

Jesse Howard (1885–1983)



Jesse Howard was known for covering his property in Fulton, Missouri, with hundreds of painted signs. Known as “Sorehead Hill,” the site contained signs that explained Howard’s daily experiences and views of the world, such as interpretations of biblical verses, commentary on local and national politicians, and disapproval of people who stole his signs.

While many local residents disliked the site, newspaper reporters, artists, and art historians at universities took notice of it. By 1968, Howard’s signs were featured in Gregg Blasdel’s *Art in America* essay, “The Grass Roots Artist,” on art environments in the United States, and later, in exhibitions at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Philadelphia College of Art. In the 1970s, the Kansas City Art Institute purchased several works by Howard, and later became the **steward** of his signs after he passed away in 1983.

In 2016, the Kansas City Art Institute, in partnership with Kohler Foundation, Inc., transferred 187 objects from its Jesse Howard collection to the Arts Center. These objects, including eighty signs, six **mixed-media** sculptures, and more than fifty **archival** documents, joined the twelve signs already in the Arts Center’s collection.

Steward

A person or organization that looks after, cares for, and manages a place or object(s).

Mixed-media

The inclusion of more than one type of medium in a work of art. An art medium is the substance or material artists use to create their work.

Archival / Archives

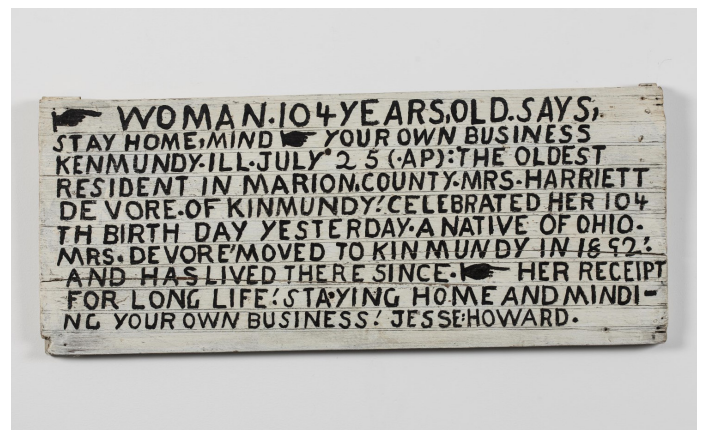
Documents and objects that are important to the history of a person, place, or event.

**John Michael
Kohler Arts Center**

jmkac.org/engage/educators



Artist Overview



Jesse Howard, untitled (God Bless the Owl), 1956; wood, enameled metal, fiberboard, leather, paint, ink; 39 1/4 x 35 x 2 1/2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of the Kohler Foundation, Inc.

Jesse Howard, untitled, c. 1945–83; oil on fiberboard; 14 1/2 x 35 1/4 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of the Raymond K. Yoshida Living Trust and Kohler Foundation, Inc.

Sharing a Message



Artists often rely on visual imagery to share a message. How do the ways artists share their ideas change when they use mostly text instead of images?

Can you think of any signs you have seen in your community or elsewhere that you might consider art? Where is the sign and what did it say?

Think about a place in your home or your community where you would want to display a sign and answer the following questions on a piece of paper:

- Where would the sign go?
- What would the sign say?
- Why is this sign important?

Now design your sign using upcycled materials like cardboard, wood, or other found objects. You can use any medium, such as markers or paint, to make marks on the surface.

You can practice writing your message on scratch paper first. Think about the lettering you want to use. Do you want to use your own handwriting or make your letters look like a specific font?

When you are finished with your sign, display it! If it is intended for a space in your community, such as your school, make sure that you have permission to display it before hanging it up.

Additional Activities

- Go on a sign scavenger hunt. What kinds of signs can you find in your community when you look closely? Are there any you have never noticed before? Do you have a favorite?
- Look at more of Jesse Howard's work at artpreserve.org/artists/jesse-howard

For K-12 Educators

Suggested National Standard Connection

Visual Arts Connecting 10.1

Anchor Standard

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Enduring Understanding

Through art-making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

Essential Question

How does engaging in creating art enrich people's lives? How does making art attune people to their surroundings? How do people contribute to awareness and understanding of their lives and the lives of their communities through art-making?