



February 1, 2013



"Synthetic Landscape (Yeti)" 2010



"Synthetic Landscape (Lichen)" 2012

Brooklyn-based artist [Shane McAdams](#) combines traditional oils and acrylics with commonplace office supplies such as glue and ballpoint pens, creating illusory landscapes for his *Synthetic Landscapes* series. Inspired by the geological wonders he witnessed during his childhood on a Navajo reservation, McAdams creates artworks that reveal themselves through layers rendered with different media. He suspends lakes, rock formations and forests among seas of abstraction, allowing us to glimpse at pieces of vistas as if peaking through an opening in the clouds. Take a look at some of his works below, images courtesy of Shane McAdams.

## Artist milks thousands of BIC pens for stunning landscapes



(Photo: Sarah Hauer / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Shane McAdams (<http://www.shanemcadams.com/>) doesn't press pen to paper, but he goes through thousands of pens each year.

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 ([https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss\\_2?url=search-alias%3Doffice-products&field-keywords=bic+cristal](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_2?url=search-alias%3Doffice-products&field-keywords=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. (Photo: 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](http://www.wisconsinart.org/) (<http://www.wisconsinart.org/>) in West Bend in "[Shane McAdams: The Accidental Landscape](http://www.wisconsinart.org/exhibitions/shane-mcadams-the-accidental-landscape.aspx)" (<http://www.wisconsinart.org/exhibitions/shane-mcadams-the-accidental-landscape.aspx>). 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.



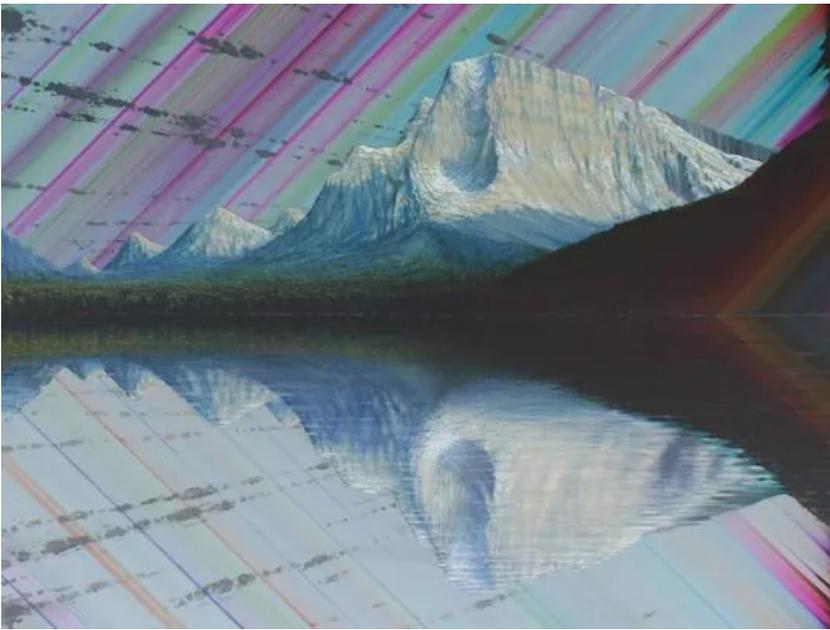
Shane McAdam's "Sharpie Landscape 53" is made from dipping a roll of paper into a bucket with ink from permanent markers. It's featured in his exhibition at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, "Shane McAdams: The Accidental Landscape." (Photo: Shane McAdams)

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.

"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. (Photo: Shane McAdams)



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

ARTS

# Artists plan road trip across Wisconsin to find art 'in the middle'



This map is posted in the war room for the “High, Low, Middle” project, a weeklong road trip across Wisconsin looking for a more viable, organic way of discovering art. Credit: Shane McAdams

An online journal about visual art, the urban landscape and design. Mary Louise Schumacher, the Journal Sentinel's art and architecture critic, leads the discussion and a community of writers contribute to the dialogue.

April 18, 2015

How many artistic inventions and inspirations have been birthed by road-tripping artists?

Three artists plan to travel across Wisconsin in an attempt to escape the echo chamber of the art world as it exists in centers

like New York, Berlin, Los Angeles, London and Tokyo, and experiment with an organic curatorial model.

Shane McAdams, a Cedarburg- and Brooklyn-based artist and Art City contributor; Mike Womack, an artist and dealer living in Brooklyn and Boulder, Colo.; and Scott Zieher of Zieher Smith Gallery in New York will spend a week on the road in a U-Haul gathering art, artifacts and evidence. They hope to collect a "visual core sample" of art in the middle, between the high and low culture of America.

McAdams will blog for Art City during the sojourn, and the trio will report and share their visual discoveries and musings by taking over my Instagram account ([marylouises](#)) for the week.

The de facto art-world critique is born from more than a decade of raucous debate among the artists and was set in motion when the three met for a drink in New York recently. Zieher suggested Wisconsin might be a good test case for their theory. They like the locale for its diversity and range, "from the bleeding edge to all-out-kitsch." Wisconsin might be among the most unbalanced and eccentric regional art centers in a brave new visual world, they suggest.

