

# ***"Love Will Find A Way"***

## ***The Complaints & Acclamations of Alabama Artists***

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Presented in conjunction with the symposium  
***Bearing Witness: Art of Alabama***

Saturday, November 16, 2019

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts,  
Montgomery, Alabama

Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church Sign with Flowers)*, 1998.  
Acrylic on plastic vase with silk flowers.





Here sits Uncle Bill Traylor and here he paints his Impressionistic Images

SCHOLARS and art critics will never come beating a path to Bill Traylor's door. That for the most obvious reason. He has no door.

The 86-year-old negro, a former slave, coal black, and gray bearded, says he left a cabin on the George Traylor plantation in Lowndes County when he was "about sixty-five." That, he claims was his last stable home.

Today, he sleeps in the 10-foot floor space allotted him at Ross-Clayton Undertaking establishment. The end-on-end caskets are shuffled aside to make room for his dimpy pallet. This article and his twice patched pipe are his most necessary possessions.

Art, that often overestimated thing which has brought lesser figures than Bill Traylor into temporary limelight, comes third with the old negro, or not at all when he doesn't feel up to it. Art is too new with him to give him

something else. There was a definite art to this stuff, the young man had decided. There was something almost fiendishly grotesque about these spawling flat figures of cats, and chickens, and men.

#### In a Cave in Africa

Oh, yes, of course! He had seen similar things before! They were almost identical to the figures found drawn in certain caves in South Africa about thirty years ago. "The figures

buy half a dozen or so of Traylor's fantastic figures.

Today, the walls of the "New South," in a room three flights up on Lower Commerce Street, are literally staring with four-eyed spawling cats, whirling with grotesque, spread-winged feet of an almost surrealistic barnyard; and leaping at every corner with Traylor's versions of chickens stealing possums, hawking, and downright hand-to-hand fighting on his highly imaginative plantation.

those figures on that top, and that was all there was to it.

3. Whether people would ever pay "big money" for his pictures or not, he didn't know. But as long as they paid something like 50 cents a half dozen, "or maybe a dozen, or maybe ten fifteen," he "warn't complainin'."

Why, Bill was asked, did certain of his pictures look like no birds ever seen on earth? And why did that gracefully poised yellow bird, looking more like a flaming yellow flamingo,

draw his kind. On closer observation they glared from the paper as savage caricatures.

What there is in the work of the negro artist, this reviewer is not fitted to say. To say the cautious least, there is marked composition and grace in many of his drawings. There is a grotesqueness, which holds the eye, and in many of his flat figures on a flatter background, there is, at least, a sense of harmony in motion, and a plan of design almost Oriental in its confusing grace.

As far as Traylor will admit, he knows only one thing about art, that one should observe carefully regardless of what one sees. "I jes' set on the street and don't do nothing," he said. "I jes' keep on lookin' at things and thinkin' 'Let's see if I can make dat look like dat'."

He knows something else. He's "wobbly kneed" with his "Head

## The Enigma Of Uncle Bill Traylor

Born A Slave, Untutored In Art, His Paintings Are Reminiscent Of Cave Pictures--And Picasso



Left: Photo of Bill Traylor (c. 1853-1949) and his art in *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1940. Above: Bill Traylor, *Yellow Chicken*, ca. 1939-40. Gouache and pencil on cardboard. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.





Above: Lee Miller, *Joseph Cornell* (1903-1972), *Paris*, 1933. Gelatin silver print. National Galleries of Scotland. Right: Joseph Cornell, *Medici Slot Machine: Object*, 1942. Mixed media construction. Photo courtesy of Christies.





Arthur Rothstein (1915-1985), *Girl at Gee's Bend, Alabama*, 1937. Gelatin silver print. Art Institute of Chicago.





Left: George Washington Carver (1864-1943). Below left: George Washington Carver in Etta Budd's art class, Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa, 1890.





