

Museum Guide

# **Terry Adkins: Resounding**

Mar 13, 2020–Feb 7, 2021

**Pulitzer  
Arts  
Foundation**



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Objects accompanied by  in this guide correspond to tracks on the audio tour.

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## Catalogue

*Terry Adkins: Resounding* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by Clifford Owens, Lowery Stokes Sims, and Stephanie Weissberg. Purchase your copy at the Information Desk, or online at [pulitzerarts.org/shop](http://pulitzerarts.org/shop).

## Questions?

If you need assistance, our museum staff is here to help. Have a question about the artwork? Ask our team or email [askacurator@pulitzerarts.org](mailto:askacurator@pulitzerarts.org).

*Facing page:* Portrait of Terry Adkins in his Brooklyn home by LaMont Hamilton

# Terry Adkins: Resounding

American artist Terry Adkins (1953–2014) made art that transgresses boundaries. Over more than three decades, he created an expansive and pioneering body of work that blends sculpture, sound, performance, video, and printmaking. Combining deep interests in history, language, and music, he devoted his work to upholding the legacies of larger-than-life figures, often from the canon of African American culture. Through his singular vision as well as his ongoing work as an educator and mentor, Adkins made a significant impact on the fields of contemporary sculpture and performance. Bringing together works from across the artist's prolific career, *Terry Adkins: Resounding* surveys the evolution of the artist's practice and sheds new light on the wide-ranging influences that informed his creative output.

Adkins was raised in a musical household in Alexandria, Virginia, where he learned to play piano and saxophone. From a young age, he was drawn to the work of jazz luminaries such as John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, and Ornette Coleman. While Adkins turned his primary focus to visual art, earning degrees in fine art and printmaking from Fisk University (1975), Illinois State University (1977), and the University of Kentucky (1979), music would remain essential to his practice. Often referring to himself as a “composer,” he applied the principles of improvisation and experimentation that he learned through jazz to his approach to art making. Throughout his career he maintained the goal of making “music as physical as sculpture might be, and sculpture as ethereal as music is.”

In 1986 Adkins founded the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a rotating group of musicians and artists who performed alongside his installations. Over the next ten years he developed a signature method of working called the “recital,” in which he would bring together a body of artworks and performances that collectively explored the legacies of under-recognized figures such as blues singer Bessie Smith, abolitionist John Brown, and sociologist and activist W. E. B. Du Bois.

Adkins did not shy away from difficult subject matter and often used his recitals as a platform to challenge familiar narratives. Referring to his work as “abstract portraiture,” he rooted his practice in research into the history of particular places and communities. Adkins mined these sites for found items such as instruments,

furniture, and machinery, using these objects as the foundations for his sculptures. Ultimately, he believed these strategies allowed him to unlock the potential of his materials in order to bring to life critical but untold stories.

*Terry Adkins: Resounding* includes more than forty objects that the artist produced from the 1970s until his death in 2014. Rarely exhibited examples from Adkins's early practice are presented alongside some of his most celebrated works, with selections from several acclaimed installations and recitals on view for the first time since their original debuts. *Resounding* also includes items that the artist collected over his lifetime including books, musical instruments, and objects from a range of artistic traditions, offering new insight into the breadth of Adkins's literary, musical, and visual influences.



The exhibition is curated by Stephanie Weissberg, Associate Curator, with Heather Alexis Smith, Curatorial Associate.

# Entrance Gallery

Terry Adkins was deeply interested in materials. Mining historical sites, industrial areas, archives, and his own neighborhood, the artist gathered objects that others might have considered scraps. Through a process he referred to as “potential disclosure,” he brought these cast-off items home or to his studio and lived alongside them until they revealed their purpose: “I take the things that society considers useless and throws away and give them a new life by re-creating and re-combining them into works of art.”

This gallery includes several examples of the broad range of materials with which Adkins engaged, spanning from more traditional media like watercolor to the inventive use of found objects as in *Nenuphar* (#4), made from the fused bodies of two sousaphones. Like a number of the works on view in this exhibition, *Nenuphar* also represents Adkins’s enduring interest in symmetry, repetition, and mirroring, concepts he sometimes traced to the architecture of churches he attended as a child.

