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Dissolving Boundaries: The Politics of Categorizing the Artwork of Thornton Dial, Sr.

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Abstract

Language shapes the way we think about art. Terms such as *outsider art*, *self-taught*, *southern vernacular*, and *contemporary* may all work to describe the same piece of artwork, yet they each communicate slightly different ideas. The use of specific terminology is powerful due to the connotations and associations it evokes. *Outsider art*, for instance, relates to ideas of "otherness" while *southern vernacular art* is imbedded in a cultural tradition and, in comparison, implies a sense of belonging. In this paper, I will examine the life and artwork of the autodidactic African American artist Thornton Dial, Sr. while assessing the implications of his placement within a variety of competing categories. Dial's artwork and biography intersects with a range of definitions, each of which shapes the dialog around his work differently. Notions of "otherness," power dynamics between the inside/outside dichotomy, as well as Dial's place within a regional African American tradition will all be explored as a way to further understand how the words we use as a culture shape the way we think about artwork such as Thornton Dial's.

1. Introduction

Determining the boundaries of art, not to mention the subfields, is no small task. "Art" consists of sets of unique objects that by virtue of their uniqueness lack precise boundaries. How can unique objects be categorized? Folklorist Gerald Pocius asserts that "perhaps of all the words that surround us in our daily life, *art* is one of the most contentious, most controversial."[1] While discerning what is and isn't art may be controversial in its own right, discerning the language that we use to describe objects once they have been accepted as art can be just as difficult. What constitutes an adequate label for artwork is up for debate among scholars, historians, critics and collectors, but the power of the label is indisputable.

Terms such as *primitive*[2] and *naïve* were once acceptable to define those who were deemed unsophisticated in relation to the academic art world, yet now these terms are viewed as revealing a class bias, or worse, racism.[3] These terms are a product of their time, and as scholarship and societal views have evolved, so has the language of art. Today, there are a number of ways to discuss the creations of autodidactic artists. *Outsider*, *self-taught*, *southern vernacular*, and *folk* are all labels that are currently used within the art world to discuss the work of artists without academic training, yet they each carry with them slightly different meanings and connotations. Many of these labels have been used to describe the work of autodidactic African American artist Thornton Dial whose artwork and biography intersects with a range of definitions, each shaping the dialog around his work differently. The categorization of Dial's work is significant because it will ultimately dictate his artistic legacy; whether he is forever known as an "outsider," as academically untrained, or perhaps Dial will transcend the categorization surrounding autodidactic artists entirely and move into the canonical and highly marketable region of *contemporary art.*

2. The Art of Thornton Dial, Sr.

Due to its complexity in terms of form, content, and context, the artwork of Thornton Dial, Sr. is difficult to categorize. His sculptures, drawings, and assemblage constructions pull together disparate materials and methodologies to create works brimming with symbolism and power. The genesis of Dial's artwork is his identity as an African American[4] man living in the southern United States; it's his lived experience that greatly informs the

work's content. Subjects as varied as love, war, and environmental disasters are all interpreted and expressed through the artist's unique aesthetic.

The piece entitled *Stars of Everything* from 2004 (Figure 1) is an example of Dial's distinct choice of materials as well as the layers of meaning embedded within each work. The central figure in this artwork is a bloated and downtrodden American eagle who is dressed in a dilapidated suit and surrounded by a field of paint can flowers. The figure wears over his shoulders a piece of old carpet and strands of rope– materials that developed as markers of social oppression early within Dial's career. The artist's juxtaposition of materials commonly associated with racial politics within his oeuvre and the use of a business suit is possibly commenting on the unreachability of the American dream of success and social mobility for many Americans, including those from his own community. As a kind of half-buzzard, the character may also be interpreted as a surreal portrait of Dial himself. According to Joanne Cubbs, curator of the Dial's first career retrospective exhibition *Hard Truths*, the artist sees himself as a scavenger or "pickup bird" who finds creativity in material scraps and constructs his art from the detritus of the world.[5] Here, he presides over a colorful universe fashioned from used paint cans, cut and splayed to form a field of brilliant stars that may be read as a satire of fame as well as a representation of the artist's genuine quest for success and its rewards.

Figure 1. Thornton Dial, Stars *of Everything*, 2004, Paint, plastic cans, spray paint cans, clothing, wood, steel, carpet, plastic straws, rope, oil, enamel, spray paint, and Splash Zone compound on canvas on wood, 98 x 101.5 x 20.5 in., Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation

The categorization of Thornton Dial's artwork can be as complex as the work itself. Often, the artist and his works are referred to as *self-taught*, which brings the artist's biography into the fore in its reference to his lack of formal education. According to Charles Russell, *self-taught* artists are "those individuals who have no academic artistic training and little connection to the mainstream traditions of Western art history, but whose works have undeniable aesthetic impact."[6] As Russell notes, the category of *self-taught art* and artists not only communicates a lack of training in regards to the formal aspects of art, such as technically how to paint or draw, but also the art historical knowledge that comes with an academic education. Without formal art training, the work of many *self-taught* artists often utilizes unusual materials and techniques, as well as contains few references to a specific art historical context. The categorization of *self-taught art* does not include artists who have received little formal art education but are art historically savvy as well as aware of contemporary art and art criticism. This distinction becomes significant in the career of Thornton Dial and other autodidactic artists who make the transition from being unaware of art history to learning about it and their place within it, bringing into question alternative modes of discussion for the artist and his work.

The variety of terms by which individuals not schooled in the history and principles of art have been categorized include *self-taught*, *primitive*, *outsider*, *art brut*, *naïve*, *popular*, *primitive*, *folk*, and *southern vernacular* depending

on factors such as the aesthetics of the artwork and the socio-economic marginality of the artist. What they all have in common is that for the most part the artwork and artists relating to these categorizations have not been included within the art historical canon (there are exceptions, such as Henri Rousseau and Joseph Cornell, both of which were self-taught but aware of art history and contemporaneous art to the point that they both befriended significant artistic figures of their times). Russell adds that "throughout the twentieth century the work of the self-taught has sporadically attracted the attention of, and occasionally been embraced by, mainstream artists and critics, but ultimately, the principles by which the academy has constructed itself prove too restrictive to define, judge, or even fully understand this idiosyncratic art."[7] There are growing attempts to bring *self-taught art* within the folds of academia and the art world system, and art such as Thornton Dial's has helped to bring the discussion to the fore by challenging long-held beliefs about the validity and significance of work made by the unschooled.

