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MIA Announces Acquisitions that Expand their American Art Collection

Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) acquires emotional, biographical work of art by African-American Artist Winfred Rambert and a fantastic painting of a mysterious girl by George Tooker. A captivating scene on hand-tooled leather by Rambert and Tooker's egg tempera scene of a curious child are the first by these artists to join the collection.

BY CAT GRANT DAILY PLANET
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Winfred Rambert American, 1945-2021 *The Beginning*, May, 2002. Dye on carved and tooled leather Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) announced two poignant acquisitions to expand its American art holdings. The first, by Black artist Winfred Rambert, was created with unusual media — dyed, tooled, and carved leather — and is titled *The Beginning* (2002).

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It is the only work he produced showing an intimate scene from his infancy: the moment his mother gave him up for adoption. Rembert's remarkable biography includes surviving an attempted lynching, time spent on a Georgia chain gang, a journey to Connecticut, and a successful art career started at age 51 despite significant forces of racism working against him.

Winfred Rembert, *The Beginning* (2002)

Winfred Rembert was born in 1945 and had a tumultuous life in which he experienced the full force of racism and white supremacy. When he was 19, he narrowly survived an attempted lynching at a civil rights demonstration and spent seven years incarcerated, laboring on a chain gang, and turned to art to tell his story. Upon his release, he married his wife Patsy and had eight children, making art of vivid scenes from his own and shared community experiences. They settled in New Haven, Connecticut, and he started experimenting with leather and dyes.

The acquired painting, *The Beginning* (2002), shows the moment his mother handed the 3-month-old Rembert over to his great aunt, Lillian Rembert, to raise. This is the only work he created about his adoption; he was the result of an affair and his mother believed that she could not raise him. The figures in the painting are dressed in their Sunday best, including suits and hats. The scene is nearly symmetrical, as Rembert's family members flank the central figures, adding a touch of formalism to this emotional moment.

Rembert's work was noticed in New Haven, and by 1998 he had a solo exhibition at York Square Cinema in town. In the years following, Rembert had museum exhibitions and his work entered major collections and was acquired by collectors across the United States. His memoir, *CHASING ME TO MY GRAVE: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South* with a foreword by Bryan Stevenson, was published in 2021, the year he died, and Rembert posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for it in 2022.