Winfred Rembert: Memory is Alive

Opens September 10, 2022
We are pleased to exhibit nine works by Winfred Rembert in the Lower Gallery. At age 51, Rembert began carving his memories—including his childhood in the Jim Crow South and his imprisonment following a Civil Rights protest—into both vibrant and painful paintings on leather. Rembert was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2022 for his memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South*. Rembert’s work has been subject to a wave of critical interest, and recent museum acquisitions include the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin.

We wish to express our gratitude to the anonymous lenders to this exhibition.

“Memory can take you for a ride. Sometimes it comes to you in pieces. It may surprise you. It may hurt. I know that well because my memory is alive.”

Winfred Rembert, *Chasing Me to My Grave*
WINFRED REMBERT
Hamilton Ave, 2006
dye on carved and tooled leather
21 x 27 3/4 inches (53.3 x 70.5 cm)
Loan / NFS
“I carried this all my life, all of these things that happened to me... I didn’t realize that by keeping my story inside so long, it would change my life and make me sick.”

Winfred Rembert, *Chasing Me to My Grave*
Halmaton Ave was the busiest street in Cuthbert Georgia. It had all the eating places, pool rooms, barber shops, shoe shine parlors. All the farmers took their fruit and vegetables there. The sidewalks were crowded, before you got started down the avenue you could smell all the cooking. No white people shopped or hung out in any of the places on the avenue. The only white people you saw there were the two white police men parked in the middle of the street watching us.
WINFRED REMBERT

White Wall Tires, 2005
dye on carved and tooled leather
21 1/2 x 29 1/4 inches (54.6 x 74.3 cm)

Loan / NFS
WINFRED REMBERT

On Mama’s Cotton Sack, 2002
dye on carved and tooled leather
32 1/4 x 30 1/2 inches (79.4 x 77.5 cm)

Loan / NFS
WINFRED REMBERT

*Watermelon*, 2003
dye on carved and tooled leather
23 1/4 x 36 1/4 inches (59.1 x 92.1 cm)

Loan / NFS
WINFRED REMBERT

Wilson Bros. Rolling Store, 2009
dye on carved and tooled leather
23 x 30 inches (58.4 x 76.2 cm)

Loan / NFS
The Wilson Brothers

The Wilson Brothers owned a bus that was loaded with things from their store and they called it the Rolling Store. They would come throw the black neighborhood and sell their goods. Mama used to buy flour, sugar, fish etc. Mama used to save the bags from the flour and make pillow cases and sheets for the bed. Lots of time we couldn't make it or get a ride to colored folk corner (a shopping place) so mama would wait on the Rolling Store on Saturday and we say my favorite from the Rolling Store was penny wheel cookies one cent a cookie.
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)

Loan / NFS
WINFRED REMBERT

Showtime, 2006
dye on carved and tooled leather
31 x 25 inches (78.7 x 63.5 cm)

Loan / NFS
Showtime is related to one of the very first pieces Rembert ever created, titled After Covarrubias. Around age 51, Rembert spotted the drawing On a Spree (1927) in a book by Miguel Covarrubias. Struck by the artist’s depictions of Black figures, Rembert used his skills in tooling leather to create a copy of the drawing, which he gave to New Haven book dealers Phil and Sharon McBlain as a Christmas gift. They hung it in their antiquarian bookshop, and after a client asked to purchase it, the McBlains and Rembert’s wife Patsy encouraged him to make more works with leather.

The below images are reproduced in Rembert’s memoir Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South.
WINFRED REMBERT

*Untitled*, n.d.
dye on carved and tooled leather
18 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches (47 x 23.5 cm)

Loan / NFS
WINFRED REMBERT

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

Loan / NFS
“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, *Chasing Me to My Grave* foreword