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# The Columbus Dispatch

## Exhibit | Zanesville artist creates colorful mosaics from beer bottle caps



• REQUEST TO BUY THIS PHOTO John Taylor-Lehman with his "Shaky House" artwork

John Taylor-Lehman is a connoisseur of beer — not the beverage but the colorful caps on beer bottles.

He collects and sorts through thousands of them. (Orange is hard to come by, he says, but Sam Adams Summer Ale features the color.)

He pursues beer caps in the name of art, creating three-dimensional folk mosaics from smashed tops of Budweiser, Corona, Dos Equis, Stella Artois, Yuengling and others. He estimates that he has used more than 30,000 caps, most donated by friends.

“I’m a beer drinker, but I don’t drink that much,” he said.

“CAPtivate,” an exhibit of works by the Zanesville artist, is on view through March 10 at the Ohio State University Faculty Club.

Taylor-Lehman’s works, less gimmicky than they sound, can be beautiful in pattern and flow of color. Many are inspired by his travels and interest in nature.

“Flight Path” shows a woodpecker with wings unfurled against a blue background. “Raven Recovery” is a majestic portrait of a crow on a red-and-gold background.

The sculpture “Foster’s Flounder” is named for the caps that form the fish’s eyes but also employs Killian’s, Budweiser and Red Stripe caps as well as a bit of an old Ohio license plate.

“John is working in a really identifiable folk-art tradition — people making art out of the materials that they have at hand,” said Duff Lindsay, owner of Lindsay Gallery in the Short North. “Believe it or not, there’s a tradition of bottle-cap art in the folk-art world.

Taylor-Lehman's pieces, Lindsay said, take a more contemporary approach.

"His work is clean-lined and modern. . . . From a distance, his flat-panel works look like paintings."

Taylor-Lehman, 57, was trained as a scientist. He specialized in botany with degrees from Kent State and Ohio State universities, and taught high-school science for 30 years in Dresden, Ohio. He thinks that artists and scientists are creative kindred spirits — each seeking and making connections in the world.

A conservation ethic, he said, is important to him.

“I use materials that otherwise would find their way into a landfill.”

Taylor-Lehman begins by sketching an idea on plywood, then seeks out caps to produce his vision. He smashes the caps, then attaches them with a nail gun.

He used to flatten caps with a hammer but needed a more efficient system.

After consulting with the Columbia Machine Co. in Zanesville and mechanical and aerospace engineers at Ohio State, he found the solution working with Tri-Valley High School industrial-arts teacher Mike Rauch. They modified a log splitter that can smash caps at an impressive rate.

Taylor-Lehman has shown works at the Ohio Arts Council’s Riffe Gallery, the Columbus Cultural Arts Center, the Zanesville Museum of Art and the 2016 Ohio State Fair Fine Arts Exhibition.

Lisa Craig Morton, art coordinator at the Faculty Club, said his unusual works represent a departure from the venue's standard exhibits.

Lindsay said Taylor-Lehman is finding his way as a self-taught artist.

"John is someone who is still developing," Lindsay said. "He is really evolving as an artist."

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