



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**THE MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS MAKES HISTORIC ACQUISITION OF WORKS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTISTS, ALL FROM ALABAMA**

**Acquisitions from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation’s William S. Arnett Collection include a major work by Thornton Dial, Sr., an early work by Jimmy Lee Sudduth, and three quilts from Gee’s Bend quiltmakers Minnie Sue Coleman, Emma Mae Hall Pettway, and Joanna Pettway.**

Montgomery, AL— The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) celebrated today the addition of five works by contemporary African-American artists from Alabama to its permanent collection. These works, on view through the summer months, will be acquired over the next two years through a generous agreement with Atlanta, Georgia’s Souls Grown Deep Foundation (SGDF).

"The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts houses an outstanding collection of American art, with the Blount Collection and Ida Belle Young acquisitions as its foundation," said MMFA Director Angie Dodson. "While recent acquisitions of historic and contemporary work have positioned the Museum to better reflect the breadth of identities and lived experiences of the residents and visitors to the City and Region, none have thrust us forward—towards a broader American art history narrative, a deeper Alabama cultural history—with more force than the addition of these five exceptional works of art to our permanent collection."

The relationship between the MMFA and the SGDF dates back to 2015, when the MMFA partnered with the SGDF on *History Refused to Die: The Enduring Legacy of the African-American Art of Alabama*—an exhibition and publication project the two institutions realized in conjunction with the Alabama Contemporary Arts Center in Mobile. During this collaboration, the Museum and Foundation discussed the importance of a commitment to return some of this work to its origins, the place of its creation. Both for the sake of preserving Alabama’s rich cultural heritage, as well as for the sake of easing the artists’ and their descendants’ access to the art, the MMFA identified as a priority bringing some of this work “home.”

Maxwell L. Anderson, President, Souls Grown Deep Foundation said, " We are delighted that this work is now part of MMFA’s collection, where it can be appreciated not only by the public, but by the artists and their families."

Continuing on the import of returning work to Alabama, Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange added: "We are thrilled to bring these works of art created by native Alabamians, to Montgomery, a place that is inextricably tied to the history of the Civil Rights Movement, a subject addressed in many of the pieces."

The MMFA Board President Pete Knight, Jr. said, "We thank the Souls Grown Deep Foundation for their generosity—it's unlikely that we would have the resources to acquire a Thornton Dial, Sr. work of this magnitude on our own."

To that, Dodson added, "And, furthermore, we praise them for putting the proceeds from the sale of these works towards the creation of a paid internship program for students of color to gain experience in the museum field. We very much hope to host and nurture SGDF interns in the many years to come, to do our part in changing the face of our profession, to better reflect the communities with whom we work, whose stories we aspire to tell, and whose individual and collective well-being we intend to support through our exhibitions, programs, and other initiatives."

### **On View**

In celebration of this landmark acquisition and to show its significance in the broadening and deepening of the Museum's collection, the MMFA debuts the five new pieces alongside related pieces from the Museum's permanent collection, opening today, May 14, 2019.

According to Senior Curator Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, "The MMFA has a long tradition of collecting and exhibiting the work of Alabama's most important self-taught African-American artists of the twentieth century, beginning with the acquisition of 30 drawings by Bill Traylor in 1982. The Museum presently holds more than 150 objects by these artists."

Curator Jennifer Jankauskas added, "These five important acquisitions are a perfect complement to our existing collections and enhance them in significant ways. They powerfully demonstrate the capacity for art to explore personal and universal issues while exemplifying the talents of the individual artists. These acquisitions allow us to present a fuller narrative about contemporary issues and allow us to continue to engage with important American artists who are associated with Alabama's rich cultural traditions."

### **The Acquisitions**

Collectively these five newly acquired works and ones that are exhibited with them document the experiences of their makers and serve as windows onto lives of African Americans in Alabama in the twentieth century during a time of great societal change. This exceptional ensemble of work celebrates the creative vision of these outstanding visual artists on the occasion of their historic homecoming.

Thornton Dial, Sr.  
(Emmelle, AL, 1928–2016, Birmingham, AL)  
*Lost Americans*, 2008  
Mixed media on wood

Thornton Dial Sr.'s work transcends the boundaries between the labels of self-taught and contemporary art. By placing his work in the context of our permanent collection on view, we are able to present a fuller narrative about art and contemporary issues such as personal identity and the historical struggles of African-American men in the American South. *Lost Americans*, 2009, is an excellent example of the artist's key themes, process, and content.

In the MMFA construction *Lost Americans*, 2008, Dial recognizes that American society in the 20th century was characterized by a tendency to violence as a result of deep cultural discord. Substance abuse, the decline of the nuclear family, and economic inequality wrought terrible damage in communities, and this in turn, led to the alienation and personal suffering of individuals. This damage to America's traditional social compact has ramifications into the 21st century, and beyond.

Jimmy Lee Sudduth  
(Cains Ridge, AL, 1910–2007)  
*Ferris Wheel at the Fairground*, 1988  
House paint and earth pigments on plywood

*Ferris Wheel at the Fairground*, 1988, reflects the artist's earliest combinations of paint and clay in which the dried clay medium is applied with a light touch (almost as pastel), and produces a magical, almost surreal quality. These works are highly unusual and, in this case, this practice is utilized to record an everyday event that the artist could have seen in rural Alabama, perhaps even in his native Fayette County. This work expands the representation of subjects that we have by Sudduth, using this technique that is quite distinctive in its masterful application of the clay.

