

# James Barron Art



## *Winfred Rembert: Looking for Rembert*

Opens September 27, 2023

VISIT US BY APPOINTMENT  
SOUTH KENT, CT  
US +1 917 270 8044

[INFO@JAMESBARRONART.COM](mailto:INFO@JAMESBARRONART.COM)

US +1 917 270 8044

[JAMESBARRONART.COM](http://JAMESBARRONART.COM)

# Winfred Rembert: Looking for Rembert

Opens September 22, 2023

With the success of our Winfred Rembert presentation at the Independent 20th Century, we would like to share the exhibition with our local audience.

“Winfred Rembert’s tooled-leather ‘paintings’ command whatever space they inhabit. Carving art into strips of leather, a skill he learned while incarcerated, he memorialized scenes from his life in Jim Crow America, from surviving a lynching, to picking cotton and breaking rocks in a prison line. The self-taught artist had a remarkable eye for color and pattern, and a lingering sorrow that sustains in the work’s quiet intensity.”

Tessa Solomon, *ARTnews*



# WINFRED REMBERT

James Barron Art is proud to exhibit a selection of paintings by self-taught artist Winfred Rembert. Rembert's tooled-leather paintings portray scenes from his childhood in rural Georgia and his young adulthood spent on a prison chain gang. Rembert's colorful, textured surfaces create a vibrant stage for him to share his story and the legacy of the Jim Crow south. In addition to his work as a painter, Rembert wrote his life story in *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (Bloomsbury, 2021) in collaboration with Erin I. Kelly, for which he was posthumously awarded the 2022 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography.

Winfred Rembert was born in 1945 in rural Americus, Georgia and grew up in nearby Cuthbert. Born out of wedlock, at three months old Rembert's mother gave him to his great aunt to raise him. Rembert began working in cotton fields and peanut farms in early childhood. He received very little schooling and by age 14 had dropped out to work full-time in the fields. At age 19 in 1965, Rembert attended a peaceful Civil Rights demonstration. The demonstration turned violent, and, fearing for his life, Rembert stole a car to escape two white men with guns. He was arrested and sent to prison without trial. He later escaped and survived a near-lynching after he was caught, an experience that would haunt him and his work. Rembert was then sentenced to twenty-seven years in prison, of which he served five years on a chain gang, followed by two years of construction work for good behavior. While in prison, Rembert learned how to read and write. He also learned to tool leather from "T.J. the Tooler" and began making leather wallets, purses, and belts.

Rembert eventually settled in New Haven with his wife Patsy, who he married after his release from prison in 1974. In 1996, when Rembert was 51, Patsy urged him to record his memories in tooled and dyed leather paintings: stories

of his youth in the cotton fields, genre scenes such as *Black Playground* (2003) and *Watermelon, Saturday Evening* (2003), and exuberant church scenes like *Leaning on the Everlasting Arm* (2008). Perhaps most importantly, he portrayed his memories of prison, including his iconic chain gang paintings, which stand as some of the most important depictions of the Jim Crow era in modern and contemporary art.

Rembert's vibrant compositions chronicle his experience as a Black man during one of the most historically significant eras of the 20th century. Rembert's paintings are remarkable not only for the stories they tell, but also for their sophisticated compositions, which sometimes verge on abstraction. We see this in his rhythmic bands of pickers and rows of cotton, as well as the cross-hatched black and white chain gang uniforms. His work stands as a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of artistic expression.

“The cotton field was the first thing in my life. The very first thing I remember... I opened my eyes and I saw that cotton, and it was a beautiful thing. When you get out there picking in it, though, you change your mind about how beautiful it is.”<sup>1</sup>

Rembert's cotton picker paintings depict the flow of workers in vast expanses of cotton. With astounding attention to detail, Rembert records each cotton boll with an abbreviated brown pod. In *Cotton Passion Workers* (2011), Rembert captures the psychological cruelty of the scene. Rembert wrote, “The cotton field is tough. You got a person, a Black person, hired to push you on... And every now and then you got a White overseer coming by on a horse or in a truck, trying to make sure you're working hard. And you ain't never working hard enough—for them.”<sup>2</sup>



*Cotton Rows with Baby and Dog* (2006) features a swaddled baby resting underneath an ad hoc tent overseen by a dog. Just as startling is the birth in *Labor Pains* (1999). Rembert wrote, “Women gave birth in the cotton field too. That was a tough thing. Some older lady who was used to seeing births was there to help someone having a baby. She would wrap the baby up in her apron, put him under the cotton stalks, and that mama would go back to work. At the time, I didn’t think anything about that. I thought maybe it was the right thing to do, because nobody said it wasn’t. Women had their babies and they would go right back to work, right then and there.”<sup>3</sup> Labor is an unusual subject in art, but *Labor Pains* is reminiscent of a Madonna and Child painting. The abstracted cotton is luminous, almost a gold ground, sanctifying the scene.

In Rembert’s genre scenes, we’re given a glimpse of the beauty of Black life in Cuthbert, Georgia. *Black Playground* (2003) captures a moment of communal joy with makeshift toys and playground equipment. Though Rembert had no toys as a child, typical of the artist, he was resourceful:

“My first toy I made from a bicycle rim. You bang out all the spokes out of it so you have the rim by itself. Then you get a stick, a green stick, not wider than your finger. You put the stick in the groove of the rim and guide the rim along as it rolls.”<sup>4</sup>





Music was very important to Rembert. He had a remarkable voice and would sometimes break into song at his exhibition openings. In *Jazz Singer* (2002), Rembert records his experiences of listening to jazz in 1960s Georgia, and in *Leaning on the Everlasting Arm* (2008), he captures the exuberance of a church scene set to his mother's favorite song:

“[Leaning on the Everlasting Arm] was Mama’s favorite song. She sung that song all the time when she was working by herself. I can see Mama just like it was yesterday, when I think about that song. I would like to think that’s what they’re singing in this picture while the preacher is waving his Bible.”<sup>5</sup>

Many of these paintings are set in locations along Hamilton Avenue in Cuthbert, which Rembert recalled as “a place for Black people. Everything on Hamilton Avenue was Black... and I never knew Black folks could have businesses.”<sup>6</sup> *Hamilton Ave* (2006) includes a police car moving towards the viewer, and a red Ford pickup with the license plate 55147 moving away from us. Rembert said, “55147, that’s my prison number. I was the 55,147th person to go through the door of Reidsville State Penitentiary.”<sup>7</sup> The painting points to the past and the future in one subtle gesture: two cars moving in different directions.