There are two dominant lenses that are often used to view the artwork of Thornton Dial, both of which are informed by the biography of the artist as well as the autodidactic nature of his work. The first lens is that of *outsider art*, a term coined by art historian Roger Cardinal in 1972.[8] Cardinal's notion of the outsider is based upon the ideas of French artist Jean Dubuffet, who, in the 1940s, began discussing the work of autodidactic artists, specifically the art of the mentally ill, in terms of "*art brut*," or "raw art."[9] Dubuffet was searching for an alternative to what he viewed as the over-sophistication of culture and the false standards put in place by the art world. He posited *art brut* as an inventive, non-conformist art that should be unprocessed, spontaneous, and emphatically distinct from what he saw as the derivative stereotypes of dominant culture.[10]

Dubuffet's criteria for *art brut* were elaborated in a number of texts, including the journal *L'Art brut prefere aux Arts culturels* (1949), and the tract *Asphyxiante culture* (1968), in which he included specific studies of individual artists.[11] His idea of *art brut* rests on a model of autonomous inspiration, where the artist is somehow insulated from all social and cultural influences as well as devoid of all schooling in the arts. The untrained and presumably isolative nature of *art brut* is central to its significance, with this feature rising to dominate later discussions as Dubuffet's ideas travel to the United States. Also of significance to the criteria of *art brut* was the idea that artwork should be made without thought of financial gain or public recognition (as this implies a kind of worldliness as well as a corruption of intent). [12]

With Cardinal's introduction of the term *outsider art*, Dubuffet's concept of *art brut* was not only translated into English parlance, but also expanded to account for more than just the art of the insane. Cardinal's *outsider* still carried with it much of Dubuffet's criteria yet it had grown to include artists loosened from Dubuffet's insanity qualification and reconceived as possessing a creativity that is not necessarily a rejection of societal values and norms, or conversely society's rejection of the individual, but rather an expression of pure individuality. In Cardinal's words, the *outsider* artist "shall be innocent of pictorial influences. And perfectly untutored; he shall be socially non-conformist, even to the point of diverging violently from the psychological norm (some of the most impressive items in Dubuffet's collection are the work of lunatics); and he shall not cater to the public."[13] What Cardinal did was broaden the definition beyond the mentally ill, in order to account for a much wider and more complex world of art.

Ideas surrounding *outsider art* have evolved beyond the early scholarship of Dubuffet and Cardinal. Many scholars have sought to understand the creation of *outsider art* by building upon the earlier established framework. Manley moves beyond the idea of the anti-social isolate described by Cardinal and Dubuffet by indicating that much of the artwork, at least in the United States, that is considered *outsider* is made by people functioning within society. Manley writes that these artists,

> are not Dubuffet's outsiders, working in isolation outside their communities. Most of them have raised families, attended church, and held down jobs just like their neighbors. What is remarkable is that such ordinary folks have made such extraordinary things…The conditions that generate this art are often ephemeral and unconscious, but they arise out of a cultural context. It is wrong to attribute the work to spontaneous or accidental creativity and to consider it only as isolated eccentricity or psychosis.[14]

Manley's argument firmly plants the work of *outsider* artists within the cultural context of the world around them. The notion of an artist that is completely isolated and "innocent of pictorial influences" is more of an ideal rather than the reality. Many self-taught artists, including Thornton Dial, are members of society who have been exposed to a wide variety of cultural influences, including newspapers, television and books.

Rhodes builds upon Manley's idea that people who create *outsider art* are indeed active participants of culture, but he adds that the culture to which they belong is still marginalized. He writes that, "The answer to the question as to whether one has to be a social outsider to be an outsider artist seems to be in the affirmative, but the definition of this is relative. In other words, you may be *part* of a culturally marginalized group and function perfectly well in that context, but marginal all the same in relation to the culture of art consumption."[15] In the case of Thornton Dial, he is very much a part of a socially marginalized group, that of the lower-income African American South, and within

this group he participates in art making within a cultural context. However, he is still considered different because his identity is in opposition to the dominant white bourgeois culture of the United States as well as to the mass culture of art consumption.

Addressing the visual aspects of *outsider art*, Russell identifies a criterion essential to modern art that is also readily evident in much *self-taught* and *outsider art*–the development of a strong, original visual language that expresses the artist's individuality and cultural understanding. He goes on to add that, "because the outsider's visual vocabulary does not develop in relation to the visual decisions of other artists who define their contribution within a shared art-historically-grounded dialogue, they have not been considered in the 'dialectical history of what defines art'."[16] While there has been little success in defining a distinct *outsider art* aesthetic due to the extreme variety and individuality of expression that the label encompasses, Russell points out that within the specific bodies of work of many *outsider* artists there has emerged a definitive visual vocabulary, which is rich with metaphor and meaning. The presence of distinctive style and content within the work of *outsider* artists is one of many contemporary arguments that points toward the possibility of the dissolution of *outsider art* as a genre and beckons its inclusion into the overall category of *contemporary art*.

Along with the perspective of *outsider art*, a simultaneous discussion of Dial's work involves ideas surrounding *southern vernacular art*, which embeds Dial's experiences and subsequent artwork into the larger cultural experiences of African Americans in the southern United States. The exact origin of the term *southern vernacular art* is unclear, but its usage in describing artwork has become popularized by the research and writing of art collector William S. Arnett along with his sons Matt and Paul.[17] Its application as a category is relatively new, and may have first appeared in print with the publication of William Arnett's book *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art,* Volume I, in 2000. This seminal text, which includes 568 pages and 801 illustrations (756 of which are in full color), is the first of two volumes that have been published, with a third projected for the future. The introductory essay written by Paul Arnett elaborates on the choice of the word "vernacular" to describe this work. He writes, '"Vernacular' denotes a language *in use* that differs from the official language of power and reflects complex intercultural relationships charged with issues of race, class, region, and education…Moreover, 'vernacular' presupposes a history and a process of historical change connected to the led lives of African Americans."[18] The usage of *southern vernacular* acknowledges the complexity of southern African American culture and seeks to place the art that it produces within a context that brings the lived experience to the fore.

