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Tape Artist

By Teresa McPherson

August 1, 2007

D.C.-based artist uses tape as an artistic medium.





Ducks floating in a pond. Dogs digging through trash in an alley. Pigeons on the streets of New York City. These might all sound like typical, almost mundane, scenes. But look closer and you'll see that there's nothing ordinary about them at all. They're sculptures, and they're made of tape.

Mark Jenkins has been tape casting since he was a child and would make casts of his pencils in class.

"It was a neat trick I'd figured out that my teacher didn't appreciate," he says. "She encouraged me instead to explore my creativity with crayons and pencils."



Jenkins put away the tape until 2003, when, while teaching English in Rio de Janeiro, he was overcome by boredom. He began to make a cast of a tin-foil ball using the same technique. "After that," he said, "I started casting other objects in my flat, including myself."

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Over time, Jenkins' sculptures have evolved as he has explored the possibilities that the media provides.

"I've done a lot of experimenting - casting different objects, adding lights, coating the sculptures with resins, and more recently adding clothes to the figures," he said. "I'm kind of hoping that I can push packing tape upwards to join the ranks of other popular sculpting mediums such as papier mache, bronze and Legos."

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Today, Jenkins' work can be found on the streets of New York City, Baltimore and throughout the world. He has been formally exhibiting his work overseas, and when there's time, he displays work in cities he travels to. Once the pieces are placed, a variety of things can happen to them. Some get "adopted" by passersby; others are picked up by city workers. Either way, they get a reaction from the people who see them.

"People are quick to come up and ask what I'm up to," Jenkins says. "They want to know what the works are made of and how many rolls of tape it takes to make a tape man."

Jenkins says he favors a packing tape from 3M the time to set which to cast his pieces. "It makes sturdy clear casts and I work with this type of tape for most of my projects."

He has created dozens of pieces, among them about 60 tape men, a few women, 100 babies, a few ducks, giraffes, horses, dogs, pigeons, and a couple of cattle skulls.

Jenkins says his animal sculptures work as a sort of "visually compelling litter" - a personal statement against those who would leave trash on the hiking trails he frequents. A self-described environmentalist, Jenkins thinks his art gives plastic litter a new sort of aesthetic. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," he says.

A tape casting tutorial is located at tapesculpture.org/index.html.

Mark Jenkins' website is www.xmarkjenkinsx.com.

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Teresa McPherson was the former Editor of *Adhesives & Sealants Industry*. She has held several editorial positions during her more than 20 years with BNP Media. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and journalism from Eastern Michigan University.

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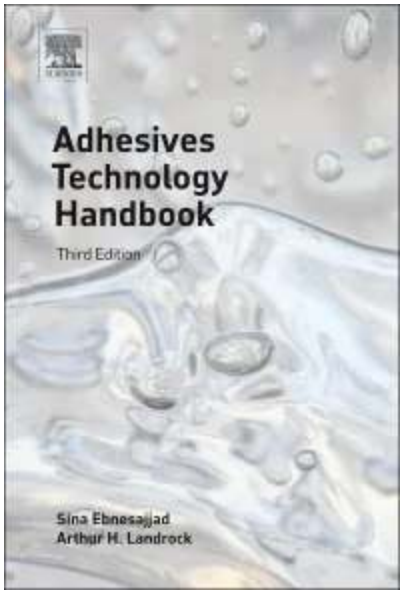

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