Joe Minter: *We Lost Our Spears*
February 9–March 19, 2022

MARCH is pleased to announce *We Lost Our Spears*, the gallery's first solo exhibition of works by Joe Minter, featuring a series of welded-metal sculptures created by the artist between 1989 and 2013. The exhibition takes its title from one of the earliest works in the show, a sculpture depicting an African couple literally separated from their spears and all that they symbolize. The work is a powerful metaphor for Minter's overall conception of modern African American identity, echoed in his writings and correspondence from the same era, as published by William S. Arnett in *Souls Grown Deep, Volume II*:

We as people of Africa have a story to tell about a journey of four hundred years here in America. Kidnapped from the motherland of Africa, placed in chains and shackles, uprooted from family into slavery. Fifty-four thousand shiploads of men, women, children—three hundred packed into the bottom of a ship for a trip across the Atlantic Ocean to America. Of one hundred million African people taken into the Western Hemisphere, seventy-five million missing—only twenty-five million made it alive in the Middle Passage to America. What happened to the seventy-five million missing Africans?

God created all men equal. The American Declaration of Independence, passed by Congress July 4, 1776, states that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America by the hand of John Hancock. How was slavery allowed in a great country like America, with such powerful words and a belief in God? My African ancestors that made it to the shores of America was royalty—kings and queens—and tradesmen, skilled craftsmen, artists, farmers. The Africans had a high-culture society and a very complex civilization. The African culture is over seven thousand years old. The Nubian people of Egypt: Where civilization began. Timbuktu of the Kingdom of Mali, with its university and scholars: A city of wisdom.

Africa have one to two thousand different dialects and languages. All of this was taken from our African ancestors at the shores of America. We was forced in chains and shackles and naked, with nothing but God to protect us and deliver us from this agony, misery, and death. We had to learn the language of our oppressor. We had to learn the culture of our oppressor. In this we lost our African language, our culture, our family, our comb for our hair, our drum for our communication. We lost our pride and dignity. We became the property of our oppressor, denied human rights for over four hundred years, treated in America like an animal, not as an African, a human being, a brother or sister, or a child of God.

But we Africans are going to make it in America and become full Americans, by the will of God and by giving our best work, each one of us. I give my art and the messages that go with it. Another person give labor, or the preparation of food, or writing, or the teaching of little children. God instruct us not to quit, not to break. To survive is to win, you know. An old oak tree don't die, you know. It bends to show its strength. Each bend that you see, if you could look inside it you could see what it went through. The last got to bend to the end.

–Joe Minter, taken from interviews and correspondence with William S. Arnett between 1998 and 2001.

The gallery installation directly references Minter's African Village in America, a sprawling collection of artworks constructed on land adjacent to both his home and the Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens, a historically black cemetery, in the Woodland Park neighborhood of Birmingham. In 1989, Minter began creating the environment in response to an announcement that the city was planning to build a civil rights museum. He worried that the *foot soldiers* would be left out of the official narrative and got to work making a literal place for them.

Joe Minter: *We Lost Our Spears* is supplemented by an online presentation of works from the African Village in America and proceeds from the exhibition benefit the environment's long-term preservation.

For inquiries, contact: info@marchgallery.org.