

Big Bend National Park Announces first U.S. Veteran-Artist Nick Collier as 2016 Artist in Residence

National Parks Arts Foundation begins nationwide Veterans-in-the-Arts Program

EL PASO, TEXAS, USA, November 15, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK, TEXAS -- It is 2004, Eastern Afghanistan. A young marine is driving on dark roads to pick up and deliver sniper teams into hostile mountain territory. "So, on my birthday that year I was driving an Army sniper team. A rusty, diesel, right-hand drive, manual transmission Toyota Hilux (a Toyota Tacoma) with a tape deck and a horrible suspension. There really isn't anything like driving by yourself in a hostile country in the middle of the night down a dirt road. But one of the funny things about it was that I never felt in danger, although I would have been dead if I had been stopped or ambushed. It actually made me feel like I was at home and not in a war. Like I was just out running dirt roads in my truck. I can still



Serviceman Portraits by Nick Collier

recall it, to this day. Life changing." That surreal and radiant intensity beneath underlying experience is something that every artist seeks out and hopes to catch in their work.

That marine, Nicholas Collier, is now the first NPAF Veteran Artist in Residence at Big Bend National Park. After leaving the Marines, Collier received his BFA from George Mason University, Virginia, in 2012 and his MFA Florida State University in 2016, and will be the Park's First-Ever U.S. Veteran Artist in Residence for the month of November 2016. Collier's residency is sponsored by the Big Bend Natural History Association, and will be one of two featured residencies at Big Bend. There are thousands of veterans who are also artists and the National Parks Arts Foundation is piloting this program to connect them to the incredible limitless sources of inspiration available at parks such as Big Bend.

But Collier's path to the artist's vocation might have been true but it wasn't exactly straight: "I wasn't really the typical art kid because I was also an athlete and played sports year-round. After I graduated high school I went off to college to initially pursue a graphic design degree. It seemed at first to be a very practical degree that still kept me in the art world. 2.5 years in I decided to put it on hold and join

the military.” says Collier. After leaving the Marines, he was on track to finish his original degree, but never that drawn to design, he was pulled instead towards the studio arts program. From that point on, fine arts has been his life.

Though he describes his basic artistic approach as multi-disciplinary, having long worked in a variety of sculptural practices, he has turned to portrait and landscape photography. Collier’s portraits are a fascinating mix of the documentary and the creative power of the photograph. “I’m currently working with a photographic process that involves an Afghan Box Camera that I built a few years ago. The landscape format is a departure from the first and primary use of the camera, that of portraits. I’m really interested in the physicality of the process with the camera and the challenges it creates.” Collier will also do



some developing in the field, using the same box camera as a portable photo studio, as he recently did in trekking the mountains of Colorado.

Collier will also produce an art show for visitors at the park, on November 25th, 2016 at 2 pm, followed by a presentation and lecture at 7:30 pm both at the Panther Junction Community Room. Says Collier: “More than likely this will be a show of photographs but I wouldn’t write off having the inclusion of a sculpture or two. My first love is working three-dimensionally.” The ideas are sure to strike in the unique atmosphere of the Big Bend, and that is just fine with Nick Collier. “A successful residency is one that inspires and creates growth. It’s about a response to a time, place, and situation. A circular cycle completed.”

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Nicholas Collier, Veteran Arts Resident at Big Bend

The Park Service is very excited to host these two artist residents this November. The November residency this year is shared by Collier, and Songwriter and Ecopsychologist

Russell James Pyle. As the Park’s Superintendent, Cindy Ott-Jones, explains “As the National Park Service celebrates our Centennial year in 2016, we look forward in our approach to serving park visitors, while remembering our heritage of service.” Programs like Big Bend’s residency add value dynamically to the Park experience for visitors now and in the future and represent the highest aspirations of the Park Service’s goals for the next century.

Big Bend National Park, founded in 1944, is a United States National Park located in the U.S. State of Texas on the United States-Mexico border at the most dramatic meanders of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande. The park covers 800,000 acres and comprises river canyons, Chihuahuan desert vistas, old mine buildings and other structures, and stunning rock formations and varied, multicolored geology.

The Park is also a world biosphere reserve and is one of the few national parks in the country Gold Tier certified for Dark Sky Stargazing. 2014's Artist-in-Residence, Pulitzer nominated playwright, screenwriter and photographer, Howard Korder (Boys Life, Boardwalk Empire) used the park's unique space-time and the solitude afforded by the residency to multitask, taking photographs and develop ideas for a television series.

NPAF is a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to the promotion of the National Parks of the U.S. through creating dynamic opportunities for artworks that are based in our natural and historic heritage. This project is supported by the Big Bend National Park Projects Budget, the National Endowment for the Arts, Big Bend Natural History Association, and other generous benefactors. All NPAF programs are made possible through the philanthropic support of donors of all sorts ranging from corporate sponsors, small business, and art patrons and citizen-lovers of the Parks. NPAF is always seeking new partners and donors for its wide-ranging artist-in-residence programs.

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