WRESTLING WITH HISTORY
SIDNEY MISHKIN GALLERY
BARUCH COLLEGE

WRESTLING WITH HISTORY
A CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SELF-TAUGHT ARTISTS

From the Collection of Ronald and June Shelp

Sandra Kraskin, Curator

Baruch College, The City University of New York
135 East 22 Street, New York, New York 10010
The Sidney Mishkin Gallery is delighted to celebrate contemporary African American self-taught artists with two exhibitions selected from the collection of Ronald and June Shelp. The first exhibition (February 16 to March 14) focuses on the Dial family and includes works by Thornton Dial, Sr.; Arthur Dial; Richard Dial; Thornton Dial, Jr.; and Ronald Lockert. The second exhibition (March 27 to April 19) includes work from a representative group of artists also selected from the Shelp Collection.

Ronald and June Shelp began collecting the work of southern African American self-taught artists in 1989, after taking a tour to Georgia organized by the Museum of American Folk Art in 1988 and guided by Ben Apfelbaum. During this tour, the Shelp's met William Arnett, a charismatic collector of self-taught artists. Several months later, after another visit to the South to meet some of the artists, the Shelp's decided to begin their own collection. With the help of William Arnett and his son Paul, they purchased 40 works of art created by southern African American self-taught artists.

Both Ronald and June Shelp were born in the South and their passion for art from this area reflects their own histories as well as their interest in folk and indigenous art. When Ronald Shelp began his career in international business in 1966, he traveled extensively in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. During these trips, he collected the work of indigenous artists.

When the Shelps began to collect the works of southern African American self-taught artists, Mr. Shelp was president and CEO of The New York City Partnership and the New York Chamber of Commerce and Industry. His position at the partnership, with its focus on New York's civic and social concerns, provided an opportunity for him to lend part of his collection for display at the partnership's headquarters. This additional exhibition space encouraged the rapid expansion of the collection, which has become one of the major collections of the work of southern African American self-taught artists.

The Shelp's have donated art from their collection to several museums. This catalog reproduces paintings by Thornton Dial, Sr., that are now in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of American Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (pages 3, 70 and 71). Other work has also been donated to the Museum of American Folk Art, the Newark Museum, and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

On behalf of Baruch College, I would like to thank Ronald and June Shelp for making these two exhibitions possible. In addition, I would like to acknowledge our appreciation to Jerome S. Berg, who suggested this project and has generously provided encouragement and financial support for the exhibitions.

The assistance of Gerard Werkin, director of the Museum of American Folk Art, New York, has also been important for this project. His colleagues Lee Kogan, director of the Folk Art Institute, and Katya Ullmann, librarian, have provided help with our research on individual artists. I would like to thank Ann Helene Iversen, curatorial assistant, for her work compiling the bibliography, and Tricia Laughlin for assistance with the exhibition and its catalog.

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge the encouragement and support of Baruch College President Matthew Goldstein and Provost Lois Cronholm. Their commitment to providing cultural programs at Baruch College has been essential to the success of the Mishkin Gallery.

Sandra Kraskin
Director, Sidney Mishkin Gallery

Cover:
Detail of
Thornton Dial, Sr.
I Had a Dream, A Dream about Heavy Bombs, 1991
Oil on canvas, 78 x 78
(The complete work is pictured on page 4)

Editor: Diane Harrigan
Designer: Robin Rose Gonzalez

Exhibition History
The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
the New York Public Library, October 1996

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Thornton Dial, Sr.
The Cool Mine, 1969
Oil on canvas mounted on wood, 68 x 72
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Ronald and June Shelp, 1993
WRESTLING WITH HISTORY

Sandra Kraskin

Why do the works of self-taught artists radiate such intensity, such visual power? These paintings and sculptures are, in fact, frequently called "visionary" or "passionate." Why do mainstream artists with extensive training from America's most prestigious universities and art schools often fail to achieve the same intensity? Why do well-trained "mainstream" artists appropriate elements of so-called "outsider" art created by self-taught artists? One of the major assets of mainstream artists—their training—places them "within" the visual dialogue of the contemporary art establishment, but it also saddles them with the history of Western art. After graduating, the task of the young artist is to confront the challenge of this history. Struggling with the past, each artist must face his or her most significant predecessors and overcome the tendency to imitate them.

