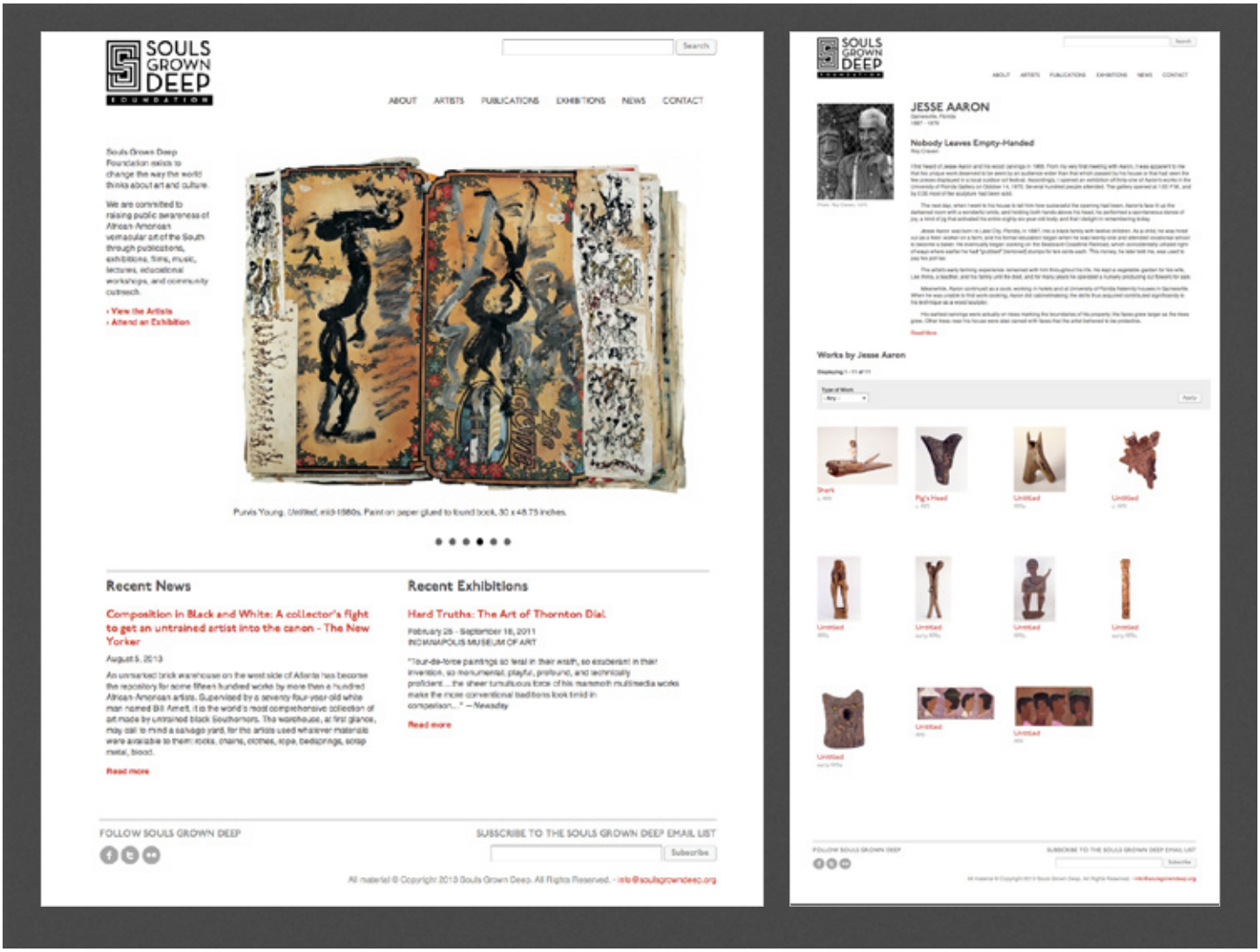


Souls Grown Deep Foundation

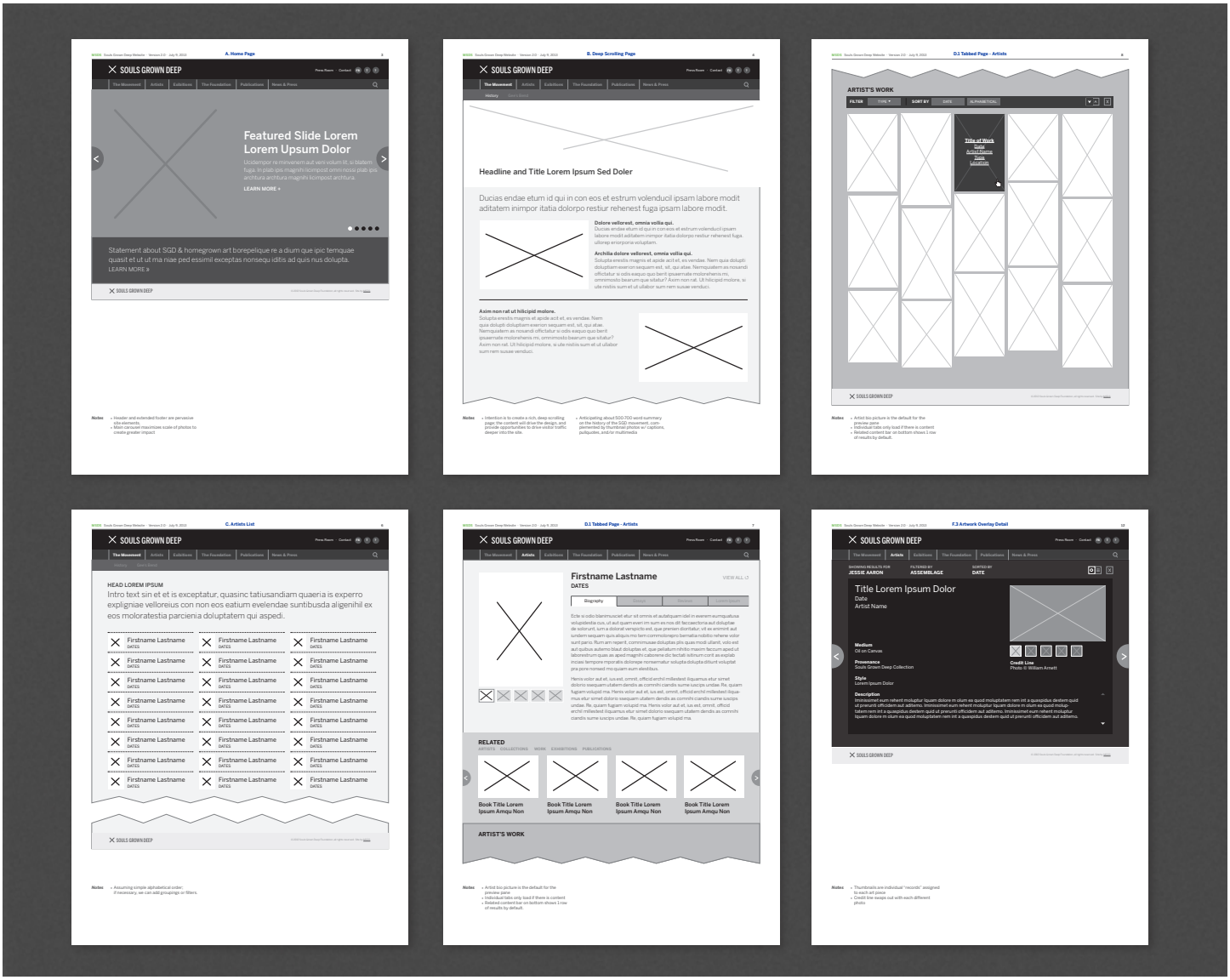
Championing an Overlooked Community of Artists From the African American South

Over the last 300 years, a sophisticated, abstract system of creative expression and cultural preservation emerged from the African American South. As significant as jazz, but often overlooked and misunderstood, is the visual vernacular of work developed across communities during this period. Souls Grown Deep Foundation has dedicated the past 30 years to collecting, preserving, documenting, and exhibiting these historic works of art. Souls Grown Deep sought to make its collection of 1,200 artworks and thousands of field photographs more accessible to curators, academics, and the general public. We partnered to design a website that pays tribute to the history, heritage, and personal expression of more than 150 artists, historically passed over by the art world "establishment."



