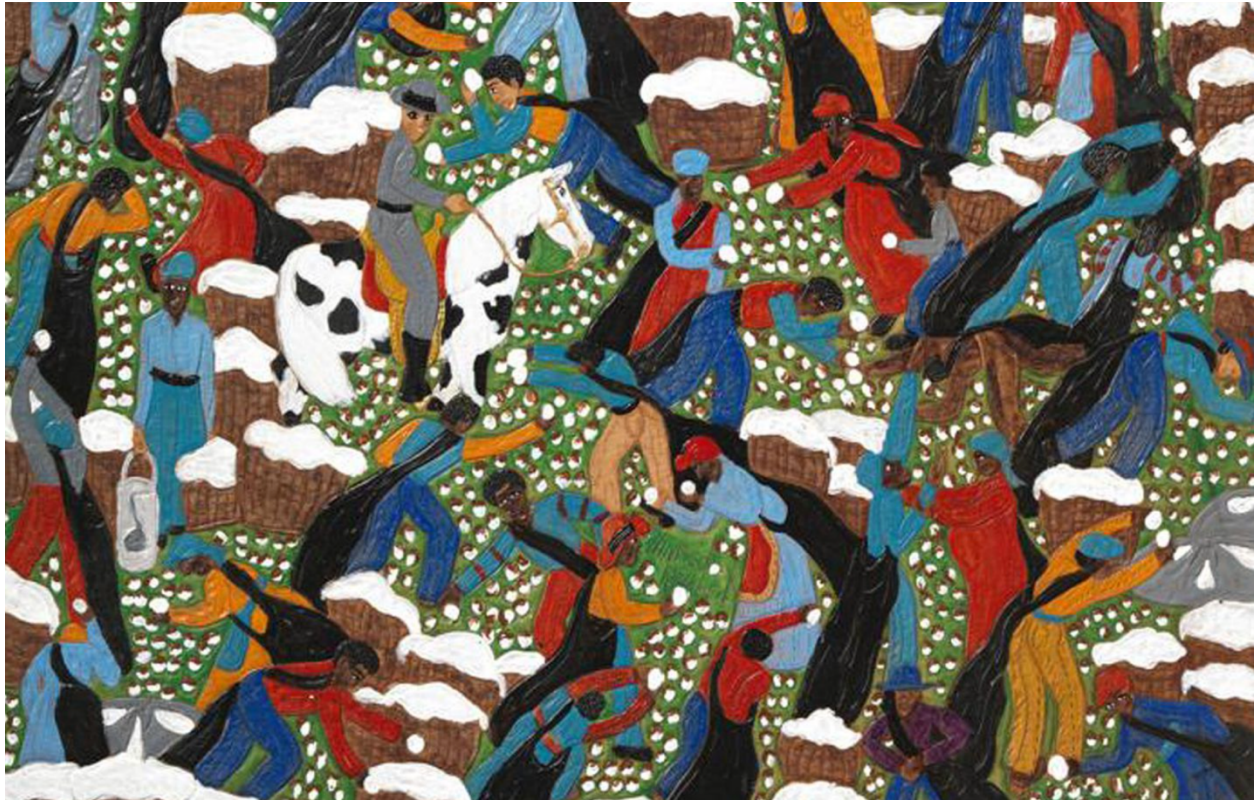


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The Boston Globe

What's up at Boston-area art galleries

By Cate McQuaid – February 12, 2013



Winfred Rembert's "Caint to Caint (Can't see when you go to work, can't see when you get back)," at Adelson Galleries Boston, refers to the long hours of cotton picking. JOHN TAYLOR

The striking exhibition "Winfred Rembert: Caint to Caint," at the recently opened Adelson Galleries Boston tells stories from the artist's youth in the civil rights-era South, tooled in leather and painted with spicy-toned shoe dye.

Rembert grew up in an African-American sharecropping family in Cuthbert, Ga., where he picked cotton when he was small, making pennies on the pound. The show's title piece, "Caint to Caint (Can't see when you go to work, can't see when you get back)," refers to long hours in the cotton fields.

The composition flows with the long, sinuous rows of workers leaning over green, cotton-dotted fields. The white crop spilling out of brown baskets almost looks like ocean foam, the sense of a wave pattern in the bent backs of the cotton pickers is so strong. "Picking Cotton/ Colors" depicts the workers with their great black sacks of cotton standing in columns between longitudinal arcs of piercing mint green. The color dazzles; the patterning pushes toward abstraction, but we never lose sight of the people with the bright wads of cotton in their hands.

Rembert, born in 1945, participated in civil rights demonstrations as a young man. At one point, the story goes, he fled a melee during a demonstration, stole a car, and was arrested. He spent the next seven years behind bars, working on a chain gang. "Cracking Rocks" depicts that futile work: Men in black-and-white striped prison uniforms

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lean, stretch, and bend as they sling sledgehammers and beat rocks into pebbles. The stripes and the figures coalesce into a sharp, slithering, almost musical rhythm.

These are unsentimental images, reminiscent of prints and paintings by Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence. The show isn't all about hard work — Rembert also depicts church revivals, concerts, and street scenes, incising textures and contours into his leather.

A documentary, “All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert,” will screen at the Brattle Theatre in Cambridge on Feb. 27.

Adelson Galleries Boston is new and old. Art dealer Warren Adelson started his business on Newbury Street in the mid-1960s before moving to New York. Now his children — son Adam, 23, and daughter Alexa, 20, have opened Adelson Galleries Boston, a swank space on Harrison Avenue. Adam Adelson says that while his father's focus is on 19th- and 20th-century American art, his gallery will have a more contemporary slant. Rembert is in Warren Adelson's stable. It will be interesting to see how the Adelson offspring develop their own vision.