

## Review: *Solidary & Solitary: The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection*

Abstract works by black artists at the Ogden Museum

By D. Eric Bookhardt



It often is said history is written by the victors. But art history often has featured unlikely, formerly obscure figures whose offbeat talents suddenly propelled them to star status. Yet, most were white and male while minorities were typically assigned secondary roles in art movements that never really reflected their artistic ideals in the first place. This landmark exhibition of work from the Joyner/Giuffrida Collection of abstract art provides a new context for exploring those artists' sensibilities, and in the process reveals a parallel aesthetic universe where abstraction is a means for personal and philosophical liberation rather than simply a style preference. Co-organized with the Baltimore Museum of Art, this Ogden Museum of Southern Art exhibition kicks off a touring itinerary that will take it to Chicago, Baltimore, Berkeley, California, Miami and other major American art venues.

*Solidary & Solitary: The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection*

• Through Jan. 21, 2018

• Ogden Museum of Southern Art, 925 Camp St., (504) 539-9650, [www.ogdenmuseum.org](http://www.ogdenmuseum.org)

Compared to the eclectic rural genius of an African-American artist like Thornton Dial, the works here are more like the edgy ruminations of abstract jazz musicians who resonate the funky gravitas of city life. So it is no surprise that pioneer mid-century black artists such as Norman Lewis seemed to exist just beyond the radar of abstract expressionist-oriented art critics even as urban black aesthetics were eloquently articulated elsewhere. For instance, the fusion of Middle Passage echoes and 20th-century industrial flourishes in Melvin Edwards' compact, densely eloquent steel sculptures elude most art history strictures although they evoke the lyrical heft of Rahsaan Roland Kirk's gritty jazz riffs. Shinique Smith's baroque concoctions like *No Key, No Question* (pictured) seem to parlay hints of Alice Coltrane's spiritual exuberance into playful new pop-cultural Afro-futurist cosmologies. Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's wry, funk-romantic figurative paintings similarly speak directly to the rhythms of black urban life, and Sam Gilliam works those rhythms into elegant concoctions that fuse color into compositions where light exists as matter, and time is subjective, relative to the disposition of the viewer.