SoulsGrownDeep.org: Before Redesign

Souls Grown Deep's existing website provided audiences the ability to learn about artists and look at their work, but with little depth. And while it shared information about The Foundation and it's activities, the website did little to present the organization as a Foundation with a critical mission that delivered the sense of urgency and importance it demanded. What Souls Grown Deep needed was a real *presence*, not just for the breathtaking and culturally significant work they were dedicated to, but for themselves as well.



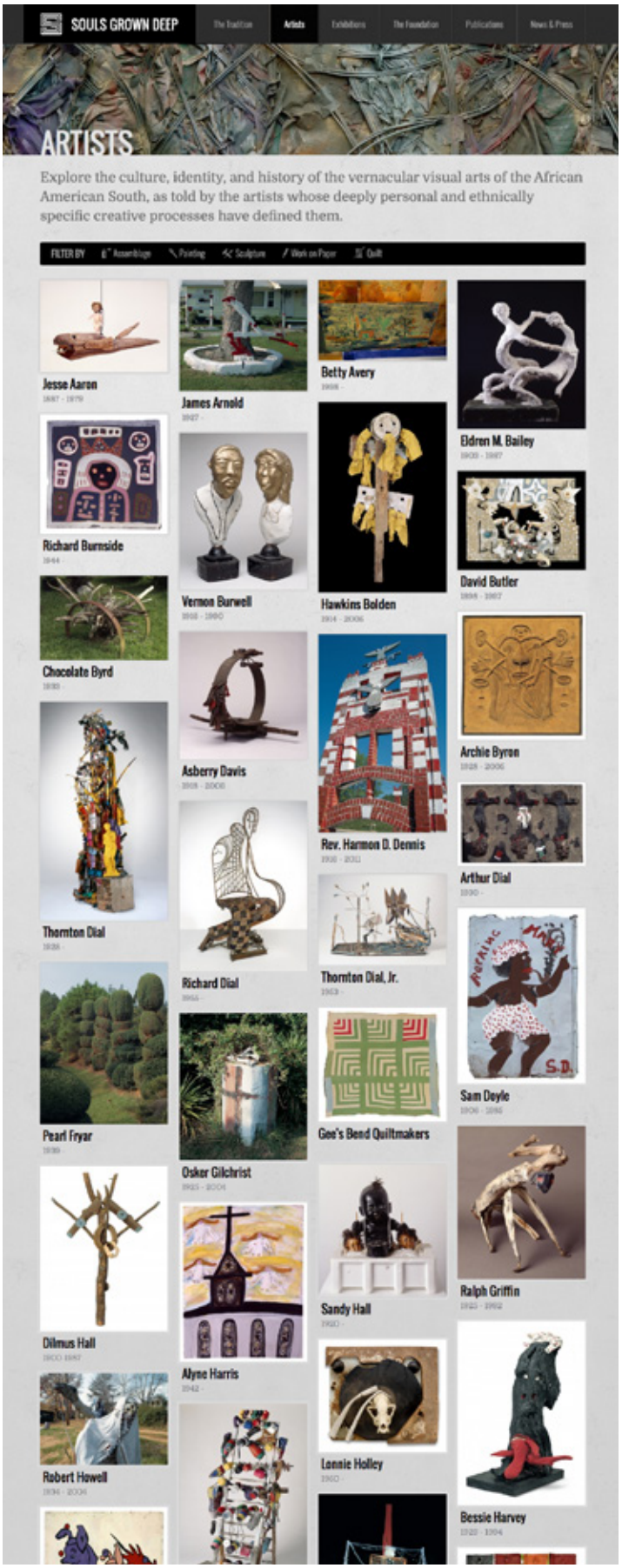
Interactive Strategy & Information Architecture