There is a distinction to be made between the *southern vernacular art* and *folk art.* According to folklorist and historian Robert Thomas Teske, *folk art* is based on traditionally shared aesthetics, techniques, and forms of art that are transmitted through culture and heritage. [19] Variety emerges within *folk art* because artists often develop their own distinct style or voice within the established parameters dictated by convention.

Southern vernacular art emerged out of the idea of a distinct African American folk tradition that dominated early discussions about self-taught African American art. Metcalf asserts that the distinction between American *folk art* and African American *folk art* are the *African* roots. While the term *black folk art* is still used today to describe the autodidactic work of some African American artists, much of this artwork, especially that produced in the southern United States, is generally referred to as *southern vernacular.*[20] This shift is related to the distinct research and documentation of William Arnett and a growing understanding that what was once referred to as *black folk art* is too spontaneous and individualistic to adhere to any kind of strict conventions or protocol relating to a clear folk tradition. While there are folk traditions that are specific to the African American community, such as the use of tree roots as sculptural material, the execution of these practices vary so drastically that it is difficult to point towards any particular methodology or aesthetic that can define it as *folk. Southern vernacular art*, however, addresses the complex associations with the African diasporic experience that can be found in this artwork, as well as the many manifestations of spirituality and creativity within the African American community.

The autodidactic nature of *southern vernacular* artwork is just as essential to its definition as it is to *outsider art*. The inclusion of Thornton Dial in Charles Russell's latest book *Groundwaters: A Century of Art by Self-Taught and Outsider Artists* (2011) indicates the way that the autodidactic aspect of Dial's artwork transcends the *southern vernacular artist* label. Russell acknowledges Dial's identification as a *southern vernacular* artist to a great extent; he flips back and forth throughout the chapter, describing Dial as both "a self-taught artist" as well as a "southern African American self-taught artist" and "southern vernacular."[21]

Arnett and other scholars (e.g., McEvilley[22]) believe that Dial's artwork, along with that of Lonnie Holley and the Gee's Bend quilt makers, embodies African American traditions such as improvisation and the coding of information through metaphor and abstraction–traditions which directly relate to modes of survival developed by African slaves brought to the U.S. and then handed down through families. According to many contemporary scholars, this act of signifyin(g)[23] continues today and is expressed through the phenomenon of the "yard show," which in turn informs the process, materials, and aesthetic of *southern vernacular art*.

Across the United States, but especially in the South, some African Americans choose to decorate or "dress" their yards with an assortment of materials such as flowers, discarded chairs and wheels, rocks (often painted white) and

an assortment of bottles, sometimes placed on the branches of trees[24] (Figure 2). "Dressing the yard" or the yard show is a complex synchronization of African, European, and American aesthetics that can be used to communicate a wide variety of messages. According to Thompson, there is a fundamental intersection between an African diasporic spirituality that is based on the idea of the interaction of spirits within the material world and its expression within the yard show. He writes that "icons in the yard show may variously command the spirit to move, come in, be kept at bay, be entertained with a richness of images or be baffled with their density, to savor sunlight flashing in a colored bottle or be arrested within its contours, and above all, to be healed or entertained by the order and beauty inherent in the improvised arrangements of icon and object."[25] Thompson adds that "for many of the makers of yard shows the main purpose is to give visual pleasure to their communities."[26]

A large part of the aesthetic of the yard show involves using what is on hand, a practice which harkens back to the days when slaves were forced to scavenge for materials in order to construct homes, gardens, and tools.[27] Anthropologist Gundaker indentifies strong themes found within the yard show, including *clothing* (frequently referencing work), *color*, *tying and wrapping* (with string, ribbon, bows, wire, etc.), and *chairs, seats, thrones*, just to name a few.[28] Many of these same methods of communication can be seen in the work of *southern vernacular* artists such as Thornton Dial.

Figure 2. L.V. Hull's (b. 1942) home and yard, Photograph taken by William Arnett in 1997, Souls Grown Deep Foundation. The "yard show" has many forms, and is very much the product of both the personal aesthetic of the maker, as well as the different messages and ideas. Here, L.V. Hull has utilized a wide range of materials such as bottles, shoes, tires, and a television- all of which have been altered in some way to contribute to the display.

A powerful example of the expression of the southern vernacular tradition within the context of Thornton Dial's artwork is the piece *The Art of Alabama* from 2004 (Figure 3). This sculpture is a towering monument to the wide variety of practices and materials that are the fabric of the black South, in which bottles, found metal, clothing, tree branches and other cast off materials evoke the displays of the African American yard show. The repetitious tying, wrapping and draping of material found in this sculpture is akin to the yard show, as is the use of vibrant color. Tying and wrapping are traditional ways of enclosing charms and, more broadly, sealing intentions. They number among the features of the African Yard show with the clearest links to the African past, as these practices have been clearly documented in the Kongolese and Yoruban traditions of constructing charms and other spiritual objects which utilize tying, wrapping and binding as methods to imbue objects with power and spiritual purpose.[29]

Prominently placed upon its own pedestal is a garden statue depicting the figure of Pandora from Ancient Greek mythology. Painted yellow and elevated separately from the cluster of found objects, she serves as an icon of aesthetic classicism and Anglo-European art history, a measuring stick against which untrained black artists such as Dial have often been compared. Through exposure to the art world and opportunities to meet other artists such as himself, Dial is aware of the cultural tradition within which he is working, and has experienced the sense of "difference" that surrounds *southern vernacular art* when placed in comparison to the mainstream. Dial's artwork is tied in with his identity and with it, his biography, both of which are essential to his artwork as a *southern vernacular* artist.

Figure 3. Thornton Dial, *The Art of Alabama*, 2004, Wood, steel, clothing, concrete sculpture, wire, oilcans, bottles, glove, license plate, found metal, paper collage, enamel, spray paint, and Splash Zone compound, 129 x 40 x 66 in., Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation

2. Biography

Dial's biography begins in 1928, when he was born just one year before the crash of the stock market and the beginning of the Great Depression. His family were sharecroppers working the land outside Emelle, Alabama in the heart of Sumter County.[30] This area of the Deep South had experienced some of the most extreme racial violence in the United States in the years after the Civil War, with the federal government sending its Seventh Cavalry in to keep the peace.[31] This legacy of racial tension is reflected in the entrenched racial and social prejudices experienced by Dial throughout his lifetime living in Alabama.

