

## 'Stalking' place, moment enhances Derry art teacher's photography



Derry Area High School art teacher Richard McWherter with his photo "Reach," selected as one of two State Museum of Pennsylvania Purchase Award winners.

When Derry Area High School art teacher Richard McWherter submitted his black-and-white photo titled "Reach" for entry into the annual statewide juried "Art of the State" exhibition, he probably expected his artwork would make its way back to him after the show.

Pennsylvania first lady Susan Corbett helped select McWherter's photo as one of two State Museum of Pennsylvania Purchase Award winners, meaning it will go on extended exhibition and become part of the museum's permanent collection.

More than 1,700 artworks were submitted, with 122 selected to be part of the 47th annual exhibition, which runs through Sept. 14.

McWherter said he often spends weeks or months, sometimes even years "stalking" locations, waiting for the right conditions for his ideal photo.

"I'll look at a scene and I say 'Oh, this would be better at a different time of year or a different time of day.' I come back and I check those at different times of the year and different times of the day to see what the lighting would be like," said McWherter, who has artwork available for viewing and purchase in the Latrobe Art Center, Greensburg Art Center and Associated Artists of Pittsburgh as well as on his website, [www.richardmcwherter.com](http://www.richardmcwherter.com).

"Sometimes I stalk locations for years," he said. "There was one covered bridge I wanted to take a picture of, and I drove past it for about 20 years until I got the picture that I liked."

There was no time for location stalking when it came to "Reach."

On a trip to California, McWherter made a quick side trip to Muir Woods in hopes of capturing compelling photos of the towering redwoods and landscapes there. Traffic delayed his arrival in the park, but the brief period of late-afternoon sun remaining yielded the perfect lighting conditions for his award-winning photo of a cluster of redwood roots emerging from an embankment.

Taking a good photograph is only the beginning of McWherter's artistic work. He later uploads the images into computer photo-editing programs and applies digital brushstrokes to add a more expressionistic style.

"I break the picture down into different layers, and each layer I do something different," he said. "A different brush size or different brush pressure, something different to each layer."

Having a talented and passionate artist as part of the high school art staff is a major benefit to the Derry Area School District, Superintendent David Welling said.

"I'm very proud that Richard is part of this staff and certainly glad that he shares those talents and insights as he's teaching art here with our students," Welling said. "We're fortunate to have somebody with his talents on board with us."

McWherter teaches "ceramics and drawing and sculpture — everything except photography," but says the same principles and elements are important in all forms of art.

"The photograph, like all art, is a dream made tangible," McWherter said. "It represents a physical extension of a memory for me. My goal is to lead the eye through an image with the same effect that a storyteller weaves a tale. I want to go beyond just recording a time and place; I want to capture that moment, how it makes me feel, and share it with others."

By Greg Reinbold, Trib Total Media

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