

THORNTON DIAL

American , b. 1928

"If everybody understand one another, wouldn't nobody make art. Art is something to open your eyes. Art is for understanding."

- Thornton Dial

BIOGRAPHY

Thornton Dial was a pioneering African-American artist who rose to the pinnacle of contemporary art history over a thirty-year trajectory that began as he approached 60 years of age. Dial's body of work exhibits formal variety through expressive, densely composed assemblages of found materials, often executed on a monumental scale. His range of subjects embraces a broad sweep of history, from human rights to natural disasters and current events. His works have been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the American Folk Art Museum, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. Ten of Dial's works were acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014.

Thornton Dial was born into a sharecropping family in rural Alabama, on the eve of the Great Depression. He experienced the trauma and tumult of both Jim Crow segregation and the civil rights movement. Profoundly influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dial used art to confront issues of racial oppression in the United States, developing an allegorical style that was abstracted but narrative, conveying concerns both personal and universal.

His large, bold works, with incisive titles and themes of race and class, captivated the art world through sophisticated content and an aesthetic that defied stereotypes of "folk." Dial bridged the worlds of Black vernacular self-taught artists and the contemporary mainstream. He was a conduit between nineteenth-century-born artists like Bill Traylor; African American quilters who had, for too long, gone unrecognized as artists; and a younger generation of Black creatives seeking a way forward.

Dial lived to see his work be acquired by some of the most revered museums in the United States and become relevant to the mainstream art world in unprecedented ways. As the art world increasingly embraced him, Dial used his voice to raise serious questions about its long-standing hierarchies and inequities. He became emblematic of a shifting southern landscape in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries — as the deeply rooted vision of Black Americans revealed its tremendous power.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013** Daybreak: New Assemblages, Bill Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2011-13** Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial.
Indianapolis Museum of Art
New Orleans Museum of Art
Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC
High Museum of Art, Atlanta
- 2012-13** Thoughts on Paper.
Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC
Fleming Museum of Art at the University of Vermont, Burlington
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
- 2012** Thornton Dial: Viewpoint of the Foundry Man, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
Thornton Dial. Virginia Union University and Art Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2011** Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
Disaster Areas. Bill Lowe Gallery, Atlanta
- 2005** Thornton Dial in the 21st Century. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
- 1999** Thornton Dial: His Spoken Dreams. Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York
- 1993** Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger.
New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
American Folk Art Museum, New York
Milwaukee Art Museum
- 1992** Thornton Dial: Works on Paper. Luise Ross Gallery, New York
- 1991** Thornton Dial, Sr.: Works on Paper. Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York
- 1990** Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World, Southern Queens Park
American Hall Of Fame-Jamaica, New York
Thornton Dial. Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta
Thornton Dial: Ladies of the United States. Library Art Gallery, Kennesaw State

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2013** Seismic Shifts: Ten Visionaries in Contemporary Art and Architecture.
National Museum & School, New York
- 2012** Thornton Dial and Lizzi Bougatsos. James Fuentes, New York
The Soul of a City: Memphis Collects African American Art,
Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee
Creation Story: Gee's Bend Quilts and the Art of Thornton Dial. The First Center
For Visual Arts
- 2011** The Armory Show, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York
- 2002-04** In the Spirit of Martin. Smithsonian Institution, Traveling
- 2000** Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1998** Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology, Philadelphia
Museum

BOOKS & CATALOGUES

- Thornton Dial: Viewpoint of the Foundry Man. catalogue, Andrew Edlin Gallery, 2012
- Creation Story: Gee's Bend Quilts and the Art of Thornton Dial. catalogue, Frist Center for the
Visual Arts and Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2012
- Thornton Dial: Thoughts on Paper. edited by Bernard L. Herman, Ackland Art Museum and
University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2012
- Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial. Catalogue, Prestel, 2012
- Outsider Art Sourcebook. Raw Vision, 2009
- Thornton Dial in the 21st Century. catalogue, Tinwood, 2005
- American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum, Catalogue, 2001
- Souls Grown Deep. Volumes 1 & 2, Arnett et al, 2000 & 2001
- Passionate Visions of the American South, Self Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present. New
Orleans Museum of Art, 1993
- American Self-Taught. Maresca & Ricco, 1993
- Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger. Baraka & McEvilley, 1993
- 20th Century American Folk, Self-Taught, and Outsider Art, Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1993
- Museum of Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art & Artists, Abbeville
Press, 1990

MEDIA

- 2011 "Thornton Dial is Not An Outsider Artist" - Studio 360/Public Radio International
2007 "Mr. Dial Has Something to Say" - Alabama Public Television
2005 "Thornton Dial" - Alabama Public Television

ARTICLES

- 2011 Kuspit, Donald. Review, Art Forum, Summer
Wilkin, Karen. "Biography, History, Self-Evident Beauty."
The Wall Street Journal, April 21
Doran, Anne. Review, Time Out New York, April 14-20
Review, The New Yorker, April 11
Lacayo, Richard. "Outside the Lines." Time, March 14
Kino, Carol. "Letting His Life's Work Do the Talking." New York Times, February 20
Gómez, Edward M. "On the Border." Art & Antiques Magazine, February
- 2010 Jones, Phillip March. "Thornton Dial, Sr." Whitehot Magazine, February
- 2002 Giovanni, Nikki; Chassman, Gary Miles; Leonard, Walter. In the Spirit of Martin. Tinwood Books
- 1997 Smith, Dinitia, "Bits, Pieces and a Drive To Turn Them Into Art." New York Times,
1993 Smith, Roberta. "A Young Style for an Old Story." New York Times, December 19
Scott, Sue. "Thornton Dial [exhibition review]." ARTnews 92, April
Lloyd, Ann Wilson. "Thornton Dial at Luise Ross." Art in America, May
- 1991 Kuspit, Donald. "The Appropriation of Marginal Art in the 1980s." American Art
Winter/ Spring
- 1987 Kroll, Jack. "The Outsiders Are In: American Folk Artists Move into the World of Money & Fame | Newsweek December 2

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Whitney Museum of American Art
High Museum, Atlanta, GA
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, GA
American Folk Art Museum, New York
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL
The Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA
High Museum of Art, Atlanta
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Indianapolis Museum of Art
Intuit, Chicago, IL
Milwaukee Art Museum
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
New Orleans Museum of Art
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, IL