

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Five Works from the Collection of Albert Murray

January 6–February 4, 2012

Opening Reception: Friday, January 6, 6:00–8:00 PM



Romare Bearden, *Fishing and Crabbing, Three Mile Creek*, c. 1965.
Collage and colored pencil on board, 9 3/4 x 11 5/8 inches.

DC Moore Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of the work of Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis selected from the collection of Albert Murray (b. 1916), the well-known novelist, social and cultural critic, and jazz historian. The exhibition, on view in our Project Gallery, celebrates the cultural contributions of these three important figures and friends.

In the late spring of 1950, Murray traveled to Paris, where he first befriended Romare Bearden (1911–1988), who was also studying via the G.I. Bill. The fruitful and complex relationship that ensued has been documented and discussed in many scholarly studies of Bearden's work. For a time, Murray and Bearden collaborated, devising the artist's themes, titling his work, and writing together. The two appear in the documentary *Bearden Plays Bearden* (1981), riffing on art and the creative process. Murray later wrote catalog essays for Bearden exhibitions and has lectured about the artist's work. In 1997, an interview with Murray was published in the catalog accompanying the Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition of Bearden's 1964 photomontage projections. *Paris Blues*, an unpublished book project they worked on together, along with photographer Sam Shaw, is currently the subject of an exhibition at Jazz at Lincoln Center, on view through January 28, 2012.

The selection of work by Bearden in Murray's collection includes art from a variety of periods and styles and speaks to the pair's shared history and interests. The exhibition includes a large-scale, abstract oil painting from around 1960, which predates Bearden's experiments in collage. *Fishing and Crabbing, Three Mile Creek* (c. 1965) is a classic example of the artist's most celebrated body of work. The inventive use of collage, references to African masks, and subject matter that evokes the American South are all hallmarks of Bearden's art from the period. A later, large monotype *Ellington*

on Stage (c. 1980), relates to Bearden and Murray's deep engagement with jazz music, an element of Bearden's work that Murray explored in the essay "The Visual Equivalent of the Blues" (1980).

It is unclear how well Norman Lewis (1909–1979) and Murray knew each other, but they were certainly part of the same cultural and intellectual circles, and Murray collected the artist's work. Bearden and Lewis enjoyed a longstanding friendship that dates from their meeting in the salons held in the early 1930s at 306 West 141st Street, the studio of Charles Alston (Bearden's cousin by marriage). Others who regularly gathered there included Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, and Augusta Savage. Bearden and Lewis remained active in the art community together for the next four decades. Beginning in 1963, they participated in the Spiral Group, a collective of artists who sought to contribute to the Civil Rights movement through their work. The two were vocal critics of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1968 exhibition *Harlem on My Mind*, which excluded art made by contemporary artists then living in Harlem. A year later, they founded Cinque, a gallery in downtown Manhattan that focused on minority artists.

The painting and pastel by Lewis in Murray's collection date from the 1950s. The two works center on the idea of the crowd, which has been identified by art historian David Anfam as "the penultimate principal motif in Lewis's unfolding repertoire." These two works are jumbles of color and movement adrift amidst a dense, atmospheric field. They date from the period in which Lewis enjoyed the most recognition for his work. He showed at the Willard Gallery regularly throughout the 1950s and won the Popularity Prize at the 1955 Carnegie International for the painting *Migrating Birds*. However, the artist never achieved the level of success and widespread acclaim accorded his Abstract Expressionist contemporaries, and his work has only recently begun to be reevaluated.

Albert Murray was born in Nokomis, Alabama in 1916 and graduated from Tuskegee Institute in 1939. He served in the Army Air Corps from 1943-1946 and for a time was involved in training the Tuskegee Airmen. He earned a Master's degree in English from New York University in 1948. From 1950-1962, he was on active duty in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a Major in 1962. Murray's books include *The Omni-Americans: New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture* (essays, 1970), *South to a Very Old Place* (memoir, 1971), *The Hero and The Blues* (literary criticism, 1973), *Train Whistle Guitar* (novel, 1974), *Stomping the Blues* (history and aesthetics of jazz, 1976), *Good Morning Blues*, *The Autobiography of Count Basie as told to Albert Murray* (1985), *The Spyglass Tree* (novel, 1991), *The Seven League Boots* (novel, 1995), *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray* (2000), *The Magic Keys* (novel, 2005), and *Rifftide, The Life and Opinions of Papa Jo Jones as told to Albert Murray*, edited by Paul Devlin (2011). Murray is also a founder of Jazz at Lincoln Center. He lives in Harlem with his wife of 69 years, Mozelle. Murray's wider relationship with visual art is explored in *Albert Murray and the Aesthetic Imagination of a Nation* (2010).

On view concurrently: **David Driskell. Creative Spirit: Five Decades**

Upcoming Exhibitions:	Janet Fish	February 9–March 17
	Charles Burchfield	Gallery 2, February 9–March 17
	Robert De Niro, Sr.	March 22–April 28
	Mark Innerst	May 3–June 8

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is located at 535 West 22nd Street, 2nd Floor and is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 to 6. Press previews can be arranged prior to the exhibition. For more information, for photographs, or to arrange a viewing, please contact Meg Bowers at 212-247-2111 or mbowers@dcmooregallery.com.