

**Butch Anthony**  
The Persistence of  
Form in Life's Remains

May 17-August 15, 2025 • The Bo Bartlett Center

OSSEOALBUS

# **Butch Anthony**

## **The Persistence of Form in Life's Remains**

May 17–August 15, 2025

The Bo Bartlett Center  
921 Front Ave, Columbus, GA 31901

Cover image credit: Travis Mackey







Image Credit: Travis Dodd

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Image Credit: Andrew Moore

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF WONDER

### Butch Anthony's Bone Logic

About 15 years ago, I was driving down Alabama Route 169 just west of U.S. 431—what used to be The Old Federal Road-- and it was there that I first stumbled upon Butch Anthony's sprawling eighty-acre kingdom of curiosities. At the time, I was unaware that I was traveling the same route where P.T. Barnum once hawked his spectacles and Lafayette made his grand American tour. This was the road Congress funded in 1805 to connect Georgia to New Orleans, cutting straight through Creek Indian Territory. This very road witnessed thousands of Native Americans forced west by the Indian Removal Act, along with soldiers, tradesmen, adventurers, peddlers, vagrants, gamblers, and speculators of every kind imaginable. And it seems fitting, on this road, in Seale, Alabama, I would discover Butch Anthony's Museum of Wonder. In this roadside attraction, the unimaginable has become routine, and the absurd has been elevated to art. For decades, Anthony has been building this modern-day cabinet of curiosities. It houses everything from the world's largest gallstone to an actual footprint purported to be from Sasquatch. Visitors can drive through shipping containers filled with assemblages or wander through buildings packed with his "Intertwangled" portraits and strange welded creations. And it was there, that first encounter with Anthony's peculiar universe of found objects, that I began my long, strange journey into his creative vision.

Over the years, I've been able to witness the evolution of Anthony's artwork, and recently, I have seen something shift. Emerging from the otherworldly ecosystem of collected wonders and assembled curiosities is his new exhibition, *The Persistence of Form in Life's Remains*, at the Bo Bartlett Center from May 17 to August 15, 2025.





This exhibition features seven large-scale bone works that represent an evolution in Anthony's artistic practice. Where earlier work layered imagery and accumulated objects with a carnivalesque spirit, these new pieces embrace a kind of monochromatic purity. The shift is striking when you first encounter these works. But having witnessed this evolution over time, the progression from the maximalist sensibility of the Museum of Wonder to the focused intensity of these unified white bone sculptures feels entirely natural and maybe necessary. In this exhibition, Anthony has distilled decades of collecting and creating into something approaching the sublime.

The amount of "stuff" in this exhibition is staggering: thousands of bones, two miles of electric fence wire, fifty-five gallons of Sherwin Williams white paint, and more. These aren't the materials of a weekend hobbyist or even a serious folk artist working within established traditions. This is the output of someone who has reimagined what it means to transform found materials into the monumental. When I hear Anthony talk about his "employees"—beetles, fire

ants, buzzards, sun, rain—he's describing a process of geological time, where a single cow's bone requires years before it's ready for artistic transformation. In this exhibition, Anthony utilizes a sophisticated conceptual approach that represents a fundamental restructuring of the relationship between natural processes and cultural production, a sophisticated approach that I began to understand during a particularly memorable visit to Anthony's place in 2018.

In 2018, contemporary artist Mark Dion was a visiting scholar at Columbus State University, and I had the opportunity to bring him to the Museum of Wonder. I told Dion that an artist in Alabama was creating work similar to his and suggested we should see it, though I wasn't sure if he would be offended by the comparison or captivated by Anthony's approach. Like Dion's institutional critiques of collecting and classification, Anthony's work functions as a modern version of seventeenth-century curiosity cabinets. But where Dion's cabinets, though often humorous, maintain a coolly analytical stance, Anthony's evoke personal history and regional specificity. His sprawling collections privilege wonder over classification and experience over expertise. Dion was not only captivated by the place but genuinely excited by what he encountered. During our drive back to Columbus that evening, he spoke enthusiastically about how Anthony knew exactly what he was doing—that his process represents a different kind of intellectualism, one emerging from lived experience rather than academic theory. Dion even noted the art history books in Anthony's house, recognizing that Anthony isn't working in a vacuum but is deeply aware of cultural products and art around him. This understanding of Anthony as an intellectually engaged artist, not an outsider working in isolation,

distinguishes his work from conventional outsider art—a label that feels increasingly inadequate. For instance, when



Mark Dion, *Cabinet* (from *Project 82 - "Rescue Archeology: A Project for The Museum of Modern Art"*), 2004  
© 2025 Mark Dion



Anthony purchases a 1790s oil painting from the Albany Museum and paints skeletal figures over it, he's engaging in conceptual strategies that wouldn't be out of place in a Chelsea gallery. The fact that he does this work in rural Alabama, using materials salvaged from roadside ditches, flea markets, and cow pastures, doesn't diminish its conceptual sophistication—it amplifies it, creating work that functions as both high and low art.

