Four Poems by Mikel Vause

Mikel Vause

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Mountaineers dream
To stand, at once and together, in three ancient lands,
China Nepal Tibet
The apex of all geography
To see Earth’s sensuous curve on the horizon
Overarch cobalt blue eternity.
It’s ironic that below cramponed feet
Which scratch both snow and sky
Teeter precariously in thin air
10,000 feet of emerald ice
Razor-sharp grey-black rock
Fall in infinite spirals into icy darkness
Memory clouded by fatigue
Blurred with summit joy
Only halfway back to lowland safety
Fatally forgotten warnings
In the most unsuspecting places
Yet in clear view
(It all depends on perspective).
Markers in tattered Gortex
And wind-beaten rainbowed nylon,
Warning or prophecy
Magically dead—global pilgrims
Wrapped in rope clinging tenaciously to ice axes
Held in frozen suspension
Defy the pull of Gravity
Ghastly smiles beckon
Stretched tight by time
Dry wind high altitude meat-locker cold
With bony frostbitten fingers
Offer unsuspecting exhausted or unprepared
The invitation of frigid immobility--
Mortal monuments cast in endless darkness.

Kathmandu
April 12, 2011
Mani Walls

And I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things.

Wilfrid Noyse said "It is in our nature to go out"
Since beginning of days
Step out of casual collective comfort,
Escape the jail-house of civilization
Explore the fringes of existence--
Physical and metaphysical
Touch dark spots of maps
Search for freshness
Investigate lost innocence
Lean against the wind
Scratch the surface of iron-hard ice
Taunt tendons, cramped muscle
Grasp cold rock—dig for razor-sharp flakes
Find what's been lost
Obey the nature of being
Humans are made to explore
Evolution at its finest
Bipedal upright stance
Big brain to process
Visual perception
All the right tools
To seek mysteries
In the lock-box of creation
In the Himalayas
It's always been so
Mani walls prayer wheels cave shrines
Older than the west
Testify of pilgrims
So far back time has forgot
The record of advancement
Scratched on cave walls
Pictographs are records of adventure
Petroglyphs the poetry of the past

Kathmandu
April 12, 2011
HIMALAYAN THUNDER

Experience is the way
Into the soul
It carries us from sunlight
To shadow and back

Feel rain
Smell of deep freshness
Speaks new life
Thunder explodes
Violent lightening
Shatters night sky

Above Kyanjin Gompa
Ignites Langtang Lirung
Exposes its deadly secrets
To all who brave the fury
Fifteen-thousand feet below

Away from cities
Uninhibited by science
And human reason
Raw power of God
Works without constraint

Pulls tools from the arsenal
Of creation
Revs up the reorganization of matter
Making the perfect more perfect
Without human consent

Kathmandu
April 1, 2011

QOMOLANGMA’S FROZEN RIVER OF TEARS

Next to the tent
Stones
Quiet and nondescript
Rest on living ice

Rongbunk Glacier
Qomolangma’s frozen river of tears
Run toward
Great Tibetan Plateau

The grave moves
Secretly as Gravity
Grinds Sherpa bones
And prayer beads to dust

A mound
Among a cluster
Of yellow tents
And fresh snow

Repository
Of right-sized rock
For tent flaps
Exposes boney fingers

That point
In accusation
Toward the Sunrise
And Heaven

Base Camp Mt Everest, North-side
April 24, 2011

Mikel Vause is Professor of English and Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Weber State University. He is an avid mountaineer.