

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, Celebrates Significant Acquisition from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation



September 8, 2021— Hanover, N.H.—This year, the Hood Museum of Art made a major acquisition of ten works of art from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation that dramatically expands the story of American art it tells by including several African American artists from the southern United States. These works will transform the Dartmouth College collection and allow new meanings to emerge from

their connections to its current holdings. These groupings offer fresh insight into the world of art but also into the rich diversity of people sharing this planet and the many ways they have chosen to express their ideas and beliefs creatively. The acquisition encompasses paintings by Ronald Lockett, Mary T. Smith, Mose Tolliver, and Purvis Young; sculpture by Lonnie B. Holley and Bessie Harvey; a quilt by Louisiana Bendolph (from the renowned community of quilters in Gees Bend, Alabama); and both paintings and a sculpture by Thornton Dial.

John R. Stomberg, the Virginia Rice Kelsey 1961s Director of the Hood Museum of Art, says, “The Hood Museum is a busy teaching museum. The process of object-based inquiry that grounds its methodology has met with success in all corners of the liberal arts, and professors from across campus mine its objects for connections to other people, times, and beliefs. These sessions offer deep learning opportunities about the art in question but also build skills ranging from close observation and critical thinking to empathy. The Hood Museum knows that, even when the works from Souls Grown Deep are not on view in the galleries, they are sure to be in high demand for the faculty in the context of teaching with art in the Bernstein Center for Object Study.”

The Souls Grown Deep Foundation was founded by the art historian William Arnett in 2010. Arnett had by then spent decades creating a vast collection of art by artists in the American South whom he had become quite close to over the years. Near the end of his own life, he established the foundation to both share these artists’ work and see their communities receive some financial benefit from its sale. His idea was that the foundation would serve to transfer the artworks out of his own holdings and into museum collections around the world. Souls Grown Deep earns some money on these transactions, which it then funnels back into the communities where the artists live or lived through targeted grants. Now up and running for over a decade,

the foundation has had a fundamental impact on museums in the United States (and has started working with institutions in Europe as well).

The name, *Souls Grown Deep*, comes from the 1921 Langston Hughes poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” which concludes: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers”—an apt allusion to the artists Arnett collected. Though different in the specifics of their work and approaches, these artists have much in common, from their lived experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South to their immense creativity when it comes to translating found materials into artwork. These works express dreams and fears, values and ideals, and they share profound observations about life. Operating without the benefit of a gallery or organized art market, most of these artists handled the promotion of their work on their own, often selling from their front yards to passersby.

Christian faith informs many of the works in the *Souls Grown Deep* collection as well. Thornton Dial (1928–2016), whose work *Heaven and Hell on Earth* is illustrated here, returned to the theme throughout his life. In this painting, he divides his world quite obviously left to right. Darker colors dominate the left side, while rich pastels of blue and yellow set the tone on the right. For Dial, the painting depicts the ever-present conflict between heaven and hell, but which side is which remains unclear. Before one jumps to the conclusion that the left leans toward hell, note that opportunities abound there, as indicated by the small objects found among the twisted detritus of industrialized city life. On the other hand, peace and tranquility seem to have been associated with the colorful area, but there are not many references to work and productivity. On this question, Dial once remarked: “They’re always together. We’re living in both all the time.”

As a celebration of these acquisitions, the Hood Museum will share a small, focused exhibition titled *Thornton Dial: The Tiger Cat* to introduce its audiences to this amazingly rich area of American modern art and welcome all the *Souls Grown Deep* works to their new home in the museum’s collection. Join us for a discussion of the exhibition on Thursday, October 28, from 12:30 to 1:30 pm, between Alexandra Thomas, Hood Museum Curatorial Research Associate, and John R. Stomberg, the Virginia Rice Kelsey 1961s Director.

Thornton Dial: The Tiger Cat was organized by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, and generously supported by the Cissy Patterson Fund and the William B. Jaffe Memorial Fund. It is on view from September 11, 2021, through February 27, 2022, in the museum’s Northeast Gallery.

About the Hood Museum of Art

The Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth enables and cultivates transformative encounters with works of artistic and cultural significance to advance critical thinking and enrich people's lives. With its renewed focus on serving Dartmouth's faculty and academic mission, the renovated and expanded facility broadens the museum's reach to students, faculty, and departments across campus, while deepening its engagement with its longtime stakeholders. It also makes a bolder statement about the significance of the arts within the life of Dartmouth and provides the arts district with an arresting new front door to the Green.

About Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College educates the most promising students and prepares them for a lifetime of learning and of responsible leadership, through a faculty dedicated to teaching and the creation of knowledge. The Dartmouth model is unique in higher education: the fusion of a renowned liberal arts college and robust research university where students and faculty partner to take on the world's great challenges. Since its founding in 1769, Dartmouth has provided an intimate and inspirational setting where talented faculty, students, and staff—diverse in background but united in purpose—contribute to the strength of an exciting academic community that cuts easily across disciplines.

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Image: Thornton Dial, *Heaven and Hell on Earth*, 1995, corn husks, corncobs, dried mushrooms, roots, burned wood, clothing, bedding, toys, wire, metal, fabric, Christmas tree ornament, rope, carpet, paintbrush, other found materials, oil, enamel, spray paint, and industrial sealing compound on canvas on wood.

Purchased through the Evelyn A. and William B. Jaffe 2015 Fund; 2021.11.2. © 2021 Estate of Thornton Dial/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Object photo by Jeffrey Nintzel.