

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE
EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF THORNTON DIAL TO DATE**

Exhibition to cover two decades of the Alabama artist's socially and politically charged work.

ATLANTA, Oct. 23, 2012 – The most extensive exhibition ever mounted of Thornton Dial's painting and sculpture will be on view at the High Museum of Art from Nov. 3, 2012, to March 3, 2013. *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial* will highlight Dial's significant contribution to the field of American art and show how his work speaks to the most pressing issues of our time, including the Iraq War, 9/11 and social issues such as racism and homelessness. The exhibition will present 59 of Dial's large-scale paintings, drawings and found-object sculptures spanning 20 years of his artistic career.

Thornton Dial's work draws inspiration from the rich, expressive traditions of the black South. With no formal art education, Dial developed a truly distinctive and original style. Influenced by African American yard shows, he incorporates salvaged objects—from plastic grave flowers and children's toys to carpet scraps and animal skeletons—to create highly charged assemblages that tackle a wide range of social and political subjects.

His art touches on topics ranging from the dilemmas of labor and the abuse of the natural environment to meditations on significant recent political and cultural moments, with a particular focus on the struggles of historically marginalized groups such as women, the rural poor and the impoverished underclass. Born out of decades of his own struggle as a working-class black man, Dial's work also explores the history of racial oppression in the United States, from slavery through the civil rights movement and into the postmodern era.

Atlanta residents may already be familiar with Dial's work. His sculpture "The Bridge," which commemorates Congressman John Lewis's civil rights activism, is located at the John Lewis Plaza in Freedom Park at the intersection of Ponce de Leon Avenue and Freedom Parkway.

"Thornton Dial's works are more than just visually compelling; they also provide powerful political and social commentary on some of the most important issues of our time," said Michael E. Shapiro, Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., Director of the High Museum of Art. "We are honored to host such a comprehensive exhibition of his work."

Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial will include 59 paintings, drawings and sculptural works as it surveys two decades of the artist's career. Highlights of the exhibition include the 1992 work "The Last Day of Martin Luther King," which examines the life, death and transformative message of the assassinated political leader, and "Victory in Iraq" from 2004, a 10-foot-long canvas that incorporates barbed wire and iconic symbols of the United States' role in world conflict. Other important works on view include "Don't Matter How Raggly the Flag, It Still Got To Tie Us Together," a 2003 work that evokes the image of a torn and ravaged American flag; "Refugees in Love," a 1991 drawing that is the earliest work on display; and the 2009 piece "Turtle Holding Flag," which celebrates President Obama's inauguration.

“Thornton Dial’s work defies easy categorization. His massive 3-D canvases and found-object sculptures draw from folk and self-taught traditions, yet his works are undeniably contemporary,” said Susan Crawley, the High’s curator of folk art. “His unique blend of aesthetics, history and social activism make him one of the most thought-provoking artists of our day.”

Exhibition Organization and Support

Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial is organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) and is curated by the IMA’s Adjunct Curator of American Art, Joanne Cubbs. Generous support of this exhibition is provided by the Friends of Thornton Dial and Art Partners.

Hard Truths is accompanied by an illustrated exhibition catalogue that features scholarly essays by David Driskell, the artist, educator and historian of African American art and namesake of the High’s Driskell Prize; cultural critic Greg Tate; and the curator of the exhibition, Joanne Cubbs. A definitive text on one of the nation’s most remarkable contemporary artists, the catalogue offers an in-depth look at the history, themes and development of Dial’s painting and sculpture.

About Thornton Dial

Thornton Dial was born in Alabama in 1928 and spent most of his adult life as a welder for the Pullman Standard Company, the maker of railway cars. Beginning as a young man, Dial also made “things” and gradually became adept in the media of painting, drawing, sculpture and watercolor. He first gained recognition as a major artist in the late 1980s, with the growing interest in so-called “folk” or “outsider” art. Despite being self-taught and choosing to remain outside of the formalized art world, his work has continued to earn critical praise for its deft fusion of painting and sculpture, its emotional power and its unique expression of a contemporary vision of the African American experience in the South. Now in his early 80s, Dial continues to build his extensive body of work. In 1993 his art was shown in a major New York exhibition held simultaneously at the New Museum of Contemporary Art and the American Folk Art Museum. In 2000 Dial was featured in the prestigious Whitney Biennial, and in 2005 the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, mounted a solo exhibition of his paintings and assemblages produced during the first half of the decade. In 2007 Dial was the subject the award-winning documentary “Mr. Dial Has Something to Say,” produced by Alabama Public Television. His works are included in the collections of a number of major museums, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Milwaukee Museum of Art and the High Museum of Art, which owns 19 works by Dial.

About the High Museum of Art

Founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association, the High Museum of Art is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 13,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists and is distinguished as the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. The High’s media arts

department produces acclaimed annual film series and festivals of foreign, independent and classic cinema. In November 2005, the High opened three new buildings by architect Renzo Piano that more than doubled the Museum's size, creating a vibrant "village for the arts" at the Woodruff Arts Center in midtown Atlanta. For more information about the High, visit www.High.org.

About The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is ranked among the top four arts centers in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines four visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art and Young Audiences. To learn more about the Woodruff Arts Center visit www.woodruffcenter.org.

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