“Hamilton Avenue was just fantastic. It has a hold on me, even now. Being introduced to Hamilton Avenue was the best thing that’s ever happened in my life... I walked from one world into another when I came out of the cotton field and discovered all those smiling faces, all those people doing well and not picking no cotton.”<sup>8</sup>

Among Rembert's most important works are his chain gang paintings, which he considered self-portraits. These paintings are kaleidoscopic blurs of black and white, faces looking out at the viewer, at each other, and down at their hammers as they pound unseen rocks. Rembert stated that he was embodied in every figure in the chain gang—a remarkable and revealing psychological posture.

“Each person in the picture has a role to play. I didn't want to play any of the parts, but I had to be somebody. I couldn't walk around and be nobody, so I became all of them. It's like I was more than one person inside myself. In fact, I think if I hadn't decided to play the all me role on the chain gang, I wouldn't have made it. Taking that stance—all me—saved me.”<sup>9</sup>

*Looking for Rembert* (2012) shows the artist at the pinnacle of his practice.

Remembering his life in both paintings and the written word not only allowed Rembert to process all that had happened, but also offered to the world one person's history of the South, a life fully lived with both hardship and joy.

Just as we cannot forget his life story, Rembert could never escape the harsh facts of his life, once remarking, “That lynching is on my back. And it's dragging me down. Even today, it happened forty-something years ago, and even today it's dragging me down. I can't rest. I lay in my bed and I can't rest. I'm running for my life every night. Somebody's after me, and I don't know what to do.”<sup>10</sup>

Of his paintings, Winfred Rembert said:

“I want to tell the truth with this art. I've got so many stories to tell, I'll never get to tell them all, but I'll do the best I can.”<sup>11</sup>

Rembert's work has been the subject of major museum exhibitions, including shows at Yale University and the Muskegon Museum, and a retrospective at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY, which traveled to the New Haven Museum (New Haven, CT); the Greenville County Museum of Art (Greenville, SC); the Flint Institute of Art (Flint, MI); and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (Montgomery, AL).

His work has been widely collected across the United States, with permanent collections including: Blanton Museum of Art (Austin, TX); Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH); Crystal Bridges Museum of Art (Bentonville, AR); Glenside (Potomac, MD); High Museum of Art (Atlanta, GA); Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH); Hudson River Museum (Yonkers, NY); Legacy Museum, Equal Justice Initiative (Montgomery, AL); Lucas Museum of Narrative Art (Los Angeles, CA); Menil Collection (Houston, TX); Milwaukee Art Museum (Milwaukee, WI); Minneapolis Institute of Art (Minneapolis, MN); National Gallery of Art (Washington D.C.); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art (Hartford, CT); and Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven, CT).

Rembert's life and work were also documented in the 2011 documentary *All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert*, directed by Vivian Ducat, and in the 2021 documentary *Ashes to Ashes*, directed by Taylor Rees for *The New Yorker*.



James Barron Art LLC first showed Winfred Rembert's work at the Outsider Art Fair in New York in January 2020. In his *New York Times* review, Will Heinrich wrote, "In Mr. Rembert's rippling panels, crowds of colorfully dressed field hands pick cotton, and men swing hammers on a chain gang. They're all the heroes of their own stories, but also one another's context, raising the impulse to fill all available space—a common characteristic of outsider art—to a philosophical pitch."

Martha Schwendener wrote in the *New York Times*, "Rembert's work is important because it offers an unvarnished view of the segregated South, from the vantage of a lived history. What makes it resonate, however, is Rembert's incredible spirit... You feel it throughout these works, which refuse to shrink from the horrors, but especially in [Rembert's memories] about singing: Even in the dreaded cotton fields, Rembert could find something to love."

#### Credits:

All works © the Estate of Winfred Rembert.

1. Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 19-20.
2. Ibid, 23.
3. Ibid, 23.
4. Ibid, 82-3.
5. Bland, Bartholomew, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace* (Hudson River Museum, 2012), 110.
6. Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 45.
7. Ducat, Vivian, director, *All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert*, Ducat Media, 2011.
8. Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 64.
9. Ibid, 148.
10. Rees, Taylor, director, *Ashes to Ashes*, The New Yorkers, 2021.
11. Oppenheimer, Ann and William, "The Indelible Images of Winfred Rembert," Folk Art Society of America, 2003.

WINFRED REMBERT

*Cotton Passion Workers*, 2011  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
33 1/4 x 32 inches (84.5 x 81.3 cm)





“The cotton field is tough. You got a person, a Black person, hired to push you on. ‘Y’all guys come on now! Get up! Ain’t nobody doing nothing!’ This Black guy, he gets paid a little more from the boss man—the plantation owner—by doing that job. And every now and then you got a White overseer coming by on a horse or in a truck, trying to make sure you’re working hard. And you ain’t ever working hard enough—for them. Now when the Black folks see the overseer, they do get faster. They pick as fast as they can.

In 1945, 1950, the owner of the plantation owned the plantation and you too. They still had you in a slavery-like situation. They controlled everybody who lived on that plantation. You couldn’t leave the cotton field because the money you owed was holding you there. Every plantation had a store, where you would get things on credit. They money you owed at the commissary store was holding you there. You just couldn’t get out of that loop, that line of debt. If you picked cotton, you owed money. You could never get out of debt.”

