

# Picture perfect

By Jeff Mucciarone

Thu Oct 04, 2007, 11:41 AM EDT

For Dorothy Kerper Monnelly, the Great Marsh provides her with an endlessly changing subject that can be both dramatic and peaceful.

The award winning photographer has documented, via black and white photograph, the Great Marsh, which spans more than 20,000 acres of mudflats, marsh and beaches from Cape Ann to New Hampshire, in her recently published photography book, *Between Land and Sea: The Great Marsh*. Her work is currently on display at the Mass Audubon Visual Arts Center in Canton. The exhibition officially opened Saturday and will run until Jan. 20.



“It’s so splendid and magical,” she said of the marsh. “The variety is pretty endless.”

And though her medium of choice is black and white, Monnelly said she loves color photography as well, but has found black and white works best for her.

“I’ve always responded more strongly to black and white than color,” she said. “It just feels more evocative of the experience that I’m having.”

The marsh, which provides lush habitat for creatures of land, sea and air, has filled up the past 15 or 16 years of Monnelly’s life in photography.

But her journey behind the lens of a camera began well before the marsh took hold of her. Monnelly, 70, began taking a major interest in photography when she was in her 20s.

“It goes back a long time,” said Monnelly, who has lived in Ipswich for the past 35 years.

While she’s been taking photographs for much of her life, Monnelly officially set her teaching career aside in 1991 to snap pictures on a full-time basis. The oldest photograph in the Great Marsh collection is a 1989 sand pattern, which can form as the changing tides retreat, leaving behind winding lines and swirls.

“It can really make a beautiful pattern,” said Monnelly, who earned her bachelor’s degree in philosophy at Wheaton College and a master’s degree in education from Harvard University. “Those patterns say big things to me.”

Monnelly said many of the world’s great thinkers have said people are becoming less connected with nature.

“We’re trying to find a way to counteract that,” said Monnelly, who grew up in up-state New York, before moving to Massachusetts to attend college. “We’re trying to rediscover our delight in the landscape.”

Along with Canton, her work is also featured in an exhibit in Denver, and another is set to open in Seattle this spring. She's especially excited with the Canton location, as she sees the site fitting well with her work.

"It's just a fabulous property," Monnelly said. "This Audubon is just a gem right in the middle of Canton."

The Canton location has a very clear sense of mission of connecting people with the natural landscape, she said.

"I think that's something that we all need," Monnelly said. "I think in connecting with the landscape, we connect with ourselves."

Monnelly also said she was very pleased with how the Audubon displayed her work in Canton.

"They did a good job of hanging and displaying and lighting," she said. "They really know what they're doing."

With her teaching background in mind, she particularly likes the Audubon's focus on teaching children.

"I'm always interested in teaching children," she said. "This is a good place to start. It's very family friendly, child friendly."

And while Monnelly is thrilled with the finished product, the process of publishing her photographs took some time, as she began the task in 2001. After being turned down several times, Monnelly's work caught the eye of George Brazillar, who she said is sort of the gold standard in the industry. Brazillar published her book in April.

"I got very lucky," she said. "I'm very proud to have him publish my book."

On top of the exhibition, Monnelly will take part in a number of events at the Audubon site in Canton in the coming months. On Oct. 18 at 10 a.m., she'll be present to discuss her photographs and the natural world.

On Nov. 3 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Monnelly will host an informal walk through the sanctuary's grounds as she discusses the landscape and the elements of images.

For more information on Monnelly, go to [www.dorothykerpermonnelly.com](http://www.dorothykerpermonnelly.com).

For more information on the Mass Audubon Visual Arts Center, go to [www.massaudubon.org/visualarts](http://www.massaudubon.org/visualarts).