



# Emery Blagdon (1907-1986)

Starting in the 1960s, Emery Blagdon worked for more than twenty-five years on sculptures and paintings in a shed near his home in Nebraska. He believed that his **mobiles**, paintings, and sculptures had powers to cure people. He used different art materials and **found objects** to create his work such as masking tape, sheet metal, aluminum foil, minerals, lights, and mechanical odds and ends.

After he died, Dan Dryden, a pharmacist who became friends with Blagdon and Dryden's friend Don Christiansen saved Blagdon's work when it was being sold at an auction. They wanted to make sure that Blagdon's creation was **preserved** so that other people could experience and look at his work. Dan Dryden referred to Blagdon's work as "The Healing Machine."



After "The Healing Machine" traveled around the United States, and even to France in 1997, Kohler Foundation, Inc., purchased the entire collection of more than four hundred individual works in 2004.

It took three years to clean and **conserve** all of the pieces of "The Healing Machine." The entire collection was gifted to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in June 2007. "The Healing Machine" is on view at the Art Preserve.

## Mobile

A kinetic sculpture that hangs from the ceiling or another support. Mobiles are carefully balanced so that they can move freely from air movement.

## Found Object

Objects that are used as nontraditional art-making tools or materials. Often, a found object is something that was discarded or no longer usable for its original purpose. It can also be something from nature that can be collected, such as driftwood and rocks. Sometimes a found object is still functional for its original purpose but is used in a different way in an artwork. For example, buttons can become a texture that covers a sculpture.

## Preserve/Preservation

The process of keeping artwork intact and preventing damage.

## Conserve/Conservation

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



# John Michael Kohler Arts Center

1 Emery Blagdon, "The Healing Machine" (detail, installation view, John Michael Kohler Arts Center), c. 1955-1986; wood, metal, paint, and mixed media. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

2 Emery Blagdon, "The Healing Machine" (untitled individual component), c. 1955-86; metal and mixed media; 26 x 21 1/2 x 21 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

# Conservation Begins with Care

Emery Blagdon's work was saved because his friend Dan Dryden cared about "The Healing Machine" and wanted future generations to be able to see it. Had Dan not purchased the work at the auction, it might not have survived for us to learn from and experience it today.

## What do you care about that you hope is protected for future generations?

Design a button or a poster to tell people about a place, building, or object that means a lot to you. You can add abstract designs inspired by Emery Blagdon's paintings and use symbols and words to create your artwork. Find a button template at [jmkac.org/engage/educators/educator-resources](http://jmkac.org/engage/educators/educator-resources).

## Additional Resources and Extensions

- Inspired by Blagdon, use recycled materials to create an object that you imagine could have powers, for example the power to heal.
- We are all a part of documenting history! Create your own archive of visual culture. Take pictures of buildings and artwork in your community that you like, objects and rooms in your home, or places in nature that you like to visit. Write about what you notice there, or your memories of visiting.
- Look at more of Blagdon's work and learn about other artist-built environments at [jmkac.org/art-preserve/collections](http://jmkac.org/art-preserve/collections).

### For K-12 Educators

Suggested National Standard Connection

Visual Arts Connecting 2.3

Anchor Standard  
Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Enduring Understanding  
People create and interact with objects, places, and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

Essential Question  
How do objects, places, and design shape lives and communities? How do artists and designers create works of art or design that effectively communicate?



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1 Emery Blagdon, untitled, c. 1955-1986; oil paint, paper, and wood; 9 1/2 x 13 x 3/4 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

2 Emery Blagdon, untitled, c. 1955-1986; metal, oil paint, and wood; 12 1/2 x 23 3/4 x 1 in.