

NEWS RELEASE

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Trees, Landscape Photographs by Mark Muse, on View through June 2 at Adkins Arboretum

The magic of momentary effects of light and atmosphere permeates Mark Muse's exquisite landscape photographs in his exhibit *Trees*, on view in the Adkins Arboretum Visitor's Center through June 2. In both black-and-white and color photos, he captures trees ghostly in the fog, sweeping mountain vistas and billows of leaves awash with sunlight. There will be a reception to meet the artist on Saturday, April 22 from 3 to 5 p.m.

For Muse, who lives in Shepherdstown, W.Va., photography is an excuse to walk on nearby farms and travel to the many parks and national forests in Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania where he shoots most of his photographs. Often sleeping in his car to be up in time for the early-morning light and mist, he finds moments when light and shadow are just right to tell the stories of the trees, wild grasses and windswept bedrock that he has discovered.

Massive hemlock trunks soar upwards in a large black-and-white photo titled "Hemlocks, *Tsuga Canadensis*, Heart's Content, Pennsylvania." Thanks to Muse's remarkable sensitivity to tone and texture, clear sunlight sculpts every crevasse and ridge in their rough bark and every delicate needle along their branches. Shot in a stand of old-growth forest, these trees are giants towering above the forest floor.

"This photograph doesn't even convey how big they really are," Muse said. "Those ferns down at the bottom are probably over knee high, so just picture yourself standing there with them halfway up your legs."



*Mark Muse, "Hemlocks,"
archival pigment print, 16" x 24"*

A keen observer, Muse has learned much from his travels with his camera. The geology of the Appalachian region fascinates him, as do its weather patterns and the subtle seasonal differences in the quality of light and delicacy of leaves. With a passion for the natural landscape, he composes his photos to reveal the beauty and character in a weather-beaten sandstone outcrop, a red oak shaped by the west wind or lichen-covered hawthorns caught in a swirling mist.

Muse earned a degree in photography in the late 1960s but only became a serious photographer a dozen years ago. He credits his career in the printing industry for the development of his skill in working with photographs.

“I’ve spent years in the darkroom—literally, years,” he said.

Muse processes his digital photographs with great care and skill. Coaxing astonishing clarity from a confusing tangle of tree trunks, twigs and vines, he turned “Along the Potomac, Maryland” into a warm, animated dance of subtle grays and browns where every detail can be seen and enjoyed.

“None of these are just straight captures,” Muse explained. “I do a lot of work getting things balanced.”

Most of Muse’s photos are printed with archival pigments on a professional-level inkjet printer, but he also enjoys experimenting with platinum prints in which a digital negative is substituted for the customary film negative. A shot of tupelo trees growing amid billows of delicate woodland plants owes its incredibly warm, nuanced tones to this more traditional process.

Muse said, “The subtlety and the smoothness of the tonality, it’s really nice. So I’m going to be doing a lot more platinum once I retire.”

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum’s ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view through June 2 at the Arboretum Visitor’s Center located at 12610 Eveland Road near Tuckahoe State Park in Ridgely. Contact the Arboretum at 410-634-2847, ext. 0 or info@adkinsarboretum.org for gallery hours.

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Adkins Arboretum is a 400-acre native garden and preserve at the headwaters of the Tuckahoe Creek in Caroline County. Open year round, the Arboretum is the region’s resource for native plants and education programs about nature, ecology and wildlife conservation gardening. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

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