While standing in Anthony's new exhibition, *'The Persistence of Form in Life's Remains,'* surrounded by these towering white bone structures, it occurred to me that these new pieces have a clear connection with late modernist American assemblage art. These new works occupy an interesting position between Robert Rauschenberg's combines and Louise Nevelson's monochromatic sculptures. Rauschenberg shocked the art world by incorporating a stuffed goat and a car tire onto his canvas (an act that I could see Anthony doing without hesitation). And Nevelson transformed cast-off furniture into monochromatic walls of abstraction. Where both artists revolutionized assemblage through extreme material choices, Anthony has pushed this collecting and arranging sensibility into a more primal terrain. Rauschenberg's combines were urban, immediate, and pop-cultural; Nevelson's assemblages achieved transcendence through uniformity of color and form; Anthony's new artworks are rural, patient, and fantastical. All three artists share an understanding that meaning emerges from unexpected juxtapositions and that repetition can transform the mundane into the monumental. But where Rauschenberg pulled from consumer culture and Nevelson from architectural

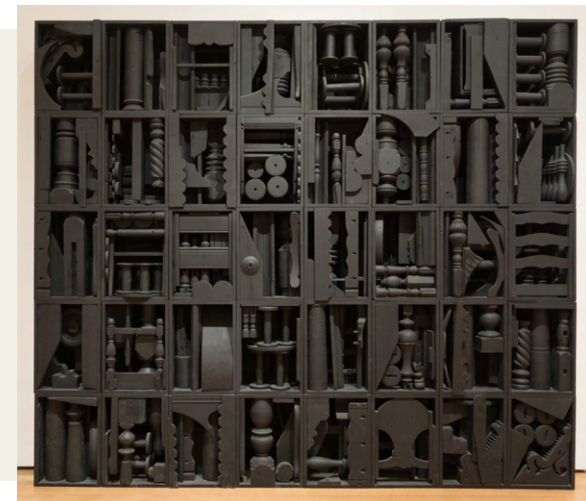
fragments, in this new exhibition, Anthony unearths something dark in our collective consciousness.

This exhibition can be a bit unsettling—not because the bone pieces are macabre (though they are) or because they smell faintly of old leather and Southern Wax Myrtle (though they do), but because they force you to confront the uncomfortable truth that everything you think you know about permanence is probably wrong. The gallery appears to have been transformed into a hybrid of a grand cathedral and ancient catacombs. In *The Persistence of Form in Life's Remains*, Anthony has assembled works that function less like traditional sculptures and more like archaeological evidence from a civilization that hasn't yet occurred—or perhaps one that already did, and we have just forgotten.

At the exhibition's south end stands the ossuary wall—a forty-foot-wide, twenty-foot-tall architectural intervention within the gallery. Anthony has filled it with salvaged church windows and discarded dresser drawers, arranging them alongside tools, shoes, chandeliers, and other Alabama remnants, all interwoven with bones. This contemporary monument weaves together the complex history of the Old Federal Road with objects you might find in your grandfather's woodshed. The wall transforms artifacts into artistic materials, functioning simultaneously as sculpture, memorial, and roadside attraction. Its scale and ambition match those of any work you would find in a major museum, yet the materials and methodology remain distinctly DIY.



"Monogram" by Robert Rauschenberg Foundation is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.



"Louise Nevelson, Big Black (1963)" by smallcurio is licensed under CC BY 2.0.





Then there's the centaur shooting basketballs through the head of the Hoop Snake, a piece that required Anthony over six months to complete. The Hoop Snake is a creature from Southern folklore—a serpent that supposedly rolls itself into a wheel and chases its prey. Anthony has transformed this mythological terror into sports entertainment, creating a horse-and-human skeleton that shoots basketballs through the snake's open mouth—a real basketball hoop, but the net is made from two hundred chicken wishbones. Anthony hammered thousands of reclaimed rusty nails straight on an anvil before driving them into cedar timbers that form the snake's body. These nails serve the same purpose as the nail fetishes in traditional African sculpture—keeping evil spirits at bay. But Anthony's humor always lurks just beneath the surface. The protective ritual becomes absurd with the sheer number of nails, the mythological becomes an athletic spectacle, and the terrifying becomes playful.