At the age of thirteen Dial had yet to receive any formal education, as he had been encouraged to spend his time and energy working off his family's sharecropping debt and bringing in extra money. His Aunt encouraged him to begin attending school with mixed results. While he learned basic skills, he found the experience of being a thirteen-year-old boy in the second grade to be humiliating. According to Dial,

> I tried to go to Sloss's Mining Camp school but the children made fun of me because I was so big, thirteen in the second grade and stuff like that. I didn't know nothing, hadn't been to school much, was more a man than a schoolboy. That was embarrassing. I went enough to learn a little bit. They told me, 'Learn to figure out your money and write your name: That's as far as a Negro can go'. I learned that. But it was just too embarrassing, all of them little children teasing me. I wasn't just big; I looked 'country'—country hair and clothes and all that.[32]

Dial eventually stopped attending school, preferring to seek out employment and spend his free time developing his art making skills. As Dial grew older, he began working for the Pullman-Standard Company in Bessemer, Alabama and married his childhood sweetheart, with whom he had five children. He also continued to create art, which was becoming increasingly large, complex and three-dimensional. Eventually, he began storing his works in a "junk shed" behind his house, taking apart old objects to construct new ones, and burying his works in the dirt to keep them out of his wife's sight, whom regarded them as a troublesome eyesore.[33] None of these early works remain, as they were all damaged beyond repair in a flood that devastated the Pipe Shop neighborhood of Bessemer where Dial was living at the time.[34]

Dial had no framework with which to view his creations as artwork. His exposure to art had been minimal, and what he did understand of it didn't match with what he had been creating on his own impetus. While Dial certainly

was a part of many cultures, such as the Pipe Shop neighborhood in Bessemer where he had lived his entire adult life, the culture of his family, as well as the culture of his ancestral heritage, he was unaware of the scope art history and contemporary art. It wasn't until Dial met art collector William Arnett that he came to understand that he was not only making art, but that it is an important expression of the African American experience.

3. Thornton Dial's Relationship with William S. Arnett

Dial continued to construct aesthetically pleasing objects for years despite objections from his wife due to the unruly nature of his work. The artist Lonnie Holley knew Thornton Dial, and one day he brought the art collector William S. Arnett, often referred to as "Bill," to Dial's home to introduce the two men. Dial was reticent at first to show them anything, having recently heard from a friend that he needed a license to create his "things," and he was worried that Arnett was coming around to write him up. When Dial had been sufficiently convinced that Holley and Arnett wanted nothing more than to see his creations, he brought them around the back of his home and extracted an eight-foot sculpture of a scrap-metal bird from the shed behind his home. Arnett was very impressed with the artwork, and offered to purchase the piece from the artist, marking the beginning of a twenty-year friendship and business relationship.[35]

Figure 4. Lonnie Holley, *In Bed With Him (The Old Man and the Young Girl)*, 1995. This sculpture was relocated from Holley's Birmingham, AL yard when he moved to a new home in Harpersville, AL. This is one of the many sculptures that William Arnett would have come across when he visited Holley's yard environment for the very first time. This photograph was taken in 1999 by William Arnett.

William Arnett's career as an art collector began while he was living in Europe in the mid 1960s. He became interested in collecting art from around the world, eventually becoming highly respected in the fields of Mediterranean art and antiquities, Asian art and African art. In the mid 1980s, Arnett began to collect the work of artists in the black American South. The major catalyst that cemented Bill Arnett's commitment to this work was his first meeting with Lonnie Holley in Birmingham in late 1986. Arnett had suspected the existence of a dynamic African American visual art tradition that had yet to surface. While similar black traditions, such as jazz and blues music, had already come to light, Arnett wondered why a parallel development within the visual arts had not been documented. His first visit to Holley's extensive yard environment, which incorporated literally hundreds of assemblages and sandstone sculptures, was the galvanizing evidence for Arnett (Figure 4). He told Holley, "I have been all over the world and have seen most of the art that the world considers great, but I have never been anywhere more important than here. Something is going on in the South that people do not appreciate fully, and it needs to be part of the history of art." He added, "The two of us can work for that understanding to take place."[36]

After his meeting with Holley, Arnett began to collect the work of African American *vernacular* artists in earnest. As his passion grew, so did his conviction that he was uncovering an artistic phenomenon within the southern United States that had been previously overlooked. His interest eventually evolved into something more akin to a social activism rather than collecting or dealing. Arnett had come to believe that the artists were not being fairly treated, and that the conditions under which they lived and worked were not conducive to sustained creativity. "There was too much poverty and exploitation by collectors and others," he recalled. "And there was far too little encouragement from either the artists' own communities or the outside world."[37] Arnett began to make a concerted effort to develop a system that would allow artists to fulfill their potential. He became good friends with a number of *southern vernacular* artists, Thornton Dial being one of his closest, and worked out ways to help them support themselves, their families, and their work. He explained to the artists the historic significance of their work, and the ways it could assist in the implementation of social change. He also paid each of them substantially more money than they had been receiving, and explained to them that others would also be willing to pay such prices if the artists would establish a firm price structure.

After Arnett's first meeting with Dial in the mid 1980s, he continued to return to the artist's home and slowly built both a business relationship and a lasting friendship. As trust was built between the two men, Dial began to receive a stipend from Arnett that enabled him to quit his job at the Pullman-Standard Company and to pursue art making as a full-time endeavor.[38] With this newfound time and freedom, Dial's work progressed rapidly. He quickly began incorporating new materials as well developing his personal iconography.

