

FROM PROCESS TO PRINT
GRAPHIC WORKS BY

ROMARE BEARDEN

organized by the
ROMARE BEARDEN
FOUNDATION



GALLERY GUIDE

NATIONAL MUSEUM TOUR

as of September 2009

2009

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME
October 1, 2009 - January 3, 2010

2010

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of
Maryland African American History & Culture, Baltimore, MD
January 16 - March 28, 2010

Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
April 17 - June 27, 2010

2011

Peninsula Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA
January 21 - April 21, 2011

August Wilson Center for African American Culture, Pittsburgh, PA
May 15 - August 15, 2011

Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO
September 15 - December 31, 2011

2012

The Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, NY
October 1 - December 31, 2012

ROMARE BEARDEN FOUNDATION

The Romare Bearden Foundation is a New York based nonprofit organization that was established in 1990 to preserve, perpetuate and make publicly accessible through its programs, the artistic and intellectual legacy of one of America's preeminent artist's. The Foundation realizes its mission by hosting, supporting and presenting scholarly and public programs, including: symposia, panel presentations; offering school-based arts education programs featuring Bearden's art and life; supporting the creative and academic development of artists, scholars and children; supporting exhibitions, new scholarly research and publications on the artist and on his significant contributions to American and world art, and; in general, making Bearden's art, archives and personal library available as a resource to the public.

Website: www.beardenfoundation.org

Full Color Catalogue Available From Pomegranate Communications

Cover Image: Romare Bearden, *The Train*, 1975, Etching and Aquatint

Exhibition Website: www.a-r-t.com/bearden

Exhibition Tour Management

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FROM PROCESS TO PRINT GRAPHIC WORKS BY ROMARE BEARDEN



Romare Bearden in his studio working on a print, Early 1980s
Photo Credit: Frank Stewart/Black Light Productions

For Romare Bearden (September 2, 1911–March 12, 1988), the process of making art was as important as the product that resulted. While this is especially true about his collages, for which he is an acknowledged master, it is equally true about his prints.

From Process to Print: Graphic Works by Romare Bearden includes over seventy-five collagraphs, etchings, aquatints, lithographs, screenprints, photo projections and monotypes, all created over a span of thirty years. The exhibition also includes collagraph plates, copper plates, and working proofs that provide the viewer the opportunity to examine the artist's creative process. They demonstrate how Bearden extended his artistic imagination beyond the collages and photomontages that inspired many of the prints and experimented, innovated, and collaborated on his journey toward mastery of the medium. Bearden's involvement with printmaking began in 1933 with a class in linoleum block printing at New York University, re-surfaced later in about 1964 when he was introduced to the intaglio process and continued with passion throughout his long and prolific artistic career.

Bearden's aesthetic methodology was driven by an intense engagement with process. This manifested in his revisiting compositions and themes from previous works and using this process of re-exploration to create new contexts and new meanings. As he pushed from one medium into another, Bearden achieved visual continuity through the repetition of iconic images, themes and motifs, including the train, the rooster, the guitar, family life, women, rituals, mythology, memories of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, urban scenes, the Caribbean, and blues and jazz. He had an extraordinary facility for weaving

into every art form a rich tapestry of themes—literary, biblical, mythological, popular, Western, and non-Western. Yet his life and art were primarily and consistently informed by his African American culture, heritage, and traditions. Bearden sought to connect in his art work the distinctiveness of African American culture with the universal and archetypal.

By applying both conventional and innovative processes in his prints—including cutting sections within copper plates, inking plates through a variety of methods, applying rainbow rolls, hand coloring, and photographic processes—Bearden produced prints that vary dramatically in appearance. Often the results that he sought, and others that were entirely unanticipated, were achieved by changing scale and color and by adding or excising elements.

Throughout his career Bearden participated in collaborations within the visual, literary and performing arts as part of his creative process. These collaborations fueled him intellectually, often challenged him technically, and ultimately enabled him to experiment. From the mid-1960s to the 1980s Bearden worked with a number of master printers, workshops and contract shops to produce edition prints or single prints made for charitable purposes or print portfolios. His collaborations with master printer, artist and teacher Robert Blackburn (b. December 10, 1920 – d. April 21, 2003), founder of the Printmaking Workshop in New York, were especially important to Bearden's technical development and his ability to innovate within the medium. Blackburn introduced Bearden to the collagraph process which, along with monotypes, was the processes for which he was most hands-on in making the printing matrices. The photo engravings of the mid-1970's, *The Train*, *12 Trains* and *The Family*, and other critically acclaimed works in the exhibition, demonstrate how Bearden achieved his greatest successes by pushing the boundaries of experimentation with approaches and processes that were distinctly his own.

