

# For Immediate Release

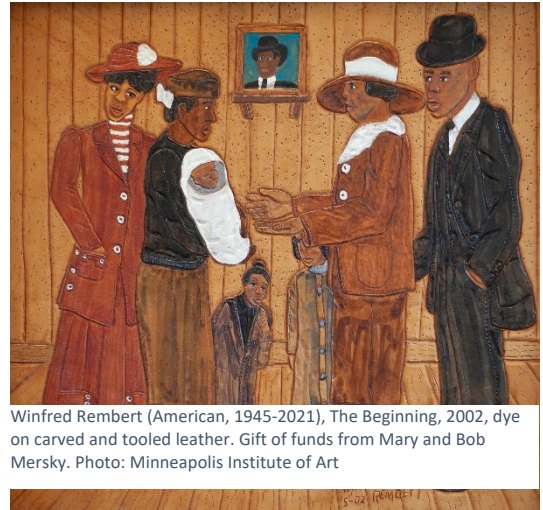
## Minneapolis Institute of Art Acquires Emotional, Biographical Work of Art by African-American Artist Winfred Rembert, Fantastical Painting of Mysterious Girl by George Tooker

A captivating scene on hand-tooled leather by Rembert and Tooker's egg tempera scene of a curious child are the first by these artists to join the collection

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

The second work is a painting of hand-mixed egg tempera by George Tooker, an artist who made some of the most unforgettable images in American art while part of a broad queer community in 1950s New York. The painting shows a mysterious young girl peeking out from behind a bush. Her expression and Tooker's use of light make the scene seem magical and otherworldly. Tooker's output of only about 100 paintings was relatively small, exploring Cold War-era themes of anxiety and uncertainty as well as transcendence—the revelatory experiences one can have in nature. The latter is masterfully depicted in *The Artist's Daughter* (1955). These are the first works by Rembert and Tooker to enter Mia's collection, expanding its holdings of historically underrepresented artists in the museum.



Winfred Rembert (American, 1945-2021), *The Beginning*, 2002, dye on carved and tooled leather. Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art

“We are excited by these riveting acquisitions, the first from both artists to join the collection. Each offers a gripping scene to get lost in: a peek into the intimate and affecting biography of Winfred Rembert and the uncertainty and distrust of George Tooker's mystical child subject,” said Katie Luber, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. “There is something more to discover at each glance.”

### 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.

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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.

## George Tooker, *The Artist's Daughter* (1955)

George Tooker is among the most important American figure and narrative painters of the twentieth century. His work often captures the anxiety of the Cold War climate, but he also depicted a wide range of subjects with care and empathy. Born in Brooklyn, he took art lessons with a professional artist family friend, Malcolm Fraser. He went to Phillips Academy at Andover, Harvard, spent time in the Marines, and enrolled at the Arts Student League, studying with Reginald Marsh and becoming a teaching assistant. Falling in with the artists Paul Cadmus and Jared French, he found a supportive circle of queer artists, writers, musicians, photographers, dancers, and curators in New York.

Tooker was committed to painting slowly, thoughtfully, and methodically using his own hand-made mixture of egg tempera paint on prepared boards. He created approximately 100 paintings, around 200 drawings, and several editions of prints. The newly acquired painting—titled *The Artist's Daughter* (1955), though he had no children—is the only one of this format and subject. Tooker said that there were few subjects he found personally meaningful and that he had explored in a complete manner; this, he noted, is one of them. The child's bright blue eyes peer out from behind a branch, at once spooky and lively.

He began exhibiting his work at the Edwin Hewitt Gallery in New York and was included in many museum exhibitions starting in 1946 with *Fourteen Americans* at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1949 he met his partner, William Christopher, an artist and cabinetmaker. They were committed to social justice issues throughout their lives and marched with Dr. King in Montgomery and Selma in 1965. After Christopher's death, Tooker became involved in the Catholic Church in Windsor, Vermont, completing several commissions for the church of Saint Francis of Assisi, a shrine, and a retreat center. In 2007, Tooker received the national medal of honor and in 2008–09 had a major retrospective at the National Academy of Design in New York, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio, which was co-curated by Mia's Patrick and Aimee Butler Curator of Paintings, Robert Cozzolino. He died in 2011.

His work is in major museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.



George Tooker (American, 1920-2011), *The Artist's Daughter*, 1955, Egg tempera on gessoed panel. The Sheila C. and John L. Morgan Endowment for Art Acquisition and the Mary Ingebrand-Pohlard Endowment for Twentieth Century Paintings. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art



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## **About the Minneapolis Institute of Art**

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

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