Winfred Rembert

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 23

WINFRED REMBERT

*Cotton Rows with Baby and Dog*, 2006  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
36 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches (92.7 x 77.5 cm)

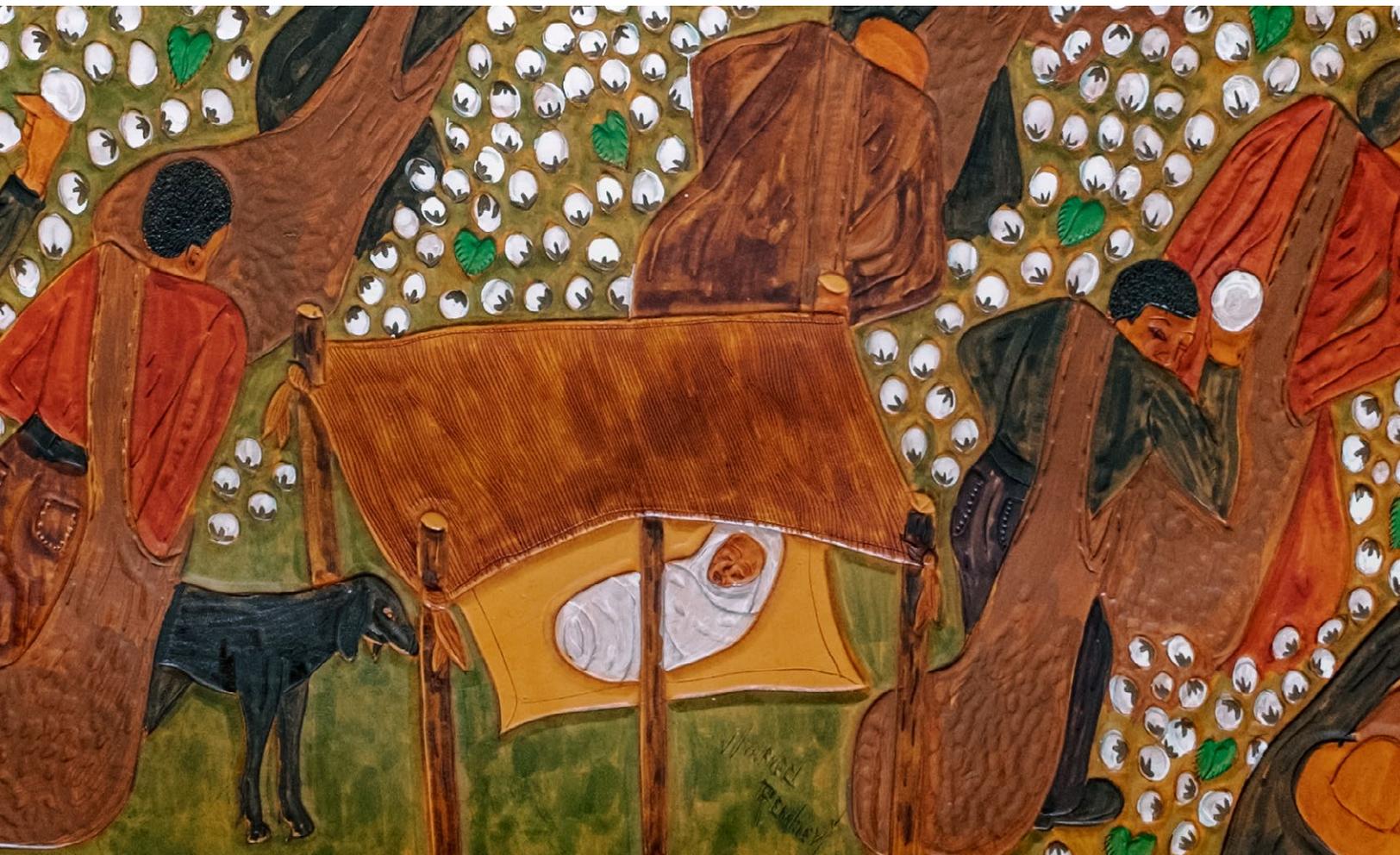


“The cotton field was the first thing in my life. The very first thing I remember. You know, kids look up and the face they see is their parents? Looking up at his parents is the first thing a child is supposed to remember. Not me. It seemed like I opened my eyes to cotton. I remember the cotton over the top of Mama. Just as far as I could see, all the way around, there was this white sheet of cotton. That’s the very first thing I can remember in my life. I opened my eyes and I saw that cotton, and it was a beautiful thing. When you get out there picking in it, though, you change your mind about how beautiful it is.

I was too young to pick cotton when I first went out there. I had to have been about four years old, just a little child. Mama had me riding on her cotton sack. The rows were so long, sometimes it would take you a whole day to go up a row. I remember how hot it was. The sun was shining hot, ninety or a hundred degrees, with no trees for shade. All you had was your hand to put over your eyes, so when you looked up you could block out the sun. I painted that too, people in the field looking up like that—cotton in one hand, shading the sun with the other.”

Winfred Rembert

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 19–20



WINFRED REMBERT

*Labor Pains*, 1999  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
43 3/4 x 35 1/2 inches (111.1 x 90.2 cm)





“Women gave birth in the cotton field too. That was a tough thing. Some older lady who was used to seeing births was there to help someone having a baby. She would wrap the baby up in her apron, put him under the cotton stalks, and that mama would go back to work. At the time, I didn’t think anything about that. I thought maybe it was the right thing to do, because nobody said it wasn’t. Women had their babies and they’d go right back to work, right then and there. It’s a *mental* ‘have to.’ It’s a thing in your head that says, *I got to go back to work. If I don’t go back to work, the White man ain’t gonna like it.* That’s what you’re telling yourself.”