From Process to Print: Graphic Works by Romare Bearden reminds us of Bearden's extraordinary versatility as an artist and his openness to the new. Bearden enjoyed grappling with the printmaking process, facing and meeting the challenges and opportunities it offered as he worked independently and with others to extend concepts, themes, and motifs from collage to the graphic medium. The exhibition reminds us of the quality that defined Bearden's genius as an artist: he was constantly stimulated—artistically, intellectually and emotionally—at the very deepest levels, in any medium he employed. It also reminds us of Bearden's humanist and populist sensibilities. Like his political cartoons and public murals, his prints served his interest, as an artist of social and political conscience, in making his art accessible to a broad public.

From Process to Print: Graphic Works by Romare Bearden was organized by the Romare Bearden Foundation, New York. The national exhibition tour was organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA.

COLLAGRAPHS

Collagraph, a word that combines collage and graphic, is an intaglio print made from a matrix that is built in an additive process as opposed to a reductive method. Cardboard, paper, and fabric can be glued together as a collage to create a multidimensional matrix. These methods were standard to making collagraphs, a popular process among printmakers during Bearden's time.

The collagraph process grows directly from collage and for this reason held a particular appeal to Bearden as a master draftsman and collagist. Bearden employed two basic methods for creating his collagraph plates. He cut and layered cardboard to build an image, scoring and removing a thin layer from selected areas of the topmost pieces for further nuance.

The matrices are also beautifully crafted works of art. The impressions pulled from them are varied and experimental. Although multiple prints were made from these plates, only one collagraph *Prelude to Troy (Before Troy)* is known to have been published as an edition. In this work Bearden combined both approaches of cutting and layering and applying glue on a single matrix.



Mysteries, 1974
Collagraph/Relief Print

ETCHINGS AND AQUATINTS

From the 1960's to the 1980's Bearden used the technique of etching and aquatints to produce several of his most critically acclaimed prints. These works, many of which were produced in collaboration with other artists/printers, combined photographic process, collage and etching. With them Bearden pushed the boundaries of experimentation and achieved his greatest innovations in the medium.

Bearden worked in etching, a process that involves the chemical removal of material from a printing matrix. A metal plate is coated with an acid resistant material which is scratched to expose the metal below. With the submersion of the plate in an acidic solution, the acid chemically removes metal from the exposed areas forming a recess that can receive ink. These recesses are the image areas of the plate. Aquatint, a tonal drawing process in intaglio, involves applying a protective coating to the matrix, selectively removing the coating, then subjecting the matrix to an acid bath. The plate is dusted with an acid-resistant powder that is fused to the plate and holds the ink used in printing.

The Train, *12 Trains* and *The Family*, combine the processes of etching and aquatint. As with *The Train*, the process for producing the plates for *The Family* began with the making of multiple transparencies (Kodaliths) of the collage, photographed through various halftone screens to produce different patterns and textures which Bearden then cut apart and re-collaged. The reconfigured transparency-collage was then re-photographed to make the Kodalith for the key plate. Proofs of the key plate were printed in both relief and intaglio, and supplementary plates were then made for added color. Additional plates were prepared for the color fields. By comparing the proofs of the key plate with the edition print we can see how Bearden again reworked the plate, removing texture throughout, and adding details such as the two children's faces. Other successful color photo-etchings followed, but none equaled the accomplishment of *The Family*.

The oldest prints in this section of the exhibition, *Untitled (Louisiana Saturday Night)* and *The Dove* were produced in dry point, an intaglio process that involves the scratching of the surface of the plate with a sharp instrument such as an etching needle, diamond scribe, or etching scraper rather than the chemical removal of material from the plate.



The Annunciation, c. 1976
Collagraph/Relief Print
Courtesy of Mary and Jerald Melberg, Charlotte, NC



The Family, 1975
Etching and Aquatint



Through Freight, 1974
(from the 12 Trains Suite)
Photo Etching with hand coloring

LITHOGRAPHS AND PHOTO PROJECTIONS



Homage To Mary Lou, 1984
Lithograph



Quilting Time, 1981
Lithograph



Untitled (Street Scene), c. 1972
Lithograph
Courtesy of Jerald Melberg Gallery, Charlotte, NC



Train Whistle Blues II, 1964
Photo projection

Lithographs are made through a planographic process, which means that the image area and non-image area are on the same surface. Chemical treatment of the matrix keeps these areas separate. Lithography involves no incising. The image is drawn directly on the printing surface with an oily pencil then the printer applies gum arabic, which adheres only to the areas untouched by the pencil. Ink adheres to the oily substrate and is repelled by the gum arabic. Lithography is the most autographic of the printmaking processes.

Bearden's lithographs are based on photographically transferred collage and monotype images. Works such as *Homage to Mary Lou*, *Pepper Jelly Lady*, and *Introduction for a Blues Queen* are examples of how Bearden's collage aesthetic: selective use and placement of color and the repetitions of geometric forms to achieve a sense of compositional movement and perspective, was best translated into the print medium. *Pepper Jelly Lady* with its border of lithographic images show how Bearden tended to extend the boundaries of the medium, in this case literally. And *Homage To Mary Lou*, with fabric textures either drawn on the plate or transferred directly, show how in his approach he was able to make many of his prints unique.

In 1964 Bearden used a photo static technique he had used to copy reproductions of old masters to enlarge a series of collages constructed out of fragments of cut-up photographs culled from a variety of sources. The process of transforming small collages to black and white and much larger scale marked an artistic turning point for Bearden. These Projections, which were first exhibited by that name to critical acclaim at Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York, enabled him to combine the formal language of cubism and abstraction with cinematic techniques. In their scale, composition, documentary quality, references to mass culture as well as in their socio-political subject matter and commentary, many of Bearden's photo projections show the influence of the German Dada movement.

SCREENPRINTS

Screenprints are produced from stenciling through a mesh screen that has the non-image area blocked. A design is imposed on a screen of silks or other fine mesh, with blank areas coated with an impermeable substance, and ink forced through the mesh onto the printing surface. It is also known as “silk screening” or “serigraphy.”

During the 1970s Bearden produced two major suites of screenprints: the highly praised *Prevalence of Ritual*, which was exhibited at the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York in 1974 and a set of six based on his *Odysseus* series of collages that were exhibited at Cordier & Ekstrom in 1977.

As with all of the print techniques, in his screenprints Bearden referenced previous works and repeated subject matter; re-worked ideas, color placement and imagery; added collage and other elements; drew directly on the prints and in other creative ways extended the boundaries and the standard approaches to the medium.



Salome, 1974
(from the *Prevalence of Ritual Suite*)
Screenprint



Home to Ithaca, 1979
(from the *Odysseus Suite*)
Screenprint

MONOTYPES

A monotype is an image produced from a matrix, typically by brushing ink onto a plate, which cannot be repeated in any way, even in part. Bearden sometimes created “ghost” impressions of his monotype images. After offsetting (printing) an image in one impression, he made a second one without reinforcing the initial drawing or painting. Works that combine monotype with other printmaking techniques are usually called monoprints, which are straightforward roll or brush on stone apply paper and run through press. A monoprint is an image produced with unique results. It does not allow for an edition, but it has one or more elements that can be reproduced.

Bearden’s monotypes were first exhibited in 1976 at Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York, his gallery from 1961 to the year of his death in 1988. Generally called “oils on paper” when exhibited, they constitute a body of work within Bearden’s exploration of printmaking that is his most spontaneous and lyrical. Typically an image is drawn or painted onto a metal plate or sheet of plastic, the latter preferred by Bearden. He sometimes employed a stencil to block out certain areas, retaining the white of the paper—a method that brings a collage aesthetic to the process.

Robert Blackburn, founder of the Printmaking Workshop, introduced Bearden to this hybrid process that conflates aspects of drawing and painting with printmaking. Many artists prior to Bearden used this technique, among them William Blake, Edgar Degas and Milton Avery. Dozens of monotypes were produced by Bearden from 1974 through 1983 using a variety of motifs, primary among them the blues, jazz and portraiture. *Performer (Pop Singer)* and *Folk Sources/Secular–Some Antecedents*, are two strong examples of the variety of effects that Bearden was able to achieve using this technique.



Folk Source/Secular -Some Antecedents, 1975
Monotype



Performer (Pop Singer), 1975
Monotype

ROMARE BEARDEN BIOGRAPHY



Romare Bearden, 1980
Photo by Marvin E. Newman

Romare Howard Bearden was born on September 2, 1911, to (Richard) Howard and Bessye Bearden in Charlotte, North Carolina, and died in New York City on March 12, 1988, at the age of 76. His life and art are marked by exceptional talent encompassing a broad range of intellectual and scholarly interests, including music, performing arts, history, literature, and world art. Bearden was also a celebrated humanist, as demonstrated by his lifelong support of young, emerging artists.

Romare Bearden began college at Lincoln University, transferred to Boston University and completed his studies at New York University (NYU), graduating with a degree in education. While at NYU, Bearden took extensive courses in art and was a lead cartoonist and then art editor for the monthly journal *The Medley*. He had also been art director of *Beanpot*, the student humor magazine of Boston University. Bearden published many journal covers during his university years and the first of numerous texts he would write on social and artistic issues. He also attended the Art Students League in New York and later, the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1935, Bearden became a weekly editorial cartoonist for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, which he continued doing until 1937.

