

MEDIATING CREATIVE IDENTITY OUTSIDE THE CANON: ALTERITY, RECEPTION, AUTHORSHIP, AND IDEOLOGY IN THE WORK OF FOUR ARTISTS

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ABSTRACT:

An unknown wire sculptor. A self-taught multimedia artist. A fourth-generation potter. A self-taught art quilter. My dissertation brings together the highly varied work of these four artists under the umbrella of their apparent status as “outsiders” – to an academic, studio art training; to the use of traditional mediums such as oil painting and sculpture; basically – to many of the things that characterize artists within the mainstream/ fine/ high art canon. Their exclusion from the canon, made evident through a lack of their works in major institutes of fine art or their marginalizing classifications as “outsider,” “visionary,” or “folk,” illuminates broader issues of agency, identity, and power both in and outside of the art sphere. My project focuses closely on these issues, their evidence in the reception of non-canonical artists both in and outside the canon, and how these *particular* artists navigate the categorical structures of the art world in creative ways. Importantly, I am interested in the multiplicity of identities these artists claim for themselves through the work they produce and the ways in which they discuss their relationships with their communities, audiences, collectors, dealers, and other artists.

SUMMER RESEARCH:

The Center for the Study of the American South was especially helpful in supporting my summer archival and field-based research on two of the artists within my dissertation: multimedia artist Thornton Dial, Sr., and art quilter Dominie Nash. In July, I took a research trip to Washington, D.C., where I visited museums featuring Dial’s work and interviewed Nash at her studio. I also took a research trip to Atlanta, GA, where I visited other museums and collections featuring Dial’s work – including the Souls Grown Deep Foundation – and interviewed William S. Arnett, a close friend of Thornton Dial and an important advocate for his work.