Winfred Rembert

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 23

“Thinking about women that I’ve known who gave birth in the cotton fields brings me back to painful memories. As a child I didn’t think much about it because I thought that was the way it was supposed to be. Not knowing all the groans, moans, and labor pains were the results of past slavery and that I was to prepare myself for a life of long struggle to achieve anything. I recall one cold morning sitting on the porch of the house where we lived, waiting for the cotton truck to arrive so that we could go to work. As I looked down the long dusty road, I could see the headlights appear through the fog and my heart sank deeper and deeper into my chest because I didn’t want to go. Mama came beside me. “Here,” she said, passing me my cotton sack and dinner bucket. By this time the truck was approaching fast and as it stopped, I heard a cry. A woman, whose name was Lottie, was very much in pain. Mama and me climbed aboard the truck looking for a seat. I sat down thinking about Mama and how long she had been getting up at 4:00 in the morning to go into the fields. Mama’s hands, the swollen and busted fingers were evidence of her own labor pain of constantly having to toil in the fields. Mama’s labor pains, physically and mentally, would follow her for the rest of her life.

Lottie would not have her child until later that day. I remember someone coming down Mama’s cotton row saying, “Miss Lillian, Miss Lottie is hassing her baby.”

This picture is dedicated to Miss Lottie and all other women who gave birth in the cotton fields.”

Winfred Rembert

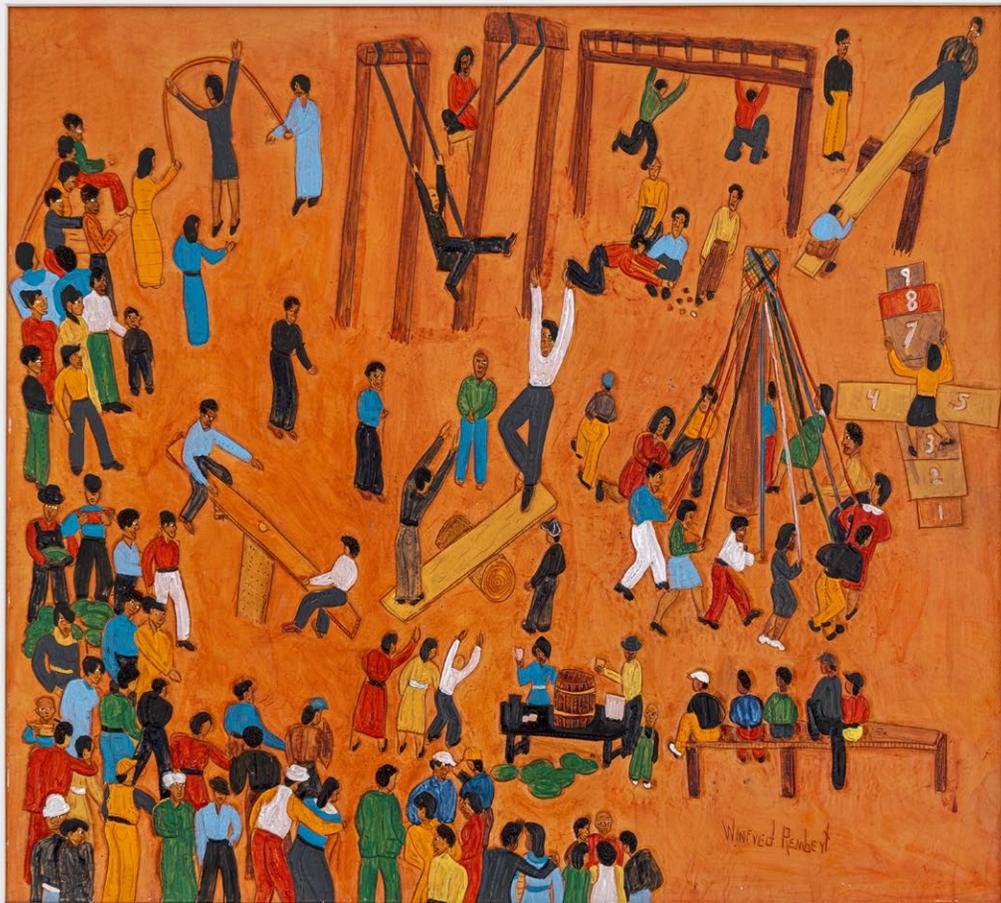
Rembert, Winfred, *Southern Exposure: Works by Winfred Rembert and Hale Woodruff* (New Haven, Yale University, 2000), exhibition catalogue





WINFRED REMBERT

*Black Playground*, 2003  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
31 1/2 x 35 inches (80 x 88.9 cm)



“Winfred Rembert inherited more than pain, abandonment, and suffering when he came into this world. He clearly found love, kindness, strength, and a powerful dignity and compassion that shines through his work and inspires us.”

Bryan Stevenson

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), foreword.



“I collect toys because I never had toys as a kid. The only toys I had were the ones I made. Some of my favorite toys now are Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, remote-controlled. I take them out on the beach and let those guys surf. They really surf! I’m also a Star Wars collector. I got interested in Star Wars on account of Obi-Wan Kenobi. He was one of the most powerful Jedis, the best Jedi that ever was, even more powerful than Darth Vader. The reason I like him is that he uses his mind rather than his Jedi stick. He uses mind tricks to get what he wants rather than hitting somebody with his sword or shooting them... I have some of the very first Star Wars characters, the little short ones. I got them back when they only cost a dollar. I also have the larger, twelve-inch figures that have a lot of features. It’s a nice collection.

...

I never had a Red Ryder when I was a boy. A Red Ryder was a top-of-the-line BB gun. If you had one, you were cool. A lot of the White boys had them, and I knew I couldn’t have one. I wasn’t even going to *think* about that, but I wanted one so bad. I had a couple others I found in the junkyard, and I could fix them. When I was seven or eight years old, I could make a handle out of wood for a broken gun.

