



# John Michael Kohler Arts Center

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Adolph Vandertie, untitled, 1976; basswood, mahogany, fabric, glass, metal, and varnish; 41 1/8 x 32 x 6 1/2 in.  
John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.  
Photo courtesy John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

## **Life on the Rails through Artists' Eyes** *Good Road to Follow* Opens March 1 at JMKAC

*Good Road to Follow*, opening March 1 at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wis., examines the work of two artists, separated by decades and experiences, whose work contributes to the lore surrounding American hobos and their lives on the road.

Highlighting the important role that artists can play in the documentation and recognition of marginalized groups of people, this exhibition speaks to the power of humankind's quest for community.

The exhibition, presenting the photographic work of David Eberhardt and the carvings and collection of Adolph Vandertie, is on view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center through January 17, 2021. While the John Michael Kohler Arts Center is closed, a video tour of the exhibition can be accessed online.

The roaming life of hobos and tramps holds a mythic place in the American imagination. Whether searching for work in the Great Depression, dropping out in the Vietnam War era, or eschewing the traditional idea of home for a transient community, those who travel the country by freight train or hitchhiking have been both romanticized and demonized. Perhaps in that contradiction is the root of the lasting appeal of this way of life.

Adolph Vandertie (1911–2007) was fascinated by the travelers who camped near the railroad tracks in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He mastered the ball-in-a-cage, a basic hobo wood-carving technique that can be modified to produce hundreds of variations. While struggling to make ends meet, Vandertie carved and collected thousands of wood objects that illustrated the hobo and tramp art style.

Vandertie admired hobos and tramps for their perseverance and what he termed their “deep sense of survival.” His carving habit kept his hands busy and his mind wandering, imagining a life on the rails unfettered by bills and work and guided by a code of ethics shared among honorable people.

To share his collection and knowledge, Vandertie established a museum in his small home. The gallery installation of his collection evokes the spaces that comprised his original house museum.

For nearly two decades, Minnesota-based photographer David Eberhardt lived among a tramp community—jumping trains, dumpster diving, and panhandling. In photographs, he captured his fellow travelers’ demons, wanderlust, search for home on the road, and that “deep sense of survival” so admired by Vandertie.

Twenty-four black-and-white images from Eberhardt’s travels are featured in the exhibition. Poignant and intimate, his photographs only hint at what’s beyond the camera’s purview—a life plagued by danger, both from within and without.

Neither of these documentarians provide a complete, or objective, understanding of the hobo culture. But, in their very different efforts and approaches to research, their commitment to witnessing a population of people on the margins remains. In reality, their work may tell us more about them as individuals, and us as viewers, than the hobos and tramps they sought to document.

*Good Road to Follow* is part of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s “On Being Here (and There)” series. The series highlights the ways artists and cultural organizations initiate community connections, encourage belonging, and provide social sustenance.

For more information, visit [jmkac.org](http://jmkac.org) or call 920-458-6144. Admission to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center is free. It is located at 608 New York Ave. in downtown Sheboygan.

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*Good Road to Follow* installation view of photographs by David Berhardt at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Photo courtesy of John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

**Hours**

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Thursday: 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.

Saturday, Sunday: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

**Location**

John Michael Kohler Arts Center: 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, WI

Art Preserve: 3636 Lower Falls Road, Sheboygan, WI

**About the John Michael Kohler Arts Center**

Founded in 1967, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center (JMKAC) is dedicated to generating creative exchanges between an international community of artists and a diverse public. Central to its mission is promoting understanding and appreciation of the work of self-taught and contemporary artists through original exhibitions, commissioned works of art, performing arts, community arts initiatives, and publications.

The Arts Center's collection focuses primarily on works by artist-environment builders, self-taught and folk artists, and works created in the Arts/Industry residency program. JMKAC is the world's leading center for research and presentation of artist-built environments. Beginning in August 2020, its collection of 25,000 individual works of art by more than 30 art-environment builders can be viewed year round at the Art Center's new satellite campus, the Art Preserve.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is supported by corporate and foundation donors, government grants, and its many members. The Arts Center is not an entity of Kohler Co. or its subsidiaries. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is located at 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, WI. The Art Preserve is located at 3636 Lower Falls Road, Sheboygan. Admission to both is free. For information, call 920-458-6144, or visit [jmkac.org](http://jmkac.org), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).