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ARTS

Artist milks thousands of BIC pens for stunning landscapes

Sarah Hauer Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

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[Shane McAdams](#) doesn't press pen to paper, but he goes through thousands of pens each year.



Artist Shane McAdams uses ink from ballpoint pens to create the colorful effects in the panels of "Splayed Willow." Sarah Hauer / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.

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The Cedarburg-based artist creates abstract landscapes using the ink he "milks" from everyday ballpoint pens — pulling the pens apart and blowing the ink out of the tubes.

To create the five panels in "Splayed Willow," McAdams used wood from a Watertown willow tree, treated it and then applied the ink from ballpoint pens he collected. The actual event is one single, fast sequence that takes about 10 minutes. McAdams applies the ink to the panel and then with gravity, resin and a little magic (a blowtorch) he creates the stunning landscapelike forms. The art nearly makes itself.

"It's more clever than complex," McAdams said.

McAdams buys pens in bulk, spending about \$6,000 a year on them. His favorite: [BIC Cristal](#). In his studio, McAdams said he has barrels of pens that don't work for his art like certain greens and bright blues.



Shane McAdams creates work like this one — "Pen Blow 155." It is on display at the Museum of Wisconsin Art by blowing ink from ballpoint pens. *Shane McAdams*

For some works, such as his series of pen blows titled by number, the art comes from the physical act of blowing the ink out of the plastic tube.

"It's like playing the trumpet," he said. McAdams said it takes the ink from about 10 to 15 pens to create the one-foot tiles.



A selection of his work is on view at the [Museum of Wisconsin Art](#) in West Bend in "[Shane McAdams: The Accidental Landscape](#)." The exhibition continues through March 12.

McAdams said that to him the ink falling onto a panel creates a more natural landscape than drawing a tree.

He's material-driven and creates effects for his artwork. One of his methods is soaking rolls of paper in buckets with ink from permanent markers. The paper soaks up the ink and then McAdams selects the landscapes he likes best.



Shane McAdam's "Sharpie Landscape 53" is made from dipping a roll of paper into a bucket with ink from permanent markers. It's featured in his exhibition at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, "Shane McAdams: The Accidental Landscape." *Shane McAdams*

The landscape in "Mesa Quick" was created with the help of cold winter nights in Wisconsin. McAdams threw gelatinized water at a styrofoam board when the temperature was least 5 degrees below zero. The water would flash freeze on the board and then act as a mask when he took a blowtorch to it. He then painted and added styrofoam dioramas.

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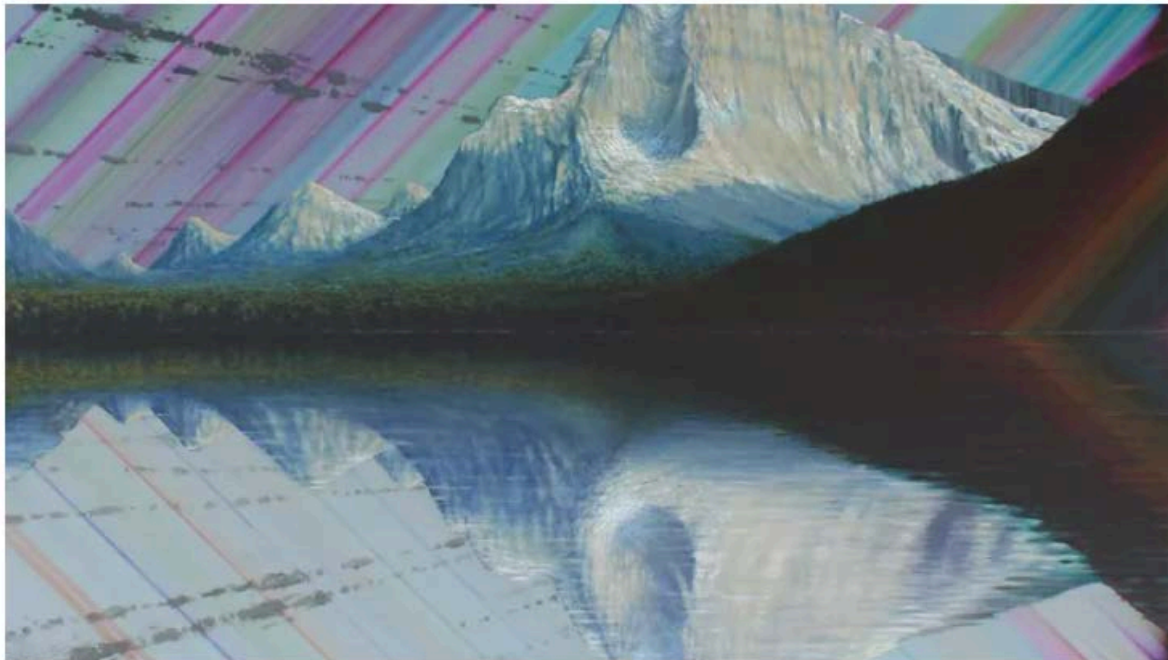
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"I want to make the Grand Canyon," McAdams said. "I want to make those things we see in nature that we think, 'How the hell did that happen.' I don't want to paint it, I want to make it. I want to be the watchmaker god that rolls the ball down and sets everything in motion."



Shane McAdams used wood from a Watertown willow tree to create "Splayed Willow," which is on view at the Museum of Wisconsin Art. *Shane McAdams*



"Nature Sandwich" by Shane McAdams, on view at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, combines pen ink and painting. *Shane McAdams*

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