The image of the tiger, which would come to dominate much of Dial's early work, is a powerful iconographic image that has received considerable scholarship in years past. In his earliest paintings and sculptures, Dial expressed the theme of continuous struggle through this iconic image of the tiger. As the main protagonist in many paintings created from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the tiger became the perfect embodiment for the quest for social progress. The piece *All the Cats in Town* from 1993 (Figure 5) uses the image of the tiger to speak metaphorically about the system of racial hierarchy within the U.S. by using the material of carpet to outline the figures. The tiger is represented in the artwork by using multiple shades of color, including yellow, possibly indicating the different skin tones included within the African American community, and historically the associations these skin tones carried. Those with lighter skin tones could more easily "pass" as white, and therefore were offered more opportunities and social mobility compared to darker skinned members of the community. The title *All the Cats in Town* could refer to Dial's reference to the variety of skin tones included within the African American community and indicates that while some may have benefited from being "less black," they are still a member of the over all social fabric of the community. In Dial's work, carpet becomes an important symbol of what is literally "stepped on" and in this artwork, the use of rope carpet may have the redoubled meaning of being inexorably bound to one's lowly, troubled fate associated with entrenched racism within the United States.[39]

The use of animals as symbolic trickster and heroic figures is prevalent in African American traditions and lore. While not normally a heroic trickster in the traditional vernacular lexicon of African Americans, Dial created the image of the tiger to represent struggle and, through this struggle, endurance and triumph. The tiger does not overcome more powerful "other" animal antagonists, as tricksters often do within the framework of common lore, but rather symbolizes the perils that African Americans encounter in their efforts to survive and triumph in the modern world.[40] In *All the Cats in Town*, the tiger is depicted as part of a grouping rather than the lone trickster or instigator, possibly indicating the "everyman" aspect of Dial's tiger.

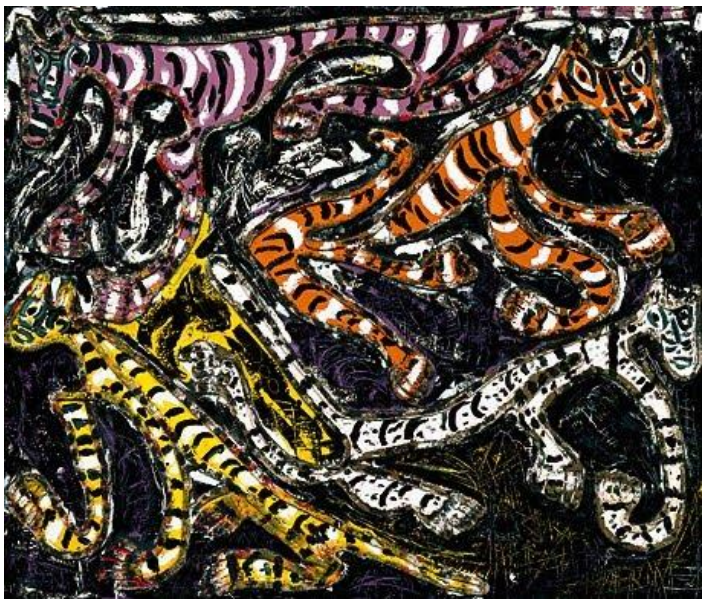

Figure 5. Thornton Dial, *All the Cats in Town*, 1993, Rope carpet, oil, and enamel on canvas on wood, 70 x 82 in., Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation

As Dial's confidence as an artist increased, it appeared to both Arnett and Dial that it was time for his first exhibition. According to investigative reporter Andrew Dietz, the very first time Dial's work was ever exhibited was in 1988, within the home of William Arnett at an event open to Atlanta's elite. The exhibition was a group show including all of Arnett's artists as well as work from his extensive Chinese and African art collections. The event was a fundraiser for *ArtPapers* magazine, an Atlanta-based, not-for-profit operation that covered *contemporary art* nationally.[41] The evening was a way for the highbrow Atlanta community to become familiar with the artists that Arnett had come to work with, including Dial, who was in attendance. After this event, in 1990, Dial had his first solo exhibit at the Library Art Gallery at Kennesaw State College in Marietta, Georgia, entitled *Thornton Dial: Ladies of the United States*. Later that same year he would also exhibit at the Fay Gold Gallery in Atlanta, which exhibits *contemporary art*[42], as well as the Southern Queens Park Association/African-American Hall of Fame in Jamaica, New York, with a solo exhibit entitled *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World*.[43] Dial's early exhibitions are significant because they exemplify how Dial's artwork would be handled by William Arnett in the future. Arnett and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation[44] have worked to solidify the identity of the artists they represent, including Thornton Dial, as firmly not within the problematic category of "outsider." Rather, Arnett and the Foundation have worked to place Dial's oeuvre simultaneously within the conversation of the southern vernacular tradition and the world of contemporary art. The reasons for this are many, but at the fore are the ways in which the category of *outsider art* is a somewhat problematic way to discuss the creative outpourings of autodidactic artists.

One of these problematic aspects is the way in which *outsider art* focuses primarily on notions of lack and isolation within the artist's life**.** Biography is central to the scholarship of both *outsider* and *self-taught art* because it provides "evidence" of isolation, lack, and trauma, and brings in the idea of individuality and singular expression. The scholarship on Dial is no exception. His biography is often used to establish the origins of his work, the narrative surrounding his discovery, his personal iconography, as well as his art making abilities despite his perceived "difference." Discussions surrounding Dial's artwork, especially within the media, often focus on the notion that he created his work *despite* his poverty, lack of education, lack of art training, and initial lack of support from his family. Often the life and artwork created by people that the dominant culture deems as outsiders is celebrated because they are viewed as making art despite their barriers, whether these barriers are socio-economic, pathologic, or any other factor that marginalizes them. This is similar to how society views and celebrates disabled people who do "normal" things despite their disability. It's as if for a moment, they reach normality by producing something, a work of art, which is validated by the larger culture.

Also problematic is the inside/outside paradigm created by the idea of "outsiderness." *Outsider* artists are viewed as being "outside" on a number of levels. First, the *outsider* artist by definition is a member of a marginalized population, which could be anything from the mentally ill, the incarcerated, the poor, or a racial minority. The marginalized status of the artist is part of what defines their place outside the mainstream and is often tied in with ideas of the authenticity of the artwork. The more marginalized and dysfunctional the artist, the more authentic (or "raw") the art becomes. Therefore, the label of *outsider* becomes code for "highly dysfunctional" as well as

"different than yourself." *Outsider art* becomes part of the spectacle where those on the "inside" can marvel at the "raw" and "unfiltered" creations of people that they would never associate with due to their "inside" status.

