BRUCE WILLEN

ARTIST

Bruce Willen is a multidisciplinary artist, designer, musician, and creator of the *Ghost Rivers* public art project, which has brought widespread attention to the ecological consequences and forgotten histories of buried urban streams. His Baltimore-based studio, **Public Mechanics**, focuses on works for public and cultural spaces. He is the 2025 recipient of the **Mary Sawyers Baker Imboden Prize**, the largest art award in the mid-Atlantic.

EDUCATION

BFA in Graphic Design. MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art). Baltimore, MD. Magna Cum Laude. 2002

SELECT PUBLIC INSTALLATIONS + SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2020–24	***Ghost Rivers*** 1.5 mile multi-site permanent public art installation tracing the buried path of a lost stream across two neighborhoods. Baltimore, MD
2026	***Harmonic Time*** Permanent public art installation. Baltimore, MD
2026	***Sculptural bus stop seating*** Multi-site commissioned permanent public art installation. Washington, DC
2026	***Living Room*** Sculptural bus shelter, permanent installation. Baltimore, MD
2026–27	***Rash Field public art*** Permanent public art installation. Baltimore, MD
2020	***The Chairs*** RFP-winning large-scale permanent public art installation. Anacostia Public Library. Washington, DC
2020	***New Orleans Convention Center Public Art Project*** Finalist for juried permanent public art commission at the New Orleans Convention Center.
2019	***Post Typography: Look Again*** Aesthetic Union. San Francisco, CA
2018	***Some Thing in the Water*** — **Light City Baltimore** 25,000 sq. ft. underwater light and audio installation. Baltimore, MD
2015	***Time Is a Milk Bowl*** Peals and Zoe Friedman installation + performance. Pioneer Works. Brooklyn, NY
2013	***Words Are Pictures Are Words*** Immersive installation & educational space design. Baltimore Museum of Art. Baltimore, MD
2006	***Post Typography*** Rhode Island School of Design. Providence, RI

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Artwork included in 30+ Juried and Curated Group Exhibitions: *Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Étienne*, Saint-Étienne France; *Baker Art Prize Winners,* Baltimore Museum of Art; *Fermata* international survey of contemporary sound artists, Artisphere. Arlington, VA; *We The Designers*, AIGA National Design Center. New York, NY; *Drawing With Words*. New York Times Gallery. New York, NY; *Hidden Heroes: The Genius of Everyday Things*. Vitra Design Museum. Weil am Rhein, DE;

SELECT COMPETITIVE GRANTS, RESIDENCIES, AWARDS

Saint Paul's Schools Warshawsky Visiting Artist Baltimore, MD. 2027

Park School Resident Artist Baltimore, MD. 2026

Baker Artist Award Winner: Mary Sawyers Imboden Prize ($40,000 — largest art prize in the mid-Atlantic) 2025

Maryland State Arts Council Public Artworks Grants ($75,000) 2023, 2024, 2025

DC Public Art Building Communities Grant ($150,000) 2024

Gutierrez Memorial Fund Legacy Grant ($12,500) 2021

SELECT MUSIC COMPOSITION, PERFORMANCE + SOUND

Music for a Ghost River (A composition and performance for three musicians and a buried creek). This piece is built around live sampling the sounds of a buried stream running below the BMA Sculpture Garden. Baltimore Museum of Art, MD. 2026

Symphonie Diagonale (New score for 1921 cubist silent film.) MdFF. Baltimore, MD

Fermata ("Bubble Bath" 12-channel music composition part of International survey of contemporary sound art.) Artisphere. Arlington, VA.

