

FORT GANSEVOORT

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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in March Winfred Rembert

Through April 22. Hauser & Wirth, 32 East 69th Street, Manhattan; 212-794-4970, hauserwirth.com.

By Martha Schwendener – March 02, 2023



Winfred Rembert's "Mixed Rows (A Chain Gang)," from 2013, at Hauser & Wirth.
Credit...Estate of Winfred Rembert/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; via the estate, Fort Gansevoort, and Hauser & Wirth; Photo by Sarah Muehlbauer

Born in rural Georgia and raised by a great-aunt, Winfred Rembert (1945-2021) suffered some of the cruelest traumas of the Jim Crow South. His childhood and years on a chain gang were spent picking cotton, which imprinted itself into his consciousness. At 21 years old, he survived a near-lynching, a horrific event that haunted him and echoed throughout his life's work.

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The dyed and carved leather paintings, on view in his career survey “All of Me” at Hauser & Wirth, range from stories of injustice and violence to fond domestic scenes. In the first category are works like “Georgia Justice” (2015) or “Almost Me” (1997), which shows a Black man hanged by the neck from a tree. “Soda Shop” (2007) and “Jeff’s Pool Room” (2003) show leisure and social scenes, and “Winfred Rembert Going North” (1997) depicts a car packed with luggage, and perhaps dreams.

One consistent motif in Rembert’s work is the white dots that appear in many paintings. These culminate on the third floor in a series of paintings with swirling, rhythmic, seemingly abstract compositions. The works here seem joyful and celebratory — until you lean in to examine one like “Mixed Rows (A Chain Gang)” (2013), and a darker tale emerges, of laboring men forced to pick cotton. Throughout the show, Rembert’s story functions like that tiny white dot in a field of cotton: individual but part of a vast history of racialized violence and injustice in America.