Unless otherwise noted, all works in this exhibition are by Terry Adkins (1953–2014).

## 1. **Unknown Maker**

Untitled, n.d.

Metal and leather

Dimensions variable

Estate of Terry Adkins



Throughout his career Adkins collected, performed with, and incorporated bells into his sculpture. His fascination with these instruments related not only to their physical forms, but also to their potential for activation through motion. He often wore bells during his performances, using the movements of his body to produce particular sounds and rhythms. Adkins specifically linked bells to African American spiritual music, in which he said: “Heaven is a bountiful land of milk and honey where one hears perpetual choirs, ringing bells, shining trumpets, and God’s trombones.”

## 2. **High Point**, 1993

Oxidized steel

43 ½ × 36 ½ × 9 inches

(110.5 × 92.7 × 22.9 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Louis and Bessie Adler Foundation, Inc. Gift, 1994. 1994.320a-j

*High Point* is made from a patchwork of rusted railroad plates and stakes. Adkins found these industrial scraps around Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1993. He was particularly interested in the region’s historical production of textiles, furniture, and coal. These products were transported through a network of train lines connecting Greensboro to cities across the United States, including nearby High Point—the birthplace of prominent jazz saxophonist John Coltrane (1926–67).

With this sculpture, Adkins references the history of industry while also alluding to the major influence that Coltrane had on his life and work.

## 3. **Mvet Majestic II**, 1989

Wood and acrylic

Overall dimensions variable, approximately 80 × 36 × 2 inches (203.2 × 91.4 × 5.1 cm)

Private collection

## 4. **Nenuphar**, 1998

Brass and copper

30 × 69 × 9 inches

(76.2 × 175.3 × 22.9 cm)

Collection of Catherine Gund

## 5. **Untitled**, n.d.

Mixed media on paper, three sheets

30 × 60 inches (76.2 × 152.4 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins

“My quest has been to find a way to make music as physical as sculpture might be, and sculpture as ethereal as music is. It’s kind of challenging to make both of those pursuits do what they are normally not able to do.”

**—Terry Adkins**

6. *Divine Mute*, 1998

Aluminum, brass, nickel, and wood

77 × 77 × 21 ½ inches

(195.6 × 195.6 × 54.6 cm)

The George Economou Collection



For Adkins, *Divine Mute* signified the spiritual awakening that abolitionist John Brown described as the inspiration for his attempts to eradicate slavery in the United States, most famously through a raid on a federal armory at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Through this maneuver, Brown (1800–59) hoped to supply enslaved people with weapons and incite a revolt. Although he and his men were ultimately captured, their actions were part of a series of events leading to the American Civil War (1861–65).

Adkins imagined that Brown's divine calling was marked by "either a very big sound or a very bright light," similar to how artists, writers, and musicians have historically represented mystical revelations. Themes of announcement and echoing are amplified in *Divine Mute* by the repetition of circular forms, including the central sousaphone bell, the eight shining roundels, and the reflective aluminum disc.

Adkins revisited Brown's legacy across eight recitals and was particularly interested in the spectrum of responses to the abolitionist, ranging from celebration to villainization.

7. *Muffled Drums*, 2003

Bass drums and mufflers

Overall display dimensions variable

Tate: Purchased using funds provided by the 2013 Outset / Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate Collection 2014



This towering stack of bass drums is the tallest sculpture Adkins produced. He included eleven drums in the original presentation. However, Adkins sometimes installed the work with eight, as seen here, because he was drawn to the numeral's symmetry and repetition of circular forms. Some of the instruments feature designs including a painted landscape; the logo of a marching band from Danville, Virginia; and the insignia of Adkins's performance group, the Lone Wolf Recital Corps.

Adkins originally included this work in a recital exploring the legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois, a pioneering American sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist. Its title likely references the Silent Protest Parade of July 1917 that Du Bois helped organize. Newspapers described over eight thousand people marching silently to the "beat of muffled drums" in the streets of New York City, protesting segregation, discrimination, and lynching in the United States. The event was developed partly in response to the 1917 East St. Louis riots in which numerous Black residents were killed; the official death toll is not known to this day.

