

Zach Mory presents ‘The Stand-In’

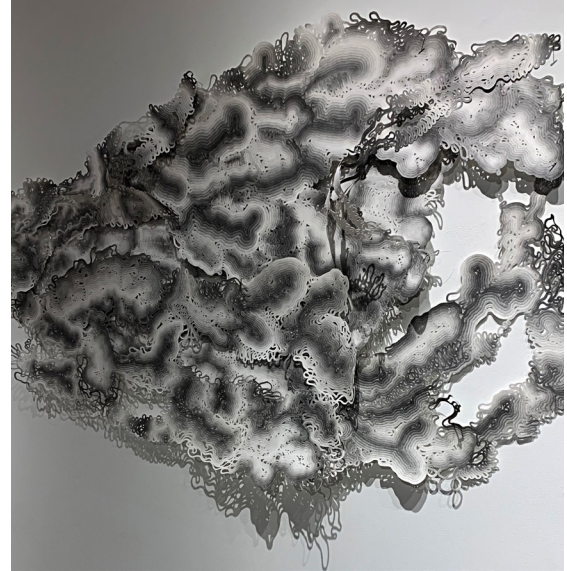
Wisconsin artist shares his intricate artwork and fascinating story with the Ripon community at the Rodman Center for the Arts

By Mandy Barlow

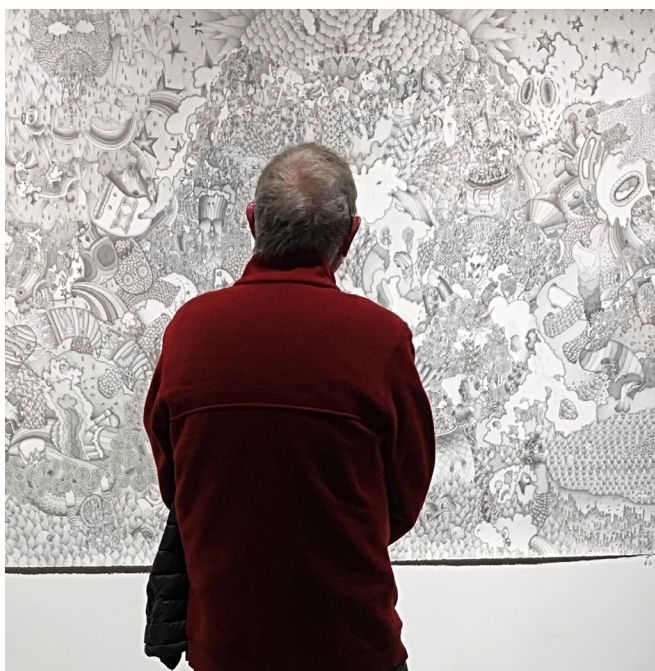
On the evening of Friday, Feb. 4, Zach Mory, an artist from Cottage Grove Wisconsin, took the stage at the Rodman Center for the Arts with many intricate drawings to showcase and a fascinating story about the evolution of his art to tell. Many students, faculty, and community members of Ripon filled the Rodman that evening, for a night consisting of refreshments, a presentation from Mory about his art exhibition, a Q&A, and a walk through the Caestecker Gallery to view Mory’s detailed, abstract artwork up close.

Rafael Salas, who gave Mory’s introductory speech at the opening of the exhibition, reminded visitors that Mory’s exhibition would be only the second in-person show since the COVID-19 pandemic forced large gatherings onto Zoom. As of recently, however, art shows have been able to resume in-person, affording artists such as Mory the opportunity to exhibit their work in-person at the college.

In addition to being an artist, Mory is a high school teacher and was an instructor of digital art and Drawing 1 at Ripon College in 2010 and 2011. Though the two have remained in touch, Salas joked that it was way too long ago for either of them to remember much about Mory’s time at the college.



Abstract paper sculpture by Zach Mory. *Photo courtesy of Mandy Barlow.*



A community member observes Mory’s work at the Caestecker Gallery. *Photo courtesy of Mandy Barlow.*

“Zach Mory’s artwork reminds us of the primacy of drawing, that the simple, physical act of putting a pencil to paper can produce profound beauty and meaning,” Salas said as he introduced the artist’s work. “Mory has worked abstractly, realistically, and most recently, has created a darkly humorous dream-world that combines cartoon imagery, animation, music, and assemblage.”

Addressing those who attended the event, Mory explained how his artwork came to be. The story roots back to when Mory was a child; his uncle owned a comic distribution company in Madison, Wisconsin, which amounted to boxes and boxes of free comic books for both him and his little brother.

“We were like 8, 9, or 10 years old; [they were] definitely comics we should not have been reading,” Mory joked, but he added that he gained a deep love for visual storytelling at a young age. “I was totally and hopelessly addicted to comics.”

This love of comics informed what he liked to draw. He enjoyed drawing characters and comic-like images, which was an interest that stayed with him throughout high school and college.

During graduate school, however, he grew away from the comic-like drawings that he loved as a kid. Instead, he suddenly became all about abstraction, which is a form of art that does not attempt to depict a visual reality.

Despite this brief abstraction phase, Mory could not run from his passion for comic-like drawings for long. In 2011, he felt a pull to return to his early drawing style of visual storytelling. In the subsequent years, he bounced back and forth between abstraction and narrative-based drawing and ultimately learned how to combine the two.



Paper and Pencil drawing by Zach Mory. Photo courtesy of Mandy Barlow.

Some of his later works kept this comic-like style while also commenting on current societal issues and political unrest. In 2020, for instance, Mory drew inspiration from the death of George Floyd, using that as a point of reference in one of his drawings.



Students observe Mory's work at the Caesstacker Gallery. Photo courtesy of Mandy Barlow.

“I wanted to reference how all of these sorts of issues with race were really coming to a front and needed to be dealt with, and still need to be dealt with, and will always need to be dealt with,” Mory said.

During the Q&A, Mory left his audience of artists with some advice: “Don’t feel like you need to find something that inspires you. Just live your life. Sit down. Get to work. And the rest will just kind of take care of itself.”

The evening came to a close after a walk through the gallery, where students and faculty had the opportunity to view much of his life’s work.

The gallery will remain open with Mory’s work until Friday, Mar. 11.