

THORNTON DIAL

Born 1928, Emelle, AL; Lives and works in Alabama

Born in a cornfield to an unwed teenage mother, Dial grew up in rural Emelle, in Alabama's western flatlands. He began full-time farm work at age five and managed to attend school only rarely. On the eve of World War II, he was sent to live with relatives in Bessemer, just outside Birmingham. There, he married, raised a family, and worked for half a century in heavy industry, building highways, houses and ultimately boxcars during a thirty-year stint at the Pullman Standard Plant.

Dial's life encompasses many of the most consequential episodes in twentieth-century African-American life - sharecropping in the Black Belt, migration from country to city, the upheaval of the civil rights era, and the ethnic conundrums of a rapidly changing postmodern America. As John Beardsley writes, "Dial's life is inseparable from history, because he had made it his business as an artist to be a historian. Dial lived history, then he represented it in paintings and sculptures.

From childhood on, Dial built "things" using whatever he could salvage, recycling even his own work to reuse materials in new creations. Dial referred to what he made only as "things," though late in life he found out that others call them "art." Having developed during the era of racial segregation, Dial's style is both personal and culturally rich, and it speaks with a resolute voice that was denied him through the years as a black factory worker.

In Dial's art, intense surfaces, multilayered narratives, shifting compositional relationships, and a metaphysical concern with issues of recycling and ancestry exist hand in hand with an ironic, earthy wit and an almost religious determination to make art's complexities and mysteries central to the human understanding of reality.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Thornton Dial*, Independent Projects, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
- 2013 *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial*, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; The Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
- 2012 *Thornton Dial: Viewpoint of the Foundry Man*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
Thornton Dial, Virginia Union University and Art Gallery, Richmond, VA
Thoughts on Paper, Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC; Fleming Museum of Art at the University of Vermont, Burlington, VT
- 2011 *Thornton Dial*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
- 2005 *Thornton Dial in the 21st Century*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- 1999 *Thornton Dial: His Spoken Dreams*, Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, NY
- 1993 *Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY; American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY; American Center, Paris, France
- 1992 *Thornton Dial: Works on Paper*, Luise Ross Gallery, New York, NY
- 1991 *Thornton Dial, Sr.: Works on Paper*, Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, NY
- 1990 *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World*, Southern Queens Park Association/African-American Hall of Fame, Jamaica, NY
Thornton Dial, Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta, GA

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

Thornton Dial: Ladies of the United States, Library Art Gallery, Kennesaw State College, Marietta, GA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY
Social Geographies: Interpreting Space and Place, curated by Leisa Rundquist, Asheville Museum of Art, Asheville, NC
- 2013 *Seismic Shifts: Ten Visionaries in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, National Academy Museum & School, New York, NY
- 2012 *Thornton Dial and Lizzi Bougatsos*, James Fuentes Gallery, New York, NY
The Soul of a City: Memphis Collects African American Art, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN
Creation Story: Gee's Bend Quilts and the Art of Thornton Dial, The Frist Center for Visual Arts, Nashville, TN
- 2011 *All Folksed Up!*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
The Armory Show, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002 *In the Spirit of Martin*, Smithsonian Institution, traveling exhibition
- 2000 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
- 1998 *Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology*, Philadelphia Museum, Philadelphia, PA

SELECTED BOOKS & CATALOGUES

- 2012 *Thornton Dial: Viewpoint of the Foundry Man*, catalogue, Andrew Edlin Gallery.
Creation Story: Gee's Bend Quilts and the Art of Thornton Dial, catalogue, Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts and Vanderbilt University Press, Print.
- 2011 *Thornton Dial: Thoughts on Paper*, edited by Bernard L. Herman, Chapel Hill: Ackland Art Museum and University of North Carolina Press, Print.
Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial, catalogue, Prestel, Print.
- 2010 Cubbs, Joanne and Eugene W. Metcalf, *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial*, New York: Prestel, Print, 11 February.
- 2009 *Outsider Art Sourcebook*, Raw Vision, Print.
- 2006 Arnett, Paul, Joanne Cubbs, and Eugene W. Metcalf, *Thornton Dial in the 21st Century*, Tinwood Books, Print, 1 January.
- 2002 Giovanni, Nikki, Gary Miles Chassman, Walter Leonard, *In the Spirit of Martin*, Tinwood Books, Print.
- 2000 *Souls Grown Deep*, Volumes 1 and 2, Arnett et al, Print, 2000 & 2001.
- 2001 *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*, catalogue, Print.

Andrew Edlin GALLERY

- 1993 *Passionate Visions of the American South: Self Taught Artists from 1940 to the Present*, New Orleans Museum of Art, Print.
American Self-Taught, Maresca & Ricco, Print.
Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger, Baraka & McEvilly, Print.
20th Century American Folk, Self-Taught, and Outsider Art, Neal-Schuman Publishers, Print.
- 1990 *Museum of Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists*, Abbeville Press, Print.

SELECTED ARTICLES

- 2014 Kennedy, Randy, "For Met Museum, a Major Gift of Works by African-American Artists From the South," *New York Times*, November 24.
Niland, Josh, "The Met Hit the Jackpot of African-American Art." *artnet News*.
Sutton, Benjamin, "The Met Museum Nets Major Collection of Outsider Art from the South," *Hyperallergic*, November 24.
- 2011 Doran, Anne, "Review", *Time Out New York*, April.
Gómez, Edward M, "On the Border," *Art & Antiques Magazine*, February.
Kino, Carol, "Letting His Life's Work Do the Talking," *New York Times*, February
Kuspit, Donald, "Review", *Artforum*, Summer.
Lacayo, Richard, "Outside the Lines." *Time Magazine*, March 14.
"Review", *New Yorker*, April 11.
Wilkin, Karen, "Biography, History, Self-Evident Beauty," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21.
- 2010 Jones, Phillip March, "Thornton Dial, Sr," *White Hot Magazine*, February.
- 1997 Smith, Dinitia, "Bits, Pieces and a Drive To Turn Them Into Art," *New York Times*, February 5.
- 1993 Lloyd, Ann Wilson, "Thornton Dial at Luise Ross," *Art in America*, May.
Scott, Sue, "Thornton Dial [exhibition review]," *ARTnews 92*, April.
Smith, Roberta, "A Young Style for an Old Story," *New York Times*, December 19.
- 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 and Fame." *Newsweek*, December 2.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL
Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN
Intuit, Chicago, IL
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, IL
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY