Hanging Tree Guitars introduces the work of Freeman Vines, a luthier and material artist born in Greene County, North Carolina in 1942. Although Vines has been creating his unique sculptural works for more than 50 years, he recently made his public debut at the Turner Contemporary Museum of Art in Margate, England as part of the We Will Walk exhibition which also features the work of Lonnie Holley, Purvis Young, and Thornton Dial.

The Vines family is deeply rooted in the flat lands of the eastern plain. Memories of their forebears lived on vividly through Vines’ mother Arie, whose family continued to sharecrop on the plantations on which they were once enslaved. Vines’ freehand sculpted guitars depict a story of the intersections of racial prejudice, resilience, spirituality, and traditional music in the American South.

Denied access to land, medicine, and education but imbued with great talent, the Vines family produced many musicians. His four sisters have continually toured for fifty years as the gospel group the Glorifying Vines Sisters of Farmville, North Carolina. Vines became one of the best mechanics in the county, after a period of time spent playing guitar on the road. It was on a stop on the gospel circuit that Vines first heard a sound from a guitar that took hold of him and consumed him. He began to build his own guitars, chasing that sound. Vines makes his guitars slowly, wrought with hand-tools from repurposed materials. Each piece is an assemblage composed from cast-off materials found in abandoned cabins, plantation estates, and tobacco barns across the county. The more Vines knows of the wood’s past purpose, the more interest he takes in the character of its sound and shape. He began using old radio parts to wire his own pickups, searching for that sound—a personal tone, a sonic identity of his own. The sound has evaded Vines, but his ongoing search has produced a body of work in a distinctive style of his own. When Vines was presented with the lumbered boards of the tree on which Oliver Moore was lynched in 1930, Vines felt compelled to explore a much darker side of his local history and the personal toll racial terror had taken on his own life in his work.

Hanging Tree Guitars invites viewers to join in Vines’ artistic search for his identity and America’s racial history. Hanging Tree Guitars presents Vines’ unique sculptural instruments and narrative quotations of Vines’ poetic speech, alongside photographs depicting the artist and his environment to situate audiences in the artist’s world. Text panels featuring demographic and historical information on Klan activity and racial terror in eastern North Carolina, African American life in rural America, and the lynching of Oliver Moore along with immersive audio loops and photographs of Vines, his workshop, and the surrounding landscape provide greater context for understanding.

Hanging Tree Guitars was developed with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts by Music Maker Relief Foundation (MMRF). Led by photographer and folklorist Timothy Duffy, MMRF has been supporting the careers of traditional American musicians in the South since 1994 and has presented more than 50 installations of their educational exhibition We are the Music Makers! and fine art photography exhibit Our Living Past since 2014. Timothy Duffy’s newest solo exhibition of tintype photographs, Blue Muse, premiered at the New Orleans Museum of Art in 2019.

Duffy met Vines in 2015 and became interested in documenting Vines’ work. Soon after, Vines was given the boards of the hanging tree and Duffy began regular visits and interviews with Vines to compile an oral history and visual documentation using the medium of tintype photography. This work continued over 4 years and resulted in the Hanging Tree Guitars exhibit and companion book to be published by The Bitter Southerner in summer 2020.

The exhibit is comprised of forty-two guitars, five guitar bodies, ten sculptural objects, thirteen original tintypes, three large photographic prints, and four scholarly researched contextual panels written by Dr. William Boone, PhD. Opportunities for community engagement with the exhibit include artist lectures with photographer and folklorist Timothy Duffy, panel discussions, guitar demonstrations, and performances by regional musical acts, many of which feature Freeman Vines’ extended family.

The stories that Vines tells and shares through his art of labor, violence, resilience, and spiritual resistance are stories that define the history of the South itself.
### Traveling Exhibition Fact Sheet

| **Exhibition Concept & Description** | The Music Maker Relief Foundation is seeking venues for *Hanging Tree Guitars*, an exhibit featuring the work of sculptor and luthier Freeman Vines. *Hanging Tree Guitars* is a unique interdisciplinary representation of the African American experience in the rural South centered on the art and words of Freeman Vines. Forty-two of Vines’ guitars form the centerpiece of the exhibit, which also includes panels offering historical and social context written by Dr. William Boone, PhD, transcriptions of Vines’ poetic speech, and immersive audio loops to situate audiences in the artist’s world. The exhibit also features photographs and tintypes of Vines, his workshop, and the surrounding landscape by photographer Timothy Duffy. *Hanging Tree Guitars* was developed with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts by Music Maker Relief Foundation (MMRF). |
| **Number of Works** | Approximately 73 |
| **Contents** | Introductory panel, contextual panels, large pigment prints, tintypes, sculptural objects, guitar bodies, guitars. |
| **Display Requirements** | Platforms: 2  
Pedestals: 8  
Vitrines: 8 (fabricated using .22” acrylic) |
| **Security** | High |
| **Catalogue Publication** | An accompanying book, *Hanging Tree Guitars*, published by The Bitter Southerner will be released concurrently with the exhibition. |
| **Public Programs** | Opportunities for community engagement with the exhibit include artist lectures with photographer Timothy Duffy, panel discussions, musical performances and guitar demonstrations. |
| **Fine Arts Insurance /Shipping** | Arranged by Music Maker Relief Foundation & host venue |
| **Projected Rental Fee** | $15,000 plus one-way shipping costs |
| **Contact** | Aaron Greenhood  
aaron@musicmaker.org  
919-643-2456 |
| **Duration:** | 6 weeks to 3 months |
| **Available Exhibit Windows:** | Opens: 10/01/21  
Closes: 12/31/21  
Opens: 01/14/22  
Closes: 04/15/22  
Opens: 05/01/22  
Closes: 08/01/22  
Opens: 08/12/22  
Closes: 11/07/22  
Opens: 11/18/22  
Closes: 01/20/23  
Opens: 03/01/23  
Closes: 06/01/23  
Opens: 06/16/23  
Closes: 09/08/23  
Opens: 09/22/23  
Closes: 11/24/23 |