

FORT GANSEVOORT

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

Newly Reviewed: Winfred Rembert

By Roberta Smith – January 13, 2022



Winfred Rembert, *Cain't To Cain't II*, 2016. Dye on carved and tooled leather, 28.5 x 33 inches.
Courtesy of Fort Gansevoort. © Winfred Rembert/ARS, NY

Beauty and horror meet in Winfred Rembert’s complexly assertive paintings. Sometimes radiant colors, tactile surfaces and folk-artish figures convey visual joy and personal dignity. Other works offer fearsome portrayals of growing up Black and male in Georgia during the Jim Crow era. In several of these, workers or convicts bend over endless expanses of white, picking cotton, overseen by white men on horses. In another, a young Black man crouches in the open trunk of a car as angry white men crowd forward; behind them are trees hung with nooses. Yet another shows a Black youth hanging upside down, on the verge of being lynched. The youth is Rembert, who lived to tell the tale, which is what is seen here.

The 23 paintings in the show, “Winfred Rembert: 1945-2021,” are finely detailed in tooled and dyed leather, a combination vital to their warmth. On the first floor of this small brick building hangs scenes from Rembert’s childhood; on the second, scenes from his brush with death; on the third, images of his seven years in prison. Afterward he married and moved to Connecticut, and around 1996, he began translating his memories into the dyed leather, using techniques learned in incarceration. For the fullest account of Rembert’s oddly majestic life, there’s his illustrated autobiography, “Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist’s Memoir of the Jim Crow South,” published last year, which I highly recommend.