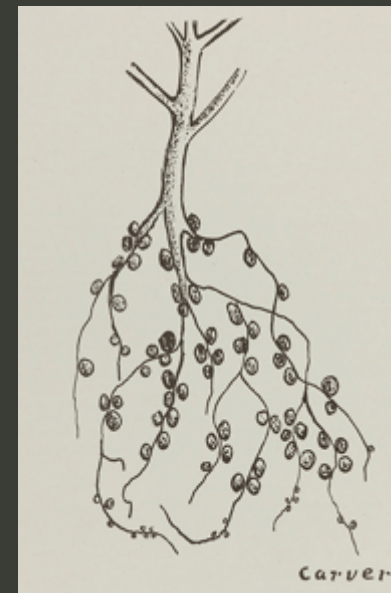
Photograph of George Washington Carver posing with paint brushes, artist's palette, and a floral still life painting, early 1900s.



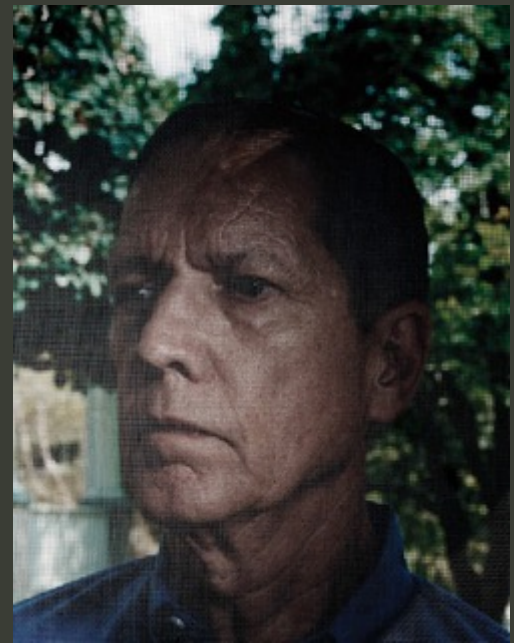


Left: George Washington Carver, *Yucca and Cactus*, ca. 1941. Oil on canvas. Above: Photo of Carver with *Yucca and Cactus*, published in *Time* magazine, November 24, 1941.





Left: George Washington Carver, *Floral still life*, nd. Oil on canvas. Right: George Washington Carver, *Illustration of root system of cow peas*, 1910. Pen and ink.



Counter-clockwise from upper right:  
William Christenberry (1936-2016).  
William Christenberry, *Side of Palmist Building, Havana Junction, Alabama*, 1973. Pigment print. William Christenberry, *Get Back at the Shack*, ca. 1970. Kodachrome.





William Christenberry, *Bread of Life*, near Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1989. Ektacolor print.



William Christenberry, *Egg Carton Cross*, Hale County, Alabama, 1975. Dye transfer print.



Upper right: William Christenberry, *Grave with Bed as Grave Marker, near Faunsdale, Alabama*, 1967. Dye transfer print. Lower right: William Christenberry, *Two Graves, Stewart, Alabama*, 1984. Chromogenic color print.





Left: Bill Traylor, Montgomery, Alabama, ca. 1940. Above: Bill Traylor, *Seated Black Cat*, ca. 1939-42. Pencil & gouache on cardboard.





Left: John Frederick Lehman, *Jug*, ca. 1870. Ash-glaze stoneware. Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama. Above: Bay Boat New Daphne delivering Baldwin County pottery to Mobile, Alabama, ca. 1925.



Clockwise from left: Bill Traylor, *Untitled (Man, Woman, Dog)*, 1939. Crayon & pencil on paperboard. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Sun Ra & his Myth Science Arkestra/ *Angels And Demons At Play* (1965). Sun Ra (Herman Blount) (1914-1993).