As a lifelong student of history, Adkins often used works such as *Muffled Drums* to demonstrate the resonance of historical events within contemporary society, in this case highlighting the continued struggle for racial justice on behalf of Black lives.

8. *Last Trumpet*, 1995

Brass, sousaphone, and trombone bells, four parts

Each 216 × 24 × 24 inches

(548.6 × 61 × 61 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of David Booth; and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Thompson (by exchange), 2017



Adkins made this monumental work as a tribute to his late father. The iconic sculpture consists of four “Akrhaphones,” trumpet-like instruments of the artist’s own invention. They allude to the trumpets played by angels during the biblical narrative of God’s Last Judgment on humanity.

To create these eighteen-foot-long horns, Adkins attached sousaphone and trombone bells to tubes of cast brass, not realizing at first that the instruments would actually produce sound. The artist exhibited this work in several recitals, and his performance group, the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, has played it on multiple occasions.

9. *Greater Deeps*, 1995

Tin and wood

32 × 27 × 18 inches

(81.3 × 68.6 × 45.7 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins

Adkins repurposed parts of a Tonka toy truck to create this memorial to his father, Robert Hamilton Adkins (1927–95), who was both a source of encouragement and figure of admiration for his son. The artist associated *Greater Deeps* with religious themes, including death, resurrection, and the soul’s departure from the body. Adkins tended to install *Greater Deeps* high on the wall, emphasizing the sculpture’s spiritual symbolism.

“When I am most successful, the work of art becomes illuminated, retaining the brilliance of the revelatory experience that created it.”

—Terry Adkins

# Cube Gallery

In *Nenuphar*, the last recital Adkins completed before his death, he explored the biographies of two twentieth-century innovators: American agricultural scientist George Washington Carver (1864–1943) and French conceptual artist Yves Klein (1928–62). While the two men never met, Adkins identified a series of connections between them, often highlighting lesser-known aspects of their histories. For example, works in the recital explore their mutual fascination with ancient Egypt, biographical connections to the sea, and the fact that they both created a similar hue of ultramarine blue several decades apart. The word *nenuphar* refers to a type of blue water lily indigenous to Egypt, serving as a link between Klein and Carver’s shared interest in the color blue, ancient Egypt, and botany.



10. *Smoke Signal*, 2013  
Eames chair bases, concrete, leather, and ebony  
222 × 27 × 30 inches  
(563.9 × 68.6 × 76.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York
11. *Nenuphar*, 2013  
Glass and Plexiglas  
52 <sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 44 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
(134.1 × 114 × 1.9 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy, New York
12. *Methane Sea*, 2013  
Wood, steel, rope, and tape  
78 × 40 × 55 inches  
(198.1 × 101.6 × 139.7 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Gift of Agnes Gund, 2014



*Methane Sea* consists of a thick tangle of maritime ropes draped over *fids*, wooden instruments used on ships. In an interview recorded shortly before his death, Adkins described how he used this sculpture to illuminate Carver and Klein’s “different relationships to the sea and to ships.” Specifically, Adkins was interested in the fact that Carver was born into slavery, a system supported by the historical transatlantic shipping routes used to transport African people into bondage in the Americas. Klein grew up in the port town of Nice, France, where, according to Adkins, “he saw no division between the sea line and the sky.” Adkins believed this experience led to Klein’s emphasis on the infinite, limitlessness, and the color blue.

The words “methane sea” appear in the lyrics of Jimi Hendrix’s song “Voodoo Chile” (1968) alongside a reference to “honey from a flower named Blue.” It is possible these

lyrics were a point of inspiration for Adkins, who dedicated multiple recitals to Hendrix.

