago. The bedrock batholithic granite cooled under a micro-continent geologists named Avalonia, a volcanic arc underlying southern Great Britain to the eastern coast of North America. Today, granite forms the bedrock of most of Cape Ann. The granite industry, which was to change the landscape of the fishing and farming communities of Rockport and Gloucester, began in the 1830s. It was to become a driving force in the local economy for the next 100 years.

The hard gray granite, with green



Susan Quateman photographing quarries



'Cathedral Quarry' photo (summer)



Silk Painting of 'Cathedral Quarry'



'Cathedral Quarry' photo (winter)



Silk Painting of icy 'Cathedral Quarry'

or bluish tinges, was quarried by large companies such as the Rockport Granite Company, which employed workers from Finland, Sweden, Ireland, and Italy. Alternatively, it was worked by two-man quarry worker entrepreneurs who quarried very small quarries, called “motions.” At least 60 quarries were established on Cape Ann from 1830 to 1930, providing granite for paving blocks, buildings, sculptures (including the granite eagles atop Boston’s Custom House), churches, curbing, and crushed stone. The industry came to a crashing halt in 1931, when demand for building materials shifted to concrete and steel, and asphalt supplanted granite for paving. The Rockport Granite Company liquidated, closing an era of Cape Ann quarrying.

As the quarries were abandoned, nature took over. Rain and groundwater slowly filled the deep-quarried chasms. Lichen spread over discarded quarried rocks and boulders. Trees and shrubs found new perches in unlikely gray rock surfaces. Vines twisted over rusting steel derricks once used to haul heavy slabs of granite. Holes drilled over a hundred years ago to split the granite became ghostly punctuation points in granite walls. The physical evidence of a once-thriving industry became shrouded by nature, as Cape Ann looked towards fishing and tourism to fuel its economy.

My quarry walks and talks with Les began under Rockport’s Keystone Bridge. Completed in 1872 by the Rockport Granite Company, the bridge traverses a path blasted through a deep wall of stone, allowing oxen and railcars to haul granite from the quarries to the shipping wharves.

Today the way under the bridge lies within a hidden-from-view, wooded area of quarries filled with water, flanked on either side by irregularly jutting walls of granite. Sometimes, as shadows shift in the glinting light they almost seem to come alive. Water seeps from deep within the rock, creating irregular wet shapes on the rockface. The drill marks cast angular impressions. Traces of 120-year-old worker initials can



Keystone Bridge Completed in 1872

be made out through the moss-covered granite. When I cry out under the bridge my voice echoes far back to my European childhood.

It is under this bridge that Les first stepped onto the Flat Ledge granite quarry floor, during the searing heat and drought of 2001. The water levels were way down, enabling him to see, with eyes that could paint while he photographed, the true beauty and “presence through absence” of the pounding anvils, wind whistling through the derricks, the cries of the men and crack of splitting rock. Les’s photographs tell a story of a world lost and found. And I, an environmental planner and artist who found her way to dyes, sumi brushes, and silk five years ago, found a stunning source of artistic



Leslie D. Bartlett: The ‘Cathedral Quarry.’ An alchemy of changing colors in late Spring.

inspiration in this forgotten landscape.

The first silk paintings inspired by the granite quarry were of a magical wall of granite, a winding pathway walk down from the bridge. We call this quarry the “Cathedral” for its immense, bulging walls of stone, through which water flows, pulsating and pushing through the stones, creating an alchemy of changing colors. One day the walls can be a stark white; another, shades of olive and deep green. Sometimes bluish-gray or pinky-red, and at other times dependably dark gray. Shrubs and ferns perch precariously from crevices in the wall, leading the eye to a ledge

above the quarry, where moss mixes with a forest floor of pine needles. In June there are outcroppings of white and pink Lady Slippers.

Other silk paintings inspired by our granite landscape walks have included lichen on rock, reflections of rocks on quarry waters, dusk light hitting the quarry waters, stumbling upon boulders, and “motions” near Halibut Point or in Dogtown, a wild area of forest, quarries, wetlands, and rocks much painted by artists, including Marsden Hartley.