"Could it be that the most fertile environment for art making in 2015 could be found somewhere in between high and low, somewhere between East and West, somewhere in the middle?" they ask in their written statement about the "High, Middle, Low" project.

Part of their theory, too, is that prestigious U.S. curators tend to create culture and appropriate the work of artists rather than observe, document and consider it openly and firsthand.

The backdrop for this project is an art world that is increasingly discussing its wayward ways, particularly the way the art market dominates and skews who and what hold influence. The Art Newspaper recently reported that nearly one-third of major solo shows in U.S. museums feature artists represented by just five top galleries, for instance.

Michelle Grabner, an artist and Wisconsin native, set out to curate last year's Whitney Biennial in a way not unlike what McAdams, Womack

and Zieher suggest, but found that the bureaucratic demands of the institution made that all but impossible. She's regularly said the process is unfair.

Some of the stops on McAdams, Womack and Zieher's Wisconsin whistle-stop tour include West Bend, Madison, Hollandale, Spring Green, Richland Center, Sparta, Black River Falls, Port Edwards, Minocqua and Presque Isle.

At the end of the journey, the artists will present the art, artifacts and findings in a [one-night, pop-up exhibit](#) hosted by the Museum of Wisconsin Art at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Kenilworth Square East, 1925 E. Kenilworth Ave. The event will take place April 24 from 5 p.m. to midnight. An artist talk will be held from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

*Mary Louise Schumacher is the Journal Sentinel's art and architecture critic. Art City is her award-winning cultural page that features more than 20 contributing writers. Email her at [mschumacher@journalsentinel.com](mailto:mschumacher@journalsentinel.com).*



#### **About Mary Louise Schumacher**

Mary Louise Schumacher is the Journal Sentinel's art and architecture critic. She writes about culture, design, the urban landscape and Milwaukee's creative community. [Art City](#) is her award-winning cultural page and a community of more than 20 contributing writers and artists. Follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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# The New York Times

September 16, 2012

## Prints That Tell a Story

By **SUZY MENKES**



**LONDON** — Digital patterns, painterly brushstrokes, mighty splodges and tiny images — British fashion has made a reputation for “all the new that’s fit to print.”

That mantra defines opening days of a joyous and colorful **London Fashion Week**. The summer 2013 shows vibrate with pattern, but with a fresh story line: the narrative print, telling a tale in tiny pictures.

Even **Matthew Williamson**’s show Sunday, celebrating his label’s 15th birthday, had digital landscape prints of the Indian state of Kerala, inspired by the New York artist Shane McAdams, to contrast with the clothing’s full-on Indian inspirations. The more colorful tie-dye effects, as though from the powders thrown around in India’s Holi celebrations, bled vivid shades onto simple clothes like white pants.

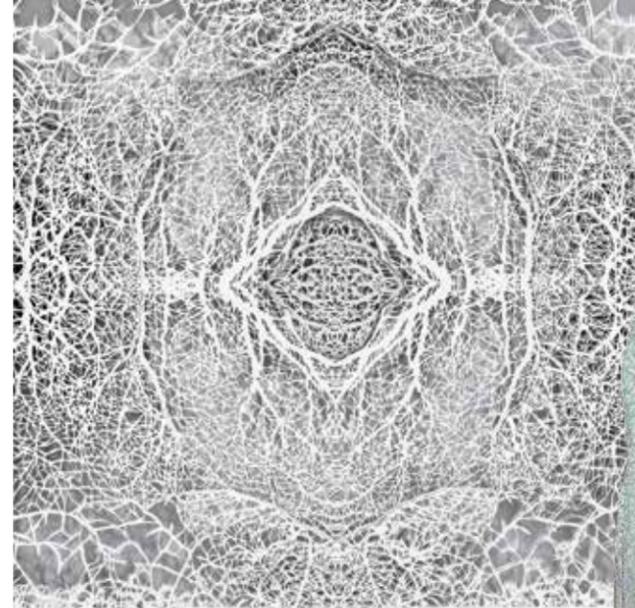
# Galeria do rock

Criada para acomodar as obras do *stone* Ron Wood, a *Scream* é hoje uma das galerias mais interessantes de Londres **POR BIJU BELINKY**

Uma rua calma em Londres, próxima à caótica Oxford Street, esconde uma das galerias mais interessantes da cidade. A fachada discreta contrasta com as obras vibrantes lá dentro, que chamam a atenção de quem passa pela calçada. Sob o lema “arte pop e acessível”, o espaço nasceu quase por acaso, quando Jamie Wood se aventurava como marchand de seu padraço, ninguém menos que Ron Wood. Além de guitarrista dos Rolling Stones, Ron é, desde jovem, pintor diletante. Em uma pausa da banda, o *stone* voltou sua atenção para as telas, enquanto Jamie tentava mudar a opinião do mercado, que via o roqueiro apenas como um artista-celebridade. Para exibir as telas do padraço e de outros artistas mais pop que o sisu-



O verão 2013 de Williamson inspira-se na obra de Shane McAdams. Ao lado, a *Scream* exibe trabalhos de Chris Bracey



