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Most Comprehensive Presentation of the Work of Thornton Dial to Premiere at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 2011

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

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, February 17, 2010—The most extensive presentation ever mounted of Thornton Dial's painting and sculpture will premiere at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, on view from February 27, 2011 to May 15, 2011. *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial* will highlight the artist's significant contribution to the field of American art and show how Dial's work speaks to the most pressing issues of our time—including the War in Iraq, 9/11, and social issues like racism and homelessness. The exhibition will present over 75 of Dial's large-scale paintings, drawings and found-object sculptures spanning twenty years of his artistic career—including 25 works on view for the first time.

Thornton Dial's work draws inspiration from the rich symbolic world of the black rural South. With no formal art education, Dial developed a truly distinctive and original style that was born out of decades of struggle as a working-class black man. Influenced by African American yard shows, Dial's work incorporates salvaged objects—from plastic grave flowers and children's toys to cow skulls and goat carcasses—to create highly charged assemblages that tackle a wide range of social and political subjects. Dial's work 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 and the rural poor. His work also explores the history of racial oppression in America, from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement and into the post-modern era.

"The work of Thornton Dial offers powerful insight into the most compelling political and social issues of our time," said Maxwell L. Anderson, The Melvin & Bren Simon Director and CEO of the IMA. "This exhibition will bring long-overdue recognition to Thornton Dial's remarkable career and make this important artist's work accessible to new audiences."

"Thornton Dial's art represents a missing chapter in American art history—the rich yet unrecognized traditions of black vernacular art from the South," said Joanne Cubbs, the IMA's adjunct curator of American Art. "His work can be viewed as the visual art counterpart to the better-known forms of black musical expression that are now recognized worldwide, such as jazz and hip hop."

Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial will include more than 75 paintings 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 ten-foot canvas that incorporates barbed wire and iconic symbols of America's role in world conflict. Additionally, a Dial work recently acquired by the IMA will be on view in the exhibition—"Don't Matter How Raggy the Flag, It Still Got To Tie Us Together," which dates from 2003 and evokes the image of a torn and ravaged American flag that nevertheless serves to unite us. The earliest work included in the exhibition will be the 1991 drawing "Refugees in Love." Among the show's many recent works is the 2009 piece "Turtle Holding Flag," which celebrates President Obama's inauguration.

Exhibition Organization and Support

Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial is organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art and is curated by the IMA's Adjunct Curator of American Art, Joanne Cubbs. Works in the exhibition will be drawn from nine lenders, with the largest number on loan from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, a non-profit organization that supports the preservation and documentation of African American vernacular art from the South. *Hard Truths* will be accompanied by an illustrated exhibition catalogue with essays by scholars, including historian of African American art David Driskell, cultural critic Greg Tate, and exhibition curator Joanne Cubbs. Promising to be a definitive text on one of America's most remarkable contemporary artists, the catalog will feature 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 railway car-maker Pullman Standard Company. Beginning as a young man, Dial worked with his hands to make "things," and gradually became adept in the media of painting, drawing, sculpture, and watercolor. Dial 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, Dial's art was shown in a major New York exhibition held simultaneously at the New Museum of 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 of an award-winning documentary produced by Alabama Public Television entitled, "Mr. Dial Has Something To Say." 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 High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the IMA, and the Milwaukee Museum of Art.

Contemporary Art at the IMA

The IMA's robust contemporary art program is evolving as a model for encyclopedic museums as they engage the art of our time. With a renewed focus on its contemporary collection, the IMA has been actively seeking out the works of new and emerging artists through both gift and acquisition, and in addition organizing major traveling exhibitions and commissioning site-specific installations.

About the Indianapolis Museum of Art

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the Indianapolis Museum of Art is among the 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States, and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The IMA offers visitors an expansive view of arts and culture through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from across the world's continents. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Recognizing the inherent connections between art, design and nature, the IMA offers visitors experiences at the Museum, in 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park, which will be the largest contemporary art park in the United States when it opens in June 2010, and at Oldfields—Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate on the IMA's grounds.

The IMA completed a \$74 million expansion project in May 2005. The construction added 164,000 square feet to the Museum and includes renovation of 90,000 square feet of existing space. In order to present major exhibitions of its own and to accommodate major traveling exhibitions, the expanded Museum was outfitted with the new 10,000-plus-square-foot Clowes Special Exhibition Gallery on the Museum's first level. In November 2008, the IMA opened the renovated 600-seat Tobias Theater. Nicknamed, "The Toby," the theater is a venue for talks, performances and films.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

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