Secondly, the *outsider* artist is generally not involved with the mechanics of the art world. Ideas of the *outsider* involve the notion that the artist does not make work with the intent to sell it for profit, and often times *outsider* artist did not know that what they made was art until they were told by someone from the "inside." As the *outsider* artist's career builds, the artist may eventually enter the art world system by attending openings and speaking about their work, but this is generally done with the aid of a guide. In the case of Thornton Dial, this guide is William Arnett. If the artists become too involved in the mechanics of the art world, too autonomous, they run the risk of being perceived as inauthentic

And thirdly, *outsider art* is outside the art historical narrative. According to Elkins, "(*Outsider art*) is invisible to a plurality of art historians who study modernism and postmodernism. By that I mean they don't study it, they don't teach it, and they don't include it in their anthologies."[45] Outsider art is, at this point, viewed by most scholars as essentially ahistorical. Because outsider artists have received no art training, their work is not in conversation with the art historical narrative and is treated as something wholly different, or outside, the realm of academic art. Because of this, often times the work of *outsider artists* are viewed as lacking the capacity to contribute to a meaningful dialog concerning contemporary issues. In reality, many so-called *outsider artists* are highly aware of issues within contemporary society and are fully capable of commenting upon and referencing the world around them.

4. Dial's Move Into the "Inside"

In his journey through the art world, Thornton Dial has experienced his share of successes and obstacles. Through the careful work of William Arnett, Dial's artwork continued to be exhibited and gain notoriety. Through the assistance of Arnett, Dial gained representation by two of the most prestigious galleries of *southern vernacular art* in the United States, Ricco/Maresca and Andrew Edlin Gallery.[46]

In the spring of 1993, Thornton Dial and Bill Arnett were contacted by the television show *60 Minutes*, and asked if they were interested in being interviewed by Morley Safer concerning Dial's life and work.[47] According to Arnett, *60 Minutes* first approached him to arrange an interview with Dial in order to celebrate him as an American hero. "When I seemed skeptical," Arnett states, "the producer, Jeffrey Fager, said, 'Look, we would never want to embarrass Dial. This is going to be a very positive piece. Morley likes to occasionally celebrate the accomplishments of great people like Dial who are unknown to the public at large.'"[48] In reality, the resulting piece, entitled the "Tin Man," was an exposé on the supposed shady relationships and business practices of Bill Arnett. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the fifteen-minute segment was the portrayal of Thornton Dial as completely ignorant to the workings of the world, and totally unaware that William Arnett owned his home.[49] After viewing the program, Dial's brief response to the house episode was poignant. "They acted like I was supposed to be surprised, but I knew about the house. Bill don't own me."[50]

What Bill Arnett and Thornton Dial couldn't have known was that Morley Safer had an agenda to portray *contemporary art*, and the industry that surrounds it, as backwards and elitist. Later the same year that the "Tin Man" episode aired, Safer aired another now infamous "exposé" entitled "Yes…But is it Art?" During this episode he quipped that artists make mostly "worthless junk" and that art dealers "lust after the hype-able."[51] Safer's obvious suspicion concerning the state of contemporary art may have played a significant role in Dial's treatment during the "Tin Man" segment on *60 Minutes.* Safer seemed to feel that not only was the American public being taken for a ride by wealthy art collectors and dealers, but so were artists. However, by pushing to equate Dial's relationship to Bill Arnett with his own suspicions concerning contemporary art, Safer manipulated the story to fall in line with the narrative of deception and ignorance that he wanted to see. As a result, he humiliated Dial by portraying him as completely unaware that Arnett owned his home, and lacking agency in his own life and career.

In response to his treatment on the television show, Dial created the painting *Looking Good for the Price* (Figure 6). This work graphically depicts the horrific scene of a slave auction, with the figure of a tortured slave depicted using the color yellow in the right-hand side of the painting, and the twisted figure of a white auctioneer dominating the left side of the composition.[52] Below, a twisted tiger portrays Dial himself, as the artist's alter ego, in a state of struggle and distress. As Dial explains,

> These folks come here from *60 Minutes* and saying they want to give respect for the black peoples making art. But after a while, that TV man start talking the art down and ask Bill how something made by a man like Dial–he be meaning a little colored boy without no education–how it be worth one hundred thousand dollars. And Bill say if stuff be selling for a million that a white man make and ain't no better, he guess Dial look pretty good for the money…I was thinking about some of that…and my auntie Sarah Lockett, she

> was telling me about the history, and about the slave-selling, and it seem to me this man talking the prices of Dial don't be no different than the slave-seller talking the price of an African, like a bull or a cow…Mr. Dial might be looking good for the price, but he just as soon *still* be a slave.[53]

In Dial's painting *Looking Good for the Price*, the artist is drawing on imagery from his own cultural past to discuss his mistreatment by the hands of Morely Safer. According to the artist, Safer's attitude dismissed Dial as nothing more than "a bull or cow" whose worth is abstractly speculated upon as if it contains no spirit, no humanity, no significance.

Figure 6. Thornton Dial, *Looking Good for the Price*, 1993, Tin, metal screen, metal fence, bicycle chain, burned materials, enamel, spray paint, and Splash Zone compound on canvas on wood, 79 x 79 x 7 ½ in., Collection of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation

While Thornton Dial suffered discrimination and condescension from some, others have exalted him. Dial participated in a number of solo exhibitions during the 1990s, including his much lauded *Thornton Dial: Image of the Tiger*, which opened in 1993. This exhibition began at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, in New York and traveled to the American Folk Art Museum (also located in New York) as well as the American Center in Paris, France. Each of these venues maintains a different mission surrounding the exhibition of art (and by exhibiting artworks, each institution contributes to the perception of the work by the art world and the public.) The New Museum of Contemporary Art, for instance, is "Manhattan's only dedicated contemporary art museum."[54] The inclusion of Dial's artwork in this space, let alone an exhibition dedicated solely to his work, reframes his artwork within a contemporary art dialog.

This inclusion evokes the question of whether or not he can be both *southern vernacular* and *contemporary* at the same time. Contradictory to the choice to exhibit his work at the New Museum, the next stop for Dial's artwork was the American Folk Art Museum, which is "devoted to the aesthetic appreciation of traditional folk art and creative expressions of contemporary self-taught artists from the United States and abroad."[55] What is interesting is the emphasis that the Folk Art Museum places on "self-taught." The New Museum makes no statement about the inclusion of self-taught artwork within the definition of contemporary art, and in welcoming an artist such as Dial, the Museum actively incorporates the autodidactic artist into the realm of the contemporary, rejecting the predominant notion that contemporary and self-taught are exclusive terms.

