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'Walking in the Whites' with Timothy Muskat, Kathryn Field

Ed Parsons Nov 8, 2019 Updated Nov 11, 2019



"Portal" by Kathryn Field. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Thursday morning this week, I drove to Plymouth to see the latest exhibit at the Museum of the White Mountains called "Walking in the Whites: A Poet/Painter Dialogue." It is a collaboration of Sandwich residents Timothy Muskat and Kathryn Field.

After walking in the door of the museum, I became absorbed in the experience. The poems of Tim Muskat brought me to familiar places high in the mountains; the wonderful oils of Kathryn Field added visual beauty to these places, each a recognizable place in the mountains and alive with light. Many are in the winter.

Muskat and Field have known each other for 28 years. They both taught at Lake Forest College in Illinois where he was a professor in English and creative writing, she an adjunct professor in sculpture.



Muskat, 58, has hiked in the White Mountains his whole life. His grandfather had a house in Silver Lake where he spent the summers as a child. The love of hiking was passed from grandfather to father to him.

After moving back here from Illinois, he switched working roles with his wife. Raising two boys gave him time to devote to the mountains as well. His achievements in them are unparalleled. Over his life he has completed the 48 New Hampshire 4,000 footers 85 times. He is presently on his seventh round of the GRID, which is hiking every 4,000 footer every month of the year. He has climbed Mount Washington 416 times. He has taken thousands of photos in the mountains over the years.

He feels at home in the solitude of the mountains. As a counterpoint his grandfather and father influenced him early on to care about the world and others. Another of his loves is baseball, and he has taught the game to Sandwich school kids for 19 years, where he encourages them to root for one another, play for the sake of the game, and do their best on and off the field.

Talking to me Thursday night on the phone, he suggested there were two things in civilization he felt expert at: baseball and poetry. He still teaches college level creative writing at times, and for the past three years has taught poetry at Belknap County Department of Corrections, and feels very comfortable doing so.

His poems about the mountains are intensely in the present moment, and bring you there. If you have been there before, you are back again.

Field has painted for 15 years, and taught art at Holderness School for 11 years. Presently, she teaches painting and sculpture in her own spacious studio in Sandwich (fieldfineart.weebly.com) and works on commissions (kathrynfield.com). She also teaches a few weeks a year at Belknap County Department of Corrections, offering pastels and drawing there.

Four years ago, she asked Muskat if he wanted to collaborate. She would paint some of his many White Mountain photographs, and he provided poems. They did it, bringing together 40 oil paintings and poems.

These line the walls at the exhibit. Also there is a slideshow of Muskat's photographs. You can put on ear phones and listen to him recite various poems as you watch. Also of interest is a list of his climbs of the 4,000 footers, the seasons indicated by different colors, and a unique graph where he divides hikes into two categories: pleasure/grandeur and challenge/dread.

Also in the exhibit are two striking bronze sculptures by Field. These greet you immediately as you walk into the main exhibit hall. Also in a side room she set up an exhibit that shows her process of creating a painting, and a participatory exercise.

Downstairs in the museum are a small exhibit called "100 years of Mount Washington," and in the large open lab room an exhibit called "Why We Hike." Plymouth State University teaches contributed to this.

On Dec. 10 at 5 p.m., Muskat and Field will give a talk at the museum on the process of collaboration. That should be good.

The Museum of the White Mountains has an extensive website, and can also be reached at (603) 535-3210.

Portal

"Exactly five thousand six hundred ninety-
three feet on the snowy talus on the brittle
north side of Mount Jefferson just south of ten
a.m. in the finely arithmetical middle of
Feburary there's a single dark eyes junko
and utterly wingless me. We chat as long as brutish



wind allows and then he breaks
for a small and sudden junko partition
of cloud to the northeast and I follow him
out as far as naked eye permits
until subtle birdlike blues and blacks
and grays absorb him and I am left struggling
to remember the two of us exactly as we were
moments before liftoff and separation

took everything, and became everything."

— Timothy Muskat



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