



A celebration of New Jersey's natural beauty

Dwight Hiscano, organizer of the Highlands Juried Art Exhibit, stands with photographers Jim Somers, George Aronson, Nick Jaramillo and Caryn Seifer, some of the artist featured in the Highlands Art Exhibit on display in the Atrium Gallery at the Morris County Administration Building and celebrates the beauty of New Jersey. Morristown. NJ 1/25/2017 (Robert Sciarrino | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

By [Mark Di Ionno | The Star-Ledger](#) on January 29, 2017 at 8:50 AM, updated January 29, 2017 at 3:44 PM

The roads rise and fall over ridges and through valleys, bending and dancing like guide ropes of asphalt to New Jersey's great beauty.

The state's industrial ugliness and urban gridlock is far off to the east, viewed only from the very tops of the highest and closest outcrops of the Highlands mountains.

Those who lampoon the state as a "What Exit?" gray expanse of belching refineries and power plants or corporate park sameness, simply don't know the place. Or they lack the artistic vision to see it.

This column is a celebration of those who see the natural beauty which, in truth, is all around us, from the Meadowlands and Highlands, to the Shore and Pinelands.

In the atrium of the Morris County administration building on 12 Court St. in Morristown are about 30 works of art specific to the flora, fauna and landscape of the Highlands, the band of Appalachian foothills that cut through North and Northwest New Jersey, from Bergen to Hunterdon counties. Eighty-eight towns sit atop those rocks, where the rivers and streams flow reservoirs that supply drinking water for much of North Jersey, including its largest cities.

It is a place of heaven-to-earth vistas that inspire awe. It is a place where one can stop and see the minutia of wildlife; bugs on leaves, fish gaping for insects.

Equally important, it is a place of state and national history, where settlers braved isolation to carve out homesteads, and industrial dreamers found ways to dig deep into those rocks and extract iron ore.

Dwight Hiscano is the curator for the 4th Annual Highlands Art Exhibit, which runs from now until March 16 on the second floor atrium of the Morris County administration building. He is a

photographer, a photography teacher and a trustee of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, which sponsors the exhibit with Morris Arts council.

"The point of the exhibit is to raise awareness of the environmental issues that face the Highlands," said Hiscano, who lives in Summit. "It's about the water, of course, and over-development. But, to me, it's also a patriotic issue. These are landscapes that connect us with our past. It's heartbreaking when we lose them."

One of the photographs in the exhibit is of Waterwheel Farm in Fredon by Eduard Moldoveanu. The red barns and horse stables are enveloped by pastures and framed by the Kittatinny Mountains.

"That's pretty much the classic Highlands landscape," said Hiscano.

In that pastoral genre are oil paintings of barns and fields beaten down by winter. New Jersey's rural life - especially in the decrepitude of old houses and ruined silos - always makes for interesting, moody art.

But more than those rural landscapes are the intimate details of wildlife, some within the close-to-home suburbs of the Highlands.

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Photographer Nick Jaramillo of Ledgewood caught a Barred Owl perched in Chatham Township's portion of the Great Swamp as a smaller bird, a Bluegray Gnatcatcher, buzzed its head.

Caryn Seifer captured a white swan, illuminated in the gloom of a winter day, on the lake at Loantaka Park in Harding Township.

"I used to walk my dog there every day," said Seifer, who lives in Morris Township. "This picture was part of a blog I did where I was publishing a new photograph every day for 365 days. It was color but I converted it to a black and white duotone (for contrast)."

George Aronson, of Morristown had a similar stark winter scene from the Great Swamp, where fallen trees in the wetlands float toward an expanse of standing trees, water and sky.

"This is one of my earliest photographs," said Aronson, who traded a career in IT for landscape photography in the 1990s and whose work has been featured in many conservation publications. "It was shot on film, but I digitized it and gave it a 19th Century treatment called 'cyanotype' which gives it that blueish tint."

One of the most interesting photographs is the minute detail of "Ice Approaching Waterfall," taken in Boonton by Jim Somers of Denville.

Somers captured the scene in the early morning light, with the blue sky and orange sun at dawn reflected in the water and ice. The contrast between the flowing water and still ice, makes the colors appear to flow and stand still at the same time.

"I love photographing water and ice, for the color and as form-generators," Somers said. "In the ripples and reflections you get these wonderful abstract elements of color and shapes."

It is this type of artistic sensibility and the artists' eye for detail, that bring the Highlands to life in this exhibit.

From "Seagulls over Spruce Run," by Charles Dexter," to the "First Snow in the Musconetcong Valley," by Laura Brown, the exhibit is a montage - and homage -- of the Highlands' natural wonders and our state's inherent beauty.

It is ours to behold, not only in an art gallery, but also from a hiking trail, bike path or car window.

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