

# Editor Note

## View Into a Larger Space

I didn't expect to get so much mileage out of this exercise when I first proposed it during a January intensive some years ago: pick a work of art—in any medium, from any period—that inspires you, and tell us what it is and what inspires you about it.

It must have been after lunch, everyone was lying in a dog pile on the floor, half napping/digesting, half socializing. “Let’s do a few works of art,” I suggested. Someone extricated herself from the thicket and began. I don’t remember what her work of art was, but I do remember that in a matter of minutes she was transformed from a drowsy lump to a person on fire with excitement—her voice, her eyes, her face, her body, all increasingly animated and engaged as she described what she loved about the work she had chosen.

I quickly wrote down her words, as it occurred to me that what was spontaneously flying out of her mouth was a vivid, unselfconscious description of her deep personal aesthetic—what she valued, found meaningful, and was most excited by in art (and in life). Her inspiration was contagious.

When my sister offered to make a special party to celebrate my 50th birthday and asked what I would most want, I was touched but not inclined to take her up on her offer. A simple dinner with family—most of whom I don’t see very often—would be plenty.

Then an idea popped into my mind that I quickly tried to push back down—too odd, too risky, too personal. But it made me happy just thinking about it, so I pursued it. What I really wanted for my birthday was to hear my family speak, as individuals, about what inspires them. And so I invited them to do what we had done in the workshop, choosing any moment in the evening to take their turn.

The evening was exquisitely self-choreographed, with a range of emotions, qualities, styles; the timing of the presentations unpredictable, appearing like gems amidst the dinner’s normal proceedings.

My sister chose the moment of serving the salad to offer her work of art. She put the Brahms *Requiem* on the stereo, and as she tossed and served, she told us what she most loved about the music—its paradoxically peaceful relationship to death, “Death where is thy sting,” it asks, unafraid, soothing. My brother-in-law chose a moment of transition in the meal, when he thought no one was paying attention, to catch my eye across the table and start talking. He told of his experience over the last several years bonding with a group of strangers on the commuter train—a small group of professional men



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who spontaneously started talking one day on the 8:04 into NYC and found themselves listening and being listened to. They started saving each other seats every morning and looking for each other and caring if someone wasn’t there, and for 50 minutes, they’d have their “group therapy session” (as he called it). They never socialized outside of the train, and never missed a morning if they could help it.

It was a grand evening. I loved the glimpse into the inner lives of these people I call sister, brother, stepmother, niece, nephew—seeing them in a way that I had never quite seen them before. I was filled with love and art and life when they all left.

Sometimes, amidst life’s personal, professional, and global challenges, the practice of focusing on inspiration seems frivolous, a luxury, but at the same time more important than ever—not as a distraction from pain but as a way to be able to support it, see it through, and see through it to a larger clearer space.

I sit now on a sunny hill in late autumn New England. There is a bittersweet moment every autumn when the last of the luminescent leaves finally falls off the trees, the loss of green life replaced by the gift of penetrating space; suddenly we’re able to see through the trees into the broad field behind them, making the context instantly grander, more expansive.

I can’t end this note without remarking on the extraordinary richness and depth of investigation represented in this issue of *CQ*—each article a fractal, a glimpse into a world all its own; each artist adding a contagious specificity and space to our dance terrain. With a passion, a hunch, a curiosity, and perseverance, these individuals have found a way to survive their own challenges, to pursue their artmaking and discovery, and to share their findings. From their inspiration, we benefit immeasurably and are led, inexorably, to our own.

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*The title is quoted from the chapter “Hierarchy of Open Space” in A Pattern Language, by Christopher Alexander et al.*