Thornton Dial Sr.
Previews: Museum of Fine Arts Houston

by Michele Wallace
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Thornton Dial was one of the first contemporary outsider artists to gain an international reputation. Born in 1928 in rural Alabama, Dial spent about forty years as a carpenter, welder, and bricklayer, all the while burying his paintings in the yard so no one could see them. Since his retirement in 1983, he has devoted his time and skills to artmaking.

The seventy-three paintings in this show are encrusted with barbed wire, carpeting, paper, and steel; the twenty-two large sculptures are made from steel piping and found objects. The exhibition, Dial’s largest to date, also includes twenty-three watercolors and charcoal drawings. But what will stand out above all is that there is nothing remotely marginal about Dial’s work.

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