At the beginning of our quarry sojourns, Les photographed his own quarry landscape compositions, and then, sometimes,



Quarry Silk Painting Installation at Crane Estate Art Show, The Trustees of Reservations, November 2013



Susan Quateman: The 'Cathedral Quarry' in silk

compositions that I saw. I took the images into Ten Pound Studio (my silk painting teaching studio) in Gloucester, and used them as guides to create my own silk interpretations. Often while I painted, I would feel myself slipping into the painting itself, becoming one with the landscape of

colored dyes and memory.

Out of these informal walks, photographing and painting, an artistic collaboration emerged. It was first expressed at a Ten Pound Studio show, in March 2015, at Flatrocks Gallery in Lanesville, a former fishing and quarrying village in Gloucester.

There we produced a joint exhibit of Cape Ann quarry photography and silk paintings. From this exhibit we produced a book of our collaborative work, "On Seeing a Granite Landscape." This past snowy winter we also created an installation of all my quarry silk paintings on the icy quarry wall—an



Leslie D. Bartlett: "Chapters on A Quarry Wall," Cape Ann Museum Installation, October 2007



SQ & LB: Silk Painting Installation at icy 'Cathedral Quarry,' March 2015

enormous feat necessitating hard hats, since there was a constant threat of ice falling down from the top of the quarry wall. This unique installation can be seen in the photograph above.

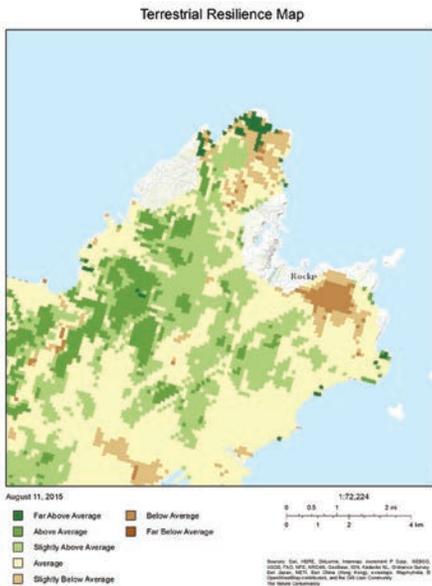
Today, as I write, we are working collaboratively on interpreting climate change with both silk and photography. The story of the granite quarries is interwoven here also. While walking through the quarries it occurred to me that the enduring quarry landscape, situated high above sea level between Halibut Point State Park in Rockport and Dogtown in Gloucester might demonstrate a special resilience vis-à-vis climate change. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), drawing on cutting-edge research by Dr. Mark Anderson, defines a climate-change resilient site as “an area of land with sufficient variability and microclimate options to enable species and ecosystems

to persist in the face of climate change, and which will maintain this ability over time.” By examining TNC resilience maps for both Halibut Point and Dogtown (next page) we see how the varied landforms with steep elevational changes—the rocky coastland, upland forests, and water-covered quarries—create microclimates that provide temperature and moisture options for wildlife and plants. These microclimates allow the inhabitant to persist at the site and buffer them from the effects of the regional climate. A recent study by the Nature Conservancy identified the Dogtown quarries and Halibut Point as among the most resilient places within the North Atlantic Coastal region.

If conservation of undeveloped land continues in these areas, it will permit the landscape to be connected by a natural cover, currently low-lying swamps of red

oaks, white ash and tupelo along with the black locust, black cherry, honeysuckle, and pines of coastal thickets and maritime forest areas. Such “connections” may serve as a stronghold for the natural habitats of the granite quarry landscape. The implications for climate change adaptation are enormous.

The granite quarry landscape of Cape Ann is a reminder of the power of humans to shape the landscape, and of the even greater power of nature to remold that same landscape into her own cast. It is also a testament that a photographer’s eye can shape a stonescape such that granite becomes ethereal and cloudlike. And that a silk painter can be inspired to create a new world of color and stone by looking attentively at both a granite landscape and photographs of rock, water, and light.



Painting a collaborative TPS vest

Climate Change Resilience Maps: The Nature Conservancy



SQ & LB: Tools of Our Trade - on a granite window ledge.

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