The next major breakthrough in Thornton Dial's career was his inclusion in the 2000 Whitney Biennial. As described in the exhibition catalog, "Since 1932, the Whitney Museum's Biennial exhibitions have been among the milestones in the history of American art and have consistently played a leading role in presenting vanguard developments to the public…portrayed is a robust cross-section of American contemporary art."[56] His inclusion in this exhibition was groundbreaking, and caused a number of leading art critics and scholars, including Arthur Danto, to question the validity of the term "outsider art" when artists such as Dial are evidently being welcomed "inside."[57]

5. Conclusion

While Thornton Dial's inclusion within the Whitney's exhibition was very important, perhaps the single most significant showing of Dial's work during his lifetime has been the exhibition *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial*. This massive solo exhibition traveled for three years (2011-2013) to a wide variety of locations across the United States, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Mint Museum and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. The exhibition was organized by the highly respected curator and scholar Joanne Cubbs, who also edited the lavishly detailed exhibition catalog, which accompanied this show. This exhibition is the largest and most in depth to date of any artist labeled *self-taught*, *southern vernacular* or *outsider*.

The amount of time, money and exhibition space dedicated to Dial's oeuvre begs the question as to whether or not this could have happened for another artist with a similar background to Dial's, who *hasn't* been vetted by the contemporary art establishment the way Dial has been. He has moved into the "inside" just enough to gain recognition while continuing to retain his identity as a marginalized member of society. It is fascinating that an artist can, in essence, simultaneously exist so completely "inside" as well as "outside."

While he may not be a household name as of yet, Thornton Dial is one of the most significant artists of our time. His work holds an incredible strength and power, which eloquently communicates not only the trials and tribulations of one man, but also the struggles of power and race within the United States. The artwork of Thornton Dial is not only a product of the African American experience, but it also represents fundamental shifts in the categorization and understanding of autodidactic art. Dial's "discovery" by Bill Arnett coincided with the emergence of *southern vernacular art* as a category, which enabled Arnett and others to appreciate and nurture Dial's creative forces. Simultaneously, the barriers between *outsider art* and the "inside" have begun to dissolve, eventually making room for Dial to move more freely, between, or even transcend, the two worlds. His artwork represents not only an important voice within American culture, but also a significant push to dissolve ideas about power dynamics within the art world and the significance of labels in their role in shaping how we think about art.

6. References

1 Gerald L. Pocius, "Art," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): 413.

2 For the duration of this paper, all references to categories of art will be in italics

3 Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 25.

4 In accordance with the prevalence of scholarly usage of the term "African American" as non-hyphenated found in my research, for the purposes of this paper I will refrain from inclusion of the hyphen as well. This usage is also in compliance with the guidelines set forth by the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th ed., which states that "Whether terms such as African American, Italian American, Chinese American, and the like should be spelled open or hyphenated has been the subject of considerable controversy, the hyphen being regarded by some as suggestive of bias. Chicago doubts that hyphenation represents bias, but since the hyphen does not aid comprehension in such terms as those mentioned above, it may be omitted unless a particular publisher requires it." *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 402.

5 Joanne Cubbs, "Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial," in *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial*, edited by Joanne Cubbs and Eugene Metcalf (New York: Prestel, 2011) exhibition catalog, 59.

6 Charles Russell, "Finding a Place for the Self-Taught in the Art World(s)," in *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972)

9 Dubuffet's ideas are rooted in the earlier work of Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933), an art historian as well as doctor of psychiatry. Around 1909 Prinzhorn began to amass a collection of patient's artwork with the intent to study their creations and develop a better understanding of their conditions. Prinzhorn is regarded as a pioneer in this inter-disciplinary approach. He amassed a unique collection of artworks from psychiatric hospitals around Europe after

World War I. He then published the groundbreaking book *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in 1922, which departed from the understanding of the works as purely diagnostic tools, and instead established the idea that they provided insight into the creative process for both the healthy and the ill, in essence arguing for their inclusion into the world of art.

10 Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 44.

11 Roger Cardinal, "Art Brut" in *Oxford Art Online*, Accessed March 15, 2013, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T004326?q=art+brut&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit.

12 David Maclagan, *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (London: Reakton Books, 2009), 14.

13 Roger Cardinal, *Primitive Painters* (London: Thames and Hudson: 1978), 2.

14 Roger Manley, "Seeds and Shadows," in *Signs and Wonders: Outsider Art Inside North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1989) exhibition catalog, 8.

15 Rhodes, *Outsider Art*, 16.

16 Charles Russell, *Groundwaters* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2011), 19.

17 The word "vernacular", according to the Mirriam-Webster dictionary, is "of, relating to, or being a nonstandard language of a place, region, or country." The term "southern vernacular" is specific to the southern United States, and is often used in relation to language and architecture.

18 Paul Arnett, "An Introduction to Other Rivers," in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, ed. Paul Arnett and William Arnett, vol. 1., *The Tree Gave the Dove a Leaf* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2000), 15.

19 Robert Thomas Teske, "What is Folk Art? An Opinion on the Controversy," *El Palacio* 88 (1983): 34.

20 Eugene W. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter, 1983).

21 Russell, *Groundwaters*, 181-197.

22 Thomas McEvilley (1939-2013) was an American art critic, poet, novelist, and scholar, a distinguished lecturer of art history at Rice University, and founder and former chair of the Department of Art Criticism and Writing at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He wrote a number of essays on the subjects of *self-taught* and *southern vernacular art*, including the essay "A New Face For History?" in volume two of *Souls Grown Deep* (2001) as well as the article "The Missing Tradition" for *Art in America*, May, 1997.

23 Signifying is a nonliteral practice that uses allusion, symbolism, euphemism, hyperbole, innuendo, irony, metaphor, and simile among other techniques to communicate ideas in a wide variety of ways (including but not limited to the visual arts). The scholar Henry Louis Gates has worked to focus scholarly attention on the practice of signifying in African American culture. Gates employs the usage of "signifyin(g)" to distinguish the practice from the term "signifying," which is used in the English language in a number of ways–most commonly to either indicate a feeling or intention or to refer to symbolism. "Signifyin(g)," in Gates's view, is a major motif of African American traditions and an important means through which African Americans have leveled a critique at white bourgeois society. For more information, please see Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s book entitled *The Signifying Monkey: Towards a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

24 Babatunde Lawal, "African Roots, American Branches: Tradition and Transformation in African American Self-Taught Art," in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, ed. Paul Arnett and William Arnett, vol. 1, *The Tree Gave the Dove a Leaf* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2000), 39.

