



David Butler (1898–1997)

David Butler was born in Good Hope, St. Mary Parish, Louisiana, in 1898. After his mother's sudden death, Butler dropped out of school in the early 1910s to care for his seven younger siblings while his father continued to work. Butler devoted what little free time he had to drawing. Some of his subjects included cotton fields, people at work, shrimp boats, and trains. When his siblings were old enough to care for themselves, he moved to Patterson, Louisiana, to look for work and start a life of his own.

Butler worked a series of jobs such as cutting grass, building roads, and working a dragline. In 1962, Butler suffered a head injury on the job and could no longer work. He began designing and constructing his living space, inspired by the imagery of his dreams and spiritual beliefs. The objects he put in his yard and home were **kinetic** sculptures, such as **whirligigs**, and windshields with silhouettes of animals, people, and imagined creatures. When his wife died in 1968, Butler started constructing "spirit shields"—window coverings and awnings that sheltered his house from both the hot Louisiana sun and, he believed, unwelcome spirits.

Over the years, Butler's dynamic home and yard installations have received national attention and acclaim, although his reaction to this attention was not always positive. Much to his disapproval, a traveling exhibition of his work toured Louisiana from the New Orleans Museum of Art to the Morgan City Municipal Auditorium in 1976. The art environment he created is no longer **in situ**.

Kinetic (art)

An artwork that moves either naturally, such as a mobile, or is machine operated.

Whirligig

An object that has one part that spins.

In situ

In the place it was originally created.



1 David Butler, untitled, n.d.; metal, plastic, fabric, rubber, paint, and mixed media; 46 1/2 x 33 1/2 x 72 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

2 David Butler, untitled, c. 1968–c. 1970; paint, steel, and mixed media; 13 x 38 x 3 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.



John Ehn (1897-1981)

Johan Henry Ehn, known as John, was born in 1897 in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He worked as a wildlife trapper across the United States. When he was in his fifties, he began creating the statues and his art environment, Old Trapper's Lodge, around a motel he owned in Sun Valley, California. Over nearly thirty years, he filled the site with painted concrete sculptures depicting folk tale characters and tombstones with playful **epitaphs**. The art environment was named a California Registered Historical Landmark in 1985.

In the late 1980s, many of Ehn's large sculptures were moved to the grounds of Pierce College in Woodland Hills, California. From the objects that remained, Kohler Foundation, Inc., **conserved** seventy, including sculpture, tools, signs, and **assemblages**, before gifting them to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in 1996.

Epitaph

Words written in memory of a person who has died, typically placed on a tombstone.

Conserve/Conservation

If an artwork is damaged, conservation is the specific techniques and acts of repairing the damage.

Assemblage

An artwork made of various two- and three-dimensional materials that are put together.



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2

1 John Ehn, untitled, c. 1970; mixed media; 29 x 28 x 2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of the John Ehn Family Trust and Kohler Foundation Inc.

2 John Ehn, untitled, c. 1961; mixed media; 22 x 15 1/2 x 13 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of the John Ehn Family Trust and Kohler Foundation Inc.