Look do inverno 2013-14 de Matthew Williamson, inspirado em obra de Caroline Jane Harris

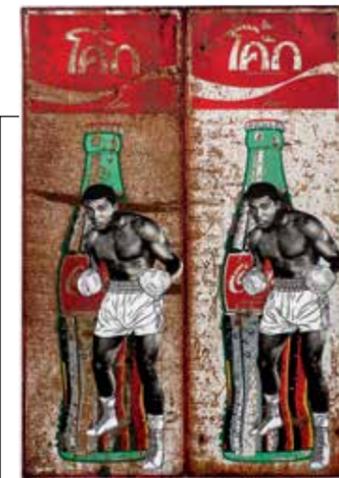
do e esnobe establishment das artes britânicas torce o nariz, decidi abrir sua própria galeria, que batizou de *Scream* - o irmão Tyrone Wood também entrou no negócio. Deu certo e hoje o espaço é visto como ótimo lugar para garimpar nomes em ascensão e também obras que fundem arte com moda, música e outros nichos culturais com influência pop. Desde 2006, a *Scream* vem apostando em artistas como o britânico Chris Bracey, que chamou a atenção da mídia inglesa com suas obras em neon. “Buscamos nomes emergentes e gostamos de manter uma coleção variada, vinda de todos os cantos do mundo”, explica Melissa Digby-Bell, diretora criativa. “O trabalho que mostramos é impactante e muito pop, o que funciona bem com o público.” E ela avisa que estão procurando por

artistas brasileiros. “Sou muito fã de os gêmeos”, completa Jamie, que tem planos de conhecer melhor o mercado paulista nos próximos anos - além da *Scream*, ele comanda a Outer Sanctum, empresa que realiza eventos e parcerias para grandes marcas também no âmbito cultural. A galeria mantém um bom diálogo com moda. Até o dia 19 deste mês, ela recebe Hand to Earth, exposição em parceria com o estilista Matthew Williamson, que tem sua loja próxima à *Scream* - a área também abriga a Fitzrovia, região que chama a atenção por sua crescente concentração de novas galerias. A mostra reúne obras da britânica Caroline Jane Harris e do americano Shane McAdams, que usaram a natureza como temática para criar trabalhos que inspiraram coleções recentes de Williamson. O estilista transfor-

Like a Rolling Stone: o galerista Jamie Wood



mou as paisagens fantásticas e de cores saturadas de McAdams em estampas do seu verão 2013, e os intrincados ramos de árvore das obras de Harris em *prints* do próximo inverno. No fim do mês, o espaço recebe mostra do chinês Ye Hongxing, que já expôs suas telas feitas com adesivos na loja de Christian Louboutin em Miami, durante a Art Basel. Por uma ironia do destino, a galeria que nasceu para representar Ron Wood não tem mais ele entre seus artistas. Em 2008, o roqueiro rendeu muito assunto para os tabloides ingleses, quando trocou a mãe de Jamie, Jo Wood, com quem foi casado por mais de 20 anos, por uma jovem modelo russa, o que provocou o rompimento com a família. A galeria, que no início chegou a representar artistas estabelecidos (Robert Crumb expôs ali), encontrou de vez sua vocação em jovens talentos. “Demoramos algum tempo para descobrir qual era nosso estilo, mas hoje olhamos para um quadro e sabemos na hora: ‘É isso’”, conta Jamie. **Scream: 27-28 Eastcastle Street, Londres**



## Reprodução de luxo

Filial virtual da *Scream* é especializada em gravuras superacessíveis

Jamie Wood criou uma extensão virtual de sua galeria, a *Scream Editions* ([www.screameditions.com](http://www.screameditions.com)), dedicada exclusivamente a gravuras. “Comecei a vender *prints* para pessoas que queriam colecionar arte, mas não tinham recursos suficientes”, explica. Enquanto as telas da galeria matriz podem custar € 24 mil, as gravuras partem de € 72.

A galeria on-line (também uma editora) oferece *prints* de artistas consagrados como Andy Warhol, Joan Miró e Peter Blake e também de nomes emergentes. Uma de suas principais apostas é Pakpoom Silaphan, que cria pinturas e colagens a partir de antigos *outdoors*. As gravuras das obras de Silaphan (acima) produzidas pela *Scream* são criadas à mão e contam com texturas diferentes, mantendo a integridade da obra original. “Normalmente, as pessoas que não entendem muito de arte visitam a galeria e compram gravuras. Voltam, compram mais algumas, e, depois de algum tempo, quando identificam seu gosto para a arte, dão um novo passo, adquirindo uma tela de verdade. Quero ajudar nesse processo”, finaliza Jamie. E a gente aplaude!

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

**June 11, 2012**

## **Subtle works at Pentimenti**

Eddie Newhall

The two artists who are having solo shows at Pentimenti handle their respective materials with such subtlety and skill, it's hard to determine how the resulting artworks were made.