In *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, literary scholar and critic Harold Bloom describes this process with reference to the development of poets:

My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves. But nothing is got for nothing, and self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself?²

Self-taught artists create themselves. They do not carry the burden of the history of art; they are, by definition, "outside" the mainstream. Instead of wrestling with the titans of art history, they directly confront their own history, their own vision of the world, or other aspects of their cultural heritage. These artists are not intimidated by centuries of masterpieces; neither are they tempted to imitate their more famous predecessors. Free to express intensely felt themes and imagery, these artists work from an interior reality rather than from a theoretical construct. It is this confidence and conviction, as well as a directness of purpose, that the viewer senses as passion in the work of the "outsider" artists.

In his essay "Proud-Stepping Tiger: History as Struggle in the Work of Thornton Dial," Thomas McVilley explains the source of the modernist dialectic of insider and outsider:

The modernist distinction between insider and outsider, or between contemporary and folk, reflects the broader distinction between culture and nature that was emphasized by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the chief philosopher of modernism. Hegel called culture Work, on the theory that through it he saw as the necessary struggle of history would be completed: nature he called Madness because supposedly it did no work and seemed to act out no historical purpose. Interpreting Hegel's theories in terms of art, culture means specifically contemporary, self-consciously historicized work, and nature signifies the naive or folk or ahistorical.³

Based on this artificial division, self-taught artists have been relegated to the margins of history and separated from the trained artists who appropriated elements of their work.

**Intersecting the History of Art**

In the 1980s and 1990s, the best contemporary "outsider" artists have intersected the history of "insider" art. In fact, the work of some self-taught artists cannot be easily differentiated from the work of professional artists. At the same time, some contemporary "insider" artists have rejected their training and reached for inspiration from traditions outside the mainstream experience. The inside and the outside are converging, pointing toward a new synthesis for the 21st century.

As an "outsider" artist, Thornton Dial, Sr., exemplifies this process. He stands with one leg inside and one leg outside the history of American art. Will his powerful work project him into the mainstream? Lack of formal training defines him as an "outsider" artist, yet his paintings have recently been discovered, exhibited, reviewed, documented, and collected—activities that redefine him as a prominent artist. In fact, his large, gestural paintings can be comfortably hung next to the best modern and postmodern art.
In 1945, the French artist Jean Dubuffet began collecting Art Brut, work he considered "tough" or "raw," which was created by untrained artists, including the mentally handicapped. Dubuffet had studied Hans Prinzhorn's book Bilderschaft der Geisteskranken, which documented the art of psychiatric patients. In this work, he found a brutal power that served as a metaphor for the "madness" that characterized the state of civilization during World War II.

Influenced by Art Brut, Dubuffet developed his own technique of painting in which he mixed pigment with sand, earth, and fixatives, building a thick textured ground. Scratching monstrous figures into this tortured ground, Dubuffet depicted the insanity of war and its effect on humanity. His "primitive," cave-like paintings, begun in 1945, visualize the failure of progress in the modern world and the regression of the human race back to an uncivilized state.

In the wake of the war, many American artists had also lost faith in "culture" and looked back to "nature" for their salvation. Influenced by the European Surrealists who came to New York as exiles during World War II, these Abstract Expressionists experimented with an automatic process of drawing, using their unconscious as a source for their imagery. They created an avant-garde movement that made New York City the art capital of the world.

Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock rejected their academic training and, instead, used an improvisational process that was closer to the approach of African American jazz musicians than to traditional painting techniques. Willem de Kooning challenged Dubuffet's monstrous figures with a series of paintings of very fierce women. His Woman I, 1950-52, emerges from a ground of violent brushstrokes, to stare at the viewer with bared teeth.

Pollock, dubbed "Jack the Drripper" by Time magazine in 1956, used the technique of dripping paint, which evoked a visionary process recalling shamanistic ritual. Like self-taught visionary artists, he created forms that were drawn from his subconscious but also represented a universal archetypal image. His paintings such as Eyes in the Heat, 1946; Slimming Substance, 1946; and Ocean Greyness, 1953, the images of eyes emerge from the layered depths of the ocean of paint to bear witness to the struggle of the artist as an individual as well as a collective member of society. The iconography of Pollock's "eyes" parallels the Kongo belief in the vision of ancestors from their spirit (kabila). The sea also provided a metaphor for the unconscious.