I made other toys too. My first toy I made from a bicycle rim. You bang out all the spokes out of it so you have the rim by itself. Then you get a stick, a green stick, not wider than your finger. You put the stick in the groove of the rim and guide the rim along as it rolls. Sometimes it got away from me and I’d have to run and catch it. I used syrup cans to make something called a ‘takalaka.’ That takalaka was a nice toy. You pry the syrup can open and the edge has a lip on it. You string the cans together and use the wire to make a handle. I’d run and pull it behind me. Now when I get to soft dirt, that’s where the fun is, because when I run with the takalaka in the soft dirt and turn a curve, the lip of the takalaka catches the dirt and sprays it out in a twirling pattern. Oh, that was pretty.”

Winfred Rembert

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 82-3



WINFRED REMBERT

*Jazz Singer*, 2002  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
33 3/4 x 41 1/4 inches (85.7 x 104.8 cm)

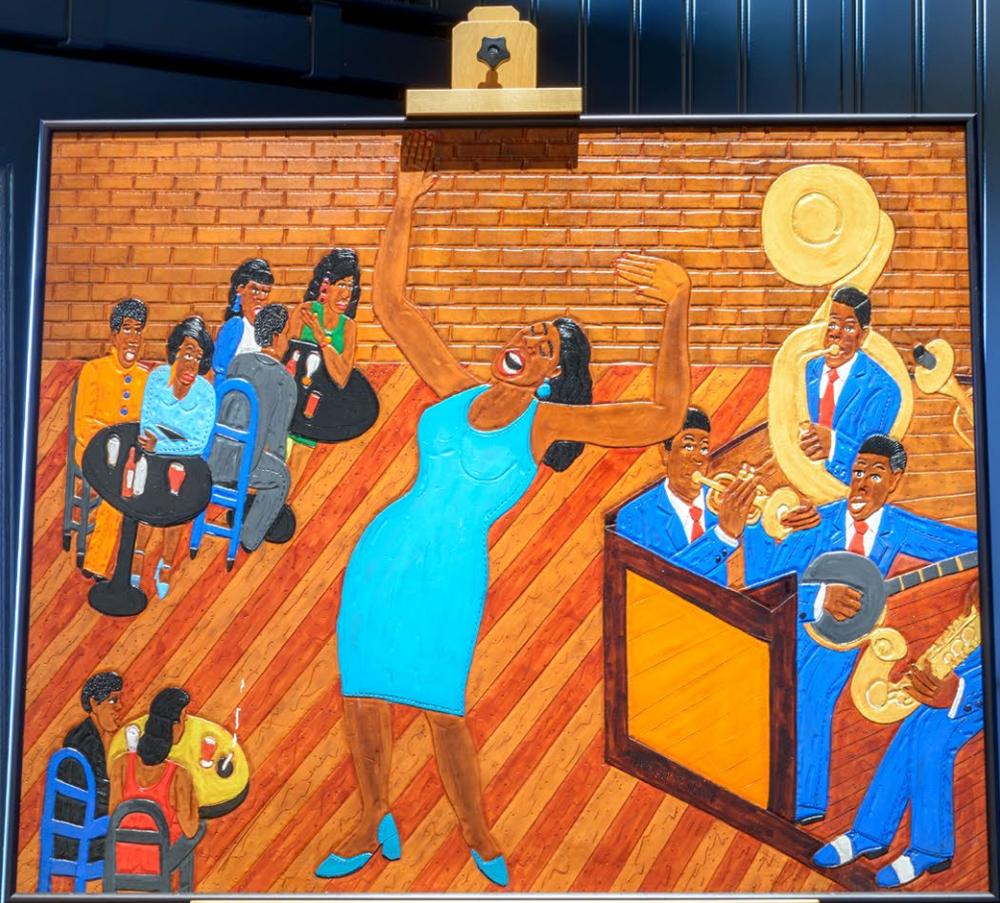


“This is what jazz looked like in the ‘60s in Albany, Georgia. My memory of jazz was of a dark place, never overcrowded, but almost full, lots of smoking and drinking and mellow moods, no dancing. Everybody just mostly laid back, sippin’ on their drinks, and puffin’ on their cigarettes.”

Winfred Rembert

Bland, BartholomeW, Winfred Rembert: *Amazing Grace*  
(Hudson River Museum, 2012), 111





*Jazz Singer* (2002) exhibited at the Independent 20th Century, September 7 - 10, 2023.

WINFRED REMBERT

*Watermelon*, 1998  
dye on carved tooled leather  
26 3/4 x 37 1/2 inches (67.9 x 95.3 cm)



The verso of *Watermelon* includes two notes from Rembert that explain his thoughts on watermelon as a subject matter and recount some of his childhood memories:

“I guess I have to talk about this picture like when I was little before I knew about the stereotype. I don’t think I even knew about the stereotype until I was an adult and saw a cartoon showing a Black man caught in a big mousetrap with a watermelon used as bait. Then I understood why white folks used to drive by and stop to take pictures of us eating watermelon.

Watermelon was an important part of our socializing, especially on Saturdays and Sundays during watermelon season. The melons would be so thick in the fields, they almost laid on top of each other. We’d get a bunch of them and tie them up in croaker sacks and put the sacks down in the well to cool. Then we’d sit around visiting, jump roping, playing horseshoes, cards and checkers, and eating watermelon. We always had a real good time.

The green melons with no strips were called Black Diamond. I think that name came from white folks who thought those melons were like diamonds to use. The man cutting the watermelon was a watermelon picker. Those guys got to looking like they lived in the gym.”