13. *After Bonnaterra 29*, 2013  
Gouache on botanical engraving  
11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 8 inches (28.6 × 20.3 cm)  
Collection of Marysia Woroniecka
14. *After Bonnaterra* (unidentified number), 2013  
Gouache on botanical engraving  
11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 8 inches (28.6 × 20.3 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
15. *After Bonnaterra 5*, 2013  
Gouache on botanical engraving  
11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 8 inches (28.6 × 20.3 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins

These works on paper (#s 13–15) allude to Carver and Klein’s lifelong investment in the natural world, color, and history. Starting with images from a series of eighteenth-century botanical illustrations, Adkins applied a vibrant layer of ultramarine gouache to evoke the iconic blues developed by the two men. The works are named for French natural scientist Pierre Joseph Bonnaterra (1752–1804), who authored several texts in the encyclopedia series from which these illustrations are drawn. Klein and Carver’s mutual intellectual pursuits resonate with several of the plants depicted here including the water cabbage (as seen in #15), a species native to the Nile River that appears in ancient Egyptian writings.

## Lower Main & Lower South Galleries

“[I am] engaged in an ongoing quest to reinsert the legacies of unheralded immortal figures to their rightful place within the panorama of history.”

—Terry Adkins

## Lower Main

16. *Untitled*, n.d.  
Mixed media on paper  
40 × 55 inches (101.6 × 139.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins

## Lower South

17. *Mute*, 2007–11  
Single-channel digital video, silent  
22:07 min.  
Estate of Terry Adkins and  
Lévy Gorvy, New York



In *Mute*, the frame lingers on blues singer Bessie Smith's polka-dotted dress, mournful face, and wringing hands as she sings a tune we cannot hear. Adkins cropped these three shots from *St. Louis Blues*, a 1929 film that contains the only known footage of the esteemed songstress. Much of the film centers around Smith's expressive rendition of "St. Louis Blues," which she sings after her unfaithful partner leaves her for another woman. Here, however, Adkins has removed the sound, focusing instead on the emotional intensity of Smith's body language. Adkins conceived *Mute* in the form of a triptych, a type of three-part artwork often placed on church altars.

Adkins admired Smith (1894–1937) for her lasting influence on blues and jazz music. He was disappointed by the lack of public monuments to the singer in Philadelphia, where she lived for nearly two decades. In order to help recover her legacy, Adkins dedicated two recitals to Smith and employed *Mute* in performances.

# Lower East Gallery

# Infinity

He compared the process of creating them to practicing a musical instrument, and also regarded it as an act of “retracing... the same action that [Coltrane] did.”

## 18. *Infinity*, 1972–2014

Cherokee trunk and John Coltrane

*Infinity* albums

20 × 26 ½ × 13 ½ inches

(50.8 × 67.3 × 34.3 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,

New York



## 19. *Infinity* drawings, ca. 2010–13

Graphite on paper

13 drawings, each 19 × 13 inches

(48.3 × 33 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,

New York

Adkins's longest-running work, *Infinity* (#18), was born out of an act of repentance.

When the artist was nineteen years old, he stole a copy of the John Coltrane album *Infinity* (1972) from a Nashville-area record store. Consumed by guilt, he decided to atone for his indiscretion by buying a copy of the record every time he encountered it for the rest of his life. Here, seventy-five records rest in a vintage trunk, whose starburst lining complements the psychedelic album covers.

Adkins described his *Infinity* drawings (#19) as another “way of doing penance” for the theft. He began making them in 2003, working from Coltrane’s 1960s sketch of a twelve-tone musical scale. Consisting of a series of intersecting lines that connect twelve points along a circle, these drawings were made by Adkins every morning and every evening.

The selection on view in this exhibition was made at the artist’s home and at residencies he held in Lugo and Rome, Italy; Saratoga Springs, New York; and Svalbard, Norway.

## Personal Collection

This gallery features objects from Adkins's extensive library and personal collection. While most of the makers of these objects are unknown, works by Adkins are noted.

Adkins was a prolific reader, and his personal library consists of thousands of books, a selection of which are presented on these shelves. Beginning in middle school, the artist began collecting copies of Italian poet Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (written ca. 1308–20), eventually gathering dozens of copies of the book. He read the text at least twenty times and often referenced it in his work, including four works on paper on view nearby (#s 25–28). Adkins's library also includes volumes on religion, art, music, philosophy, and literature from across cultures. Many of these texts served as points of inspiration for his artistic practice.