Almost five decades later, Thornton Dial, Sr.'s painting I Had a Dream, a Dream about Heavy Burden, 1991 (cover), presents a postmodern vision, with its peering eyes serving to witness history. Dial's history, however, is the history of the black experience in America, not the history of American art. Instead of the visual unification of conflicting forces seen in Pollock's paintings, Dial's dramatic works reveal many overlapping layers of experience that do not unite into one view but present a more complex reality, one concerned with many levels of experience. Dial's paintings exemplify the postmodern struggle to deconstruct the exclusionary categories of modernism. As a self-taught artist struggling with history, Dial combines "nature" and "culture" in what McEvilley describes as Dial's "tiger's leap" into contemporary art.

Using his metaphorical tiger, Thornton Dial, Sr., wrestles with American history and his cultural heritage as an African American in order to portray his own vision of reality. Dial's title for his painting When the Tiger Cat Leaves the Jungle He Gets a Monkey on His Back presents his theme, and many of his large, dramatic paintings depict a narrative of struggle: I Had a Dream, a Dream about Heavy Burden; The Big Black Bowl of Life; Plastic and Frogs (Scratching for Life); Dickinson's Electric Light; and Strategy of the United States: Black Storm Coming On. As McEvilley pointed out in a discussion of the development of Dial's art, "In 1987 his tiger starts out primitive, but by 1989 or 1990 it has become contemporary." 16

The Dial Family History

Born in Alabama in 1928, Thornton Dial, Sr. has spent his life making "things." With little formal education and no art school training, he used his experience as a steamworker to make welded assemblages of scrap metal. After working for 30 years at the Pullman Standard Company, a manufacturer of railroad cars, Dial found himself unemployed at the age of 55. He began to devote more time and attention to his creative work, and, by 1987, Dial was making paintings on canvas and wood. Acknowledging that art is about ideas as well as painted images, Dial engages important historical and cultural issues. He knows that "art isn't about paint. It isn't about canvas. It's about people. Too many people died without ever getting their mind out to the world. I have found how to get my ideas out and I won't stop. I got ten thousand left." 17 Thornton Dial, Sr., does not decorate objects. He wrestles with history and tradition, challenging the boundary between self-taught and contemporary mainstream art.

Other artist-members of Thornton Dial, Sr.'s extended family include Arthur Dial (his brother), Richard Dial and Thornton Dial, Jr. (his sons), and Ronan (his nephew). They also contend with contemporary social and political issues. Thornton Dial, Jr.'s Mississippi Burning, 1989; Arthur Dial's Welfare Office, 1990; Richard Dial's The Comfort of Prayer, 1988; and Ronald Lockett's Traps, 1988, and Homeless People, 1989, are all created by artists who—sustained by their cultural heritage—have struggled with the experience of being African American in the United States.

Ronald Lockett is a younger member of the family; his father was raised with Thornton Dial, Sr. Lockett graduated from high school in Bessemer, Alabama, and helped in the family business, manufacturing lawn furniture. Encouraged by family artists, Lockett began to develop his own creative work. His painting Traps, 1989, is a masterpiece of postmodern art. Both physically and intellectually layered, this painted construction of wood, wire fence, tin, plastic, and oil and enamel serves as social and political commentary. With images of chains and traps, Lockett recalls the history of slavery and its aftermath in the United States, as well as contemporary concerns about young African Americans trapped in poverty. Lockett's political content as well as his use of materials, such as the overlay of wire fencing, suggests a comparison with the contemporary German artist Anselm Kiefer and the work of mainstream American artists Julian Schnabel and David Salle.
African Traditions in American Art

The work of the southern black self-taught artists in the Shelb Collection celebrates a strong African American tradition. Visual images that refer to African art and continue African traditions can be discovered in this contemporary American art. In "Africanisms in Afro-American Visionary Arts," Maude Southwell Wahlman suggested:

...most ideas highly valued by cultures are encoded in many forms outside the human mind. Such seems to be the case with African protective religious ideas which have been encoded into visual arts, songs and dance, and black speech. All forms recognize improvisation as a style and many refer to West African and Central African religious concepts which survive in contemporary Afro-American cultures because they have been encoded in so many ways. The redundancy indicates high value and insures survivability.14

Wahlman observed that many African American visionary artists derive imagery from their dreams, and she emphasized the importance of the use of improvisation as a traditional protective device. If improvisation is considered protective, the process of imitation becomes useless.15

With logs and driftwood, self-taught artist Ralph Griffin improvised human figures and animals, often painting them red, black, and white, the traditional Kongo colors of protection.