Winfred Rembert  
February 1998

6

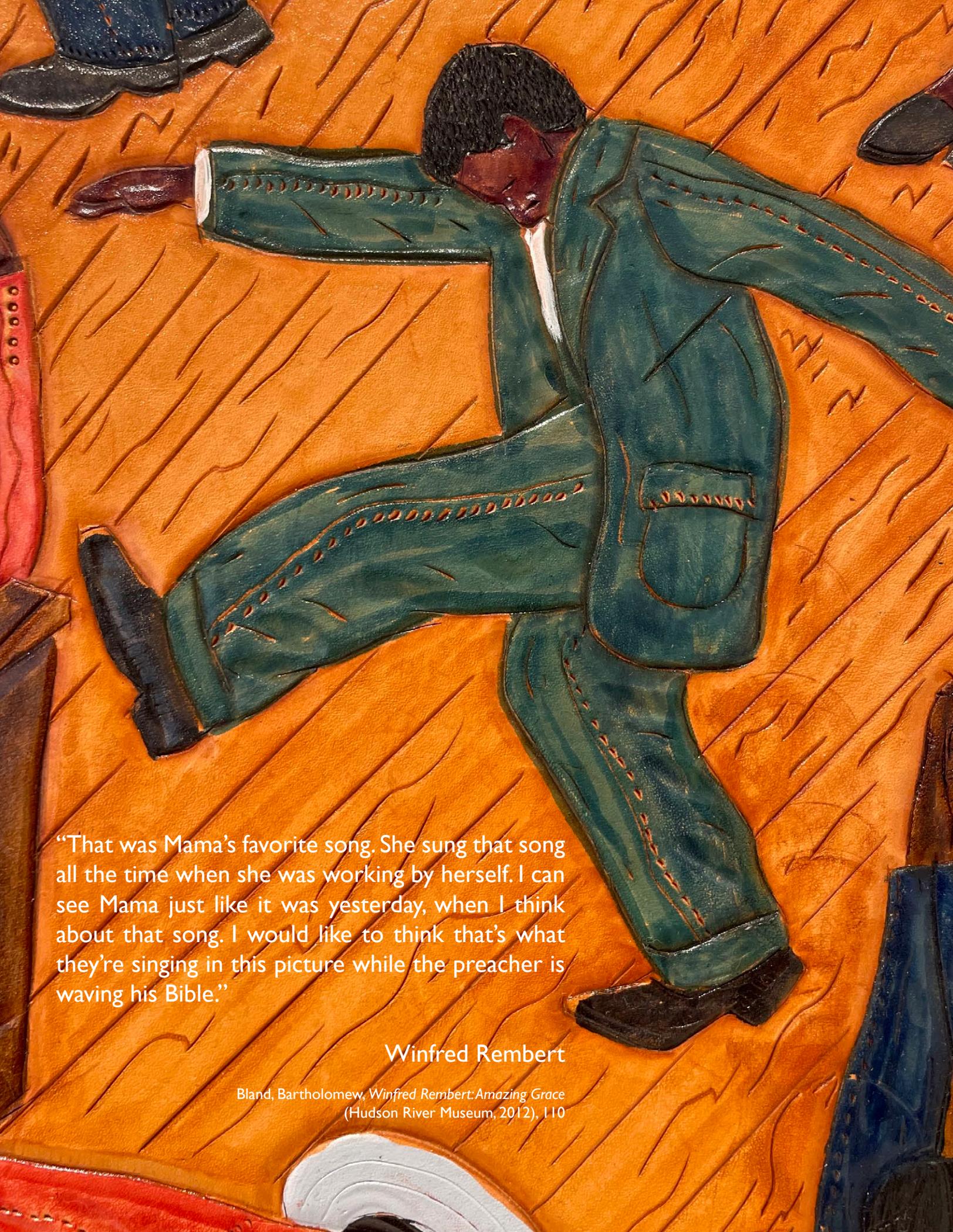
## WATER MELLON

ITS NOT TRUE THAT ONLY BLACK  
PEOPLE LOVE WATER MELLON,  
I MUST SAY THAT WE DO LOVE  
WATER MELLON, WATER MELLON  
WAS A BIG PART OF SOCIALIZING  
THE BEST WATER MELLONS WERE  
CALLED BLACK DIAMOND, I THINK  
THE NAME CAME FROM WHITE  
FOLK WHO THOUGHT THOSE MELLONS  
WERE LIKE DIAMONDS TO US

WINFRED REMBERT

*Leaning on the Everlasting Arm*, 2008  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
30 1/4 x 34 1/4 inches (76.8 x 87 cm)





“That was Mama’s favorite song. She sung that song all the time when she was working by herself. I can see Mama just like it was yesterday, when I think about that song. I would like to think that’s what they’re singing in this picture while the preacher is waving his Bible.”

Winfred Rembert

Bland, Bartholomew, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*  
(Hudson River Museum, 2012), 110





“Duck took me to places on Hamilton Avenue. He said to me, ‘C’mon, I want to take you to the poolroom.’ Duck could shoot pool real good. He took me to the poolroom and introduced me to a guy named Jeff, who owned the poolroom. Jeff fell in love with me on the spot—I had that knack of people liking me. He said, ‘Listen, you want a job?’

‘Yeah, I want a job.’

‘I want you to run the poolroom for us.’

...

Hamilton Avenue was just fantastic. It has a hold on me, even now. Being introduced to Hamilton Avenue was the best thing that’s ever happened in my life. It was and still is. I never had such a good time. I go there now and look at the old buildings falling down, places I used to go, and there’s nothing but memories. I think the reason Hamilton Avenue meant so much to me, in my youth, goes back to the love part of my life. I mean, not receiving my mother’s love. I think my mother followed me, in my mind, everywhere I went. I needed her love. So when I was getting that love from the people, I was getting something I never had. The people treated me so well, it was like I was a movie star or something. Everywhere I went during that era, every place I went in and hung around, I got that love, that kindness from people.”

Winfred Rembert



“The chain gang was a big part of my life. 55147, that’s my prison number. I was the 55,147th person to go through the door of Reidsville State Penitentiary.”

Winfred Rembert

Ducat, Vivian, director, *All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert*, Ducat Media, 2011.

