



William S. Arnett Bio

William S. Arnett is an art historian, documentarian, scholar, patron, photographer, author, and editor. He founded the Foundation in 2010 after more than three decades collecting, documenting, and promoting African American artists of the South.

After devoting himself for several decades to the art of diverse civilizations—from the ancient Mediterranean to China and Southeast Asia to sub-Saharan Africa—Arnett began in the mid-1980s to collect work by self-taught African-American artists in the southeastern United States. His efforts were premised on a conviction that the region’s art constituted a crucial chapter in the larger history of art that had been transfigured by the Civil Rights Movement, but nevertheless had remained outside the scope of conventional scholarship and arts institutions. He then began to document the work and lives of these artists, building an extensive collection to serve as a permanent record and legacy of this cultural phenomenon.

Beginning in 2000, Arnett oversaw a series of groundbreaking publications and exhibitions on this historical period (ca. 1970-2010), including the two-volume *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South* and several books on the now celebrated quilts of Gee’s Bend, Alabama. Arnett subsequently donated many of the key works to the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, whose collections currently comprise approximately 1,200 works by more than 150 artists.