



Local art galleries, along with the annual Crawford County Arts Show and Wabash Valley Wine & Art Festival, make the river town of Palestine a culture-seeker's destination.

Illinois MADE

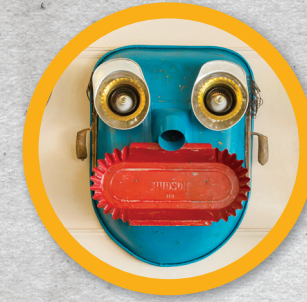
A trip to Palestine reveals the colorful folk art of Steve Meadows



Every morning at the Village Inn on Main Street in rural Palestine, farmers converse over mugs of steamy coffee and hearty breakfast platters under the watchful, boat-propeller eye of a huge fish. The dorsal fin made from a rusty, two-man crosscut saw, the tricycle-fender mouth, and colorful bottle cap scales on the 10-foot catch don't resemble any fish natural to Crawford County. But this trophy is as native to southeastern Illinois as bluegill, the official state fish swimming in the nearby Wabash River.

The sculpture crafted of local junk was made by folk artist Steve Meadows, who eats at the diner often. He says, "I kept seeing that big empty wall, so I gave them one of my fish to hang there."

The Steve Meadows Folk Art Gallery housed in a restored 1900s storefront—plus the town's pioneer history preserved in the 1901 Fife Opera House and reconstructed 1812 Fort LaMotte—regularly reel tourists into Palestine. It's one of Illinois' oldest towns, chartered in 1811 and listed on the National Register



of Historic Places. Visitors are welcomed by a giant, garbage can-eyed, ironing board-tongued wagging face on the side of a barn at the intersection of Main Street and State Route 33, part of the Lincoln Heritage Trail.

Thirty years ago, Meadows repurposed his architectural and carpentry knowledge earned working in Midwest cities into becoming a self-taught artist creating whimsical works composed of discarded everyday objects. He scavenges materials along river banks, digs through the local dump and drives country roads, hauling his finds in a psychedelic painted van. Old lumber, rusty machinery, bins of silverware and piles of dented pans fill his warehouse, which smells of sawdust and paint. Meadows points out, "There is nothing here of value, but I create from it because I see all kinds of possibilities."

Like doorknob eyeballs, leaf rake spiky hair and plunger noses on Meadows' kitchen pan, cartoonish faces. They're for sale in his gallery displaying repainted found furniture, hand-carved animals, junk-bejeweled hearts and flowers made of fan blades and Jell-O molds.

Artworks are one of a kind, but almost always get the same response. Meadows says, "Most people smile, maybe because they see a new way to look at stuff they use and throw out every day."

Meadows' pieces sell well at art shows throughout Illinois and as far away as Oklahoma's Tulsa International Mayfest and Augusta, Georgia's Arts in the Heart Festival. Sarah Pierpont, director of Recycle Santa Fe Art Festival, says, "People love Steve's work because the cast-off things he uses you'd find in New Mexico's back 40."

Meadows grew up on a farm in tiny Willow Hill, Illinois. He says, "My dad worked us kids hard, so I can screw this in, pound that out, splash paint all about, go like a mad fool for hours making art and still do laundry, eat at the diner, walk my dog and go fishing for junk all in one day."



Stroll Main Street Palestine to see artist Steve Meadows' "farm stuff" sculptures. Spot a shapely milk can woman and a totem pole made of sickles, rakes and trowels.



Check the Illinois Made section of EnjoyIllinois.com for more artisans and their unique creations.