WINFRED REMBERT



WINFRED REMBERT

*Looking for Rembert, 2012*  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (80 x 80 cm)





“The chain gang is one of the most ruthless places in the world. The state owns prisoners, so there are rules and regulations, but the county owns the chain gang, and there are no rules and regulations. The guards don’t care what you do, so there’s more pressure on you to be bad. Inmates put pressure on you to fight...

It seemed to me the goal of the chain gang was to make you bad, to make you do bad things. That’s the Winfred I didn’t want to be. I showed meanness as a survival tool. I would sometimes do crazy things things to people. I had to go through a lot to show myself as somebody who couldn’t be bullied. I would say things like, ‘I might lose my life, but I’m not going to be bullied,’ and I would mean it. I had to take on all these personalities. I only wanted to be one of them, but the one I wanted to be, I couldn’t be...

*All Me*—that’s how I painted it. Each person in the picture has a role to play. I didn’t want to play any of the parts, but I had to be somebody. I couldn’t walk around and be nobody, so I became all of them. It’s like I was more than one person inside myself. In fact, I think if I hadn’t decided to to play the all me role on the chain gang, I wouldn’t have made it. Taking that stance—all me—saved me. Everybody thought I was crazy.”

Winfred Rembert

Rembert, Winfred, and Erin I Kelly, *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South* (New York, Bloomsbury, 2021), 146-8



Art

## A Focus on Biography at Independent 20th Century

The fair shines a light on lesser-known artists, often overlooked in their day or excluded from canonical retellings of art history.



Elaine Velie September 8, 2023

The standout display is nestled in the corner of the second room at James Barron Art's [presentation](#) of work by Winfred Rembert, whose biographical paintings on tooled leather panels evoke a seemingly endless store of personal memories. The works' folk-art stylization diverges from the modern art in the rest of the fair, much of which can be neatly categorized into Pop Art, Cubism, and Abstract Expressionism.



## Art History Gets (Another) Rewrite at the Second-Ever Independent 20th Century

### Winfred Rembert at James Barron Art



Winfred Rembert's leather-dyed paintings at Independent 20th Century.

Photo : ARTnews/Tessa Solomon

Winfred Rembert's tooled-leather "paintings" command whatever space they inhabit. Carving art into strips of leather, a skill he learned while incarcerated, he memorialized scenes from his life in Jim Crow America, from surviving a lynching, to picking cotton and breaking rocks in a prison line. The self-taught artist's work is a powerful and poignant reminder of the struggles of African American laborers during the early 20th century.



# THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Finding humour in New York's Independent 20th Century fair

The art fair's second edition features plenty of paintings, plus some unusual sculptures, by previously overlooked 20th-century artists



Winfred Rembert, *Black Playground*, 2003

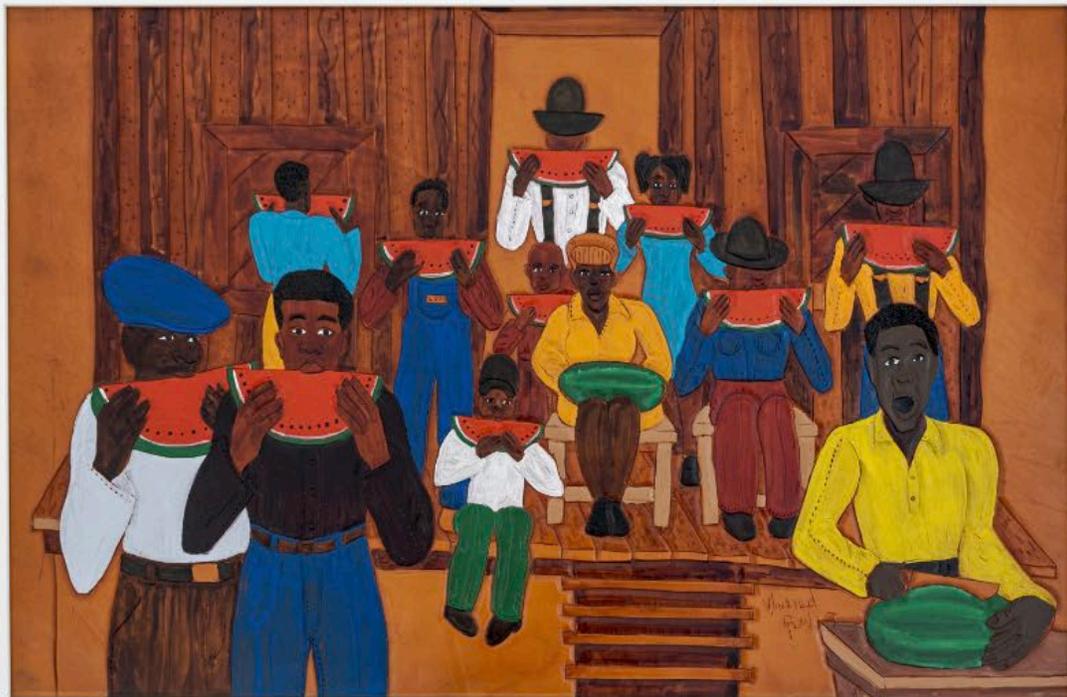
© Estate of Winfred Rembert, courtesy James Barron Art

Art Fairs

# At Independent 20th Century, a Rewarding Roster of Self-Taught Artists Share the Spotlight With a Conceptual Coffee Klatch

The fair's second edition trains a sustained eye over the recent past and offers a corrective to historical blind spots.

Annie Armstrong, September 7, 2023



Winfred Rembert, *Watermelon, Saturday Evening* (2003). Presented by James Barron Art at Independent 20th Century.