He described his process: "I take a root from the water and have a thought about it, what it looks like, then I paint it red, black, and white, to put a bit of vision on the root."16 Griffin's The Wizard, 1988, from the Shelb Collection, is made from driftwood and paint. This figure's twisted root form refers back to the earliest Kongo healing charms, and its white painted eyes recall the traditional use of white kaolin by African sculptors.17 Griffin's Untitled (Dog), 1989, evokes an association with its Kongo counterpart, the dog-like Nkisi, in which the dog functions as a messenger from the dead.18

With a teapot, a piece of garden hose, and some carpet, Hawkins Bolden created a mask-like sculpture with pieced eyes. He explained his process:

I take all kinds of old buckets, garbage can tops—all kinds of stuff. I've been getting all of this old carpet to make the tongues out of it. That's what I do with that... Those buckets, I make eyes on them. They have four eyes; some have three—a middle eye. I make them so they can see good: two eyes here, and one way up on the top of the head. The third eye sees a whole lot, you know.19

Turning the teapot upside down, Bolden transformed the spout into a nose. He extended it downward to the earth with a section of garden hose, providing a conduit for the safe passage of the soul on its journey to the watery realm of the ancestors under the sea.20 In America, this

African graveyard tradition is also apparent in cemeteries where sections of iron pipe have been used to serve as passageways for the spirit.21 Bolden's teapot-head, with its jagged, punctured eyes, also continues the African American tradition of placing last-used objects with ritually pierced openings on grave sites.22 The iconography of the eyes as representative of ancestral vision assumes additional significance in the work of Hawkins Bolden, who has been blind since childhood.

Demonstrating the continuity of the traditions of West Africa, Mary T. Smith's painted figures on sheet metal stood as guardian figures in her yard. The mask-like round heads of some of these figures suggest the form of the Kongo cosmogram, with its intersecting vertical and horizontal line, which denotes the four corners of the world.23 In an untitled painting of 1987 from the Shelb Collection, Smith created a blue face outlined with regal gold against a black ground. This powerful static figure confronts the viewer with a ceremonial force. Another untitled painting of 1987 by Smith depicts a black mask-like face outlined with bold, green brushstrokes. This emblematic form is loosely painted and radiates dance-like motion.

Energetic, bold, and loosely painted, Smith's figures visually converge with the style and subject matter of neo-Expressionist paintings.
created by such mainstream artists of the 1960s as Georg Baselitz and Mario Merz. In fact, the 1980s avant-garde art began to look more like the work of self-taught artists. Boundaries were erased as many contemporary artists tried to achieve the intensity of vision that characterized the work of self-taught artists. The "outsiders" provided a model for the "insiders" to follow in their quest to reject the history of art and to invent the art of the future.

Retrieving History

As the 20th century comes to an end, the creative force of self-taught artists like Mary T. Smith and Thornton Dial, Sr., cannot be ignored or discounted. The postmodern discourse addresses social and political issues, including racism and multiculturalism, presenting a broader historical context that can include self-taught African American artists.

Notes


4. In 1952, Dubuffet's Art brut collection was installed in East Hampton, New York, at Alfonso Ossorio's estate, where many American artists were able to view it. The collection was exhibited a decade later at Codier and Warren Gallery in New York. It is now located in Lausanne, Switzerland.


