

State of the Art

Britt Fleming, March 30, 2008

Northography came into existence in April 2006. Over the course of the past two years, it has expanded, experimented with new forms, and matured. Membership grew from a handful of people to over 65 members, which is the number of artists who have posted work. Most of those have made return visits, but the number of members who participate on a weekly basis usually runs from 15 to 20, although we are beginning to see numbers closer to 30. These are positive statistics; but what is more encouraging is to see how many members have published their work, often developed within the unique framework of Northography.

Based on these facts, Northography has been a success. The primary purpose of the project is to encourage creativity, and it has done so. Also, through collaboration in a virtual (and hopefully relaxed) work(?)shop environment, members have been able to strive for artistic improvement. Of course, a technological project like this can never be considered a substitute for scholarship, live workshops, or spending summers in a Tyrolean villa. A website does have one advantage over all of the other venues though – it's always there. In what we think of as the real world, poets are often teachers, bartenders, technicians, and every other occupation you can think of. They have families, houses, cars, jobs, and a little bit of time left over to write. They are spread out over congested metropolitan areas, nestled in small towns, lost in suburban space. So how can they get together and talk about it, do some writing, and compare notes?

Internet technology has made it possible for those with like interests to have their own meeting place 24/7, anywhere in the world. As much as we would like to see each other's lovely faces in the flesh, opportunities to do so are few and far between. In lieu of being able to raise a few at the corner tavern, most of us will settle for electronic communication. Again – this does not replace the powerful impact of human presence, but instead augments it. Poets who had never heard of each other a year ago, now run into each other at scheduled readings. Relationships are formed, synergy takes place, and creativity gets another turbo-boost. They are creating art, as they were meant to, and loving it.

There have been challenges along the way. Many of them are the same problems one encounters in any group of like-minded individuals. They are surmountable with a little empathy and patience. Our humanity enfolds us all one and the same, so we learn to live with it. Together, we face a bigger challenge – with poetry itself. Basically, people have to learn how to read and write in order to appreciate the written word. They have to be able to read with confidence and not feel like it is *hard work*. The extent to which individuals embrace language skills is a reflection of the pervading culture. Take a look at our world and ask yourself what needs to change. The interesting thing about art, though, is that while it is a product of culture, it also has the power to change it.

Speaking of changes, there are several that have recently taken place in Northography. A “Links” link has been added beneath the “News” link. Please take a look at them and share any suggestions you might have. Also, there is a “CALENDAR” link at the top of the home page. If you look at the month of April, you’ll get an idea of what a full plate of events looks like. Once again, any suggestions are welcomed. Another change has been in membership. We have opened our arms to those living outside the borders of Minnesota. If you know of anyone, anywhere, who loves to write and works at it, please point them in this direction.

Which brings us to the future. One initiative many of you already know about is for the Minnesota

Poetry Festival. If anyone would like to join in the brainstorming session, please do so here: <http://www.minnesotapoetryfest.com/>. At this point, we're taking notes, writing outlines, doing research, and dreaming. There is a correct way of doing this, so it has to be planned carefully. The most important task will be to form a committee of talented, dedicated volunteers. The earliest projected date is sometime in 2009. You'll hear more about the MPF as we go forward. In the meantime, we'll continue to schedule readings and are always looking for new venues and themes.

Another good idea that has been brought up is for a Northography publication. It has been suggested that an editorial committee be formed to select the best work from the last two years, compile it, edit it, and publish it in a book or chapbook format. If anyone is interested in helping out with this project, please raise your hand.

Honestly, there is no end to the possibilities, so I won't go into all of them here. What I'd like to do, though, is thank all of you for contributing so much to this project. Everyone has been very supportive. Every time you post your work, you're putting your best into it, and that's the most that can be asked of anyone. Please continue to cast your spells with words and, if you feel like sharing them with the rest of us, please do so. Because without them, this website would just be a stream of electrons trapped in metal, and the world would just be a wet rock.