

# arts wednesday

## Cotton fields in leather, shoe dye

By Cate McQuaid  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

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



JOHN TAYLOR

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.

that futile work: Men in black-and-white striped prison uniforms 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 War-

ren Adelson’s stable. It will be interesting to see how the Adelson offspring develop their own vision.

### Harries makes a splash

Mags Harries, best known as a public artist, scales down to gallery-size work for her show at Boston Sculptors Gallery. Harries has always been eloquent and succinct with her visual metaphors. This time she focuses on water — rising water levels, threatened drinking water supplies, and more.

The simple but staggering “Tides 2013/2050” uses a wooden ladder to chart the projected

### WINFRED REMBERT: Caint to Caint

At: Adelson Galleries  
Boston, 520 Harrison Ave.,  
through March 31.  
617-832-0633,  
www.adelsongalleries  
boston.com

### MAGS HARRIES: Levels

SUSAN LYMAN:  
Sculpture in Wood  
At: Boston Sculptors  
Gallery, 486 Harrison Ave.,  
through March 3.  
617-482-7781,  
www.bostonsculptors.com

### MARTIN MUGAR AND PAUL POLLARO: Incommensurabilities?

Paint and  
the Expanded Real  
At: Bromfield Gallery,  
450 Harrison Ave., through  
Feb. 23. 617-451-3605,  
www.bromfieldgallery.com

rise of tides in Boston over the next 37 years, placing blue wooden planks at predicted water levels. “Remiss” has galvanized steel buckets nested upside down, seeming to go right up into the ceiling — a picture of building, not carrying water. The captivating and sweet “Rain Cloud” might be better at that: a poetic cluster of clear plastic umbrellas, suspended upside down from the ceiling — an indoor, man-made cloud.

Also at Boston Sculptors, Susan Lyman plays up the natural assets of wood — burls, knobs, knots, and grain — to move it toward figuration that is both elegant and creepy with its curves and protrusions.

“Meredith,” for instance, a standing length of spruce with strangely feminine curves and washed with transparent pigments of rosy pink and lime green, slides and juts from bottom to top, where Lyman has carved two blushing pink gullies. “Fruit Basket” features a container with two flanks speckled and dimpled with purple, and a gourd shape sitting in it, with a

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