

ROMARE BEARDEN

Southern Recollections



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A Family Guide

2 September 2011 – 8 January 2012

The Mint Museum

What I have tried to do is set down a world, and have asked the viewer to enter it so he can envision those things I have seen and felt. A work of art can always keep growing. You can always add something to it each time you see it.

—Romare Bearden



**Bearden's Studio on Canal Street,
New York City, 23 October 1976**
(detail) | Photography © Blaine Waller, 1976

Cover: **Evening of the Gray Cat**, 1982
Collage on board, 30 x 40 inches |
Collection of The Mint Museum,
Charlotte, North Carolina |
Gift of Bank of America. 2002.68.3 |
Photography by David H. Ramsey

Welcome to *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections*.

This exhibition marks what would have been the artist's 100th birthday on 2 September 2011. Although Bearden did not live long enough to join this celebration, his art lives and grows each time we view it.

A little history

Romare Bearden's earliest years were spent in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the home of his great-grandparents. Soon Romare and his parents moved to New York City to seek opportunities unavailable to African Americans in the South. But young Romare continued to return home to Mecklenburg County for summer visits. Years later, when Bearden grew up and began creating art, memories of life in the South resurfaced. These lasting impressions became the groundwork for the art you will see today.

Be on the lookout for:

African masks	musical instruments
trains	hats
families	nature

Take a moment to look at this portrait of a family at home. Do your eyes move all around the painting before settling on one area? The objects on the table seem still and restful, but much of the scene commands the viewer to really LOOK. What geometric shapes do you see repeated? As a young artist, Romare Bearden was interested in Cubism, an artistic style developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in France in the early 1900s. In the Cubist style, the subject matter is broken up into shapes and “put back together” in an abstracted way. Do the faces in the painting seem mask-like? Many artists of the 20th century were inspired by the simple, geometric lines and shapes of African sculpture.

The Family, circa 1941 | Gouache with ink and graphite on brown paper, 29 1/8 x 41 1/4 inches | From the Earle Hyman Collection in memory of Rolf Simes, promised gift to the National Gallery of Art | Image Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



Masks

In his collages, Romare Bearden often constructed faces using cut-up pictures of African masks.



Tidings from the Prevalence of Ritual series, 1973 | Paper and polymer on composition board, 16 x 25 inches | Collection of The Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina. | Gift of Bank of America. 2002.68.1 | Photography by David H. Ramsey | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Compare these two images. What do they have in common? Romare Bearden often explored the same themes, or stories, over and over again. These two works share the same subject but they don't look the same at all. Can you find wings on one of the women? In both works, the basic composition, or visual structure, was inspired by classical paintings of the Biblical story of the archangel Gabriel bringing tidings, or news, to Mary. But could it also tell the story of two good friends saying goodbye at the train station? Bearden's collages, built up with many layers of paper fragments, were also layered with multiple stories. This way people can find their own meaning in the art.

Trains

In Bearden's art, trains are "journeying things" that represent movement and change.



Sunset Limited, 1974 | Mixed media collage on fiberboard, 14 x 20 inches | Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York, New York | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Of the Blues: Carolina Shout, 1974
Collage and acrylic and lacquer on board,
27 ½ x 51 inches | Collection of The Mint
Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina. |
Museum Purchase: National Endowment
for the Arts Matching Fund and Charlotte
Debutante Club Fund. 1975.8 |
Photography by David H. Ramsey | Art ©
Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed
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What is happening in this picture? Look for clues that tell you where the people are standing, and what time of year it is. What is the mood? What is the large man in the center doing with his hand raised? If you stepped into this scene, you would find yourself standing knee-deep in a river, participating in a summertime baptism. During this religious ceremony, the preacher sprinkles renewing water over the head of a young person. Members of the church community wave their hands in the air, clap, and pray. The hot pink sky burns bright, contrasting with the cool blue-green river.

Rituals

Bearden depicted the beauty and importance of the everyday life and rituals of African Americans.





Evening of the Gray Cat 1982
Collage on board, 30 x 40 inches |
Collection of The Mint Museum, Charlotte,
North Carolina. | Gift of Bank of America.
2002.68.3 | Photography by David H.
Ramsey | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation
/ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Can you find the butter churn, scrub brush, and laundry basket in *Evening of the Gray Cat*? In this interior scene, a family takes time out to relax after a long, busy day. The sun has set, the lanterns are lit, and chores can wait until morning. Still dressed in his railroad uniform, a man picks out a tune on a guitar, a woman sips a drink, and a second woman slices into a juicy watermelon, perhaps picked from her own garden. While the dog waits for a treat to fall on the floor, the cat naps nearby. How does your family slow down and relax at the end of the day?

Music

Romare Bearden improvised, or made adjustments as he composed his art, like a jazz musician improvises when performing.

