

David Best: Artist Archive
Collection CAE1905

Introduction/Abstract

David Best is an internationally renowned American sculptor best known for his Burning Man temples. This archive represents his entire artistic practice.

Biographical Note: Name of Creator

David Best (born in San Francisco, 1945) is an internationally renowned American sculptor. Best attended the College of Marin in Kentfield, California, and in his mid-twenties, after being drafted to serve in the U.S. Army in Germany, he enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute, earning his B.F.A. in 1974, followed by his M.F.A. in 1975.

Best's primary influences are artists of the Beat generation, funk and assemblage artists such as Edward Kienholz and Bruce Conner, and outsider artists. His elaborately detailed and technically accomplished works—paintings, sculptures, collages, art cars, and ceramics—can be found in many distinguished public and private collections, such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Oakland Museum, the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, and the San Jose Museum of Art. He is, however, best-known as the Temple Builder at Burning Man. Thomas Albright's influential book, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-80: An Illustrated History* (1985) included a brief passage on Best and his work, and his exhibitions have been reviewed in numerous publications such as *Artweek*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*.

Scope and Content

Artist David Best first began collaborating with others 20 years ago, when he began stripping down vehicles and giving them total sculptural makeovers, using recycled materials and found objects, often retrieved from dumps and dumpsters. Since then, he has created “art car” sculptures from the skeletons of 36 cars and two buses and has worked with more than 10,000 people.

Best built his first Burning Man Temple in 2000 titled the *Temple of the Mind*. During construction it became a memorial to Michael Hefflin, a member of the crew who died in a motorcycle accident just prior to the event, and as such became a sacred space for remembering others. In 2001, Burning Man helped fund the Temple projects and David, along with Jack Hays who was also responsible for the construction of the *Temple of the Mind*, built the much larger *Temple of Tears*. That year marked the beginning of a new ritual for the participants at Burning Man each year. After days of writing prayers on the structures, of affixing offerings from one's life such as photographs or paintings, or of leaving the ashes and other moments of loved ones, the Temple was burned on Sunday night.

In 2002, Best returned with a new project: *The Temple of Joy*. In 2003, David departed from the wood temples and created the ornate paper *Temple of Honor*. In 2004, the *Temple of Stars* was a quarter mile long and almost 120' high. David took a break in 2005 and 2006 to work on personal projects, including the *Hayes Green Temple* in San Francisco. Returning in 2007, Best, Tim Dawson and the temple crew built the *Temple of Forgiveness*. Best originally suggested he might create one more temple in 2010 or 2011, however the 2010 *Temple of Flux* and the 2011 *Temple of Transition* were designed and built by other artists. Best returned in 2012 to design and coordinate the building of the *Temple of Juno*. In 2014, Best and crew constructed the *Temple of Grace*.

In January and February of 2019 Best traveled to Coral Springs and Parkland, Florida to build *The Temple of Time* in remembrance of the 17 lives lost at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14th, 2018, from a school shooting. He has also created temples in Nepal and Ireland.

Materials in the archive span Best's career and include slides, transparencies, digital images, technical drawings, sketches, models, PowerPoint presentations, and audio files.

This archive is currently in process.