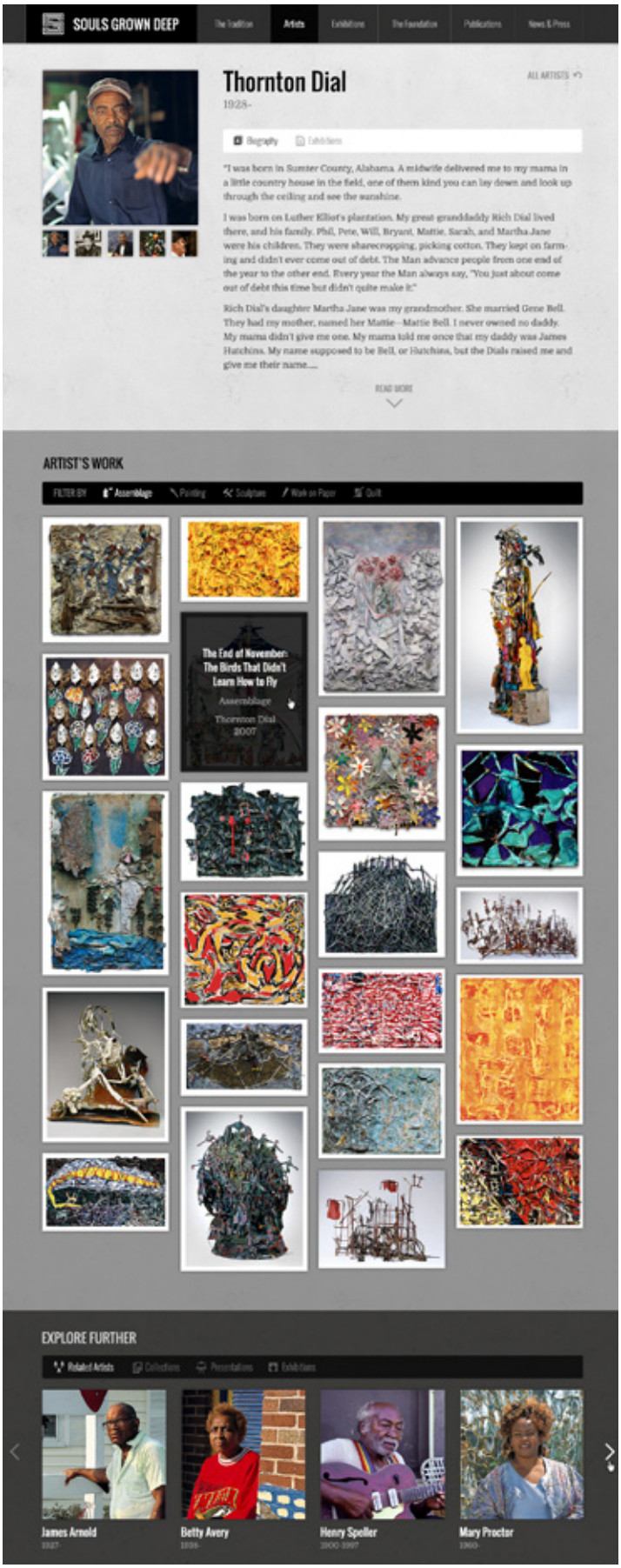
Souls Grown Deep had recently undertaken an extensive photographic archiving of their work, providing an ideal jumping-off point for exploration. After learning more about The Foundation's mission and discussing goals and needs, we recommended a site strategy that would provide the core organizational structure all foundation's need to discuss their efforts and operations, while focusing the bulk of the design on recreating the experience of a museum exhibit. Working with a tight budget and an extensive feature set, we devised a lean information architecture to support these goals, while accommodating a variety of content types and browsing schemes with a minimized number of templates.