Adkins also displayed a range of memorabilia, instruments, and cultural artifacts alongside his books. Included here is a statuette of a saint wrapped with rosary beads (#24), as well as two memory jugs—commemorative objects from the American South that are inset with items like buttons, doll parts, shells, and beads (#s 21 & 23).

20. **Selection of books from artist's personal library**  
Paper and binding  
Estate of Terry Adkins
21. **Memory jug**  
Mixed media  
11 × 5 × 5 inches (27.9 × 12.7 × 12.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
22. **Photograph of the artist with a harp lute, 1980s**  
Photograph  
7 × 5 inches (17.8 × 12.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
23. **Memory jug**  
Mixed media  
11 × 6 × 6 inches  
(27.9 × 15.2 cm × 15.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
24. **Saint statuette**  
Wood, pigment, and rosaries  
13 ½ × 4 ½ × 4 inches  
(34.3 × 11.4 × 10.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
25. **Terry Adkins (1953–2014)**  
**Untitled, n.d.**  
Gold pigment in binder on paper  
15 × 18 inches (38.1 × 45.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
26. **Terry Adkins (1953–2014)**  
**Untitled, n.d.**  
Paint on paper  
15 × 18 inches (38.1 × 45.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
27. **Terry Adkins (1953–2014)**  
**Untitled, n.d.**  
Gold pigment in binder on paper  
14 ¾ × 18 ⅞ inches (37.5 × 46 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
28. **Terry Adkins (1953–2014)**  
**Untitled, n.d.**  
Paint on paper  
15 × 18 ¼ inches (38.1 × 46.4 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
29. **Bells**  
Metal, leather, and rabbits' feet  
Dimensions variable  
Estate of Terry Adkins

### 30. Instruments



As a lifelong musician Adkins maintained an expansive collection of instruments from around the world, eighteen of which are exhibited here. This presentation was inspired by a 1990 installation in which Adkins hung a dense configuration of instruments from his personal collection, including a number of the ones on view here, against a royal blue wall. Nearby was a selection of the artist's own works, several of which shared formal similarities with the instruments.

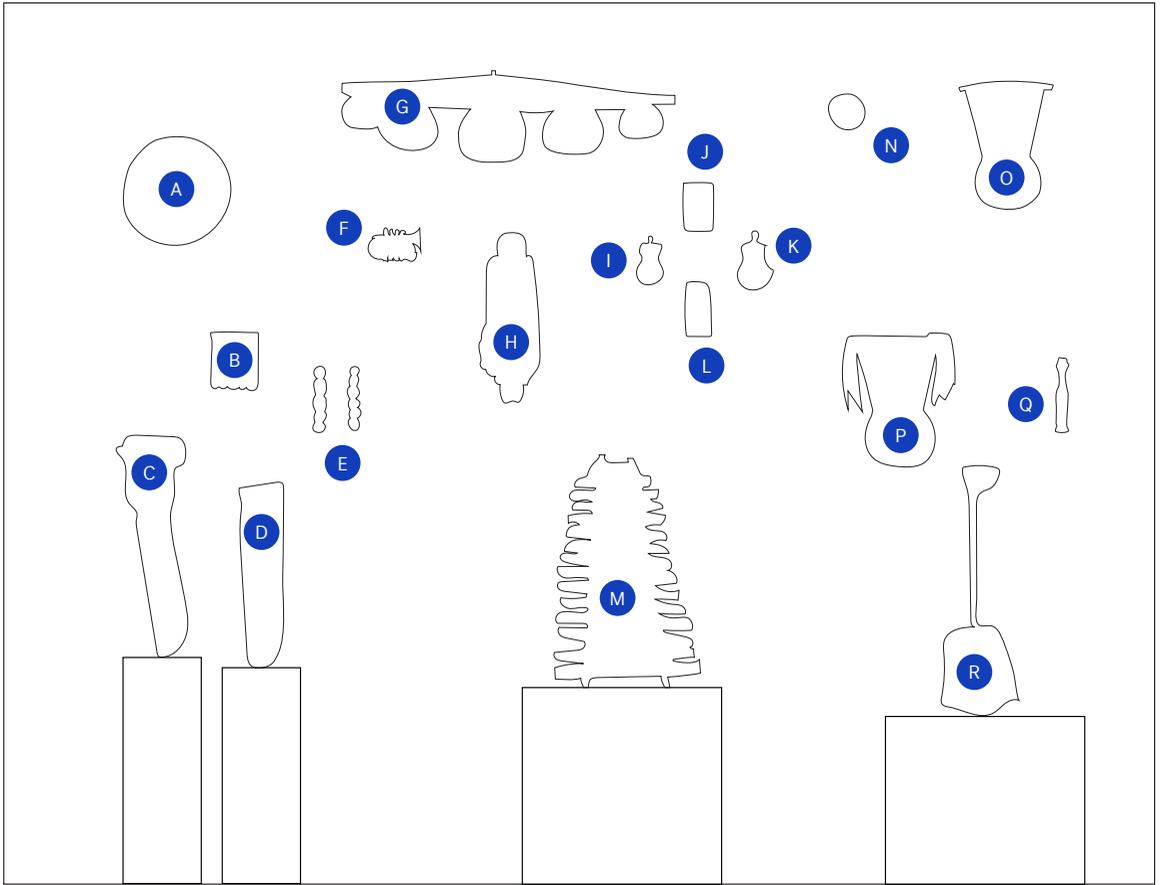
Adkins was particularly drawn to instruments from Africa, due in part to their roles in ceremony and performance. Most of the objects in his collection were made with organic materials, such as the chest drum covered with lizard skin (N) and the five wooden thumb pianos (B, I, J, K, L). The *mvvet* (G), xylophone (M), two bowl lyres (O, P), and rattles (E) incorporate gourds, whose hollow bodies resonate sound.