At the center of this exhibition is a wedding dress made entirely of bones, accompanied by a giant golden ball and chain dragged behind the bride. This sculpture reimagines traditional matrimonial ceremonies—a marriage reconfigured through Anthony's eye for alchemical transformation. During the opening reception, even though I knew about it beforehand, I was still stunned to see a live model standing inside this skeletal gown with a bone snake wrapped around her. This tableau managed to be both beautiful and humorous, like stumbling across a voodoo ceremony conducted by Martha Stewart. There was something absurd about the whole enterprise, the kind of

sideshow spectacle that runs through much of Anthony's work. This is an artist who once traded Leon Russell a few paintings for a 1988 Cadillac, then decorated it with yard-sale trophies and a deer head on the front grille. Stories like this reveal Anthony's commitment to the ridiculously absurd and his ability to transform everything in his orbit into potential art.

In our current moment, when much contemporary art feels disconnected from lived experience, Anthony's work offers something different: an original vision that arises from a deep engagement with place, history, and the endless possibilities of transformation. His bone quilts and the ossuary wall don't just reference tradition—they transform it into something celebratory, something universal that we all understand deep within ourselves. Standing in Anthony's exhibition, I began to realize that what he was offering us wasn't just art but a different way of thinking about value. In a culture obsessed with the digital, the immediate, and the new, Anthony's logic provides a kind of corrective. He shows us that the most meaningful transformations often occur slowly, naturally, and with the patient engagement that can only come from someone who has learned to see possibility everywhere they look. Like the best roadside attractions, Anthony's work demonstrates that wonder is always available to those willing to look closely enough, dig deep enough, and believe in the possibility that the world might be stranger and more absurd than we ever imagined.

*Michael McFalls*







Image Credit: Travis Dodd







### The Dream House, or The Bone House, 2024

Animal bones, aluminum wire, paint, electrical pipe, muffin pans, tin, windows, and used paint brushes



"When I was little, I used to build forts out in the woods, every kind of fort you could imagine. Tree forts, underground forts, even forts that looked like beaver lodges. I didn't know it then, but I was practicing something older, something buried deep in the human story.

The other night, I dreamed of a house made of bones.

Rib cages arched into a vaulted roof. Vertebrae stacked into columns. It floated just above the earth, the heavy bones made somehow weightless, drifting silently through the woods like a ghost and casting long shadows on the ground below.

I had just been reading about the Bering Strait and the ancient crossings. The first migrants traveling into North America built their shelters from the remains of woolly mammoths. Tusk and bone lashed together, then cloaked in hide. Survival made sacred through necessity.

**Architecture carved from extinction."**

*Story by Butch Anthony*





### Bone Quilt #3, 2024

Animal bones, wire, bottle caps, paint, and electrical wire



"Over the course of three years, I worked not with machines but in quiet partnership with nature. Beetles, buzzards, ants, rain, and sun became my patient collaborators, cleansing each bone until only the essential remained: matter both sacred and raw.

Watching David Lynch's 1967 student film *Six Men Getting Sick (Six Times)*, the piece translates the film's cyclical violence and visceral purging into a physical, tactile form.

The quilt's surface is riddled with what look like crawdad holes, out of which bone chains emerge and spill—each one a gesture of internal expulsion, the body attempting to rid itself of what it can no longer hold. The entire piece is coated in six layers of white paint, a direct nod to the film's six repetitions, and to the idea of white as a sediment of healing and not as purity.

This is not an object of comfort; it is a relic of transformation, a fragile form stitched from the remnants of hard and haunted histories."

—Butch Anthony





### Bone Bouquet (*Osseoalbus phalli*), 2025

Over 100 raccoon baculum bones (*Procyon lotor*), deer and cow bones, wire, paint, chicken wishbones, and chewed beaver sticks

"In college, my favorite class was systematic botany. I spent months crisscrossing Alabama collecting, drying, and classifying over 100 plant species, learning to key them out and name them by their Latin identities. I always wanted to discover a new species no one had seen before.

I never did.

So now, I create my own.

This piece is part of an ongoing practice of invented taxonomy, giving form and name to imagined life. *Osseoalbus phalli* takes its title from Latin roots: "bone," "white," and "phallus," nodding to the material's origin and form. The work subtly references the Adam and Eve story, where some scholars suggest the "rib" taken from Adam may have been the baculum, a bone found in most mammals but absent in humans. A reminder that myths, like species, evolve."

—Butch Anthony



### Smell-A-Rama: Southern Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*)

Southern wax myrtle

"Southern wax myrtle is one of my favorite smells from childhood. It grows wild in the woods around my family's farm."

**To experience:** Remove the lid and take a deep whiff. Let the scent transport you, and imagine the fragrances of the *Bone Bouquet*.





