

THINGS TO DO > ARTS

'Miles of canvas': In 50 years of painting, St. Croix River Valley artist Mary Pettis has learned nature's language

Her Wisconsin landscape 'Quiet Visitor' is a finalist in the international PleinAir Salon Art Competition



1 of 11

Artist Mary Pettis takes a short break to welcome the sun as she works on a painting along the banks of the St. Croix River at Interstate Park near Taylors Falls, Minn., on Thursday, April 30, 2026. Pettis, 72, of Taylors Falls, is a finalist in the 15th Annual PleinAir Salon Art Competition for her painting "Quiet Visitor" which showcases Cascade Falls in Osceola, Wis. Plein air painting is the practice of painting landscape pictures outdoors. (John Autey / Pioneer Press)

By **MARY DIVINE** | mdivine@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

PUBLISHED: May 9, 2026 at 5:20 PM CDT | UPDATED: May 10, 2026 at 12:08 AM CDT



Listen to this article now



Powered by Trinity Audio

00:00

15:15

Landscape artist Mary Pettis is walking along the St. Croix River in Interstate State Park just south of Taylors Falls, trying to decide on the subject of her next painting.

"It shouldn't be half water, half sky," said Pettis, scanning the Wisconsin shoreline. "Generally speaking, the story should be either the water or the land. So where do you put the horizon line? If I set up here, then what's going to happen with the light? Can I make a painting out of something that's so subtle and so dull?"

It turns out she can.



Artist Mary Pettis painted "Waking Spring" during a two-hour session on the banks of the St. Croix River at Interstate Park on Thursday, April 30, 2026. (Courtesy of Mary Pettis)

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

- 1 Fire near Crosslake likely caused by humans; 61 reopens after North Shore blaze contained
- 2 Rare public appearances, low profile mark Raúl Castro's life since stepping down as Cuba's president
- 3 Annual ranking puts St. Paul 4th for parks, just behind Minneapolis
- 4 Woman steps into open manhole in Manhattan and falls to her death
- 5 After Timberwolves' embarrassing loss to Spurs, Tim Connelly vows to be aggressive this offseason
- 6 Man armed with concealed knife attempts to enter Lakeville mosque
- 7 Pioneer Press 2026 Patio Guide: Neighborhood spots
- 8 Bayport, Lake Elmo teachers, students say goodbye to old schools, hello to new
- 9 Chemistry and critics part of the picture for Wild star Kirill Kaprizov
- 10 Roseville twins among first to get 4-year nursing degrees from St. Thomas