

Self Taught: Seven African American Vernacular Artists
Rebecca Randall Bryan Gallery,
Coastal Carolina University
<https://www.coastal.edu/bryanartgallery>

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Press contact and images: Cynthia Farnell, cfarnell@coastal.edu (843) 234-3466

Additional contact: Dan Powell, powelld@salve.edu (401) 241 -9819

The Rebecca Randall Bryan Gallery at Coastal Carolina University is pleased to announce *Self Taught: Seven African American Vernacular Artists*. The exhibition, co-curated by George Jacobs and Dan Powell, features paintings, sculpture and multi-media work by Bessie Harvey, Purvis Young, Thornton Dial Sr., David Butler, Jimmie Lee Sudduth, Mose Tolliver and Mary T. Smith.

The exhibition runs from **January 11, 2007 through February 8, 2007**. The public is invited to the opening reception at the Rebecca Randall Bryan Gallery on the campus of Coastal Carolina University on **January 11, 2007 from 5pm - 7pm**.

The highlight of the exhibition will be a gallery talk on the artists and exhibition given by art historian, **Paul Arnett**. Mr. Arnett is the co-editor, with his father William Arnett, of the definitive study of African American Vernacular art, the two volume set, "Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South." The event is free and open to the public. ***Date and time TBA.***

Once ignored and marginalized by the art world with labels such as "folk art" and "outsider art", African American Vernacular art is unarguably one of the most vital creative forces in American art today. The seven artists in this exhibit were chosen for their outstanding contributions to the movement and are widely recognized as masters of the genre.

Poet, painter, sculptor and storyteller **Bessie Harvey's** work grew out of a necessity to quiet the pain of a difficult and demanding life. Her gift was the ability to see and hear the inner spirit and voice of objects and to fashion them into visual form. Enchanting and mesmerizing, her expressive paintings and her sculptures made from tree roots and found objects, are not easily forgotten.

Thornton Dial Sr.'s work is a remarkable fusion of painting, sculpture and drawing. For Dial, everything he sees or touches carries visual and expressive potential. Dial's mixed media constructions, and sculptures are oftentimes uniquely personal responses to social and political events, as well as original and compelling articulations of his own insights and ideas.

Purvis Young is a well known local fixture in the "Overtown" section of Miami, Florida. He turned to painting while serving time in jail and draws inspiration for his work from the streets of Overtown. A sharp and observant social commentator, Young's work reflects his commitment to faith and community. His energetic and expressive paintings exude an intensity and immediacy unmatched in contemporary art today.

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Mose Tolliver's subjects range widely from family, animals, turtles and angels, all painted with an economic palette in a direct, lyrical style. One of the first African American vernacular artists to achieve national recognition Tolliver was deservedly considered one of the South's most influential and respected artists. The art world was saddened by his death on October 30, 2006.

David Butler's inventive and fabulous constructions, critters and elaborate whirligigs fashioned from roofing tin and festooned with found objects have a bold directness and whimsical immediacy. Working with discarded materials, Butler created a complex environment of artistic forms inspired by bible stories and populated with fanciful creatures.

Jimmie Lee Sudduth utilizes natural materials such as turnip leaves, roses, honey and mud to create the color and pigment for his paintings of animals, people and buildings. The son of a Native American "medicine lady" he began painting in mud at the age of three, so the story goes, and has never stopped. The people, buildings and animals of his hometown, Fayette, Alabama, populate his work as well as paintings of Indians, sharecroppers, trains, trucks and cars.

Mary T. Smith first began decorating her yard in Hazelhurst, Mississippi by hanging painting of animals and people on her fence. Smith continued making paintings and decorating her yard until her one acre lot became a complete comprehensive visual environment. "I did it to pretty up the place," she once stated, "And to please the Lord." Simple and direct, her wonderful paintings often employed a limited palette and sometimes incorporated text.

Free guided tours of the exhibition for elementary, high school and other community groups are available. Please contact director Cynthia Farnell at cfarnell@coastal.edu or call (843) 234-3466 to make advance reservations.

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