

# Jimmy Lee Sudduth

1910–2007

CAINES RIDGE, ALABAMA

Jimmy Lee was one of the early masters of southern self-taught art. He was raised on a farm at Caines Ridge, near Fayette, Alabama, and began making art as a child, surrounding the porch of his parents' house with hand-carved wooden dolls, and drawing in the dirt or on tree trunks outside. As his talents became known in the community, he began collecting pigments from clay, earth, rocks, and plants for use in his finger paintings. He used his fingers because "they never wore out." His numerous works were typically executed on found surfaces such as plywood, doors, and boards from demolished buildings.

He experimented with mixing his pigments with various binders to make them adhere better, including sugar, soft drinks, instant coffee, and caulk. As he was digging up mud from under a cane grinding, he noticed that the mud adhered to the trees longer even through rainstorms. He finally had what he wanted. Jimmy Lee began mixing his mud with sugar and came up with a medium he calls "sweet mud." A few early paintings were colored with pigments of grass, berry juice, or plants, but he soon combined paint with the mud when his paintings became in demand. Sudduth's materials are no less inventive than his themes.

Jimmy Lee is one of the most recognized southern folk artists. His art can be found in the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art, the American Museum of Folk Art in New York, and galleries around the world. Most recently, Jimmy Lee has been a major focus of the book, *Souls Grown Deep, African American Vernacular Art of the South, Volume One*.

*"You can paint a thousand dollars worth of pictures with just a cupful of sugar."*