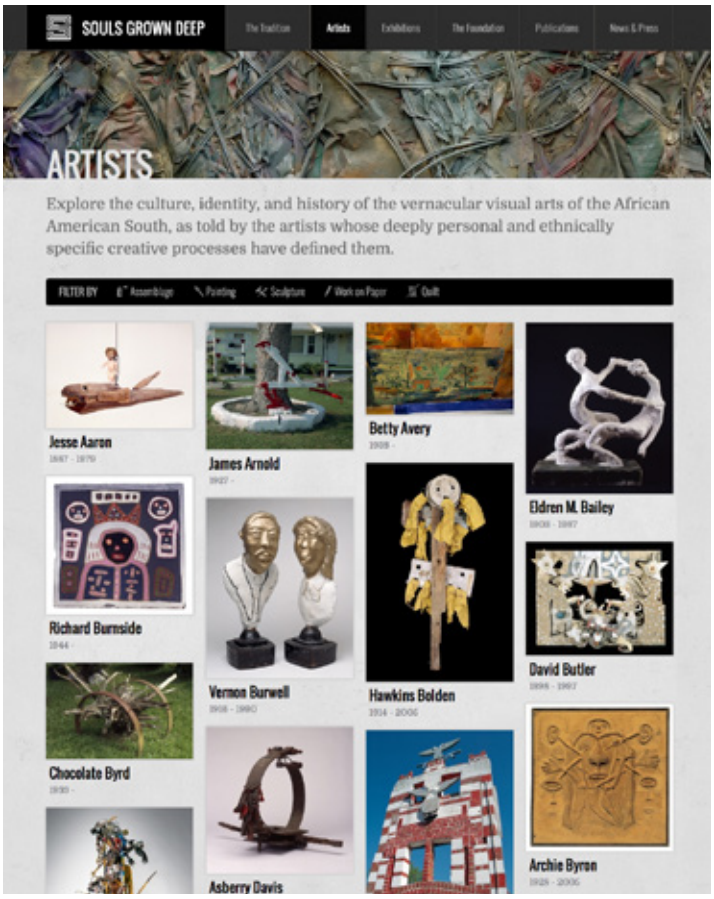


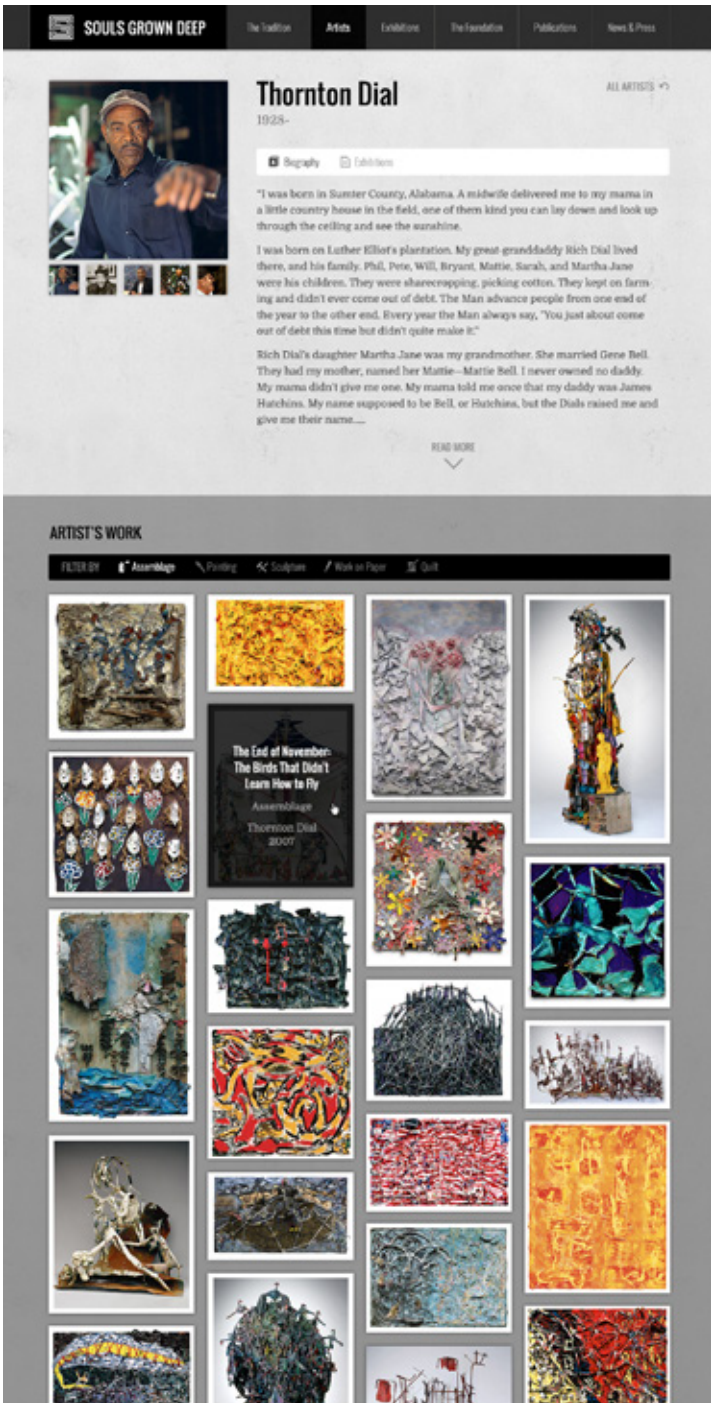
Website Design

Design for Souls Grown Deep's website proved the transformative effect viewing art has on people, because it wasn't until we got to design and began working with the rich imagery that wireframes truly came to life. Much like Souls Grown Deep and the artists whom they champion, the website it presents a distinctive voice with a dignified boldness and charisma—while celebrating the lives and work of the community of artists for which the foundation is helping raise awareness. The result is both an intuitive and expressive user experience that raises awareness, educates, and facilitates exploration—supporting Souls Grown Deep's mission while giving voice to a community of artists and a vital period in American history.


SOULS GROWN DEEP
ARTISTS
Explore the culture, identity, and history of the vernacular visual arts of the African American South, as told by the artists whose deeply personal and ethnically specific creative processes have defined them.
FILTER BY
Jesse Aaron
James Arnold
Betty Avery
Eldren M. Bailey
Richard Burnside
Vernon Burwell
Hawkins Bolden
David Butler
Chocolate Byrd
Asberry Davis
Archie Byron
Thornton Dial
Rev. Harmon D. Dennis
Arthur Dial
Richard Dial
Thornton Dial, Jr.
Pearl Fryar
Osker Gilchrist
Gee's Bend Quiltmakers
Sam Doyle
Dilmus Hall
Alyne Harris
Sandy Hall
Ralph Griffin
Robert Howell
Lonnie Holley
Bessie Harvey


SOULS GROWN DEEP
Thornton Dial
1928–
ALL ARTISTS
Biography
"I was born in Sumter County, Alabama. A midwife delivered me to my mama in a little country house in the field, one of them kind you can lay down and look up through the ceiling and see the sunshine.