20. Ibid.

Hawkins Bolden
Scatterme, c. 1988
Found metal, carpet, wood, and nails
79 x 25 x 14"  

Richard Barnside
Swords and Shirts and Odd
and Ends, 1988
Enamel on wood, 20 x 35"  

Archie Byron
Family Pain, 1988
Elmer's glue, sawdust, and pigments on plywood, 48 x 43½"
Arthur Dial

Adam and Eve, 1989
Tubing, carpet, and sealing compound on plywood, 39 3/4 x 39 3/4"
Richard Dial
The Man Who Tried to Comfort Everybody: 1989
Welded found metal and paint (chair). 64 x 28 x 32"  

Thornton Dial, Jr.
Crucifixion: 1989
Wood, barbed wire, paint, and nails. 52 x 44½ x 21"
Thornton Dial, Jr.
*King of Africa*, 1989
Enamel, carpet, and industrial sealing compound on wood, 48 x 60"

Thornton Dial, Jr.
*Mississippi Burning*, 1989
Tin and enamel on plywood, 48 x 50"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
The Beaver Dam the River and the Tigers Go Across, 1990
Oil on canvas, 99 1/2 x 69 1/4"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
The Big Back Bowl of Life, 1993
Oil and enamel on canvas mounted on wood, 65 x 65"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
Fishing for Love, 1991
Mixed media on paper, 30 x 22"
Thornton Dial, Sr.

Life Goes On for the African Lady. 1990
Mixed media on paper. 30 x 22 1/2" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.

Long Faced Lady in New York City. 1991
Mixed media on paper. 29 1/4 x 22 1/4"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
The New, 1992
Charcoal, graphite, and colored pencils on paper, 29 5/8 x 41 1/2"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
Rolling Mill: Steel Is the Master, Lady Is the Power, 1992
Enamel, steel springs, metal hinges, metal nozzles, pipe joints, garden hoses, wire, tin, rope, and industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood, 71 × 72½ × 3½".

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Plastic and Fragments (Scratching for Life), 1994
Oil, enamel, dried toothbrushes, plastic bags, wire, carpet fiber, and industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood, 42 × 36 × 8".
Thornton Dial, Sr.
-Spirit of Grand Central Station: The Man That Helped the Handicapped, 1990-
Enamel on headed rope carpet and industrial sealer compound on canvas mounted on plywood
60 x 83⅞" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
-Taking Care of Old Things (Honoring Lannis Holley), 1992-
Enamel, burlap, wire screen, rope carpet, and industrial sealer compound on canvas mounted on wood, 50⅜ x 65"
Thornton Dial, Sr.
Sitting and Waiting—The Man Needs, 1993
Enamel, oil, spray paint, found metal, and wood on canvas on wood, 60 x 48 x 7 1/2"
Bessie Harvey
Prehistoric Bird, 1988
Wood and paint, 29 1/2 x 44 x 19 7/16"
**Bessie Harvey**

*Zuma and Zeb*, 1986
Wood, wood putty, feathers, human hair, costume jewelry, glitter, and paint, 3'7" x 19 x 7½"

*View 1*

*View 2*

**Lonnie Holley**

*Big Mama*, 1986
Painted sandstone, 24½" x 13½ x 8½"
Lonnie Holley

Fighting at the Foundation of the Cross, 1988
Wood and found material, 57 x 36 x 15"
Joe Light
*Sheep, 1989*
Enamel on wood, 24 x 28½".

Ronald Lockett
*Adam and Eve, 1988*
Enamel and tin on plywood relief, 48 x 49 x 10".

Joe Light
*Red Mountain, 1989*
Enamel and metal on wood, 48 x 96".

Ronald Lockett
*Garden of Eden, 1988*
Enamel on tabletop, 35½ x 47½".
Ronald Lockett
Smoke Filled Sky, 1989
Enamel, charred wood, twig, and nails on plywood, 46½ x 47½ x 3"
Ronald Lockett
Indhuwood 1963
Busted tin collage and colored pencil on wood, 47 x 45"

Charlie Lucas
Children of the World Reaching Out, 1989
Welded found metal, 55 x 27 x 20"
J. B. Murry
*Untitled, mid 1980's*
Acrylic, gouache, and marker on paper, 23\(\frac{5}{8}\) x 19\(\frac{3}{4}\)".

Lorenzo Scott
*Jesus at a Child*, c. 1980
Oil on canvas with hand-painted wood frame
33\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 21\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 3\(\frac{5}{8}\)".

J. B. Murry
*Untitled, c. 1979-80*
Paint and marker on wood paneling, 20\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 25".

