

Bernard Langlais (1921–1977)



Bernard Langlais was born in Old Town, Maine, in 1921. He began his artistic training at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., which was followed by scholarships to study at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and the Brooklyn Museum Art School. He also won a Fulbright Scholarship to study the paintings of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch in Oslo, Norway. As an artist working actively in New York in the 1950s, Langlais created landscapes and still lifes in a **Modernist** style. He was also influenced by fellow artists working in New York at the time and experimented with **Abstract Expressionism**.

Langlais along with his wife, Helen, and artists such as Alex Katz, Jean Cohen, Lois Dodd, William King, and Charles Duback began spending summers in Maine in the early 1950s. One summer in 1956, while renovating his summer cottage, Langlais began working with scraps of wood. He called his process “painting with wood.” Though people liked his abstract wood **reliefs** in New York, in the early 1960s, Langlais decided that he no longer wanted to show work in galleries, and he and his wife moved permanently to Maine. In the last eleven years of his life, he constructed more than sixty-five **monumental** wood sculptures on the land around his home and produced a large collection of two- and three-dimensional works exploring the animal kingdom.



Artist Overview



Modernist

From the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, artists experimented with techniques of creating images that were different from traditional painting and drawing. Art movements such as Cubism—creating an image using primarily geometric forms — or Pointalism—creating an image with small dots—are examples of Modernist art forms.

Abstract Expressionism

An art movement that occurred after World War II. Artwork defined as Abstract Expressionism can have many different appearances, but there are some overarching similarities among them. The works are abstract, or do not look like anything realistic and are primarily shapes, line, and color. Also, they are often created spontaneously or without much planning.

Relief (sculptural)

A sculptural relief contains forms that project out from a background.

Monumental

Of great importance or size.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center

1 Bernard Langlais in Cushing, Maine, 1976. Photo: David Hiser.

2 Bernard Langlais, untitled (Three Lions) (in situ), c. 1976–1977; wood, paint, and metal; dimensions variable. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Colby College and Kohler Foundation Inc.



Frank Oebser (1900–1990)

Frank Oebser was a dairy farmer who created a series of **kinetic** and stationary works. Farm tools, carriages, old furniture, baling wire, and whatever materials were at hand became part his animated artwork of people and animals. For Oebser, transforming outdated machines into works of art allowed him to **upcycle** the objects and turn his farm into a place of joy. His art environment was called Little Program and was located in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

Kinetic (art)

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

Upcycle

To reuse discarded materials to create something new.



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