Classroom Connection: A Lesson Plan from John Michael Kohler Arts Center's Educational Resources, "Kinetic Collaborations"

ART CURRICULUM

KINETIC COLLABORATIONS

ARTIST CONNECTIONS:
Emery Blagdon
David Butler
Tom Every

David Butler, LA
1898–1997
David Butler brought a garden of color, form, and motion into being in the front yard of his home in Patterson, Louisiana. Based on images that appeared in his dreams, he created magnificent animals and scenes that appeared to come to life in a dynamic installation where whirligigs added sound and motion. Butler began his yard show, an African-American tradition, in the late 1960s, making what is widely regarded as one of the most important art environments ever made in the United States.

Tom Every, WI
1938–
Through an alter ego he calls "Dr. Evermor," artist Tom Every created a sculptural environment that includes The Forevertron, an immense iron structure that reaches skyward some 50 feet and spans approximately 7,200 square feet. Every inherited a family ethos of "save everything and make do." From youth, he learned the value of cast-off materials and gained an interest in recycling that spurred an artistic course that has culminated in a series of "mechanical fantasies."

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BIG IDEA: TRANSFORMATION

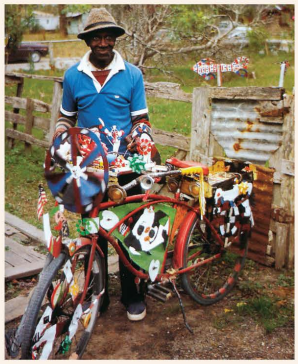
Transformation is an important and inevitable part of life. It can also result from active engagement. Art-environment builders are compelled or even driven to transform themselves and/or their environments. Art offers a medium for exploring transformation that allows for the reconstruction of the ordinary into the extraordinary.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

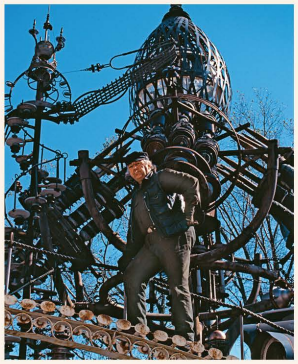
- What is transformation?
- Why would someone transform themselves or their environment?
- How does transforming something change its meaning?

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students work in teams to transform ordinary mechanical objects into an extraordinary kinetic sculpture.



David Butler with his sculptural bicycle, Patterson, LA, c. 1980. Photo: Richard Gasperi.



Tom Every (Dr. Evermor) on his Forevertron. Photo: Ron Byers, c. 1995.

OBJECTIVES:

(Organized by National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes)

Connecting: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the idea of transformation as it applies to art and everyday life.

Responding: Students will analyze and discuss artists like Emery Blagdon, David Butler, and Tom Every, who transformed ordinary objects.

Creating: Students will effectively use a variety of tools and materials to take apart mechanical objects and reassemble into a new kinetic sculpture.

Presenting: Students will present challenges and successes of object transformation.

AGE GROUP: early childhood, elementary, secondary

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JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

KINETIC COLLABORATIONS

Tom Every, *Isis*, 2000; metal and mixed media; 104 x 72 x 84 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

VOCABULARY:
assemblage, functionality, kinetic, repurpose, transformation

ART MATERIALS:

- **Found mechanical objects:** bicycles, motors, appliances, electronic equipment, musical instruments, toys, wagons, pulleys, propellors, various scrap metal, etc.
- **Materials for assemblage:** wires, various hardware, zip ties, duct tape, rubber bands, rope, etc.
- **Variety of tools**

RESOURCES:

- Umberger, Leslie. *Sublime Spaces & Visionary Worlds*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.

CONNECTIONS:

- Art History: Alexander Calder, Rube Goldberg machines, Leonardo da Vinci sketches
- Music Video: OK Go "This Too Shall Pass" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qybUFnY7Y8w
- Children's Books: McGough, R. (2004). *Dotty inventions and some real ones too*. London, UK: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

  Spires, A. (2014). *The most magnificent thing.* Tonawanda, NY: Kid Can Press.

David Butler, untitled (bicycle), n.d.; steel, paint, and mixed media. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

DISCUSS:

- Discuss the idea of transformation with the students.
  - "What do you already know about transformation?"
  - "How have you experienced transformation?"
- Introduce, view, and discuss the work of David Butler, Tom Every, and Emery Blagdon. All of these art-environment builders transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary.
  - "What objects and materials do you recognize within these works of art? In what ways have they been transformed?"
  - "Why do you think the artists selected these objects?"
  - "How has the meaning or purpose of these objects changed?"

CREATE:

1. In small groups, have students investigate a variety of materials and mechanical objects and use a variety of tools to disassemble.
2. Teacher will demonstrate various techniques of assemblage and discuss various aesthetic choices (e.g., balance, composition, scale).
3. Students select a variety of deconstructed objects to repurpose into a kinetic sculpture.
4. Each group will sketch a design of their proposed assemblage incorporating concepts of engineering, mobility, functionality, and aesthetics.
5. Using a variety of tools, students collaboratively construct their design using problem-solving skills.

REFLECT:

- Students will discuss challenges and successes of object transformation.
  - "What was the most difficult part of this process?"
  - "What challenges emerged and how did your group work through them?"
  - "How did your final product compare to your original design?"
  - "How does your piece address the concepts of engineering, mobility, functionality, and aesthetics?