

ARTnews

Muses: Lonnie Holley on Thornton Dial, African Village in America, and Gee's Bend Quilts

by The Editors of ARTnews
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Thornton Dial. Matthew Arnett/Courtesy Souls Grown Deep Foundation

“Muses” is a column for which creators from different disciplines reveal sources of artistic inspiration and instigation.

Lonnie Holley is an artist and musician who was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1950. His work as a visual artist found support from the Atlanta-based Souls Grown Deep Foundation and appeared in the recent exhibition “History Refused to Die: Highlights from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation Gift” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Musically, Holley garnered praise for a 2013 album, *Keeping a Record of It*, issued by the label Dust-to-Digital and subsequent releases—including *MITH*, a moving new album with Holley playing keyboard and singing spiritually searching songs—on Jajaguwar. For the latest “Muses,” Holley wrote to *ARTnews* with artists who mean a lot to him. —*The Editors*

Thornton Dial

He's the master. There wasn't and won't be anyone else like him. Just knowing Thornton Dial was an opportunity for me to learn so much. From his experiences to his deep well of thoughts about life, he had no equal. And the way he was able to work all those things into his art just always blew my mind. Our mutual friend Amiri Baraka used to talk about Mr. Dial's art and say that it spoke to people on all different levels—it didn't matter who you were and what you knew, you could learn and understand something about the world from his art. That's just truth, and Mr. Dial's work was only about the truth. I'm often credited with helping to "discover" him. Maybe so, but he was going to be found one way or another. All the credit for that really goes to William Arnett, the great champion of artists like me and Thornton Dial. Mr. Dial could paint or draw or make sculpture out of any material like it was the only thing he ever did in his life. I try not to envy other people, but it was hard not to envy his brain power and skill. I'm so glad he lived long enough to see his art and his life celebrated.