

# WALKING IN THE WHITES:

A Poet/Painter Dialogue

Timothy Muskat & Kathryn Field



# WALKING IN THE WHITES:

A Poet/Painter Dialogue

Timothy Muskat & Kathryn Field

Museum of the White Mountains

November 5 - December 13, 2019

# Timothy Muskat

Timothy Muskat was born in 1961, in New York City, and since that original moment has pitched his tent in New Jersey, New York (twice), Montana, Illinois and, briefly, western North Carolina. He was a New Hampshire summer denizen as a youth — “from diapers to divorce” — and considers the White Mountains the country of his soul. For the last nineteen years he has resided in nearby Sandwich, New Hampshire with his wife, two exceptional sons, and a series of reasonably good dogs. A former professor of English and Creative Writing, Tim was educated — undergrad and grad — at Cornell University, earning somewhere in a happy/bleak interregnum an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Montana. Tim is the author of four collections of poems, numerous critical essays, and the recipient of several prizes and awards for both his poetry and his classroom work.

# Kathryn Field

Kathryn Field was raised in New York City and educated at Temple University's Tyler School of Art. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. For over thirty years Kathryn worked as a professional artist/educator, teaching at both the university and at the Holderness School in Holderness, NH. Since leaving full-time teaching six years ago, Kathryn has spent most of her time in her studio, creating paintings and sculpture working on commissions and offering workshops. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the United States and in Sydney, Australia. She has executed commissions for public and private nonprofit institutions, corporate clients, and private collectors.

You can see additional work at [www.KathrynField.com](http://www.KathrynField.com)

## PORTAL

Exactly five-thousand six-hundred ninety-  
three feet on the snowy talus on the brittle  
north side of Mt. Jefferson just south of ten  
a.m. in the finely arithmetical middle  
of February there's a single dark-eyed junco  
and utterly wingless me. We chat as long as brutish  
wind allows and then he breaks  
for a small and sudden junco 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*



Kathryn Field, *Portal*, oil on wood panel, 2018

## UPPER LAKE OF THE CLOUDS AT SUMMER'S END

The storied mountain's glacial eye  
grows bluer under blue-winged sky.  
Slashed and scarred by wind and rime,  
it bides a different sort of time.

Girding sedge trades green for rust:  
it's not a case of can, but must.  
The sullen rocks have lain about  
since pressure drove them up and out.

The fierce ravine the eye can't see  
unleashes mist to glaze the scree.  
A raven's coarsened croak floods air —  
I think it comes from over there.

Secrets silvered water keeps  
are vaulted in its blackened deeps,  
as metamorphic dark below  
is haunt of things we cannot know.

Some venture here to pray or think,  
or simply stand upon the brink.  
One fall I found a man in tears,  
undone, it seemed, by starkest fears.

Today the world feels lonely, lost —  
a knifing breeze foretells the frost.  
The massive mountain still to climb  
looms larger in a troubled mind.

When despot winter sacks this place  
and redraws beauty's changeling face,  
the little tarn will lose all sight  
but somehow live beneath the white.

*Timothy Muskat*





Kathryn Field, *Upper Lake Of The Clouds At Summer's End*  
oil on canvas, 2018

## AT THE OSSEO OVERLOOK

You could almost forget, looking out,  
that most of the world,  
what we've made of it  
almost from the beginning,  
will never again be beautiful.

You could almost forget, looking out,  
sins and shortcomings you've shouldered  
nearly to the tiptop of this blameless mountain,  
and which will still be with you  
when you make your way down.

You could almost forget, looking out  
at near and far, trees and light,  
ridges and contours carved before time,  
that forgetting itself is privilege  
as dear as any view.

*Timothy Muskat*



Kathryn Field, *At The Osseo Overlook*, oil on canvas, 2019

# SHAFTS OF LIGHT ON THE HANCOCK NOTCH TRAIL

Things that mean most  
I do not share.

It's self-protection —  
I care, I care.

Glistening beams I saw for instance  
slanting across the trail

made golden bars,  
the perfect jail.

I could have stayed hours  
but blaze was brief,

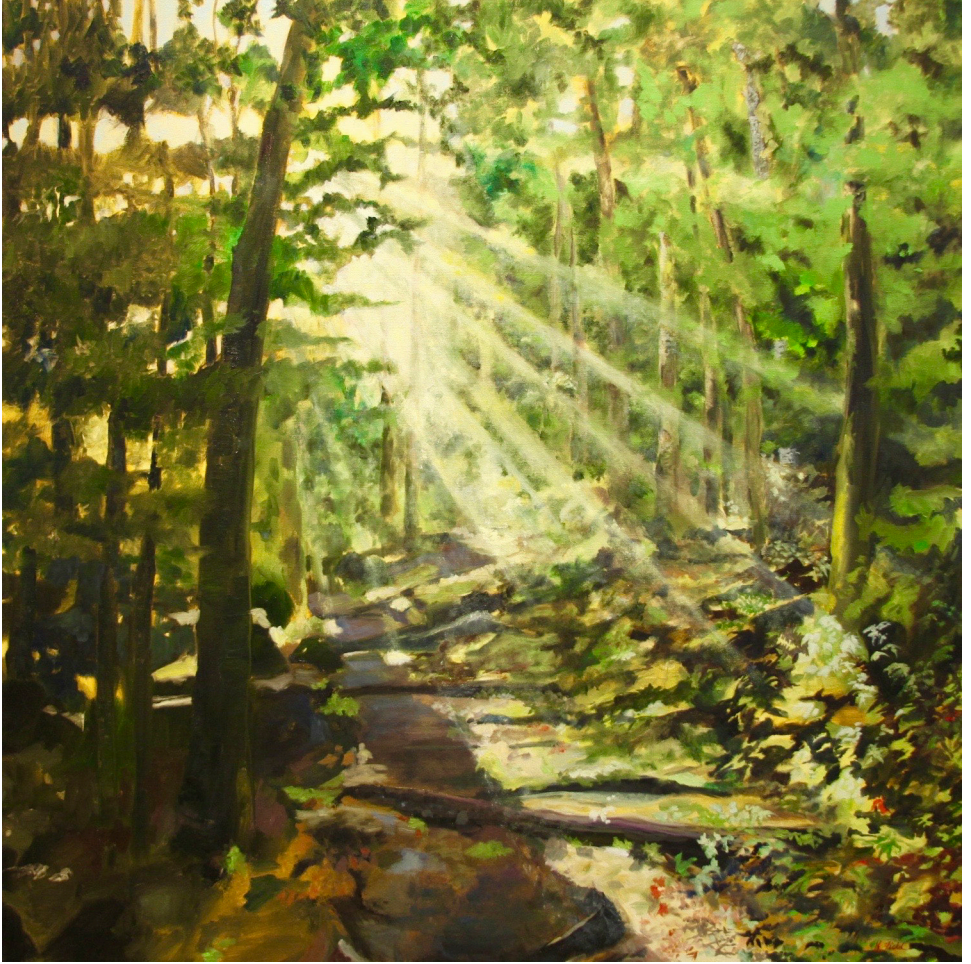
a sort of forest  
bas relief.