## It's a Nice Day for a White Wedding, 2025

Animal bones, electrical wire, and metal



Built from over 500 pounds of animal bones and stitched together with miles of aluminum electrical wire, *The Bone Wedding Dress* is Butch's interpretation of Alabama haute couture. Drawing inspiration from

women's fashion between the 16th and 18th centuries, when garments like corsets were often structured with whale bone, it stands as a monument to endurance, ritual, and the skeletons beneath the surface of beauty.





## Ossuary, 2025

Wood, bones, found objects, aluminum wire, paint, shoes, drawers, and beaver sticks

A reimagining of the Golden Chamber of St. Ursula in Cologne, this ossuary draws from materials gathered along the historic Federal Road in Seale, Alabama. Shoes mark the footsteps of those who once traveled the path; roadside drawers become vessels of memory. Bedspring doors evoke sleep as a passage to peace. Butch transforms cast-off remnants into a shrine that blurs the sacred and the forgotten.







## The Legend of the Hoop Snake, 2025

Cedar logs, salvaged nails, chicken wishbones, horse skeleton, medical anatomical human skeleton, basketballs, found objects, and a basketball hoop



Butch's work is deeply rooted in the rich soil of Southern folklore, where myth, memory, and material are always tangled. *The Legend of the Hoop Snake* draws from an old Alabama tale of a serpent that grabs its own tail and rolls like a "hoop" through the woods. John Henry Toney of Seale, Alabama once warned, "If a hoop snake catches you, he'll form a hoop around your neck and kill you, then stick his tail up your nose to make sure you're not still breathing."

This piece weaves together that legend with nearly 100 pounds of straightened

nails salvaged from over a dozen abandoned homes across Alabama and Georgia, each hammered in like a protective charm against danger from biting snakes. A basketball hoop serves as the snake's tongue, with a net made of 200 chicken wishbones. At its center, a centaur shoots a golden basketball into the net, shattering the snake into 21 pieces.

In Butch's world, the stories never die they just take new forms—nailed together from memory, myth, and the remains of the South.





## As You Like It, or The Seven Layers of Intertwangleism, 2025

Mixed media, anatomical models, and assorted found drawers

Butch created a specific genre of work called *Intertwangleism*, (inter = to mix; twang = a distinctive way of speaking, thinking, behaving, assessing; and ism = a theory). Butch attended Auburn University in the early 1980's, where he studied zoology, geology, and botany. While there, he enrolled in a comparative anatomy class that he would later attribute to the use of veins and bones in his art.

"Once upon a time...

An ugly boy and an ugly girl lived in the woods. As they looked up into a tree, down came a snake and said to them, "Eat this apple, and all your ugly parts will separate and then come back together into a beautiful boy and a beautiful girl."

Something in the blood in their veins told them this would be a good move.

After they tasted the apple, all their parts popped out of their bodies: first the skin, then the bones, the veins, then the muscles, then the shadow. Then they felt a strange movement, and all the parts ran this way and that and disappeared into the woods.

Finally, the shadow said, "I must make a magic potion to lure the parts back together."

The shadow made a magic drink of Yaupon holly leaves and drank it.

Magically, the seven parts came back together, and they were both very beautiful.

And they lived happily ever after, but they had to wear clothes."

Story by Butch Anthony



## Smell-A-Rama: Horse Leather

Horse leather

"Open the lid and take a whiff.

"Breathe in deep. That's the smell of a hot, lathered horse just after you've pulled off the saddle.

One of my favorite smells from childhood.

*This is what the Scentaur smells like.*

Sometimes I dream about it.

Maybe you will too."





**Man from 1843, 2025**

Oil painting from 1843 found in Columbus, GA



**Lady from 1843, 2025**

Oil painting from 1843 found in Columbus, GA





## ABOUT THE BO BARTLETT CENTER

The Bo Bartlett Center is a multidisciplinary art space located on the Columbus State University campus in downtown Columbus, Georgia. Spanning 18,425 square feet, this former textile warehouse was transformed into a gallery space by AIA award-winning architect Tom Kundig and opened to the public in 2018. The center functions as both a gallery and an experimental arts incubator. Based on the belief that art can change lives, the center embraces a dual mission: to reach students and community through art programs that encourage participation from diverse voices, and to engage in collaboration with other institutions to present innovative exhibitions, publications, and interdisciplinary events.

At the heart of the center is the Scarborough Collection, featuring 14 monumental paintings by Columbus native Bo Bartlett. Along with these paintings, the center maintains Bartlett's comprehensive archive of records, writings, photographs, and sketchbooks that document his artistic process.

The Bo Bartlett Center is a unique cultural arts institution that serves both the students of Columbus State University and the surrounding communities.

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