The artist sometimes played the instruments in his collection, including his cherished West African harp lute (R), which he likely acquired from an art dealer while traveling in Europe in the 1980s. A nearby photo (#22) depicts Adkins with this instrument in the Alps.

*Unless otherwise specified, the dates when these instruments were made are unknown. For more information about the instruments on view here, please ask for a copy of our in-gallery resource sheet.*

- A. **Rawhide drum**  
Rawhide and metal  
18 × 18 × 5 inches  
(45.7 × 45.7 × 12.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- B. **Thumb piano**  
Wood, metal, and bottle caps  
9 ½ × 8 × 2 ½ inches  
(24.1 × 20.3 × 6.4 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- C. **Drum**  
Wood, hide, hair, and plant fiber  
41 ¾ × 12 × 12 inches  
(106 × 30.5 × 30.5 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- D. **Drum**  
Wood and hide  
33 ¼ × 8 × 8 inches  
(84.5 × 20.3 × 20.3 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- E. **Rattles**  
Left: Wood, metal, plant material, and feathers; Right: wood, metal, plant material, and animal pelt  
Left: 12 × 3 × 2 inches  
(30.5 × 7.6 × 5.1 cm);  
Right: 12 × 2 × 2 inches  
(30.5 × 5.1 × 5.1 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- F. **Pocket trumpet**  
Metal  
6 × 8 ½ × 4 ⅜ inches  
(15.2 × 21.6 × 11.1 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- G. **Mvet**  
Gourds, wood, and plant fiber  
15 × 58 ¾ × 12 inches  
(38.1 × 149.2 × 30.5 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins

