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Winfred Rembert: Amazing Grace Images on Leather at the Hudson River Museum

2012



Winfred Rembert, *Flour Bread*, 2003. Dye on carved and tooled leather, 25 5/8 x 34 3/4 inches. Courtesy of Adelson Galleries, NY.

YONKERS, NY.- The work of Winfred Rembert, a self-taught artist, who documents his life and the tumultuous moments of the American Civil Rights Movement, is on view at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, from January 21 through May 5, 2012.

In more than 50 works on hand-tooled leather – stretched, stained, and etched – Rembert constructs scenes from the rural Southern town where he was born and raised, and peoples it with characters working the fields, joyous at church meetings, and enjoying its pool hall, jazz club, and café. His images are alive with figures and color, and dense with pattern. Some, more somber, convey the strife and grief of his own experiences of a near lynching and prison life. Growing up in 1950s rural Georgia, Rembert did backbreaking labor in the cotton fields. A young man, he was arrested during a 1960s civil rights march, and survived a near lynching. A prisoner serving an unjust seven-year sentence, he learned to make pattern and design on leather by

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watching a fellow inmate create tooled leather wallets. Years later, adding color on tanned leather, Rembert conjured a world of incredible brutality and close personal ties existing in discomforting proximity. The exhibition's riveting themes include the Cotton Field series, where cotton balls snake relentlessly through rows of toiling field hands: Rembert said, "curved [cotton] rows make a beautiful pattern. But as soon as you start picking, you forget how good it looks and think how hard it is. There just isn't anything you can say about cotton that is good.

Amazing Grace, the first major museum exhibition of Rembert's work, incorporates historical photographs of places in Georgia, a documentary of his life by noted filmmaker Vivian Ducat, and gospel music both recorded and performed by Rembert in the Hudson River Museum galleries on several dates. Music, pivotal in Rembert's life and art, and has contributed to his success as a mentor to young people.

Rembert, who now lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut, has shown his art at the Yale University Art Gallery alongside Hale Woodruff, a mid-20th century artist who also chronicled rural Georgia.. Jock Reynolds, director of the Yale Art Gallery said, "I found myself captivated by the work of an entirely self-taught artist who was unaware of the strong affinities of form, subject matter, and narrative that he shared with Hale Woodruff and other towering figures of African-American Art such as Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden."