

FEATURED POPULAR TOP STORY

Mahn, Myth, Legend: Max Mahn's whimsical printmaking

Lauren Reinhart / Montana Kaimin
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Max Mahn at the print making studio in Fine Arts building. Mahn got his start taking interest in graffiti and working with spray paint, and has since went on to create art work for bands like Modest Mouse and Death Cab for Cutie.

Chris Lodman / Montana Kaimin

From gnomes riding three-headed ducks to otherworldly depictions of shrooms, giant deer wandering over a gas station and a dinosaur surrounded by levitating miniature pyramids, Max Mahn's designs put you in a stoned state of mind without smoking any devil's lettuce.

Mahn creates prints of band posters, stickers and designs for Dogfish Head, a brand of craft-brewed ales. Born and raised in Missoula and a University of Montana alumnus who designed t-shirts for KBGA, Mahn is a printmaker who now has his own company called Twin Home Prints, based in Missoula. He kick-started his career exclusively using a spray paint can.

"Starting in middle school and through high school, I focused all of my free time on graffiti," Mahn said. "This leant itself to creating stencils from time to time. This evolved into me wanting to create more complex stencils and stickers. Toward the end of high school, some of my friends and I started screen printing shirts and stickers in my basement and the rest is history."

Mahn visited UM's School of Art from March 4 to March 6 to work with the students on two prints with MATRIX Press. MATRIX Press collaborates with renowned artists from across the globe, joining forces with students and the printmaking faculty to create exclusive prints.

Through this partnership, students have the opportunity to actively participate in every stage of the creative process alongside the artist. The prints crafted during these intensive week-long workshops are distributed among the artist, students and MATRIX Press.

Mahn's ongoing interest in printmaking is based on dabbling in other mediums of art. You can often see his interest in painting, illustration and watercolors in the products he sells.

"Printmaking is a medium where you can combine a lot of other mediums, such as painting, illustration or watercolor, for example," Mahn said. "In addition to that, I've always appreciated the process of printmaking and the precision you can get from screen printing. It naturally leant itself toward my bold and whimsical illustrations."

Mahn's bold and mind-bending illustrations help him create posters for various bands, which are available on his website. He started making band posters while he was in college. According to Mahn, there is a lot of reaching out to people and getting emails returned. Ten years later, the people who respond to his endless emails are still clients today.

"In college, I started making posters for my buddy's band Wrinkles here in Missoula by sneaking into the art department at night and printing until the early hours of the morning. From there I never stopped," Mahn said.

Mahn has suggestions for up-and-coming artists, particularly students, facing any form of struggle before they give up on their progress.



University of Montana Alumnus Max Mahn helps students during the printmaking process at UM's School of Art on March. 4. Mahn lives in Missoula and runs his own company named Twin Home Prints.

Chris Lodman / Montana Kaimin

"You just have to put yourself out there and be willing to accept the rejection," Mahn said.

"Ten years later I've made lots of contacts in the industry and am lucky enough to create the weird things I make full-time for lots of cool clients. A key part to keeping those connections is to always meet your deadlines, provide quality work and don't be an asshole."

Mahn has no specific muse that he focuses on when he creates prints for his clients. Prints will be different based the aesthetic of the customer. According to Mahn, he serves a variety of customers. If someone goes to Mahn for a custom piece and does not vibe with him, that is alright too. Mahn will make suggestions on which artists one should go to that might fit their style.

“Each print is different. For client work, I am typically trying to create an image or aesthetic that is fitting to the band,” Mahn said. “You wouldn’t want a melting skull for a Norah Jones poster, and you wouldn’t want a cute butterfly for an Osees poster. There’s a bit of responsibility to create something that resonates with the band along with their fans.”

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