

What is Vernacular Art?

Vernacular art is a very emotionally charged type of art, often created using **found** materials.



Vernacular artists are untrained, often living in isolated settings, who create art in response to their environment and experiences.

These artists see painting or sculpture as a powerful form of expression and communication, even though they are not professionally or academically trained in the field of art.

The artists represented in the Gadsden Arts Center's Permanent Collection have diverse reasons for making art, but all are driven to create in response to the world around them.

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Connect the statement on the left to artist on the right. Hint: Answers can be found inside this guide and on the informational panel.

Which artist uses a soda can tab as a hanger?

Joe Louis Light

Which artist began painting after tragedy struck his family?

"Mr. Eddy" Mumma

Which artist paints on both sides of his works?

Ruby C. Williams

Which artist attaches found items to his works?

Mose Tolliver

Which artist originally began painting to attract visitors to her fruit stand?

Lonnie Holley



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Vernacular Art



Selections from the Gadsden Arts Center Permanent Collection

Lonnie Holley
Joe Louis Light
"Mr. Eddy" Mumma
Mose Tolliver
Ruby C. Williams

Meet the Artists

Use this guide to learn more about each of the featured artists

Lonnie Holley

Born in 1950 in Birmingham, Alabama, Lonnie Holley is the 7th of 27 children. Holley's discovery of his artistic talents came through



personal tragedy. After a house fire killed two of his nieces in 1979, and the family couldn't afford tombstones, Holley built them himself out of sandstone. A "universal believer," Holley asked God to give him something "to go to the top in life, and He did."

Holley believes that divine intervention led him to create his artwork, and thus a deep faith underlies many of his pieces. In the beginning, Holley constructed his sculptures primarily out of sandstone, but later expanded his materials to include discarded wire, metal, and wood.

Vocabulary

found materials - materials found in a person's immediate environment that can be used to create art

vernacular art - art made by untrained artists in response to their environment and experiences

Joe Louis Light

Born in 1934 in Dyersburg, Tennessee, Joe Light saw himself as a fighter against the shortcomings of humanity and used his paintings as his "weapons." His house and yard were covered with his paintings, instructing his neighbors on the word of salvation. Light's paintings are characterized by bold, black lines outlining brightly colored cartoon-like figures. He worked with house paint on wood and also painted on discarded objects. Sometimes, he placed these discarded items directly on top of his paintings, adding what he called "attachments."



Ruby C. Williams

Ruby C. Williams was born in the 1920s in Bealsville, Florida. Her great grandmother was one of the original founders of her town, which is one of the first African-American founded communities in Florida.

Originally, Williams began painting signs in order to attract visitors to her produce stand on Highway 60. When her signs gained popularity, she decided to sell her work and has been painting prolifically ever since. Her paintings tell stories from the Bible or from her own family and often have one of her moral "sayings" written on them.



"Mr. Eddy" Mumma

Edward Mumma was born in Milton, Ohio in 1908, and retired to Gainesville, Florida. In retirement, "Mr. Eddy" took an art class under his daughter's encouragement, in which a teacher said his style was "sloppy." Although he never took another class, Mumma continued to paint, creating between 600 to 800 works which he kept at his house and rarely sold.



Most of Edward Mumma's work consists of abstract versions of portraits focusing on faces and hands. His portraits almost always depict the same close-up, expressionless round face, with variations of colors, hand placements, and dress. Mumma often painted on both sides of his works, and framed them with scrap wood or plastic.

Mose Tolliver

Born in Alabama in 1920, Mose Tolliver started painting prolifically after an accident made him unable to work. His images were created on pieces of plywood with house paint, which Tolliver called "pure paint." As a hanging device, he often attached the tab of a soda or beer can.



Tolliver had a need to create, often painting up to 10 works per day. As the years progressed, Tolliver became less dexterous and began to train his children to carry out his art. Though not created by his hand, the works are his vision.