A private morning bath  
of light

for one who yearns  
for out of sight.

*Timothy Muskat*





Kathryn Field, *Shafts of Light on the Hancock Notch Trail*  
oil on canvas, 2019

## MOVING MOUNTAINS

When Kathryn approached me nearly four years ago to ask if I would consider an artistic collaboration — which would involve her painting from a selection of my White Mountain photographs and me providing “companionable” poems — I was roundly skeptical. For one thing, I had never thought of my photographs (over 75,000 of them) as anything other than documentation of a very private sort: visual records of mountains I had climbed and of my own distinctly mountain-born experiences, that I might now and then look back on to stir memories of surprise or beauty or delight. For another, I was wary of my poems “admixing” with another medium. Poems, after all, are *sui generis*, arising as it were of their own volition, unbidden and unforeseen, with “agendas” entirely their own. To think of them “paired” with either photograph or painting or even *experience itself* felt at best disingenuous, at worst unjust. And that I might be writing *to or about*, say, a vista, was out of the question. Finally, there was the small problem that I was in all likelihood dying. I’d been diagnosed a few months before Kathryn came calling with an incurable lymphoma and given, curtly, forty-six months. My mountain life, not to mention life itself, seemed at an end, and I was scared and surly.

Longer story short, thanks to a stem cell transplant I am, in oncological parlance, “in a good remission,” again able to explore the high and wild places I love, while Kathryn and I, not without some amicable sparring, have managed to bring together some forty paintings and poems. And though I confess the triumvirate photograph/painting/poem remain to me very different beasts (to say nothing of wild experience itself, which exists on a whole different plane), I can say definitively that my poems and Kathryn’s paintings do, on some level, come together quite nicely, with interesting effect. I must also acknowledge, in tribute to Kathryn, that her paintings in powerful ways *bring back* my experiences — the shimmer and pulse of them, the shivery immediacy — in ways that my necessarily more static photographs do not. And that bringing-back, I have discovered — an effect, you could say, of the brushstroke — has allowed me to return again and again to my poems, perhaps to hear them a little differently, and to tinker with their shape and melody and texture in ways that better fit and serve the ineffable mountains that are always before me, and part of who and what I am and where, always where, I am going.

*Timothy Muskat*

## Reflections on the Collaboration Process

Seeing is fleeting, a transitory grouping of shapes, forms, and light. What you do not see you will never see again.

When I am out of doors, I sketch, paint with watercolors, photograph, document. In my studio, day after day, I go deeper in. It is where my exploration of the nature of natural spaces begins.

Throughout this poet-painter collaboration, here has been my process:

I study Tim's photographs, looking for one that will excite/energize/allow me — entry. When I find one I can “answer” to — or which echoes in some way my own experience with the White Mountains — I do a preliminary sketch of it in oils. Then I read a handful of Tim's poems: I want to hear what he is feeling.

At some point the poems and photographs are put away and I begin to work directly with the raw image on my canvas.

It is a dance. Emotion and color are my principal partners. Sometimes I will lead; sometimes emotion and color take charge, and then the paintbrush takes over.

Seeing is fleeting. If I look away for a moment, all may be lost forever.

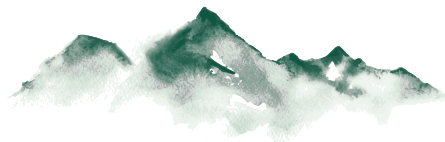
*Kathryn Field*

The Museum organizes a series of exhibitions throughout the year in both the 34 Highland Street building and the Silver Center for the Arts. Exhibitions welcome visitors of all ages and present artwork and ideas about the White Mountain region, as well works by students, faculty, and community members who live here.

**The Mission of the Museum of the White Mountains** *is to obtain, maintain, and provide access to resources and activities that educate and engage its audience with the region's artistic, historical, geographic, and cultural treasures. Its purpose is to enrich the life and scholarship of the Plymouth State University community, researchers, and the broader public.*

Admission is free and open to the public for self-guided tours.  
Monday-Friday, 10a.m. – 5p.m.  
Saturday, 11am – 4p.m.  
Closed Sundays and University Holidays.

[plymouth.edu/mwm](http://plymouth.edu/mwm)



**MUSEUM**  
OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

Art and culture come to life at Plymouth State.