Shane McAdams' paintings of vividly colored landscapes are an unusual combination of abstraction and representation. In Synthetic Landscape 59 (Jaundiced Dusk), for example, a sky with unnaturally vertical streaks of color meets a photo-real mountain range, and then continues as a reflection in a lake in front of the mountains. McAdams compares his process to the development of the topography of the Southwest, a comparison that seems apt when you learn that these fastidiously worked images are fashioned with a ballpoint pen, PVC glue, oil paint, acrylic, and resin.

Jacque Liu, who has the larger of the two exhibitions (he also has the gallery's Project Space, a former vault), is showing works from three series, all obviously related to one another, and all abstractions based on his memories of architectural and environmental details.

In his "Ululation" pieces, Liu manipulates Mylar and paper into bas-reliefs of creases and bulges, sometimes employing buttons. Clothing seems an obvious touchstone. By contrast, the works from his "Distend" series juxtapose separate rectangles of Mylar and colored paper, one overlaid on another. These seem more closely related to architecture and minimal abstract painting.

# BEAUTIFUL/ DECAY

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## SHANE MCADAMS' BALLPOINT PEN PAINTINGS

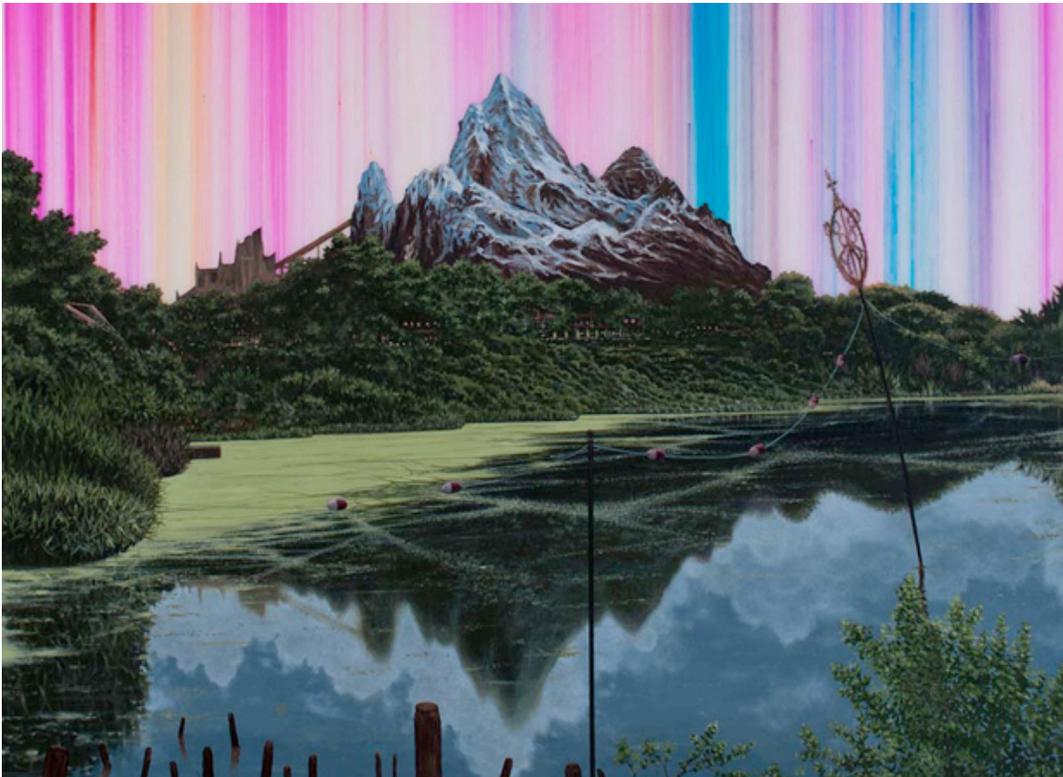
February 3rd, 2012 by



**Shane McAdams** abstract and landscape paintings are created with a mix of acrylic paint, resin, and your average ballpoint pen ink cartridges. McAdams takes ink from the pen cartridges and pours them onto the canvas surface, blowing on the ink to create the streaks of color. But the experimental nature of his works doesn't stop there. He then subjects his works to the powerful lights of a tanning salon which cause a chemical reaction to the pen ink which then creates the tie dyed streaked effect. The result is a world unique to McAdams where the natural and the artificial collide to create spectacular visions of a utopian and hyper colored future

## Shane McAdams gets straight to the (ball) point

Brooklyn-based artist uses Biro ink for psychedelic Southwestern landscapes



Synthetic Landscape 51(Yeti), 48 x 48 cm, ball point pen, oil and resin on panel

Brooklyn-based artist Shane McAdams uses ink extracted from ballpoint pens to create paintings inspired by the landscapes of the American southwest which formed the backdrop to his childhood. Fascinated by the way the elements of wind and rain change and cultivate the natural environment, McAdams also leaves much of the creative process behind his works to chance.

His vivid images on paper are created by extracting ink from pen

barrels, heating the liquid, mixing it with solvents and then applying to paper, allowing gravity, wind and other physical forces to dictate the movement of the ink.

