

**JOHNSON
LOWE** GALLERY

RICHARD DIAL

AMERICAN IDOLS

April 10 - June 27, 2026



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RICHARD DIAL

American Idols

ON VIEW: April 10, 2026 - June 27, 2026

Johnson Lowe Gallery is pleased to present *American Idols*, an exhibition of sculptures by Richard Dial spanning 2006–2025, on view from April 10 through June 27.

Richard Dial is famously reluctant to explain his work—and in *American Idols*, the works themselves make explanation unnecessary. They hold an undeniable aesthetic force. His chairs look drawn on paper rather than bent and welded from steel. Dial's metalwork mimics the gesture of a pencil line. To make metal behave like a quick mark on paper requires not just skill but a particular kind of confidence, an assurance that the material will follow where the idea leads. It's a confidence earned over more than four decades of relentless experimentation matured into a sophisticated ingenuity often attributed to his academically trained contemporaries. Dial is an artist that is constantly refining his craft, and pushing the limits of his materials, the result of which is a visual language indebted to his southern roots yet entirely his own.

The exhibition takes its name from *American Idol*, one of two non-chair works on view. The title of the piece is a nod to the hit early-2000s reality competition show in which aspiring singers perform for a chance at a record deal, with audiences voting to determine their fate. The sculpture depicts a figure with knees on the ground, microphone in one hand, one finger pointing skyward. The hair appears so delicate it seems wet. Everything about the piece is kinetic, a body caught mid-plea, mid-performance, desperate to be chosen.

In *Gethsemane*, we see another kneeling figure - bearded, hunched forward, hands clasped, the body slumped, exhausted. The Garden of Gethsemane is where, according to the Gospels, Jesus prayed the night before his crucifixion, suffering so intensely that he sweated blood. Set against each other, these two pieces anchor the whole

show. One figure kneels before an audience, desperate to be seen. The other kneels before God, desperate to be heard. Both yearn for something different, another way.

The chairs that fill the rest of the exhibition extend these themes. They are sculptural objects, built from the same dynamic aesthetic vocabulary as *American Idol* and *Gethsemane*, rooted in the world Dial grew up in. Born in Bessemer, Alabama, he came of age in the Jim Crow South, and that history runs through the work. Richard Dial, his brothers, and their father, legendary contemporary artist Thornton Dial, founded Dial Metal Patterns in the early 1980s. The Dial's made patio furniture together and at its height they employed around twenty other metal workers, providing jobs in a steel town that was hit hard by deindustrialization. The same warehouse that housed the family business for decades is now where Richard has his studio—and, in his later years, Thornton had his studio there as well. Art is just as much a family business for the extraordinary Dial family.

American Idols is a show about faith, spectacle, history, and longing, rendered entirely in steel, and it does not ask permission to matter. The work carries its meaning in its form, its weight, its posture. In an art world that frequently depends on explanatory text, conceptual framing, and written argument to justify what hangs on the wall or sits atop plinths, Dial asserts something straightforward: the object is enough.

Robell Awake, 2026

Gethsemane, 2007
Wrought iron and fabric
58 1/8 x 32 x 30 in.
\$25,000.00







Americal Idol, 2006
Oil-based paint on metal,
electrical wire
59 1/4 x 35 5/8 x 31 in.
\$30,000.00





***Exhausted in Love*, 2006**

Exhaust pipes, tire rims, welded steel, and denim

44 1/2 x 67 x 27 in.

\$40,000.00





Looking Back, 2026
Oil-based paint on metal,
burlap, foam, and wood
70 x 43 x 41 in.
\$30,000.00





Master's Chair, 2007

Welded steel, fabric

55 3/4 x 52 x 29 1/4 in.

\$40,000.00









Partners, 2007
Oil based paint on welded
steel, wood and fabric
60 1/2 x 28 x 31 in.
\$25000.00







Laid Back, 2023

Oil-based paint on metal,
fabric, and wood

53 x 81 x 29 in.

\$40,000.00







Royalty, 2007

Welded steel, fabric

66 1/8 x 33 1/2 x 26 in.

\$30,000.00





Mr. Bojangles, 2005
Oil-based paint on metal,
electrical wire
83 x 31 1/2 x 33 3/4 in.
\$30,000.00







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BIOGRAPHY

Richard Dial (b. 1955) is an American artist known for turning metal furniture into anthropomorphic sculptures. Trained as a machinist, he founded Dial Metal Patterns in Alabama in 1984, where his brothers and father, made wrought-iron furniture. Using these skills, he began creating art from industrial materials. Dial's sculptures often look like chairs but are not meant for comfort. Instead, they present figuratively dynamic constructions that explore themes of power, history, family, and African American experience. Inspired by traditions where chairs symbolize authority, he transformed them into figures that question leadership, religion, social systems and the ideals of the American Dream.

Richard Dial has exhibited at the Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, Ohio), the Michael C. Carlos Museum (Atlanta, GA), the High Museum of Art (Atlanta, GA), the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (Kalamazoo, MI), MARCH (New York, NY), Maus Contemporary (Birmingham, AL), the Museum of Art (Tallahassee, FL), and the Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, OH), among others. His work resides in the collections of the American Folk Art Museum (New York, NY), the Birmingham Museum of Art (Birmingham, AL) the High Museum of Art (Atlanta, GA), the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Houston, TX) and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation (Atlanta, GA).



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SELECT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 *American Idols*, Johnson Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia
2025 *Wise Spirit*, March Gallery, New York, New York
Seated in Memory: The Sculptures of Richard Dial, Dr. William R. Harvey Museum of Art, Talladega, Alabama
2024 *Everyday Love*, Institute 193, Lexington, Kentucky

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *CHR*, curated by Ebony L. Haynes, The Armory Show, New York, NY
2024 *Carpenter's Gothic*, SOMEDAY, New York, NY
The Stars Fell on Alabama, Edel Assanti, London, UK
2022 *Living Legacies: Art of the African American South*, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
Circa 1989, MARCH, New York, NY
Anyone Can Move a Mountain, Maus Contemporary, Birmingham, AL
2021 *The Marzio Years: Transforming the Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston, 1982–2010, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
2020 *Trip to the Mountaintop: Recent Acquisitions from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation*, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
2009 *Folk Art Revealed*, The American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
2004 *African-American Art in the Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
1996 *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, Michael C. Carlos Museum at City Hall East, Atlanta, GA

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2016 Karen Wilkin, Horace Randall Williams, Sharon Holland, *History Refused To Die: The Enduring Legacy Of The African American Art Of Alabama*, Tinwood Books.
2001 *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*, Vol. II, Edited by William Arnett and Paul Arnett: Tinwood Books.

COLLECTIONS

American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, TX
Souls Grown Deep Foundation Atlanta, GA