

Art in America

Thornton Dial: Mr. Dial's America

March 8, 2018



A foretaste of the Met's upcoming show of the work of self-taught artist Thornton Dial and his peers, including Nellie Mae Rowe and Lonnie Holley, all from the American South, this well-chosen exhibition draws from Dial's output of the last two decades. In his politically inflected sculptural assemblages and expressionist relief paintings—dense accretions of paint, wood, cloth, metal, carpeting, bones, and found objects that he began making in the 1980s—Dial, who died in 2016 at age 87, focused on social issues, particularly the African American struggle. In the eight magisterial works here, he addresses such subjects as the O.J. Simpson trial, the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11, and—in a sparkling relief painting featuring a real frying pan and other cooking utensils—the ordinary pleasure of a shared meal.