# Winfred Rembert / CV

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 Hauser & Wirth, *Winfred Rembert. All of Me*, New York, NY
- 2022 James Barron Art, *Winfred Rembert: Memory is Alive*, South Kent, CT
- 2021 Fort Gansevoort, *Winfred Rembert: 1945-2021*, New York, NY
- 2020 James Barron Art, *Winfred Rembert: I Want to Tell the Truth*, South Kent, CT
- 2018 The Butler Institute of American Art, *Southern Roots: The Paintings of Winfred Rembert*, Youngstown, OH
- 2017 The Muskegon Museum of Arts, *Southern Roots: The Paintings of Winfred Rembert*, Muskegon, MI
- 2016 Catamount Arts, *Winfred Rembert: An Artful Response*, St. Johnsbury, VT
- 2015 New Haven Museum, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, New Haven, CT
- 2013 Danforth Art Museum, *Winfred Rembert: Beyond Memory*, Framingham, MA  
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Montgomery, AL  
Flint Institute of Arts, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Flint, MI  
Tillou Fine Art, *Winfred Rembert*, New York, NY
- 2012 The Citadelle Art Foundation, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Canadian, TX  
Greenville County Museum of Art, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Greenville, SC  
Hudson River Museum, *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Yonkers, NY (traveling exhibition)
- 2010 Adelson Galleries, *Winfred Rembert: Memories of My Youth*, New York, NY
- 1998 York Square Cinema, New Haven, CT

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022 Florence Griswold Museum, *Dreams & Memories*, Old Lyme, CT  
North Carolina Museum of Art, *Start Talking: Contemporary Art from the Collection of Hedy Fischer and Randy Shull*, Raleigh, NC  
22 London, *Mirror Mirror*, Asheville, NC
- 2021 Adelson Galleries, *Winfred & Mitchell Rembert: Father and Son*, New York, NY  
James Barron Art, *Direct Action: Homage to Martin Luther King, Jr.*, South Kent, CT  
Florence Griswold Museum, *Social & Solitary: Reflections on Art, Isolation, and Renewal*, Old Lyme, CT  
Greenville County Museum of Art, *Soul Deep: African-American Masterworks*, Greenville, SC
- 2020 Hudson River Museum, *Landscape Art & Virtual Travel: Highlights from the Collections of the HRM & Art Bridges*, Yonkers, NY  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, *Protest and Promise: Selections from the Contemporary Art Collection 1963-2019*, Hartford, CT  
Hudson River Museum, *Collection Spotlight: Derrick Adams Selects*, Yonkers, NY  
James Barron Art, *Outsider Art Fair*, New York, NY
- 2015 Adelson Galleries, *Fall Exhibition: Five Artists, Jacob Collins, Federico Uribe, Winfred Rembert, Andrew Stevovich, Jamie Wyeth*, New York, NY
- 2002 Kresge Gallery, Ramapo College, *Willie Birch and Winfred Rembert (African American Series Exhibition I)*, Mahwah, NJ
- 2000 Yale University Art Gallery, *Southern Exposure: Works by Winfred Rembert and Hale Woodruff*, New Haven, CT

## Awards and Grants

- 2022 Pulitzer Prize winner for Biography/Autobiography  
Mary Lynn Kotz Award for Art in Literature
- 2016 United States Artists Barr Fellowship
- 2015 Honored by Equal Justice Initiative
- 2011 'Winfred Rembert Day' declared in Cuthbert, GA

## Bibliography

- 2021 Rembert, Winfred, Kelly, Erin I., Stevenson, Bryan. *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, ill.  
*Winfred & Mitchell Rembert: Father and Son*. New York: Adelson Galleries, 2021
- 2012 *Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace*, Yonkers,; Hudson River Museum, 2012, ill. (exh. cat.)
- 2009 Hankin, Lisa Bush (ed.), Adelson, Warren, Reynolds, Jock. *Winfred Rembert: Memories of My Youth*. New York: Adelson Galleries, 2009, ill. (exh. cat.)

## Public Collections

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH  
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR  
Flint Institute of the Arts, Flint, MI  
Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT  
Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, GA  
Glenstone, Potomac, MD  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH  
Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY  
Legacy Museum, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL  
Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles, CA  
Menil Collection, Houston, TX  
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN  
Muskegon Museum of Art, Youngstown, OH  
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.  
Richard M. Ross Museum of Art, Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH  
Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

## Winfred Rembert / Selected Public Collections



*Rows to the Right*, 2012  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
25 1/2 x 29 inches

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX  
The University of Texas at Austin

Purchase with funds provided by Suzanne Deal Booth  
2021.34



*All of Me III*, 2002  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
29 1/2 x 27 3/4 inches

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH

Gift of Agnes Gund in memory of Ed Harding  
2022.61

## Winfred Rembert / Selected Public Collections



*Chain Gang Picking Cotton*, 2005  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
36 x 32 inches

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR  
2021.67



*Picking Cotton, Rows to the Left #2*, 2010  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
33 x 31 inches

Flint Institute of the Arts, Flint, MI

Museum purchase with funds donated by Mr. William S. White, 2013.1

## Winfred Rembert / Selected Public Collections



*Cotton Pickers*  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
28 x 35 inches

Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT

Purchase, 2021.6



*The Dirty Spoon Cafe*, 2002  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
50 3/4 x 37 inches

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA

Purchase through funds provided by patrons of  
Collectors Evening 2016, 2016.2

## Winfred Rembert / Selected Public Collections



*Sunshine II*, 2012  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
31 1/4 x 31 inches

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

Purchased through the Evelyn A. and William B. Jaffe  
2015 Fund, 2021.29



*The Curvey II*, 2014  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
24 x 20 1/2 inches

Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY

Gift of Jan and Warren Adelson, 2020  
2020.11

## Winfred Rembert / Selected Public Collections



*Baptism, 2001*  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
28 1/2 x 33 3/4 inches

Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI

Gift of Anthony Petullo, M2012.197  
Photo credit: John R. Glembin



*The Beginning, 2002*  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
23 1/16 x 23 3/4 inches

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN

Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky  
2022.51



*G.S.P. Reidsville, 2013*  
dye on carved and tooled leather  
24 3/4 x 36 3/4 inches

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Gift of Funds from Glenstone Foundation  
2022.37.1