25 Robert Farris Thompson, "Bighearted Power: Kongo presence in the Landscape and Art of Black America," in *Keep Your Head to the Sky*, ed. Grey Gundaker (Charlotesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 54.

26 Ibid.

27 Lawal, "African Roots, American Branches," 40.

28 Grey Gundaker, "Tradition and Innovation in African-American Yards," *African Arts*, vol. 26 no. 2. (April 1993); 62-63.

29 Wyatt Macgaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi," in *Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi and the Art of Renee Stout*, Wyatt Macgaffey and Michael D. Harris (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1993), 60.

30 With slave labor abundant, Sumter County had once been the center of Alabama's cotton industry prior to the Civil War. During Reconstruction the economy stalled and many freed slaves, including Dial's ancestors, fell into the vicious cycle of debt that is sharecropping.

31 Andrew Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero* (Atlanta: Ellis Lane Press, 2006), 6.

32 Thornton Dial, "Mr.Dial is a Man Looking for Something," in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, ed. Paul Arnett and William Arnett, vol. 2., *Once That River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2011), 195.

33 Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero*, 20.

34 Ibid.

35 Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero*, 82.

36 Robert Hobbs, "William Arnett's Formative Role as Patron and Collector of African American Vernacular Art," from an unpublished article commissioned in 1995 by the then director of the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University, Dr. Maxwell Anderson in anticipation of their contribution to the publication which would have accompanied the 1996 *Souls Grown Deep* exhibition, Accessed March 15, 2013, http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/news-and-press/william-arnetts-formative-role-as-patron-and-collector-of-african-american-vernacular-art/.

37 Ibid.

38 Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero*, 104.

39 Cubbs, "Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial," 39.

40 John W. Roberts, "Tricksters, Martyrs, Black Firsts: Representations of the Folk Hero in African American Vernacular Art," in *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, ed. Paul Arnett and William Arnett, vol. 2, *Once that River Starts to Flow* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 80.

41 Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero*, 108.

42 http://www.faygoldgallery.com

43 "Thornton Dial: Solo Exhibitions," Accessed March 17, 2013, http://www.edlingallery.com/artist/thornton-dial.

44 The date of the formation of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation is unclear. According to the Foundation's website, the organization was formed by William Arnett as a not-for-profit with the goal of "bringing (southern vernacular art) to a wider audience. Having published award-winning books *The Quilts of Gee's* and *Thornton Dial in the 21st Century* and developed the exhibitions of the same name, The Souls Grown Deep Foundation has helped bring overdue exposure and recognition to southern African American artists who have toiled in obscurity for far too long. With numerous books and exhibitions on the horizon, the foundation will continue to change the way the world thinks about art and culture." From "SGD Foundation Exists to Change the Way the World Thinks About Art and Culture," Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Accessed March 17, 2013, http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/about/.

45 James Elkins, "There is No Such Thing as Outsider Art," originally published in *Inner Worlds Outside*, edited by John Thompson (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 71-79. Exhibition catalog. On Academia.edu, Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/163447/There_is_No_Such_Thing_as_Outsider_Art. For a further discussion of the problematic usage of the category of "outsider art" please see Elkin's entire essay.

46 Dial continues to be represented by both galleries today. The Andrew Edlin Gallery deals with a selection of the artist's large assemblage wall pieces and floor sculptures, while Ricco/Maresca represents Dial's drawings. During my research, I attended the New York Outsider Art Fair where both galleries maintained booths. I can personally corroborate that they both held coveted spaces on the fourth floor of the DIA Center, denoting their high status and reputation. Both galleries also represent some of the most valued work in the field of self-taught art, including Henry Darger and Martin Ramirez.

47 Dietz, *The Last Folk Hero*, 176.

48 Robert Hobbs, "William Arnett's Formative Role as Patron and Collector of African American Vernacular Art," Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/news-and-press/william-arnetts-formative-role-as-patron-and-collector-of-african-american-vernacular-art/.

49 Due to a number of growing concerns the Dial family was facing, William Arnett offered to help them move into a safer neighborhood and a larger home. He put a deposit on the house in his own name, and tried in vain for months to obtain a mortgage for the Dials. Ultimately Arnett had to refinance his own home to obtain the $350,000, which he used to purchase the Alabama home that provided Dial with a place to live and work. Dial and his family were completely aware of the entire nature of the transaction, and it was general knowledge that Arnett owned the house.

See Robert Hobbs' article "William Arnett's Formative Role as Patron and Collector of African American Vernacular Art," Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/news-and-press/william-arnetts-formative-role-as-patron-and-collector-of-african-american-vernacular-art/.

50 Robert Hobbs, "William Arnett's Formative Role as Patron and Collector of African American Vernacular Art," Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/news-and-press/william-arnetts-formative-role-as-patron-and-collector-of-african-american-vernacular-art/.

51 While a video of the infamous "Tin Man" episode is seemingly impossible to locate (transcripts are available for purchase from CBS), the 1993 episode "Yes…But is it Art" is quite easy to locate on the CBS website at http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7403564n. Morely Safer has recently (2012) produced another

controversial segment on the topic of contemporary art entitled “Even in Tough Times, Contemporary Art Sells,” where he visits the 2012 Art Basel International Art Exhibition located in Miami, FL.

52 Cubbs, “Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial,” 41.

53 Thornton Dial, “Mr. Dial is a Man Looking for Something,” 215 .

54 “About,” New Museum, Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.newmuseum.org/about

55 “Mission,” American Folk Art Museum, Accessed March 20, 2013, http://www.folkartmuseum.org/mission

56 Maxwell L. Anderson, “Whitney Annuals and Biennials: Themes and Variations,” in *Whitney Biennial: 2000* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams, 2000), exhibition catalog, 16.

57 A significant essay on the topic of Dial’s inclusion in the Whitney’s 2000 Biennial and the possible dissolution of outsider art is Arthur C. Danto’s essay “The End of the Outsider,” in *Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South: The Ronald and June Shelp Collection*, ed. Elisa Urbanelli (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), exhibition catalog, 30.