- H. **Terry Adkins (1953–2014)**  
*Medallion*, 2002  
Iron bells sheathed in rattan with  
feathers and tape  
32 × 13 × 4 ½ inches  
(81.3 × 33 × 11.4 cm)  
The George Economou Collection
- I. **Thumb piano**  
Wood and metal  
9 × 4 ½ × 1 ¼ inches  
(22.9 × 11.4 × 3.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- J. **Thumb piano**  
Wood and metal  
9 × 6 × 1 ⅞ inches  
(22.9 × 15.2 × 4.8 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- K. **Thumb piano**  
Wood, metal, plant fiber, and  
glass beads  
10 ½ × 4 ⅝ × 2 ⅙ inches  
(26.7 × 11.7 × 5.4 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- L. **Thumb piano**  
Wood, metal, and plant fiber  
10 × 4 ⅝ × 2 ⅙ inches  
(25.4 × 11.7 × 5.4 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- M. **Xylophone**  
Gourds, wood, hide, and textile  
41 ¼ × 28 × 15 ½ inches  
(104.8 × 71.1 × 39.4 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- N. **Chest drum**  
Wood, reptile skin, and hide  
11 ½ × 9 × 9 inches  
(29.2 × 22.9 × 22.9 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- O. **Bowl lyre**  
Wood, hide, pigment, plant fiber,  
and synthetic string  
25 × 18 ½ × 6 inches  
(63.5 × 47 × 15.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- P. **Bowl lyre**  
Wood, reptile skin, hide with animal  
hair, and plant fiber  
22 ½ × 18 × 6 inches  
(57.2 × 45.7 × 15.2 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- Q. **Slit drum**  
Wood  
16 ¼ × 3 × 3 inches  
(41.3 × 7.6 × 7.6 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
- R. **Harp lute**  
Hide, plant fiber, wood, metal,  
gourd, duct tape, and electrical wires  
49 × 16 × 16 inches  
(124.5 × 40.6 × 40.6 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins



## Early Work

One of the most formative periods in Adkins's career was the two years he spent in Zurich, Switzerland, starting in 1986. During residencies at Projekt Binz 39 and Galerie Emmerich-Baumann, the artist refined what would become some of the core aspects of his signature style. Many of the works on view here demonstrate Adkins's lifelong interest in symmetry, circular forms, and vivid color. The hand-carved and painted sculptures, often made from salvaged wood and metal, also represent his early engagement with found materials.

Shortly after arriving in Zurich, Adkins founded the Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a rotating group of musicians and artists who performed alongside his installations. Adkins's interest in music and performance is evident in the titles and forms of many of the works in this gallery, some of which reference the instruments in his collection.

31. *Mvet Glorious*, 1989  
Acrylic on wood  
Overall dimensions variable, each  
76 × 21 × 3  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (193 × 53.3 × 8.6 cm)  
Collection of Ruth Lloyds and William S. Ehrlich



*Mvet Glorious* reflects Adkins's interests in mirroring, surface, texture, and the connections between form and sound. The sculpture's serrated edges resemble the ridged gourds that often adorn the *mvet*, a stringed instrument used by the Fang people of Central Africa (see #30 G, an example from Adkins's own collection, in the previous gallery). For Adkins, the instrument's name, pronounced "em-vet," felt particularly onomatopoeic—the sound of

the word evokes the twanging tones that the instrument produces.

32. *Reply*, 1987  
Copper, wood, and pigment  
67  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 11 × 4  $\frac{5}{16}$  inches  
(172.1 × 27.9 × 11 cm)  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Broughton
33. *Call*, 1987  
Brass, iron, wood, and plaster  
7 × 47  $\frac{1}{2}$  × 7 inches  
(17.8 × 120.7 × 17.8 cm)  
Private collection
34. *Horus*, 1986  
Wood, rawhide, and enamel paint  
30 × 30 × 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
(76.2 × 76.2 × 3.8 cm)  
The George Economou Collection
35. *Parker Gray*, 1986  
Wood and enamel  
10 × 37 × 5 inches (25.4 × 94 × 12.7 cm)  
Estate of Terry Adkins
36. *Ascension Academy*, 1989  
Wood and pigment  
16 × 61 × 10  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches  
(40.6 × 154.9 × 26 cm)  
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA.  
Museum purchase with funds from the Virginia Commission for Arts Grant and Art Purchase Fund. 93.48

The titles of these two works (#s 35 & 36) link them directly to the artist's biography. *Parker Gray* (#35) is titled after the first public high school for the Black community of Alexandria, Virginia—opened in the 1920s by Adkins's grandfather, Reverend Andrew Warren Adkins (1884–1963). The sculpture's striated wooden surface mimics the clapboard siding common to homes in the surrounding neighborhood.

*Ascension Academy* (#36) also makes reference to a school of personal significance to Adkins. In the mid-1960s the artist was among the first class of Black students to integrate Ascension Academy, an elite all-white Catholic school. This sculpture, painted in a luminescent white, shares a similar form to *Parker Gray*, and both works demonstrate Adkins's deft ability to convey concrete concepts such as personal biography through abstraction.