I was born on Luther Elliot's plantation. My great granddaddy Rich Dial lived there, and his family. Phil, Pete, Will, Bryant, Mattie, Sarah, and Martha Jane were his children. They were sharecropping, picking cotton. They kept on farming and didn't ever come out of debt. The Man advance people from one end of the year to the other end. Every year the Man always say, "You just about come out of debt this time but didn't quite make it."
Rich Dial's daughter Martha Jane was my grandmother. She married Gene Bell. They had my mother, named her Mattie—Mattie Bell. I never owned no daddy. My mama didn't give me one. My mama told me once that my daddy was James Hutchins. My name supposed to be Bell, or Hutchins, but the Dials raised me and give me their name....
READ MORE
ARTIST'S WORK
FILTER BY
Assemblage
Painting
Sculpture
Work on Paper
Quilt
The End of November: The Birds That Didn't Learn How to Fly
Assemblage
Thornton Dial
2007
EXPLORE FURTHER
Related Artists
Collections
Presentations
Exhibitions
James Arnold
Betty Avery
Henry Speller
Mary Proctor







Our Client's Take

"It was enormously gratifying how the MSDS team sought to understand a field of art that historically has been poorly represented. They applied a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities, helped us better communicate the Foundation's mission and vision, took time to educate us, and were willing to challenge some of our preconceptions. The process was engaging and edifying—and the result more than we could have hoped for."

Scott Browning, Assistant Director