

[Dial at Andrew Edlin Gallery](#)

[Dial at Souls Grown Deep Foundation](#)

Thornton Dial (American, 1928-2016)

Read an [artist spotlight](#) written by docent Ellen Oxfeld at the Montclair Art Museum and browse the Smithsonian American Art Museum's [education guide](#) to teaching African American civil rights through American Art using Dial's work.

Watch a [1991 video](#), "A Day with Thornton Dial Sr." with Frank Maresca, Roger Ricco, and William Louis-Dreyfus.

Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger was the first major solo exhibition by the artist when he was 65 years old. The exhibition was on display at the [New Museum](#) and the [American Folk Art Museum](#).

In 2000, Dial was included in the famous Whitney Biennial. [See installation images](#) of the exhibition on the Whitney's website. Gaining traction in response to the Biennial, the Houston Museum of Fine Art installed an exhibition entitled *Thornton Dial in the 21st Century* in 2005. [Read an announcement](#) about the exhibition in Artdaily.

Watch the Emmy-winning 2007 film from PBS, [Mr. Dial Has Something to Say](#) and read a rare interview with the artist in [Whitehot Magazine](#).

In 2011, the Indianapolis Museum of Art organized the exhibition [Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial](#), an exhibition of seventy large-scale paintings, drawings, and found-object sculptures. The exhibition subsequently traveled to the [New Orleans Museum of Art](#), the [High Museum of Art](#), and the [Mint Museum](#).



Dial, 2011
Photograph: Mark Mahaney



Dial at his Bessemer, Alabama studio, 2011
Photograph: Josh Anderson

The New York Times published an obituary for the artist upon his death [in 2016](#). The High Museum also organized the exhibition [Green Pastures: In Memory of Thornton Dial, Sr.](#) and [PBS News Hour](#) aired the story "How a Sharecropper's Son with a Third-Grade Education Changed the Definition of the Word 'Artist.'"

Dial's work exploded in the art world after his death. A [2018 article in Artnet](#) speculates: "Does Being Labeled an 'Outsider Artist' Stall a Market? Thornton Dial, Now a Museum Sensation, Is Poised to Break Out."

Flip through a [catalogue](#), *Thornton Dial*, published by Bill Lowe Gallery in 2019.

The 2021 MARCH Gallery exhibition [Thornton Dial, The Earliest Years: 1987-1989](#) was the first solo exhibition of the artist's work on the West Coast of the United States.



Thornton Dial (American, 1928-2016)

Black Honey, 2015

Cardboard, spray paint, and enamel on canvas over wood

Private Collection; L2023:65.3

Born and raised in rural Alabama, Thornton Dial did not begin his artistic career until the 1980s. The artist often worked to reframe the narrative of Black history from slavery to the election of President Barack Obama, inspired by his own experience as a Black man living through the 20th century in the American South. **Black Honey** is an assemblage painting of found materials. The manipulated cardboard evokes a honeycomb, where honeybees produce their stores. At the same time, the work makes reference to the Southern adoption of the name “honey” as a term of endearment. As Dial once said: “Since I been making art, my mind got more things coming to it. The more you do, the more you see to do.... I believe I have proved that my art is about ideas, and about life, and the experience of the world.”

On view September 6 – December 10, 2023

Thornton Dial (American, 1928-2016)

Untitled, 1987

Enamel on metal

Private Collection; L2021:107.1

Before Thornton Dial began an art career in the late-1980s, he worked for thirty years as a metal worker at the Pullman Standard Plant in Bessemer, Alabama. Dial honed his skills as a fabricator until his fifties, making fishing lures, nets, and found-object assemblages in his spare time. In the summer of 1987, Dial's artist friend Lonnie Holley (b. 1950) stopped by with collector William Arnett (1939-2020). Holley made an impromptu wire sculpture, to which Dial responded: "If that's art, then I'm going to show you some art." Created that same year, **Untitled** is one of Dial's earliest formal artworks. This sculpture and others catapulted Dial's career, which expanded to address black history, slavery, discrimination, and poverty in the American South. This sculpture was recently included in the exhibition *Thornton Dial, The Earliest Years: 1987-1989* at Parker Gallery Los Angeles, the first solo exhibition of Dial's work on the West Coast.

On view October 27, 2021 – January 30, 2022