An exhibition of his work, shared with fellow landscape-inspired artist Christopher Saunders, is set to open tomorrow at the [Allegra LaViola Gallery](#) in New York (January 6 until February 4

The brightly-hued work on display includes works from his 'Synthetic Landscape' series where realistic images of mountains and lakes are squeezed between abstract patterns verging on the psychedelic

McAdams's first drawings were tracings from road atlases that he collaged into fantasy political maps with fictionalised place names.

"The maps began to function (though I didn't see it in these terms at the time) metaphorically as well as spatially, as traces of passing time as well as unfolding space," he says. "Likewise, I saw the sandstone towers in the desert as maps of time, recording millions of years of wind erosion that just happened to look like modern art. Like the stratified rock on the Navajo reservation, where I spent much of my childhood, the forms in my work are often analogs to the methods of their creation. They take root in the physical properties inherent within specific, mundane materials such as Elmer's glue, correction fluid, ballpoint pen ink and resin, whose limits are stretched by subjecting them to non-traditional applications, generating structures whose complexity belies the elegance of their creation. This process reflects the physical forces that are constantly working to fashion and sculpt the natural landscape, and, by bracketing these forms with hand-rendered and conventionalised images, I hope to evoke the duality between the actual and the artificial as it is conveyed through idealised representations of order and beauty."

**Shane McAdams & Christopher Saunders: *The Fair and Open Face of Heaven***

**Allegra LaViola Gallery**

**January 6 – February 4, 2012**

***In The Fair and Open Face of Heaven,***

**By Kris Scheifele**

Shane McAdams and Christopher Saunders intermingle landscape and abstraction in unsettling, depopulated vistas which conjure the complicated relations humans have with the land they inhabit. The title of this two-person show at Allegra LaViola Gallery is from Keats for whom escape from the city to the great outdoors provided rejuvenating contemplation of religious proportions. The prescription for the nineteenth-century industrialist/capitalist unable to make the trip was meditation on the next best thing — a landscape painting. Members of the Hudson River School who made these works, and who often accompanied the dangerous westward expeditions, did more than offer soothing, picturesque reflections. By chronicling the land shaped by dramatic geological events and other natural forces, they became the ad men for nation-building and economic exploitation, events which would also leave their mark. Since then, cross-country excursions have become infinitely easier, but the scenes encountered along the way offer weightier ruminations—the increasing cost of civilization. All this is the territory explored by McAdams and Saunders meant, perhaps, to have a different kind of curative effect.

In selections from his *Synthetic Landscape* series, McAdams samples sights encountered on the classic American road trip: exotic rock formations, Native American landmarks, and the open highway as well as Disney theme parks and other pockmarks of commercial consumption. While he based his painted (and in one case drawn) landscapes on photos he took himself, many almost identical shots of places like Window Rock and the Grand Canyon's North Rim Lodge can be found online. Having entered the avalanche of digital information, these once hard-to-access natural wonders have been reduced to blasé stops on the well-beaten tourist trail. However, their link

back through staggering stretches of time is still available, for those so inclined, to lend perspective on our place in the universe.

Blending the primordial microcosm of Terry Winters with the variegated macrocosm of Thomas Moran and others like him, McAdams obscures many of his expansive scenes with a clustered cellular lace; whether encroaching or receding is unclear. The process-derived overlay, created by reactions between materials such as PVA glue, correction fluid, and resin, stands in stark contrast to the more controlled areas produced, with varying degrees of precision, by McAdams's hand, a contrast similar in severity between a gorge and a pit mine. In other instances, ballpoint pen ink bleeds under a slick coat of resin creating colorful psychedelic streaks hanging vertically in the white background or pulsing outward from a central portal. These areas of abstraction feel artificial, even toxic, suggesting everything from Apple products to chemical spills to peyote-enhanced visions. This artificiality is nowhere more evident than in *Synthetic Landscape 52 (Tree of Life)*. The bizarre branch structure emerging from the stubby, over-sized trunk is an immediate tip-off that this is not simply a lush paradise. This is an attraction at Disney World, a fourteen-story, man-made structure open for business for your highly-regulated entertainment, a quiet clash between nature and culture.

Saunders takes this clash to another level, one of insidious emissions. Infusing his paintings are themes from Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, named for the ubiquitous buzz of human chatter, technology, and information threaded through everyday life. In the novel, this drone is interrupted by an accident, "the airborne toxic event." This lethal chemical cloud brings both a heightened fear of death and fiery, technicolor sunsets, a combination of the apocalyptic and the sublime which permeates Saunders's abstract atmospheres.

With far darker inflection, Saunders shares the same fascination with the sky as Claude Lorrain and Byron Kim. In vertical compositions, heavy celestial blocks press down on low, carefully taped-off reductions of roads, fields, runways, and parking lots. The brush that created the smooth, icy surfaces seems to have been made from the same feathery material as the wisps of cloud and color. The vaporous splotches and weird gradations feel otherworldly because they are mutant mash-ups, blended samples of sky, pollution, smoke, explosions, and swarms.

These images are silent but deadly. In *Whitenoise no.14*, a wave of magenta rains a faint haze far below where a raw, muddy light meets an ochre plain. In *Whitenoise no.11*, a misty, pink swath infiltrates a gray smog illuminated on the left by a powdery flash. The lower band of green, yet unaffected, contains a contaminating encounter. This is the empty cosmic darkness, the abyss, that no amount of clutter, no amount of white noise can protect against. This work, like that of McAdams, successfully harkens both backward and forward to a world without us. This show was frightening and beautiful.

# The Seattle Times

## 'Synthetic' a colorful show at Winston Wächter

Unlikely combinations of style within the same painting mark Shane McAdams' "Synthetic Landscapes," the highlight of "Synthetic," a group show at Seattle's Winston Wächter Fine Art.

July 21, 2011

By **Michael Upchurch**

*Seattle Times arts writer*



COURTESY OF SHANE MCADAMS

Cyan devours a landscape in Shane McAdams' "Synthetic Landscape 26 (Cyan Symmetry)."

"Synthetic," the name of the new group show at Winston Wächter Fine Art, suggests either something artificial or some twining synthesis of disparate materials.

What it doesn't indicate is the *conflict* in painting styles — you might even call it a "war" — that goes on in the four "Synthetic Landscapes" of Shane McAdams, the most striking artist on display in the exhibit.

McAdams, a New Yorker originally from the American Southwest, could clearly get by as a landscape painter pure and simple. The figurative portions of his paintings have a glossy photorealistic detail to them as they portray a mountain, a lake or even Niagara Falls. The twist: These sights are set among — or squeezed between — eye-grabbing abstractions.

In "Synthetic Landscape 26 (Cyan Symmetry)," riverside greenery, reflective water surfaces and a backdrop of arid mountains float narrowly between vertical cyan stripes of an almost neon intensity. What we have here is two entirely different kinds of art battling it out on the same canvas, with the jagged borders so dense in color that they appear to be swollen or infected. The

same is even more true of "Synthetic Landscape 27 (Magenta Symmetry)."

Something different goes on in "Synthetic Landscape 22 (Sturm and Durango)," in which a pointy mountain, whose flanks follow the laws of drapery as much as those of geology, is encroached upon by a lichen-spotted pattern. This highly irregular "frame" around the peak seems as though it might wipe it entirely from view. Niagara Falls is given the same treatment, with some trompe l'oeil ambiguities thrown in, in "Synthetic Landscape 16 (Niagara)."

The cheeky 3-D lenticular photographs of Seattle-born artist Margeaux Walter, who now lives in New York, chronicle disruptions of a different sort. Walter is a storyteller whose narratives unfold as you walk past them.

Her bathroom-set "iPhone Accident" is a cautionary tale in four stages, suggesting that chatting and wiping are a dangerous mix. "Vacay" portrays four swimsuit-clad women (all Walter, who serves as her own model) happy to yak on their cellphones in a Jacuzzi until a serious distraction comes along: a buff, shirtless dude with a margarita to offer. Humor dominates Walter's trick photography, but there's some sharp post-feminist satire here as well.

Photographic tricks of another kind mark the work of San Francisco artist Liz Hickok, who gives the phrase "jello shot" a whole new meaning. She literally photographs Jell-O: buildings, monuments and even whole city skylines made of the stuff, as in "View from Alcatraz," where San Francisco's Coit Tower and Transamerica Pyramid become wobbly visions on wobbly ground.

Hickok, on her website, declares she's after "something unexpected and ephemeral," and she's found it here with her photographic record of jewel-colored Jell-O cities that can't hold their shape for long ... perhaps in homage to Hickok's seismically shaky hometown.

The other three artists in "Synthetic" aren't quite as striking, although Seattle painter Elizabeth Gahan does do curious things with watercolor, oil and acrylic on canvas over panel. Her urban scenes have the character of architectural renderings set oddly afloat — viewed through airy bubbles and adorned with bright plastic, thick foliage.

Still, McAdams, Walter and Hickok are the biggest news here.

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY



December 10, 2010

"Micro Chasm" is a particularly succinct title for **Shane McAdams'** current



Shane McAdams, "Synthetic Landscape 23 (Curve of the Earth)," 2010, mixed media on canvas over panel, 24 x 24", at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

exhibition, as the works integrate microscopic forms with macrocosmic landscapes: chasms, canyons, waterfalls, and mountainscapes, many of them inspired by the Brooklyn-based artist's childhood in the southwest American desert. With conceptual invention and technical virtuosity, he combines semi-abstracted imagery that evokes the biological sciences with old-school landscape painting of the Hudson Valley School lineage. In years past, McAdams drew and painted abstractly, incorporating diverse media such as Elmer's glue, resins, pigments, even ballpoint pens, in exultant compositions that exploited surface and materiality as ends in themselves.

More recently, his long-standing fascination with geologic topographies compelled him to marry his material explorations with finely brushed paintings in a series he calls "Synthetic Landscape."