Herbert Singleton
*Entertain at the Feet*, 1994
Wood and paint, 19\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 60".
Mary T. Smith
Distilled, 1987
Enamel on plywood, 33 1/8 x 24 1/4"
Mary T. Smith

Entitled, 1987
Enamel on plywood, 36 x 28 1/4" 

Georgia Speller

Devil's Home in the United States, 1986
Acrylic, tempera, and pencil on paper
17 7/8 x 23 1/2" 

Georgia Speller

Mule Man in the Country, 1987
Acrylic and pencil on paper
18 x 24"
Henry Speller

**Train**, 1987
Marker on paper, 18 x 24" 

**Two Ladies**

Pencil, crayon, and marker on paper, 24 x 18" 

Jimmy Lee Sudduth

**Duck**, 1985

Berry juice and dirt on wood, 12½ x 23" 

**People at Church**, 1987

Natural homemade pigments and pencil on wood, 18½ x 23"
Jimmy Lee Suddoth

Ferris Wheel, 1988
Natural pigments and house paint on wood, 24 x 32”

Jimmy Lee Suddoth

Self Portrait with Kangaroo, c. 1985
Natural and artificial pigments on wood, 48 x 32”
James "Son" Thomas

Black Woman, c. 1986
Unfired clay with hair and glasses, 8 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 6" 

James "Son" Thomas

Squirrel, 1987
Unfired clay and spray paint, 5 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 3"

Mose Tolliver

Two Quail Birds, Two Finch Birds, Two Love Birds with a Ford Basket, 1988
House paint on plywood, 24 x 25 1/4"
Mose Tolliver
Deep Sea Water Turtle, 1967
House paint on plywood, 23 3/4 x 24"
CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITIONS

Part I: The Dial Family
A Celebration of African American Self-Taught Artists from the Collection of Ronald and Jane Shelp

Arthur Dial
Adam, 1989
Watercolor, mixed media on paper, 40 x 39 3/4" 

Arthur Dial
A Release, 1989
Watercolor, mixed media on paper, 40 x 39 3/4" 

Richard Dial
Release, 1988
Steel and enamel chair, 54 x 21 1/2 x 19" 

Richard Dial
The Comfort of Prayer, 1988
Steel and enamel chair, 54 x 21 1/2 x 19" 

Thornton Dial, Jr.
Cat, 1989
Enamel on carved plywood, 48 x 70 1/2" 

Thornton Dial, Jr.
Crucifixion, 1989
Wood, barbed wire, paint, and nails, 52 x 44 x 21" 

Thornton Dial, Jr.
King of Africa, 1989
Enamel, carpet, and industrial sealing compound on wood, 48 x 60" 

Thornton Dial, Jr.
Mississippi Burning, 1989
Tin and enamel on plywood, 48 x 50" 

Thornton Dial, Jr.
Moses and the Ten Commandments, 1988
Metal, steel, and enamel, 45 x 20 1/2 x 37 1/2" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
A Look in the Jungle: One Man Serves the Tiger Cat, 1988
Enamel, rope, carpet, and industrial sealing compound on wood, 48 x 96" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
The Risen Son the River and the Tigers Go Across, 1990
Oil on canvas, 59 x 60 1/4" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
The Big Black Bull of Life, 1991
Oil and enameled on canvas mounted on wood, 65 x 65" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
I Had a Dream, a Dream about heavy Burdens, 1991
Oil on canvas, 78 x 78" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Julie, 1993
Roots, goat carcass, wooden palette, enamel, and industrial sealing compound, 57 x 53 x 48" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Long Faced Lady in New York City, 1991
Mixed media on paper, 29 1/2 x 22 1/2" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
The News, 1992
Charcoal, graphite, and colored pencils on paper, 29 1/2 x 41 1/2" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Plastic and Fragments (Scratchings for Life), 1994
Oil, enamel, dried teardrops, plastic bags, wire, carpet fiber, and industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood, 42 x 36 x 8" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Rolling Hill: Steel Is the Master, Lady Is the Power, 1992
Enamel, steel springs, metal hinges, metal nozzles, pipe joints, garden hose, wire, tin, rope, and industrial sealing compound on canvas mounted on wood, 71 x 72 1/5 x 5 1/5" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
Taking Care of Old Things (Honoring Lennie Holley), 1992
Enamel, buttap, wire screen, rope, carpet, and industrial sealing compound mounted on wood, 50 1/4 x 65" 