After joining the Harlem Artists Guild, Bearden embarked on his lifelong study of art, gathering inspiration from Western masters ranging from

Duccio, Giotto and de Hooch to Cezanne, Picasso and Matisse, as well as from African art (particularly sculpture, masks and textiles), Byzantine mosaics, Japanese prints and Chinese landscape paintings.

From the mid-1930s through 1960s, Bearden was a social worker with the New York City Department of Social Services, working on his art at night and on weekends. His success as an artist was recognized with his first solo exhibition in Harlem in 1940 and his first solo show in Washington, DC, in 1944. Bearden was a prolific artist whose works were exhibited during his lifetime throughout the United States and Europe. His collages, watercolors, oils, photomontages and prints are imbued with visual metaphors from his past in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Pittsburgh and Harlem and from a variety of historical, literary and musical sources.

In 1954, Bearden married Nanette Rohan, with whom he spent the rest of his life. In the early 1970s, he and Nanette established a second residence on the Caribbean island of St. Martin, his wife's ancestral home, and some of his later work reflected the island's lush landscapes. Among his many friends, Bearden had close associations with such distinguished artists, intellectuals and musicians as Albert Murray, James Baldwin, Stuart Davis, Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Joan Miró, George Grosz, Alvin Ailey and Jacob Lawrence.

Bearden was also a respected writer and an eloquent spokesman on artistic and social issues of the day. Active in many arts organizations, in 1964 Bearden was appointed the first art director of the newly established Harlem Cultural Council, a prominent African-American advocacy group. He was involved in founding several important art venues, such as The Studio Museum in Harlem and the Cinque Gallery. Initially funded by the Ford Foundation, Bearden and the artists Norman Lewis and Ernest Crichlow established Cinque to support younger minority artists. Bearden was also one of the founding members of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters in 1970 and was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1972.

Recognized as one of the most creative and original visual artists of the twentieth century, Romare Bearden had a prolific and distinguished career. He experimented with many different mediums and artistic styles, but is best known for his richly textured collages, two of which appeared on the covers of *Fortune* and *Time* magazines, in 1968. An innovative

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artist with diverse interests, Bearden also designed costumes and sets for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and programs, sets and designs for Nanette Bearden's Contemporary Dance Theatre.

Among Bearden's numerous publications are: *A History of African American Artists: From 1792 to the Present*, which was coauthored with Harry Henderson and published posthumously in 1993; *The Caribbean Poetry of Derek Walcott and the Art of Romare Bearden* (1983); *Six Black Masters of American Art*, coauthored with Harry Henderson (1972);



Romare Bearden, Jeanne Moutoussamy and Bob Blackburn (master printer) inspecting a new group of monotypes, 1975
Photo Credit: Frank Stewart/Black Light Productions

The Painter's Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting, coauthored with Carl Holty (1969); and *Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*, a children's book published posthumously in September 2003.

Bearden's work is included in many important public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and The Studio Museum in Harlem, among others. He has had retrospectives at the Mint Museum of Art (1980), the Detroit Institute of the Arts (1986), as well as numerous posthumous retrospectives, including The Studio Museum in Harlem (1991) and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2003).

Bearden was the recipient of many awards and honors throughout his lifetime. Honorary doctorates were given by Pratt Institute, Carnegie Mellon University, Davidson College and Atlanta University, to name but a few. He received the Mayor's Award of Honor for Art and Culture in New York City in 1984 and the National Medal of Arts, presented by President Ronald Reagan, in 1987.

As the first traveling exhibition organized by the Romare Bearden Foundation, *From Process to Print: Graphic Works* by Romare Bearden makes Bearden's legacy—which extends far beyond the material objects he produced—publicly accessible. It represents the culmination of an idea and the result of the extraordinary effort by many at the Foundation to bring it to fruition. The exhibition was generated from our ambitious goal to ensure that through our exhibitions and publications program, Bearden's art, life, and legacy continue to be critically assessed and that his place in the canon of American art is defined and secured. An artist of broad scholarly and popular interests, a thinker and a doer, a true Renaissance man of his time, Bearden's legacy is visual, literary, and humanist. This is confirmed by his extraordinary oeuvre, by his authorship of books and articles on African American art and aesthetics, by his long-acknowledged practice of nurturing the creativity and supporting the work of his contemporaries, and by his generosity of spirit.

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Finally, our deepest thanks go to Romare Bearden. His enduring artistic and intellectual legacy is embodied in his extraordinary works of art and enriches all of our lives.

Grace C. Stanislaus
President and CEO
Romare Bearden Foundation, New York City, 2009