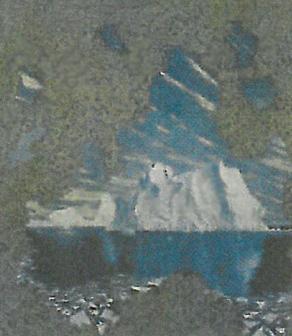
As framing devices he uses clustered forms resembling cells, amoebae, and chloroplasts, configured in organic compositions shot through with holes of varying sizes, which function as windows through which the viewer peers. On the other side of those windows are dramatic vistas painted with realist, if not quite hyperrealist, precision. In "Synthetic Landscape (Iceberg)," he finesses the transition between abstract foreground and naturalistic background by rendering the crackled ice water surface in a spiky, straight-edged fashion that is more the province of perfect Euclidean geometry than messy organics. This tension, combined with the unnatural linearity of the clouds above the iceberg, effectively questions the point at which microcosm ends and macrocosm commences. Likewise, in "Synthetic Landscape 28(Electricity)" the branching tendrils of a lightning bolt visually echo the lichen-like sprawl of the cutout foreground. This duet continues in images of

skyscape "Synthetic Landscape 25 (Vanishing Point)," mountainscape "Synthetic Landscape 23 (Curve of the Earth)," caverns "Synthetic Landscape 24 (Cave Painting)," moonscape "Synthetic Landscape 22 (Sturm and Durango)," farmland "Synthetic Landscape 21 (Parceled Kansas)," and waterfall "Synthetic Landscape 16 (Niagara)."

In a striking sub-series, McAdams frames his landscapes with a different device. Instead of the honeycombed peekaboo windows, he uses vertical lines that resemble aurora borealis, creating a horizontal vantage point for his landscapes. Often these vertical lines are heightened by the use of vividly saturated colors, as in "Synthetic Landscape 27 (Magenta Symmetry)" and "Synthetic Landscape 26 (Cyan Symmetry)." Across this body of work is a playfulness in execution, a musical sense of theme and variations. McAdams delights in making things visible that we cannot normally see, and counterposing them with wide-angle views that tourists ooh and ah over in National Parks. This witty conceit complements a serious undertone endemic to our age of green thinking: the ways in which particles invisible to the naked eye, such as hydrofluorocarbons, are inexorably tied to things that are visible and measurable, such as glaciers and ice shelves. The relationship between molecular and human-scaled concerns, the artist seems to imply, have never been more consequential. That these paintings manage to encapsulate so much while still invigorating the eye is a testament to a vision that updates a classic painting motif with contemporary visual pastiche, and pivots to address ripped-from-the-headlines scientific and political relevance.

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**VISUAL ART  
REVIEW**



**Shane McAdams**  
Micro Chasm  
Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW  
9th, Tues-Sat 10:30 am-5:30 pm,  
through Dec 31

**A** painting of a pristine glacier is caught underneath an abstract overlay of splotches and gold. The overlay looks equally astrological and fungal, appearing to grow over the bright landscape in a lazy fractal. Herein, New York-based painter Shane McAdams combines realism and abstraction in service of a value shift—not only challenging humanity's perception of the natural world, but also perception itself. As with McAdams' other works on view at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, the secret's in the sauce.

And the sauce is Elmer's Glue, correction fluid, and other common household substances that are applied to McAdams' landscapes, modifying the base image. McAdams' artist statement describes the value shift implied by this technique: "In the sense that the abstraction is created by the inherent properties and physical realities of the materials, these forms are more natural than the grandiose and sterile vistas depicted within."

Of course, value shifts based on "inherent properties and physical realities of the materials" are fairly common—for example, see Appendix Collective's current show at the New American Art Union, which questions the authenticity of reality by working synthetic materials until they resemble natural objects. What sets McAdams apart is his work's ability to entice an exploration of its conceptual content, without requiring such an exploration to reap immediate visual rewards. In satisfying both cerebral and visceral consumers, McAdams' work is fairly unique among material-based conceptual exhibitions. **MATT STANGEL**

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

'Tension/Release'  
Caren Golden  
539 West 23rd Street  
Through August 8

## A Delicate Balance

Careful with the kids at this one—not because of any untoward subject matter, but due to that “you break it, you bought it” rule. Curator Shane McAdams has gathered together sculptures that offer insightful content and precarious formal equipoise, such as the stacked plates and carefully interlocked coffee cups that make up Ron Baron's *End of an Error* (2008). Supported on a base of four human skulls, this ersatz Trajan's column is topped by a George W. Bush souvenir mug and a tiny globe, but unlike the Roman emperor's monument to imperial conquest, this flea-market memorial commemorates presidential incompetence. Things get even dicier in the rear gallery, where Alejandro Almanza Pereda has constructed tetrahedrons out of bowling balls and delicately angled fluorescent tubes; perched atop these glowing pyramids, the solid orbs could be blind versions of the greenback's all-seeing “Eye of Providence.” There are some snappy drawings and collages, but William Lamson's videos most fully realize the show's theme of stress and liberation. If Hemingway had made hi-def shorts, he might have come up with the 68-second *Duel* (2008), in which two young men stand back-to-back on a broad, snowy plain, each holding four black balloons and a handgun. They step off half a dozen paces, spin around, release the balloons, and track their weapons skyward. One protagonist is a crack shot, and the charcoal dust that filled his opponent's clutch of balloons gently drifts down through the azure sky as the other flock escapes from the top of the frame. Less macho but more poignant are the brightly colored helium balloons of *Emerge* (2007), which burst from a fog-shrouded lake, momentarily rest on the surface as water drips off their skins, then meander slowly heavenward.