Did you know that the porch is one of the most important “rooms” of the Southern home? In *Family*, we see a portrait of Romare Bearden’s own family on the stately front porch of his great-grandparents’ home in Charlotte. Can you guess which figure is Romare? The artist depicted himself as a baby, cradled in the arms of his great-grandmother. Settled comfortably on the front porch, the family catches a breath of fresh air on a beautiful day and basks in the joy of kinship.



Family, 1986 | Collage on wood, 28 x 20 inches | Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. | Transfer from the General Services Administration, Art-in-Architecture Program 1990.37 | Photography © Smithsonian Art Museum, Washington DC / Art Resource, New York | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Back Porch Serenade, 1977 | Collage with color inks and pencil on fiberboard, 6 x 9 inches | Collection of The Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina. | Partial Gift from the collection of Lyn and E. T. Williams. Museum Purchase with funds provided by the Romare Bearden Society, John and Stacy Sumner Jesso, Richard “Stick” and Teresa Williams, Yele Aluko M.D. and Shirley Houston Aluko M.D., Tom and Phyllis Baldwin, Dr. Kim Blanding and Family, Dee Dixon, The Charlotte Chapter of The Links, Inc., Dr. Keia Hewitt, Ken and Toi Lay, The Honorable Congressman Mel and Eulada Watt, Patti Tracey and Chris Hudson, Elizabeth A. Apple, Dr. Karen Breach-Washington and Mr. Harry Washington, Rubie R. Britt-Height and daughters, Ron and Nicole Freeman, John and Vernell Harvey, Drs. Roger and Natasha Denny, Keva and Juanita Walton, and Dr. Spurgeon and Sterlin Webber III. | Photography by David H. Ramsey | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

The three fellows in *Back Porch Serenade* have retreated to the back porch to play some tunes together. What instruments do they play? Two of the men are seated on wooden crates flipped on end. The fiddle player sits on a chair, probably toted out onto the porch especially for the occasion. Not as fancy as the front porch in *Family*, this simple structure out back serves as a fine retreat. Do people in your community spend time together outside?



Hats

Romare Bearden himself often wore hats, and many of the people in his artwork did, too.



Madeleine Jones' Wonderful Garden

1977 | Collage of various papers with ink, graphite, and surface abrasion on fiberboard, 13 x 15 ½ inches | Constance and Frederick Brown, Belmont, Massachusetts | Image Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington | Art © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Do you like to garden, or do you have neighbors or family who grow flowers or vegetables? In this collage, Madeleine Jones stands outside her humble home, apron around her waist and baby in her arms, nearly swallowed up by the lush vegetation of her yard. Have you noticed that Romare Bearden often exaggerated certain things to call attention to them? Here he played with the scale of the flora and fauna, or plants and animals. Lilies and roses bloom larger than life, and birds of all sizes twitter from the treetops. Collaged leaf images look tropical in their grandness. The golden Carolina sun shines on a home place that isn't grand, but is rich with the bounty of the earth.

Earth

Working the land was a way of life for African Americans for many years. Romare Bearden honored this tradition in his art.

Exhibition-Related Programs for Children and Families

Mint Museum Uptown

Lewis Family Gallery

Open during regular museum hours.

Kids of all ages can play, explore, and learn about Romare Bearden and other artists from the museum collection. This hands-on space provides a creative environment for creating art, engaging in building and puzzle challenges, posing for pictures, creating a giant doodle, and stepping into a Romare Bearden collage!

Sunday 16 October | 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Sunday Fun Day - *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections*

Make your own “Mecklenburg memories” at this celebration of master collage artist Romare Bearden! Make a collage, garden with Sow Much Good, attend a book reading, and see a film about the artist.

Sunday 16 October | 3:00 p.m.

Book Reading and Signing with Jeanne Walker Harvey

Meet the author of the new children’s book *My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden’s Childhood Journey*.

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 6, 7, and 8 January 2012

Community Homecoming Weekend

Last chance to view the exhibition, with gallery tours, performances, and music.

Mint Museum Randolph

Select Thursdays, September - October | 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

After-School Class – *Maudell’s Secret Garden* (grades 1-3)

In this five-part series, children will use drawing, painting, and collage to explore the flowers found in Bearden’s celebration of Charlotte gardens. Tuition, pre-registration required.

Select Thursdays, September - October | 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

After-School Class – *Art Odyssey: Memory Trains* (grades 4-6)

In this five-part series, students will use drawing, painting, and collage to explore the themes of Romare Bearden’s art. Tuition, pre-registration required.

Visit mintmuseum.org for more details.

*Most artists take some place,
and like a flower, they sink
roots...My roots are in
North Carolina.*

—Romare Bearden

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There are many wonderful books available about Romare Bearden.
To learn more, visit the Mint Museum Shops or your local library.

Discover exhibition resources on the Mint Wiki page.
Go to <http://mintwiki.pbworks.com> and select the link
for *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections*.



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This gallery guide was written and compiled by Leslie Strauss, Family Programs Coordinator.



Mint Museum Uptown at Levine Center for the Arts
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