Thornton Dial, Sr.
You Can See It in the Street (Homeless People in New York), 1991
Graphite and watercolor on paper, 50 x 30" 

Ronald Lockett
Adam and Eve, 1988
Enamel and tin on plywood relief, 48 x 49 x 10" 

Ronald Lockett
Homeless People, 1989
Enamel and wire on plywood, 48 x 48 1/2" 

Ronald Lockett
Smoke Filled Sky, 1989
Enamel, charred wood, twigs, and nails on plywood, 46 1/4 x 47 1/2 x 3" 

Ronald Lockett
Taps, 1988
Enamel, tin, and wire mesh on plywood, 48 x 50" 

Ronald Lockett
Undiscovered, 1993
Rusted tin collage and colored pencil on wood, 47 x 45" 

Purvis Young
Wild Horses, 1978
Paint on cardboard, 25 1/4 x 19 3/4" 

Purvis Young
Untitled, 1991
House paint and found wood on plywood, 48 x 73"
CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITIONS

Part II: Wrestling with History
A Celebration of African American Self-Taught Artists from the Collection of Ronald and June Shelp

Leroy Almon
Assimilation, 1985
Wood carving with paint, 24 x 25½ x 3½".

Hawkins Bolden
Vaccine, c. 1968
Found metal, carpet, wood, and nails, 79 x 25 x 14".

Hawkins Bolden
Untitled, c. 1987
Mixed media with tapot, garden hose, and carpet
13 x 9½ x 10".

Richard Barnside
Swords and Shields and Odds and Ends, 1988
Enamel on wood, 20 x 35".

Archie Byron
Family Pain, 1983
Elmer’s glue, sawdust, and pigments on plywood
48 x 43½".

Archie Byron
Homeless, c. 1987
Sawdust and Elmer’s glue on plywood, 29½ x 17¼".

Thorton Dial, Sr.
Rolling Mill Steel Is the Master, Lady, Is the Power, 1992
Enamel, steel springs, metal hinges, metal nozzles, pipe joints, garden hoses, wire, tin, rope, industrial
scaling compound on canvas mounted on wood
71 x 72½ x 3½".

Ralph Griffin
Medicine Man, 1987
Paint, found wood, and nails, 51 x 16 x 20".

Ralph Griffin
Untitled (Dog), c. 1989
Acrylic paint on wood, 13½ x 32½ x 5".

Ralph Griffin
The Wizard, 1988
Driftwood and paint, 18 x 11 x 12".

Bessie Harvey
Prehistoric Find, 1988
Wood and paint, 29½ x 44 x 19½".
(base of sculpture 14 x 38")

Bessie Harvey
The Prophet, 1987
Wood, wood putty, cowry shells, fabric, costume jewelry,
paint, and artificial hair, 29 x 9½ x 17½".

Bessie Harvey
Zuma and Zeb, 1986
Wood, wood putty, feathers, human hair, costume jewelry,
glitter, and paint, 37 x 19 x 7½".

Lonnice Holley
Big Mam, 1986
Painted sandstone, 24½ x 15½ x 8½".

Lonnice Holley
Fighting at the Foundation of the Cross, 1988
Wood and found material, 57 x 36 x 15".

Lonnice Holley
Material Hang, c. 1988
Mixed media, 52 x 20 x 17".

Lonnice Holley
Support of My Feet to Stop Hunger, 1992
Mixed media, 23½ x 16 x 16".

Lonnice Holley
Tears of Sorrows, 1985
Sandstone, 19 x 11 x 14".

Joe Light
Best Mountain, 1989
Enamel and metal on wood, 48 x 96".

Joe Light
Sheba, 1989
Enamel on wood, 24 x 28½".

Ronald Lockett
Pages, 1986
Enamel, tin, and wire mesh on plywood, 48 x 50".

Charlie Lucas
Children of the World Reaching Out, 1989
Welded found metal, 55 x 27 x 20".

Charlie Lucas
Mr. Pump, 1989
Welded found metal, 18½ x 7 x 5½".