Peals Multi-instrumentalist and composer

- → Recorded 4 full-length albums, 2 EPs (Thrill Jockey Records)
- → Collabs w/ artists, filmmakers, musicians incl. James Iha of Smashing Pumpkins
- → Interactive sound art app, *Bubble Bath*, that generates abstract musical soundscapes and allows listeners to build their own ambient arrangements
- → Music used on *This American Life*, David Chang's *Ugly Delicious*, *Invisibilia*, and several documentary films.
- → Over 14 million album streams and extensive radio and podcast play

SPEAKING, PANELS + WORKSHOPS

Featured speaker and keynote at dozens of universities, schools, speakers series, and conferences including:
Harvard University, Hopscotch Design Festival, Intl. Placemaking Week, AIA Baltimore, AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Artists), Kansas City Art Institute, Minneapolis College of Art & Design, MICA, Cooper Union, Type Directors Club NYC, University of Texas at Austin

50+ HONORS

Additional honors, awards, and competition wins include:
2025 Mary Sawyers Baker Imboden Prize, AIGA Design Awards, *Creative Review*, Chicago International Poster Biennial, AIA Baltimore (Grand Design Award), *Communication Arts* Design Annual, Type Directors Club Competition, *Print Magazine* Design Annual (16 awards), American Illustration, Maryland Federation of Art

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND + SELECT CLIENT WORK

Public Mechanics: Founder. Baltimore, MD (2020–present)

- → **Baltimore Museum of Art** Museum rebranding + wayfinding design.
- → **Signal Station North** Public art, branding, creative placemaking strategy for NEA-funded neighborhood artistic lighting initiative. Baltimore.
- → **Jewish Museum of Maryland** Museum rebranding + wayfinding design.
- → **Middle Branch Park** Branding, experiential design, community engagement strategy, public art programming in partnership w/ **Field Operations**. Baltimore.

Post Typography: Creative Director + Founding Partner. Baltimore, MD and Brooklyn, NY (2007–2020)

- → Illustrated **multiple covers of *Time Magazine, The New York Times, Washington Post, ESPN Magazine***, and many other publications.
- → Conceived and led high-impact placemaking projects for **Light City Baltimore Festival, Waverly Main Street, Union Craft Brewing**, and others.
- → Experiential design and branding for the **Parkway Theatre** and **The Voxel Theater**
- → Clients included: **Baltimore Museum of Art, U.S. Forest Service, American Institute of Architects, Beach House, Sony Music Entertainment, Penguin/ Random House, Maryland Film Festival, U.S. Green Building Council**

House Industries: Designer. Yorklyn, DE (2003)

- → Pioneering type foundry and design studio best known for its widely-used typefaces and collaborations with **Heath Ceramics** and **Eames Foundation**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art). Undergrad + grad-level courses
Experimental Typography, *Graduate Design Studio*, 2005–2015, 2023, 2024

University of Maryland, College Park. Designer in Residence (6 credits), 2015

CIVIC ADVOCACY + ENGAGEMENT

Jones Falls 2076 A year-long public reimagination project for Baltimore's central river

Baltimore Design School board member. Served on the Professional Development Committee and Board at this design-focused public school. 2018–2024

Successfully advocated for creation of a municipal civic innovation office in Baltimore. (Mayor's Office of Performance and Innovation established in 2017)

Old Goucher Neighborhood Master Plan Initiated project, led design team, contributing editor for Baltimore neighborhood urban planning project, 2014–2016

SELECT PUBLISHED WRITING

Lettering & Type (Princeton Architectural Press, 2009)
An introductory book on lettering, type, and experimental alphabets

Post Typography (Pyramyd Éditions, 2007)
Paperback monograph of Post Typography's early work. Paris, France.

Design Observer "In Defense of Inconvenience" — essay, 2019

Washington Post "Ocasio-Cortez Scored a Victory for Campaign Posters," 2018

Maharam Stories (Rizzoli) — contributing essayist, 2012–2015

SELECT PRESS

Interviewed, Featured, and Reviewed in more than 150 Publications including: *Fast Company*, *Metropolis*, *CityLab*, *NPR Weekend Edition*, *Next City*, *Washington Post Magazine*, *Print Magazine*, *Sirius XM Radio*, *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, *iDN Magazine*, *Orion Magazine*

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Work featured in over 25 design and art books including:
Area 2 (Phaidon), *Contemporary Graphic Design* (Taschen), *Graphic Design: The New Basics*, *Thinking With Type*, *D.I.Y.* (Princeton Architectural Press), *Please Make This Look Nice* (Rizzoli)