



# John Michael Kohler Arts Center

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Bayne Peterson, untitled, 2020; dyed plywood; 11 x 15 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.  
Courtesy of the artist and Kristen Lorello, NY; Private Collection. Photo by Jeffrey Sturges.

## Wood Sculptures Reward In-Person Viewing New Exhibition opening Dec. 13 at John Michael Kohler Arts Center

Wood is a familiar material, used to make hundreds of objects we come into contact with every day. Its ubiquity can make it invisible, collapsing its particularities and aesthetic qualities.

*The Shallow Act of Seeing*, opening Dec. 13 at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, features contemporary works of art by artists who render wood strange. Their work challenges the assumptions we carry about wood: that it is hard, masculine, inflexible, useful, brown, impersonal, and serious.

All three artists featured, Dan Gunn (IL), Bayne Peterson (RI), and Rachel Beach (NY), make work that pushes both the physical and the conceptual limits of wood. From a curatorial perspective, as the pandemic increasingly defined our world by where we could not go, the idea of foregrounding physical things made by people felt ever more important.

It became apparent that the work these artists were making needed to be experienced in person to be complete. They reward spending time with them, sharing space with them. The *Shallow Act of Seeing* became a celebration of both the mutability of wood and the reopening the Arts Center's galleries. The exhibition is on view through May 16.

A former set builder, Dan Gunn took inspiration from several aspects of the theater for his lacquered plywood wall hangings. Drawn to the dramatic drapes of the stage curtains, Gunn echoes these forms. From afar, they appear to be fabric bunting, but, with inspection, are revealed to be wood. Intentionally imperfect, Gunn also likens the works to props.

"When you're sitting in the audience, all the props on stage look real," said the artist. "But when you see them with the lights on and up close, you realize in many cases they're actually poor facsimiles. They have to look just real enough that, in the context of the theater, you accept them."

Gunn is not trying to trick people; rather, he is interested in where the line of realism is. What are the elements needed to push his sculptures as close as possible to the point of belief?

Bayne Peterson is also interested in ways of making wood appear soft. Using dyed plywood to form undulating and curvaceous structures, at first glance their material is also hard to identify. He rigorously sands the sculptures to create a surface that does not react to light or shadow. The seemingly impossible curves suggest that the material is pliable.

Peterson spent time studying Inuit carving and was inspired by the subtle and organic renderings of animals and the smooth finishing. Striking and irregular color combinations add to the disorienting experience of viewing the work; like miniature topographies, the sculptures combine round curves and flat shapes. They dance with the eye.

For this exhibition, Rachel Beach produced a new body of work. In opposition to her typically solid totemic towers, she experimented with negative space and absence. Beginning with sketches of four kinds of classic vessels, she extended the lines out and then mirrored that expanded shape. She stretched this new form to a human scale, emphasizing the points of possible contact as a viewer stands in front of them. Each of the resultant latticed sculptures is a complex network of tangled lines that appear to rearrange itself as a viewer moves around the work.

These works call out for company. They want to be examined, studied, and reacted to. They are here to welcome you back.

*The Shallow Act of Seeing* is part of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's "Return to the Real" series, which explores how art can remind us of the rich rewards of the real versus digital experience.

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, Wis.

This exhibition is supported by the **Kohler Trust for Arts and Education**, the **Frederic Cornell Kohler Charitable Trust**, **Kohler Foundation, Inc.**, **Herzfeld Foundation**, and the **Wisconsin Arts Board** with funds from the **State of Wisconsin** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

**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](#).