J. B. Murry
Untitled, 1979-80
Paint and marker on wood paneling, 20½ x 25".

J. B. Murry
Contest, mid 1980’s
Acrylic, gouache, and marker on paper, 25¾ x 19½".

Lorenzo Scott
Jesus as a Child, c. 1980
Oil on canvas with hand-painted wood frame
53¼ x 21½ x 3½".

Herbert Singleton
Lazarius at the Feet, 1994
Wood and paint, 5½ x 60".

Mary T. Smith
Hello to Y'all, 1988
Enamel on plywood, 30 x 26½".

Mary T. Smith
Coutiled, 1987
Enamel on plywood, 33½ x 24½".

Mary T. Smith
Coutiled, 1987
Enamel on plywood, 36 x 28½".

Georgia Speller
Don’t Be Home in the United States, 1986
Acrylic, tempera, and pencil on paper, 17½ x 23½".

Henry Speller
Plain, 1987
Market on paper, 18 x 24".

Jimmy Lee Sudduth
Duck, c. 1985
Berry juice and dirt on wood, 12½ x 25".

Jimmy Lee Sudduth
First Wood, 1988
Natural pigments and house paint on wood, 24 x 32".

Jimmy Lee Sudduth
People at Church, c. 1987
Natural homemade pigments and pencil on wood, 18½ x 25".

Jimmy Lee Sudduth
Self Portrait with Reindeer, c. 1985
Natural and artificial pigments on wood, 48 x 32".

James “Son” Thomas
Black Woman, c. 1986
Unfired clay with hair and glasses, 8½ x 8½ x 6".

James “Son” Thomas
Squint, 1987
Unfired clay and spray paint, 5½ x 6½ x 3½".

Mose Tolliver
Self-Portrait, 1987
House paint on plywood, 35 x 22½".

Mose Tolliver
Two Quail Birds, Two French Birds, Two Love Birds
with a Fowl Basket, 1988
House paint on plywood, 24 x 25¼".

Felix Virgus
Adam and Eve, 1988
Tempera on wood, 12½ x 23½".

Purvis Young
Collage with Tracks, late 1970’s
Paint on paper on wood, 48 x 43½".

Purvis Young
Untitled, 1991
House paint and found wood on plywood, 48 x 7½".

Purvis Young
Wild Horses, 1978
Paint on cardboard, 25½ x 19½".

Dimensions are in order of height, width, and depth.
Selected Bibliography

General Books, Articles, and Catalogs


Leroy Almon (b. 1938)


Hawkins Bolden (b. 1914 or 1915).


Richard Burnside (b. 1944)


Archie Byron (b. 1928).


Richard Dial (b. 1955)


Thorton Dial, Jr. (b. 1953)


Thorton Dial, Sr. (b. 1928)


Ralph Griffin (1925–1992)


Bessie Harvey (1929–1994)


Lonnie Holley (b. 1950)


Joe Light (b. 1934)


Ronald Lockett (b. 1965)

Thornton Dial, Sr.

**Top of the Line**, 1992
Mixed media, 65 x 80\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 7\(\frac{3}{4}\)
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Ronald and June Shep, 1993

Thornton Dial, Sr.

**Everybody Got a Right to the Tree of Life**, 1988
Enamel, tin, glass marbles, and industrial scaling compound on wood, 48 x 96\(\frac{3}{4}\)
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Gift of Ronald and June Shep
PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

The Annex: 62 (bottom)

Courtesy of William Arnett Collection: 49 (bottom)

Dan Deagan: 9 (bottom), 41

Gamma One Conversions, Inc.: Cover and page 4, 11, 12 (bottom), 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 37, 62 (top), 70, 71

Dan Jurgen: 12 (top), 16, 17, 22, 35, 37, 38, 40, 44, 46, 49 (bottom), 58 (top), 61

Courtesy of Ricco/Maresca Gallery: 32, 45

Mark Kostam: 9 (top)

Bard Wrisley: 3, 25 (bottom)

Zindman/Fremont: 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 24 (top and bottom), 25 (top), 26 (top and bottom), 27, 36, 39,
42 (top and bottom), 43 (top and bottom), 47, 48 (top and bottom), 49 (top), 50, 51, 52, 53 (top and bottom),
54 (top and bottom), 55 (top and bottom), 56, 58 (bottom), 59, 60 (top and bottom)