Minnie Sue Coleman  
(Alberta, AL, 1926–2012, Birmingham, AL)  
*Pig in a Pen Medallion*, about 1970  
Polyester

Minnie Sue Coleman was the daughter of Minder Coleman, one of the earliest founders and leaders of the Freedom Quilting Bee. This brightly colored collection of polyester and double-knit fabrics is a variant of the "Pig in a Pen" pattern that features strips of fabric placed in concentric circles around a center medallion. This quilt was one of six quilts by quilt makers from Wilcox County, Alabama's Gee's Bend community that were featured in a series of U.S. postage stamps issued in 2006.

Emma Mae Hall Pettway  
(Rehoboth, AL, born 1932)  
*Bars/Strips*, about 1975  
Cotton corduroy

The cooperative known as the "Freedom Quilting Bee" was formed on March 26, 1966, by some sixty quilt makers in Gee's Bend under the leadership of Minder Coleman, a quilter and community leader, and an Episcopal priest, Father Francis X. Walter. The Bee found a home in a sewing center constructed in March of 1969, bringing tangible economic benefits (such as washing machines and upgrades to electrical service or plumbing) to the families of the Bend through the sale of these communally made products.

Emma Mae Hall Pettway was a native of Wilcox County's small community of Rehoboth, but married and moved within the County to Gee's Bend with her husband Lovell when she was a young girl. There she met her husband's family relations including Louella Pettway and Aolar Mosely, learning more of the Bend's traditions from these women's quilting circles. Emma Mae Hall Pettway was one of the quilt makers who took advantage of the leftover material that was used in making corduroy pillow shams under contract for the Sears Roebuck Company. This quilt is an impressive example of a "double-sided quilt," in which two quilt tops have been placed back-to-back. In this instance, she utilized only two colors of corduroy fabric and placed the emphasis on the geometries of the tops—one a variation of the standard "Bars" pattern, and on the reverse a lively construction of smaller strips that seems to vibrate with intense energy.

Joanna Pettway  
(Gee's Bend aka Boykin, AL, 1924–93)  
*Housetop Variation*, about 1950  
Cotton, cotton corduroy, wool, and linen

This *Housetop* variation quilt from around 1950 is a great deal earlier than the best-known Gee's Bend quilts, and establishes the solidly bold, geometric quality for which the quilts of this community are known. This is the quality that one sees most frequently in the later quilts, and it serves as a document that informs the genesis of the Gee's Bend style.

#### **About the Souls Grown Deep Foundation**

The Souls Grown Deep Foundation is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to documenting, preserving, and promoting the artwork by artists from the African-American South. The Foundation was established with the largest and foremost collection of works by African-American artists from the Southern United States, which it is working to disburse into the collections of museums around the world to make the work accessible to the widest possible audience. As of May 2019, the SGDF has now placed more than 350 works in 16 institutions, primary through a combination of gift/purchases. The Foundation advances its mission by advocating the contributions of these artists in the canon of American art history, accomplished through collection transfers, scholarship, education, public programs, and publications. Through grants and other initiatives, the Foundation has also extended its mission to serve those communities that gave rise to the visual traditions of the artists represented in its collection. For more information, visit [www.soulsgrowndeep.org](http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org).

#### **About the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts**

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 by a group of local artists as a place for both exhibiting art and a space for art education. The original intentions of our founders—to exhibit and teach—continue to inspire and inform every action and activity here at the Museum which, since 1988, has shared the 277-acre Blount Cultural Park with our partners across the lake at the celebrated Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Today's MMFA visitors stroll art-studded grounds and permanent collection galleries. They see compelling changing exhibitions and learn about art by playing in our interactive gallery, Artworks, making art in its bustling studios, or by participating in other engaging events and programs. And, as of late September 2018, MMFA visitors can now relax and recharge in the serenity of our stunning new three-acre John and Joyce Caddell sculpture garden.

While the Museum's collection is still home to the art of many of the regional artists who first established it, over time, it has become known for its strength in American art and Old Master Prints. Recent, important acquisitions of art made by African-American and Asian artists and works inspired by images and themes related to the experiences of these groups represent the breadth and depth of the lives and concerns of those who now call Montgomery and the River Region home. Through the exhibition of this work as well as the programs and events that help connect our communities with it, the MMFA is recognized as a leading arts and cultural resource here in the state and Southeastern region.

The MMFA is a department of the City of Montgomery and is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery, with additional funds from the Montgomery County Commission and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

## **General Information**

**Location:** Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park  
One Museum Drive  
Montgomery, Alabama, 36117

Free admission and ample parking.

### **Hours:**

#### **ArtWorks**

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 AM–5 PM

Sunday, Noon to 5 PM

#### **Galleries, Caddell Sculpture Garden, and Parker Terrace:**

Tuesday–Saturday, 10 AM–5 PM

Sunday, Noon to 5 PM

**Café:** Tuesday–Saturday, 11 AM–2 PM

**Museum Store:** Tuesday–Saturday, 11 AM–2 PM

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