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Saratoga Waldorf teacher subject of Vik Muniz subway art

Michael Whitney of Schuylerville and his children met Gov. Andrew Cuomo at unveiling of mural

By Wendy Liberatore Thursday, January 5, 2017



The photo posted on the Twitter account of Gov. Andrew Cuomo (left) with Michael Whitney and his children in front of the Vik Muniz mosaic of Whitney in the Second Avenue subway station in New York City. (Executive Chamber)

A Waldorf school art teacher will be forever memorialized as a "typical New Yorker" at the Second Avenue subway stop.

A life-size image of Michael Whitney, created by international photographer and sculptor Vik Muniz, is assembled in mosaic tiles at 72nd Street in New York City.

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"How cool is that," said Whitney who visited his recently unveiled image on New Year's Day. "It's unbelievable to stand next to yourself in mosaic."

The Waldorf School in Saratoga Springs practical arts teacher and father of three worked a dozen years for Muniz when both lived in Brooklyn. He built all of Muniz's cabinets, tables, sculpture pedestals and other high-end furniture for the artist. One day, prepared to install a new door for Muniz, he showed up in an orange shirt and ended up in a photo shoot.

"He had me pose with all different facial expressions, looking different ways," said Whitney who now lives in Schuylerville. "He said he wanted me because I was a regular guy from New York. It was a fun experience but I had no expectations."

Then two years later, Muniz's assistant sent Whitney a photo of his image being created in tiles in Turin, Italy.

"I was pretty excited," said Whitney. At that point, "I took the shirt and put it in a drawer."

Whitney wore that orange shirt again when he went to the unveiling with his three girls, Lizzy, Flora and Vivienne. Gov. Andrew Cuomo was there to see the mosaics, too. Whitney and the Governor were captured together in photograph, next to his mosaic, that the Governor tweeted out.

"I didn't expect that," said Whitney. "That was a cool experience."

In addition to Muniz, works artists Sarah Sze, Chuck Close and Jean Shin are also featured on the Second Avenue subway line at 96th, 86th and 63rd streets respectively.

The New York Times calls the subway art "one of the most ambitious contemporary art projects that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has ever undertaken."