37. *Nile (Three Rivers for the M. P. Year)*, 1987

Gourd, rubber, wood, and copper

16  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 94  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 5  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches

(41 × 239 × 15 cm)

Galerie Greta Meert

38. *Untitled*, 1986

Wood and encaustic

5  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 55  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 1  $\frac{15}{16}$  inches

(14.5 × 141.5 × 5 cm)

Galerie Greta Meert

*This gallery originally included a sculpture by Adkins titled *The Still* from 1989. The work was not available for the extended timeline of the exhibition.*

## Lower West Gallery

With his 2003 recital *Towering Steep*, Adkins explored the intersection of blues music and the Great Migration, a period during which millions of Black Americans moved from the South to metropolitan centers of the northern, midwestern, and eastern United States. The recital included works Adkins created during a residency at the former Finesilver uniform factory in San Antonio, and pays homage to four early blues icons with Texas connections: Blind Lemon Jefferson (1893–1929), Blind Willie Johnson (1897–1945), Robert Johnson (1911–38), and Lead Belly (1888–1949). The sprawling floors of Finesilver were filled with decades-old mechanical and textile scraps that Adkins repurposed into art. He listened to Texas blues late into the night while creating a body of work that addressed the lives and contributions of both the now-anonymous factory workers and the illustrious musicians who shaped the character of San Antonio.

39. *Bona Fide*, 2000

Stencil board

86 × 86 inches (218.4 × 218.4 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,  
New York



*Bona Fide* consists of approximately fifty stencils originally used to create pant legs. Adkins fanned the stencils out in the order that he encountered them in their boxes, capitalizing on the chance affinities between the patterns' sizes and shades. This element of improvisation relates to his longstanding interest in the spontaneity of jazz music. The repetitive task of laying out the materials not only references their original use in an industrial setting, but also highlights Adkins's interest in working with "materials that were made by other hands for other purposes."

40. *Single Bound*, 2000

Metal and rooster feathers

84 × 72 × 11 ½ inches  
(213.4 × 182.9 × 29.2 cm)

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the Archer M. Huntington Museum Fund and with support from the Blanton Contemporary Circle, 2001

41. *Smoke Stack*, 2003

Copper, aluminum, and tar

16 ½ × 30 × 30 inches  
(41.9 × 76.2 × 76.2 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,  
New York

42. *Matchbox Blue*, 2003

Aluminum clothes hangers

42 × 28 × 18 inches  
(106.7 × 71.1 × 45.7 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,  
New York



To create *Matchbox Blue*, Adkins

consolidated rusted metal hangers into a teeming mass. The artist likely found the materials on the premises of the former Finesilver uniform factory in San Antonio. The work takes its title from a song written and recorded by Blind Lemon Jefferson in 1927, with lyrics that describe the nomadic lifestyle of early blues musicians: "I'm sittin' here wonderin' will a matchbox hold my clothes? / I ain't got so many matches but I got so far to go."

43. *Strung Refuge*, 2000

Aluminum and wood

36 × 48 × 24 inches (91.4 × 121.9 × 61 cm)

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Eileen Harris Norton

44. *Possession*, 2003

Inkjet on paper, sound

Each 7 7/8 × 5 7/8 × 3/4 inches  
(20 × 14.9 × 1.9 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,  
New York

*Possession* pays tribute to the four pioneering blues musicians who inspired the *Towering Steep* recital: Blind Willie Johnson, Robert Johnson, Lead Belly, and Blind Lemon Jefferson (shown here from left to right). As in the original recital, iconic portraits of the men are paired here with audio of their greatest hits, creating an immersive environment reminiscent of Adkins's time at Finesilver, when he worked long hours while listening to their music.

45. *Pine*, 2003

Rattles and incense

Each 18 × 18 × 16 inches  
(45.7 × 45.7 × 40.6 cm)

Estate of Terry Adkins and Lévy Gorvy,  
New York

“You could say that [I’m a composer]... who selects the structure, sets up the situation, but then lets it take on a life of its own.”

—Terry Adkins



