



Joe Minter, United States, 1943

*Old Rugged Cross*, 1998, Found wood, nails

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### **Excerpt from Label Copy**

Minter lives in Birmingham with his wife, Hilda Jo. A sculptor and self-titled Peacemaker, he focuses much of his practice on his home. His yard is the stage for African Village in America, an installation where his artworks, like *Old Rugged Cross*, detail the 400-year journey of African descendants in America. Minter believed self-knowledge is the only way he could pacify the divides within his community. Delivered as a message from God, his creations of Black history, told in wood and metal, facilitate a connection between the ancestors and their descendants.

“God gave me the vision of art, to link that truth to that four-hundred years journey of Africans in America, link that truth to the children who are turning away from us, and I decided to name it the ‘African Village in America’. It tries to tell the story of that life we have spent here.” Joe Minter

1. Look closely at the sculpture, *Old Rugged Cross*. What do you see? Keep looking. What else do you notice about it? How do you feel when you are looking at this artwork? What other words could you use to describe how you feel? What do you see that makes you feel that way? What do you wonder about when you look at *Old Rugged Cross*?

2. Joe Minter has dedicated his art to tell the stories and keep memories alive of the history of African descendants in the United States, ranging from slavery to civil rights activism. He uses discarded materials to symbolize that what is thrown away or invisible could be made into something powerful and spiritual. Minter's art tells stories of Black Americans often left out of the nation's version of history. What story of invisibility from history would you like other people to know about? What kind of discarded items or materials could you reuse to create an artwork that tells that story? Why?

3. Minter made *Old Rugged Cross* to tell the story of four young Black girls (Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley) who were killed in Birmingham. The 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, where they died, was a white-supremacist terrorist attack. Why do you suppose Minter wanted to tell this story, some 35 years after this tragedy? Why do you think he might have created an image of old rugged crosses to tell their story?