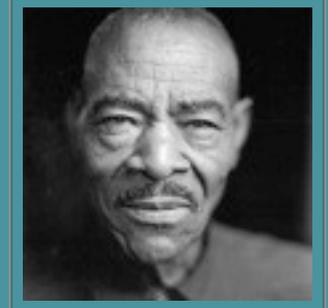


Family Gallery Guide

Highlights from the Gadsden Arts Center Permanent Collection

Thornton Dial, Sr.



Thornton Dial, Sr., now in his 80s, is a vernacular artist from Emelle, Alabama. He grew up in poverty, creating toys from the discarded objects around him. Dial had little formal education, yet his works reveal his unlimited creative imagination, intelligence and wisdom.

Mr. Dial worked at a railroad car factory until it closed, and then began working on his art full time. He says he learned about drawing from his job at the factory, studying designs for the steel machines. In 1987, a art curator and dealer, Bill Arnett, noticed Dial's work, and helped bring it to public attention through major exhibitions. In 2007, Dial was featured in the PBS documentary "Mr. Dial Has Something to Say" (visit our Children's Learning Area to see the film) and exhibitions of his work have been seen and collected in major art museums around the United States including the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The Gadsden Arts Center has seven works by Thornton Dial, Sr. in its permanent collection, all generously donated by Lou and Calynne Hill of Tallahassee, Florida.

Everything is Under the Black Tree

Everything is Under the Black Tree is a painting of a large white fish surrounded by a flowering black tree against a yellow background. The fish has blue and pink flowers and a face in profile painted on its side. We can estimate it was created in the 1980s, before Dial began his large sculptural assemblages and his drawings on paper. This style seems more rigid than his later painting style, and the large number of images and forms squeezed into the composition is a precursor to Dial's larger, form and image filled sculptural assemblages. In the 1990s, Dial began his drawings and paintings on paper, which have less figures and animals filling the space.



Everything is Under the Black Tree, n.d.
paint on plywood, 48 x 31 1/2 inches

The Tiger Knocks the Lady Down and the Midget Runs Away

This assemblage depicts a fallen woman surrounded by a tiger, a man, and swirling eyes, executed in mainly reds, blues and white. In the book, *Thornton Dial: Image of Tiger*, published in conjunction with an exhibition organized by the Museum of American Folk Art, this painting is said to be part of a pair of works that form an analogy between pet ownership and racial inequality. In this piece, the tiger, thought to be Dial himself, has pounced on his keeper, a white woman, and knocked her down. The little person, representing the majority of African-Americans, runs from the scene in fear. The swirling eyes are crowded into the background, a common theme in Dial's work, representing people watching and waiting for an outcome.



The Tiger Knocks the Lady Down and the Midget Runs Away, 1988
mixed media, 97 1/2 x 48 inches

Big Black Bear Trying to Survive



Big Black Bear Trying to Survive, 1993
mixed media, 48 x 36 inches

Big Black Bear Trying to Survive is typical of the large sculptural assemblages Mr. Dial was creating in the 1990s. These works are intricate, thoughtful compositions that always contain a message, often dealing with race and inequality in America, or male-female relationships. These large-scale works are created with discarded items Dial found. *Big Black Bear Trying to Survive* is composed of various scrap metal, carpets, and trash bags, and depicts a large black bear laying on its side, intently staring out at the viewer.

Glossary

assemblage - a three-dimensional work of art made with found materials, similar to a collage

vernacular art - art made by untrained artists in response to their environment and experiences

Try This at Home!

Dial used objects he found to create complex designs that meant something to him. With your parent's permission, explore your home and around your home and collect discarded objects. Create an assemblage that says something important to you.