



Bob Bickers of Murrysville: "Desert Yucca."



Jeanne Daly of Murrysville: "Blue Pacific Irises."



Ed Straub of Murrysville: "garden."

SHOWCASE OF TALENT

Penn State New Ken's East Suburban Artists League exhibit features local artwork

BY REX RUTKOSKI
VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

Al Owcar said he just wanted to give people "a good feeling" with his art. The former Lower Burrell resident and Springdale native is still doing that even after his death Oct. 29 at the age of 80.

His long battle with heart disease did not keep him from pursuing his passion for art, which lives on in public places and private residences throughout the Alle-Kiski Valley.

A painting of flowers, which he completed for the East Suburban Artist League annual show this year at Penn State, New Kensington Campus, has been hung in the gallery in tribute to him.

The show, featuring work from artists in a variety of media, is under way daily through Dec. 29. There will be a meet-the-artist reception at 7:30 p.m. Friday in the gallery.

"Dad loved painting. I am the oldest of three, and I remember sneaking downstairs to the basement with my sister just to smell the oil-paint aroma that was there when he painted,"

recalls Sherry Potocnak of Allegheny Township, one of Owcar's daughters.

He initially worked in oil, then started colored pencil and was just beginning to try acrylics when he died.

"It was good therapy for him, because he could no longer golf or go fly fishing," Potocnak says.

He had undergone a quadruple bypass in 1981 and had a second one 11 years later. "He had good and bad days but always managed to get up and do something," Potocnak says.

Owcar was drawn to landscapes as subject matter because of his love for nature and the outdoors.

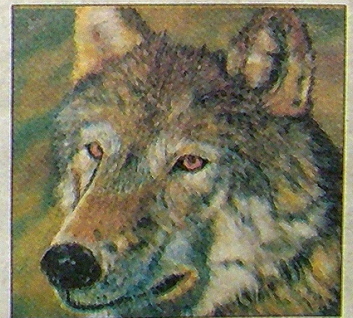
"His one regret in life was that after he retired he never traveled so he could take pictures and then paint. He always wanted to go to the New England states to find things to inspire

him," his daughter said. "Dad painted what he liked. He had thousands of pictures of flowers, landscapes, old barns and more stored in his computer just waiting for a painting."

Owcar would drive for hours looking at the scenery. If he found something he liked, he would take a dozen photos of it from every angle.

"He never copied a place or thing in a painting. He would paint it as he saw it," Potocnak said. "His painting had to meet his standards, or it would end up in the trash. He never liked anyone looking at his paintings until they were finished and they were exactly the way he wanted them."

Randy Owcar of Allegheny Township said his dad's painting of an orange iris in this month's show came from a visit to a friend's house who



Dorcas Deforno of Kiski Township: "Wolf."

grows a lot of flowers. "He had never seen an orange iris before, he had his camera with him and thought that it was so unusual that he was compelled to paint its beauty."

That beauty and spirit survives in Owcar's work say those who know him.

Dorcas Deforno of Kiski Township, who has two paintings in the exhibit — a wolf and a red boat from Maine —

East Suburban Artists League annual show

When: Daily through Dec. 29; 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Friday; noon-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Where: Penn State, New Kensington Campus, Route 780, Upper Burrell

Admission: Free

Free Meet-the-artist reception: 7:30 p.m. Friday in the gallery

Details: 724-334-6004; www.nk.psu.edu, click on "News and Events," then "Photo Gallery"



SUBMITTED BY EAST SUBURBAN ARTISTS LEAGUE AND THE FAMILY OF AL OWCAR

The late Al Owcar (left) stands in front of one of his paintings at last year's East Suburban Artists exhibit. Owcar died in October, at the age of 80.

says she's pleased to see Owcar honored. "He is going to be missed by a lot of artists, close friends and family," she says. "Al was very helpful in teaching me to paint in these past seven years."

Deforno shared her friend's sense of accomplishment in "making a painting become real."

Ed Straub of Murrysville, president of East Suburban Artists League, was impressed with his artistic talent. "In particular, I liked the work he did with colored pencils, such as his painting, 'Ants in your Plants.'"

Like Owcar, Straub finds art "a relaxing way to spend time" after retirement. He has entered an oil of Renziehausen Park Garden in McKeesport and a watercolor of roses in that same park's rose garden. "I just paint whatever I feel like painting," he says.

Jean Ross of Kiski Township, who works in oil and watercolor, says she identifies with Owcar's strong feelings for nature. "I like to show people the beauty of our local area," she says.

A painting of the Kiski River is one of her works in the exhibit.

Patricia Dickun of Washington Township is represented with a pastel portrait and an oil landscape. "I enjoy the feelings I get while in the process of creating art and then recalling those feelings while viewing it," she says.

Jeanne Daly of Murrysville said she had always wanted to take up art and finally did after retiring from teaching. "I like the expressive freedom of the brush and the delight of seeing how colors interact and flow," she explains. She has entered a pastel she calls "Blue Pacific Irises."

Lane Neff of Murrysville is exploring creativity through photography, represented in this show with some travel views from the road. "I'm drawn to the simple details of a subject," Neff says.

The process of creation and imagination is fascinating and freeing to artist-lawyer Bob Bickers of Murrysville, who has hung "Desert Yucca," a scene from one of his favorite places, Big Bend National Park in Texas. "Making something recognizable from mere pigment is amazing. Making something that can touch the human heart is nothing less than a miracle."



Jean Ross of Kiski Township: "Vine."



The painting Owcar would have entered this year, an Orange Iris, will be hung in tribute to him.

Rex Rutkoski can be reached at rrutkoski@tribweb.com.