CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ON THE INSIDE

We don't know much about the subjects of Zwelethu Mthethwa's big color photographs at the Studio Museum except that they are South African migrant workers living outside Johannesburg. Posed informally in temporary housing, they recall the inhabitants of domestic settings in pictures by Diane Arbus, Bill Brandt, Bill Owens, and, especially, Walker Evans, whose images of sharecroppers in their shacks feature similarly meager belongings and walls papered with newspapers, magazine pages, and flyers. Some of Mthethwa's sitters are uncomfortable with his camera—one pregnant woman looks especially wary—but most are welcoming, leaving us free to pry into their bedroom or inventory the contents of their kitchen cupboard. Even when the occupants are absent, as in a series of poignantly empty beds, the care that informs each decorative detail suggests a quiet, tenacious presence. But it's Mthethwa's presence, implicit yet keenly felt, that turns what could have been dry ethnographic documents into images full of warmth and wit.

—Vince Aletti

Lonnie Holley

The terms "straight" and "outsider" have a particular meaning in the six-year-old Alabamian, who lost school in the seventh grade, because Holley's starting sculptures reveal a keen sense for the expressive properties of found materials, from scissors to twine. His early photographs of women with elaborate hairdos could sound like Ginzburg's "Circus," but evocatively abstract (a truth of instant evoking from a concrete slab has a stark and unexpected power). A hit with some.