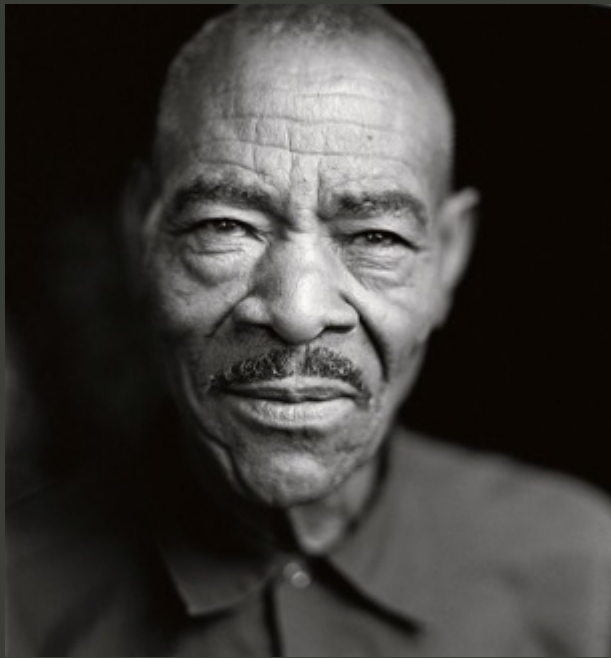
Above: Mose Tolliver (1925-2006).  
Right: Mose Tolliver, *Self-Portrait*,  
1978. House paint on plywood.  
American Folk Art Museum, New York.





Left: Lonnie Holley, *Memorial at Friendship Church*, 2006. Mixed media assemblage. Above: Lonnie Holley (b. 1950).





Above: Thornton Dial (1928-2016). Right: Thornton Dial, *Life Go On*, 1990. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum.





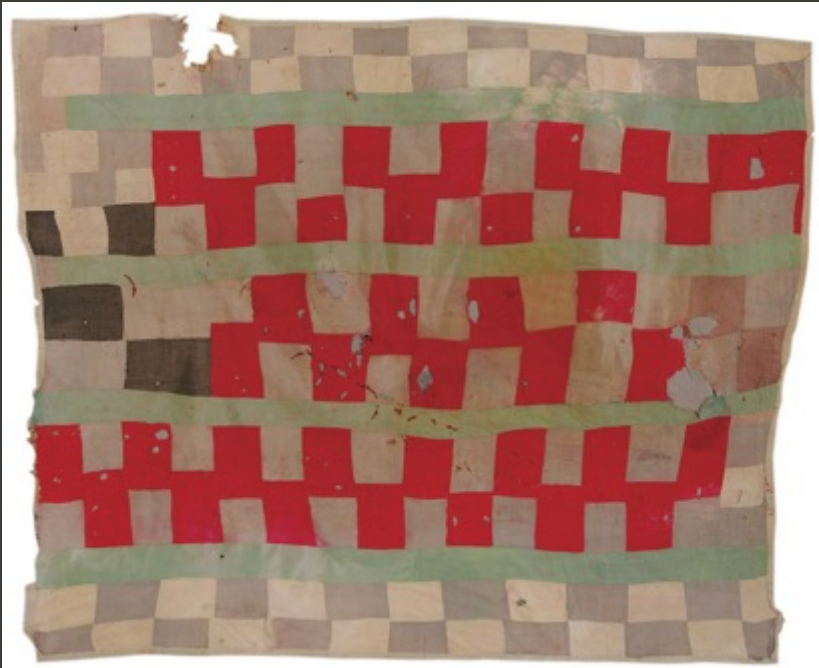


Roland Freeman, *Annie Mae Young (with grandchild)* (1928-2012), 1993. Color photograph.





Upper left: Annie Mae Young, *Bars and blocks work-clothes quilt*, 1944. Denim. Souls Grown Deep Foundation. Lower left: Annie Mae Young, *Rows of rectangles quilt*, 1943. Cotton and wool. Souls Grown Deep Foundation.



Annie Mae Young, "*Housetop*"  
*sampler variation quilt*, 1950s.  
Denim. Souls Grown Deep  
Foundation.







Annie Mae Young, *Center medallion strips quilt with multiple borders*, ca. 1965. Cotton and wool. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Photograph of Cudjo Lewis (1841-1935) in his home in Africatown, Mobile, Alabama, ca. 1930.