

# Teacher Guide

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## *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*

On view | November 5, 2021–February 6, 2022



Nadine Robinson (American, born England, 1968), *Coronation Theme: Organon*, 2008. Speakers, soundsystem and mixed media. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA., given by John F. Wieland Jr. in memory of Marion Hill, 2008.175. Image: © Nadine Robinson

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#### Exhibition Overview

- *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* features a multigenerational group of artists working across a wide range of media—including sculpture, painting, film, photography, and sound.
- *The Dirty South* presents more than 130 works of art from over 70 artists.



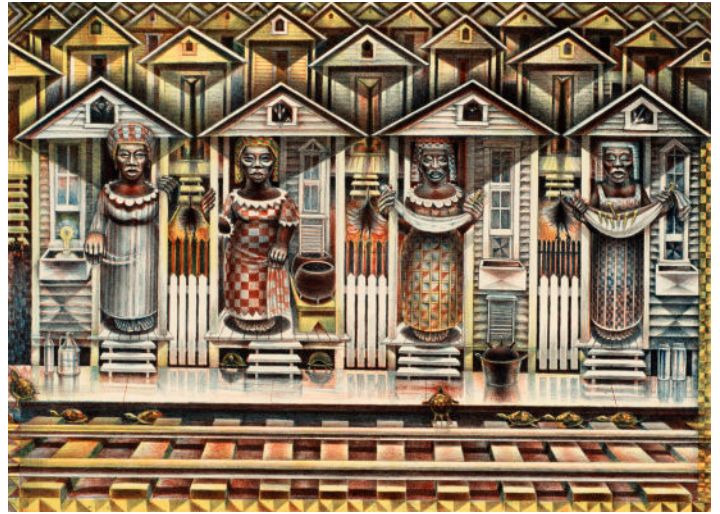
Rodney McMillian (American, born 1969), *From Asterisks in Dockery*, 2012. Vinyl, thread, wood, paint, light bulb. Courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles

- The exhibition is organized into three thematic sections including: Black Corporality (the Black body), Landscape, and Sinner and Saints (religion and spirituality).
- The exhibition makes visible the roots of Southern hip-hop culture and reveals how the aesthetic traditions of the African American South have shaped visual art and musical expression over the last 100 years.
- While the expression “Dirty South” is codified within the culture of Southern hip hop music, it encompasses a much broader understanding of the geography, history, and culture of the Black South. Many artists in the exhibition are connected to Houston or Texas in general.
- The exhibition also features a Cabinet of Wonder which contains musicians’ stage wear, instruments, and ephemera, including Bo Diddley’s guitar, outfits worn by James Brown and CeeLo Green, Ornette Coleman’s saxophone, and original DJ Screw “grey tapes”.
- Cabinets of Wonder laid the foundation for the modern-day museum—institutions with extensive holdings designed to evoke thought and wonder through experiential encounters with art.
- The Cabinet of Wonder in *The Dirty South* is a dynamic reimaging of the wunderkammer referencing the presentation of Surrealist-owned objects at The Menil Collection, this cabinet of wonder highlights the exchange between object makers and musicians. Musical instruments and stage wear conceived as “power objects” reverberate with the energy of the performer.
- The works featured are presented by both academically trained artists and other aesthetically astute artists whose creative visions were honed through family and community experiences.

## Key Questions

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- How have visual artists been inspired by music? What examples can you find through history?
- How have visual artists and musicians worked together to create new work?
- What is the importance of music in the African American South?
- How does landscape relate to the body? What themes in history connect the two?
- What are your associations with the South? List the people, food, objects, ideas, films, or songs that make you think of the South.
- What does the expression “The Dirty South” mean to you?
- After spending time with the Cabinet of Wonder in *The Dirty South*, can you name some “power objects” in your life?



John Biggers (American, 1924-2001) *Four Seasons*, 1990. Colored lithograph on paper. Gibbes Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, 1994.017 Image: © 2020 John T. Biggers Estate / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY, Estate Represented by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, Courtesy of Gibbes Museum of Art / Carolina Art Association

## Curriculum Connections

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**Visual Art** | Choose a favorite song or musician. Inspired by either their lyrics, technique, or life—create a visual artwork.

**Visual Art** | Make a work of art that is inspired by your definition of The South and what that means to you. Think about the history, the body, the land, the sounds, the food, and the spiritual traditions associated with The South.

**Music** | How have certain genres of music come to be associated with different cities or regions? Choose a region and a matching genre of music. Do some research on the history of the association. Who are the key musical figures?

**History** | How does history play a role in the works included in *The Dirty South*? Research an artist in the exhibition who is using history in their work. Knowing the historical context of the work—does that change how you feel when you view the artwork?

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