

The Art of Romare Bearden Opens at The High Museum



Romare Bearden, *The Block II*, 1972. collage of various papers with foil, paint, ink, graphite, and surface abrasion on seventeen fiberboard and plywood panels including two applied in relief and one recessed. 64.8 x 188 cm (25 1/2 x 74). The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. Copyright ©Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York.

ATLANTA, GA.- The nationally acclaimed exhibition "The Art of Romare Bearden" is on view at the High Museum of Art. Featuring approximately 130 works, this exhibition is the most comprehensive retrospective ever assembled of Bearden's distinct art, including many pieces that have been rarely exhibited from private collections. The exhibition runs through April 24, 2005, and is the last venue for this touring exhibition.

"The Art of Romare Bearden" explores the complexity and scope of Bearden's evolution as an artist in the 20th century. The retrospective is presented thematically in chronological order and underscores the diverse range of Bearden's work – paintings; drawings and watercolors; monotypes and edition prints; collages of diverse materials, including fabrics; photographs; and designs for record albums, costumes and stage sets, and book illustrations; and the artist's only known sculpture.

"Bearden, as an artist of great innovation and masterly technique, reached far beyond the label of African American art with his work," explained Philip Verre, Deputy Director of the High Museum of Art. "His approach to and use of collage technique to tell the story of modern African American experience elevate him to a level where all who view his work will discover a meaningful experience."

Bearden's work represents the places where he lived and worked: the rural south; northern cities, principally Pittsburgh and New York; and the Caribbean island of St. Martin. Bearden's work also reflects his wide range of interests and explores overlapping themes of religion, ritual practice, everyday life, jazz clubs, history, mythology, and literature.

The Exhibition - Romare Bearden's oeuvre of more than 2,000 known works in many media reveals the diverse influences of Western sources ranging medieval stain glass and Italian masters such as Duccio, Giotto to Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse, as well as his absorption of African art, Byzantine mosaics, Japanese prints, and Chinese paintings. The sections of the exhibition are Origins, Circa 1964, Mecklenburg Memories, The City and Its Music, Stories, Women, Monotypes, Collaborations, and Late Work. Highlights include "Berkeley-The City and Its People" (1973), which measures 10 x 16 feet and is seen in the touring exhibition for the first time outside of the Berkeley City Council chambers where it was installed in 1974; The "Block II" (1972), an unusual multipanel piece depicting the varied indoor and outdoor life of Harlem; and "Mauritius" (1969), his only known work of sculpture, which alludes to a martyred Roman soldier, an African recruited from upper Egypt.

On view in the exhibition is also a work from the High's permanent collection. Romare Bearden's "Noah, Third Day" was acquired by the Museum in 1973. Bearden wrote about the collage saying, " 'Noah Third Day' represents my continuing interest in the prevalence of ritual. That is, as a young boy in the Baptist church, I'd hear many sermons around such biblical happenings as – Noah's Ark. And what I've tried to show is the continuing relationship of these myths throughout the years."

The exhibition was first at the National Gallery of Art, and then traveled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibition runs concurrently with "Frank Stewart, Romare Bearden: The Last Years" and "Connections: Community and Culture in Self-Taught Art" on view through April 30, 2005, at the High Museum of Art Folk Art and Photography Galleries located downtown. "Frank Stewart, Romare Bearden: The Last Years" showcases 46 images of Romare Bearden, through the eyes of contemporary photographer Frank Stewart. "Connections: Community and Culture in Self-Taught Art" consists of folk art from the High's permanent collection that explores common themes in the work of self-taught artists and trained artists such as Romare Bearden.

The Artist - Romare Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, the seat of Mecklenburg County, on September 2, 1911. About 1914, his family joined in the Great Migration north, settling in New York City, which remained Bearden's base for the rest of his life. He became a prolific artist whose works were exhibited throughout the United States and Europe. He was also a respected writer and an eloquent spokesman on artistic and social issues of the day. His many awards and honors include the National Medal of Arts he received from President Ronald Reagan in 1987, one year before he died in 1988.