

# The art of nature

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Submitted Mar 01, 2012. Accepted for publication Mar 15, 2012.

DOI: 10.3978/j.issn.2223-3652.2012.03.02

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Since 1995 I have been living and working on World Heritage Listed Fraser Island as a guide and photographer. Fraser Island is located on the east coast of Australia and, with an area of 184,000 hectares, it is the largest sand island in the world. (<http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks/fraser/index.html>) It is also the only sand island in the world that has rainforest growing on it, has the oldest sand dunes in the world, the purest strain of dingoes left in the world and over half of the world's perched dune freshwater lakes.

The task of photographing Fraser Island is an endless one. My goal is to capture some distinctive essence of a scene or an object. Often though just when I think I have succeeded and I take a few steps back or forward, left or right, some other distinctive feature reveals itself. It is as if beauty is hidden in everything or maybe trapped and it is my purpose to release it from the prison of ordinary things. Large and small things in nature are beautiful, but sometimes our business in the world leads us to trample over masterpieces without notice. By walking just a little bit slower than normal and stopping just before that fatal step, I hope to capture this beauty. Sometimes I wander in the forest searching for something and almost by surprise or mistake I notice the unexpected. Calling out through a single red leaf on a green, gold or black background. A perfect example is the bark of Eucalypts and Angophoras trees (*Figure 1, 2*).

When walking through nature it is difficult to decide which photo to take. Which way of looking at beauty do we choose? The photograph singles out one tiny fragment of the multifaceted crystal of existence almost like a spotlight illuminating a single object in the darkness of too much that is interesting. By framing one piece of time it allows the onlooker to wander through a world within a world. We can step out of time and wander within a moment contemplating something that may never have existed otherwise. The photos I have taken over the last 13 years are just a small collection of frozen moments that point not

only at themselves, but at infinite other possibilities that have faded into the past, because no one photographed them. The mixture of sadness that they were missed and joy that they existed sharpens awareness into the everyday world in which we live.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2011 a wildfire raced through several thousand hectares of bushland and burnt everything in its path. On the day of the fire it seemed no plant or animal could have survived. There were no leaves on any plant and no wildlife to be seen (*Figure 3*). However, Australian Fauna and Flora has been adapting to recurrent catastrophes for millions of years, in particular since the continent has been subject to the effects of a weather pattern known as the El Niño.

The El Niño is a climate cycle that oscillate every 2-10 years. It is greatly affected by a very large body of warm water moving back and forth along the equator between Australia and South America. This oscillation affects the weather on a global scale. When close to the Australian continent this warm body of water can produce great flooding as seen in Queensland, Australia at the beginning of 2010. Two years prior, while the mass of warm water was close to the South American continent, Queensland saw a great drought. For example, Fraser Island received only 2 days of rain in 8 months. Organism trying to survive in this type of environment must be able to adapt to recurrent conditions of extended drought, fire and intermittent flooding. The majority of plants and animals in Australia have adapted to these extreme weather patterns.

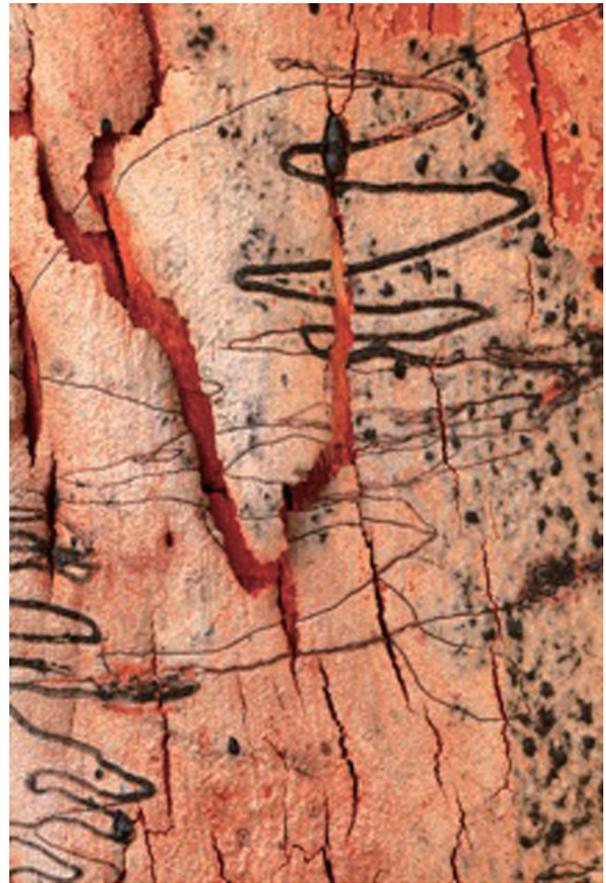
Two days after the fire had passed in October 2011, I began to document the regeneration of the forest of Fraser Island. The resilience and rapid recurrence of the fauna and flora has been a unique experience (*Figure 4*).

## Acknowledgments

*Disclosure:* The author declares no conflict of interest.



**Figure 1** Angophora Bark. All smooth barked Eucalypts and Angophoras lose their bark on Fraser island around the first week of November each year. They do this because they get too big for it. A bit like a snake having to shed it's skin



**Figure 2** (and Cover Image): Scribbly Gum Bark. *Eucalyptus racimosa*. On the bark of this tree there are markings that at first look man made. However, they are made by a moth larvae which lays its eggs on the bark of the tree. The eggs develop into larvae, which wind back and forth looking for sugar in the sap. At the end of each marking there is a loop where the larvae turned around and went back along the old track to pick up the new sugar that tree would have sent there to heal itself. Ingenious



**Figure 3** Angophora Trees under Stars. This image was taken at night during a waxing moon. I painted the branches a little with my torch to highlight these two amazing trees. Angophoras are always orange, however one of the side effects of the fire was that the colours of these and many other plants became greatly magnified in their intensity. The white spots in the sky are the stars as they move across the heavens. You can see the constellation of Orion in the top right corner



**Figure 4** Regeneration. This is an image from the same group of trees after their recovery from the fire. While many trees are killed by total defoliation following a fire, some can re-sprout from epicormic buds, which are buds positioned beneath the bark. Eucalyptus trees are known for their ability to vegetatively regenerate branches along their trunks from buds. This is because epicormic buds of Eucalyptus trees are more protected than on other tree species because they are set much deeper at maximum bark thickness. Initially the new buds are red when they emerge from the bark. After a short while they turn green resulting in the tree looking a bit like a French Poodle

**Cite this article as:** Meyer P. The art of nature. Cardiovasc Diagn Ther 2012;2(2):181-183. DOI: 10.3978/j.issn.2223-3652.2012.03.02