Pretty gunplay: William Lamson's *Duel*, 2008



image courtesy of the artist and Pierogi 2000

# THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

## LOOK, MA, NO HANDS: MCADAMS' DAZZLING ALCHEMY

Mario Naves, September 25, 2006

During its heyday in the 1960's and 70's, Motown Records was known as a "hit factory." It's difficult to imagine anyone who can't recognize the songs and the sound of Motown. Propulsive, sparkling, spotlessly arranged, and refined without sacrificing grit or flow—their aural character is of a piece.

Motown founder Berry Gordy consciously took the principles of mass production (gleaned from working on the Lincoln-Mercury assembly line) and brought them to the music business. But to overstate the record label's reliance on formula would diminish the distinctive stamp that a musician can put on a song. Individuals as diverse and quirky as Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and Martha Reeves were vital in augmenting and, in an odd way, strengthening the strictures of the factory.

These considerations came to mind as I mulled over the process-oriented paintings of Shane McAdams, currently on display at Denise Bibro Fine Art in Chelsea. Mr. McAdams' abstractions may not be Top 40 material, but they're remarkably consistent in character and quality; there's not a bum picture in the bunch. Mr. McAdams is a one-man hit factory.

The Motown analogy hits a snag in terms of mood. Mr. McAdams doesn't wear his soul on his sleeve; the paintings are, in fact, cool and impersonal. Anonymity is the goal. The (somewhat clunky) title of the exhibition, *Unmoved Mover*, indicates as much: It suggests detachment, and it places the work at a remove from artistic motivation, or at least the temperament that guides it.

Mr. McAdams fashions distinctive images, but his paintings are inherently hands-off. Typically, each canvas is an open-ended accumulation of organic phenomena. Opalescent and atmospheric drips, blips, bubbles and splatters separate, coalesce and expand over the canvas. There's no "touch" to the paintings; Mr. McAdams doesn't have one—at least not in the way that, say, Philip Guston has a touch. Mr. McAdams may well consider the notion antiquated or a cliché. He strives to avoid an overt indication of the hand. With their elusive and seductive range of pictorial incident, the viewer is left to puzzle over the painter's methods. The "how'd he do it?" factor is high.

How he does it is through the resistance that can occur between disparate materials. Call it the oil-and-water school of picture-making. Employing various substances—oils, acrylics and ink, to name just a few—Mr. McAdams exploits their innate material components and adds additional ingredients to upset the balance. Layers of paint pull away from each other, forming rivulets of color and texture. The pictures thrive on incompatibility, paying tribute to process and paint. The science that goes into their making is most evident in the dense, sometimes crystalline surfaces

that result.

Enamored of the unavoidable materiality of paint, Mr. McAdams creates uncompromising statements of physical fact. But he doesn't forgo illusion: The images "discovered" during painting—microscopic life forms, dew-covered spider webs and constellations—rescue the work from object-like inertia. Illusion and, with it, metaphor slip in over the transom, whether Mr. McAdams wants them to or not. It's to his credit that the paintings are allowed to develop on their own terms.

Chance is a factor as well. The improvisatory nature of Mr. McAdams' art has its precedent in the Dadaists' experimentations with chance incident—the scatter collages of Hans Arp come to mind—and, more so, in Color Field painting and Process Art. Mr. McAdams is drawn to strategies in which technical know-how, or the absence of it, can bypass rational thought.

That's not to say Mr. McAdams doesn't have control over the destiny of the paintings. He is, in many ways, a control freak. It was the critic Harold Rosenberg, I believe, who made the distinction between the artist who investigates and the artist who explores: The former is interested in results, the latter in experience. Mr. McAdams flits in between the two, with the investigator outgunning the explorer.

The uniformity of the square formatting, the contained nature of the compositions, the reliance on material opposition, even the fact that the paintings are numbered—these self-imposed constraints act like hurdles in front of artistic prospect, but they also help put the work into focus. Given the unequivocal beauty of Mr. McAdams' pictures, one could argue that narrowness is necessary. But where does such dazzling alchemy lead?

Attempts at intervening in and interrupting a hard-won style—the inclusion of patterns and shapes taken from fabrics and maps, for example—show a painter trying to wiggle out from under the dictates of his own ingenuity. Mr. McAdams would do well to make the most of his palette, with its trailing slurs of jewel-like color, to aid in the broadening of his art. In the meantime, the assembly line remains intact.

Then again, assembly lines can work magic—just ask Berry Gordy. It remains to be seen whether or not Mr. McAdams can keep pumping out the hits, but one thing is certain: Anyone fascinated by the possibilities of painting—not to mention its very real limitations—will keep an eye on his future endeavors. His spare, elegant and knowing art merits our attention.