

High Desert Museum adopts writing prize

September 17 is a big day for the Waterston Desert Writing Prize. Not only will the sixth annual awards ceremony be held, recognizing the overall Prize winner, the two finalists and the inaugural student essay winner, but also the High Desert Museum, Central Oregon's renowned natural and cultural history museum, will make official its adoption of the Waterston Desert Writing Prize.

An invitation and link to reserve a virtual seat at this exciting event, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, September 17, is available on the Museum's website, www.highdesertmuseum.org/waterston.

Since its inception, the Waterston Desert Writing Prize Awards Ceremony has been hosted by the High Desert Museum. The mission and goals of the Prize complement those of the High Desert Museum, emphasizing the importance of protecting deserts and creating important conversations about the issues affecting them.

Prize Founder and President Ellen Waterston states: "I believe I can speak for both boards of directors in saying this is a very exciting day. The Museum is positioned to grow the breadth of reach and depth of the Prize and, in so doing, will acquaint a larger literary audience with the Prize as well as the extraordinary spectrum of programs and activities the Museum offers."

High Desert Museum Executive Director Dana

Whitelaw calls the transition "a natural fit."

"It has been an honor to partner with the Prize for six years and a privilege to continue the brilliant work of the Waterston Desert Writing Prize," she says. "Sharing inspiration about and insight into desert landscapes and cultures crafted by such gifted writers aligns perfectly with the Museum's mission to foster understanding of and dialogue about the High Desert."

Now in its sixth year, the Waterston Desert Writing Prize honors creative non-fiction that illustrates artistic excellence, sensitivity to place, and desert literacy, with the desert as both subject and setting. The Prize recognizes the vital role deserts play worldwide as ecosystems and in the human narrative. Since its founding, the Prize has received submissions from across the United States and from more than 20 countries. The overall winner receives a cash prize, currently \$2,500, and a two-week residency at PLAYA, an artists' and scientists' residency campus in Summer Lake, Oregon.

In addition to the formalities of the transfer of the Prize to the care of the Museum, the September 17 virtual celebration will feature a reading by the 2020 Prize recipient, Hannah Hindley, of Tucson, Arizona, for her winning book proposal, "Thin Blue Dream," a collection of interconnected stories that explore the Sonoran Desert's disappearing urban waterways.

Prize finalists Eli Beck, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Leath Tonino, Ferrisburg, Vermont, will also offer brief readings from their proposals. Beck was recognized for his submission "Rude Awakenings," an examination of wilderness therapy programs in the Four Corners region of New Mexico.

Tonino submitted "Nooks and Crannies: Mapping the

(Unmappable) Waterpocket Fold with Prose Vignettes," a documentation of his experiences in Capitol Reef National Park. The essay by Al Lehto, the winner of the inaugural student essay writing competition, reflects on the many hours their artist mother spent painting in the Oregon Badlands Wilderness east of Bend, and the times they would join her.

The Prize Awards Ceremony is free, however registration is required in order to receive the ZOOM link. For more information contact info@waterstondesertwritingprize.org or call 541-480-3933. To register for the 2020 Waterston Desert Writing Prize Awards Ceremony, visit www.highdesertmuseum.org/waterston.



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