



“My purpose
is to paint
the life of my
people as
I know it.”

Romare Bearden

Romare Bearden's remarkable curiosity, intelligence, vivid imagination, and constant experimentation made him one of the most unique artists of the twentieth century. At the National Gallery of Art this fall, you can explore the wide range of his work in the exhibition *The Art of Romare Bearden*.

Romare Bearden, *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away* (detail), 1966/1967, collage of various papers with charcoal and graphite on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Paul Mellon Fund



Tomorrow I May Be Far Away
Romare Bearden, 1966/1967,
collage of various papers with
charcoal and graphite on
canvas, National Gallery of Art,
Washington, Paul Mellon Fund

1 Tell me about the artist

Romare Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1911. When Bearden was about three years old, his family moved from the rural South to New York City, where their lives centered on vibrant Harlem. Bearden opened up his mind to everything in the city—its diverse people, the new sounds of jazz, and a wide variety of art, including paintings by Pablo Picasso and sculpture from Africa. Bearden studied everything he could, and when he decided to be an artist, he had a rich source of knowledge and experiences from which to create art.



The Artist
Romare Bearden in New York,
mid-1970s, Estate of Romare
Bearden, courtesy of the
Romare Bearden Foundation,
New York, photograph by
Nancy Grampton

2 What's going on in this picture?

In the center of *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away* a man is seated in front of a cabin. A woman peers from the cabin window, her hand resting on the sill. Behind them we see a lush landscape filled with birds, a woman harvesting a melon, and a neighboring cabin.

What do you think the man and woman are watching? What do you think will happen next? Create a story to go along with this picture.

Many of Bearden's works are inspired by memories of places where he had lived or visited—New York City, Pittsburgh, the Caribbean, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. After moving north with his parents, Bearden returned to the South often during his childhood to visit his grandparents in Charlotte, North Carolina. *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away* reflects Bearden's memories of the people, landscape, and daily activities of the southern community.

3 How did he make it?

Bearden collected a wide variety of patterned papers, including magazine illustrations, wallpaper, and hand-painted papers. He cut them into pieces and glued them onto a large canvas, layering the pieces to make the picture. Bearden described his work as "collage paintings" because he would often paint on top of the collaged papers.

To learn more about Romare Bearden, visit our Web site: www.nga.gov/exhibitions/beardeninfo.htm



4 So much to look at!

Because so many pieces make up Bearden's pictures, there are many details to examine. Look closely at some of the details in *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*:

Above left: The woman's dress is made of the same hand-painted blue paper as the man's clothing and the water barrel at his feet. **Can you find any other types of paper that have been cut into several pieces and used throughout the collage?**

Above center: Bearden used as many as fifteen different magazine cuttings for the man's face. Look at how many different kinds of paper were used to form the hands and eyes throughout this work. Bearden was particularly interested in hands and eyes because they help express a person's character.

Above right: **Did you spot the train rolling across the horizon?** You can find trains in many of Bearden's collages. The train reminded Bearden of his travels between the North and South as a child. The train was also important in African-American history, symbolizing events such as the Underground Railroad, the escape route from slave states, and the Great Migration to jobs in the North and West after emancipation.

booknook

These books can be found in the Children's Shop located on the Gallery's concourse level or at your local library or bookstore.

Uptown

By Brian Collier
Ages 4 and up

Collier's dazzling paint-and-photo collages are paired with a young boy's guided tour of his Harlem neighborhood.

I Live in Music

Poem by Ntozake Shange,
paintings by Romare Bearden
Ages 6 and up

Inspired by Bearden's images of musicians, Shange's lyrical poem is a tribute to the ways music can touch the soul.

Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story

By Romare Bearden
Ages 6 and up

Recently discovered, this is the only picture book both written and illustrated by Bearden. Bearden's story of a young slave's heroism is matched with vivid watercolor and collage pictures. On an accompanying CD, Maya Angelou reads the text.

Romare Bearden: Collage of Memories

By Jan Greenberg
Ages 8 and up

This vivid biographical account of Bearden is accompanied by numerous color reproductions of his collages.

try this!

activity



above: Bearden working in his Long Island City Studio, early 1980s, Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of the Romare Bearden Foundation, New York, photograph by Frank Stewart

left: *Watching the Good Trains Go By*, 1964, collage of various papers on cardboard, The Collection of Philip J. and Suzanne Schiller, American Social Commentary Art 1930–1970

Bearden's Photomontages

A *photomontage* is a collage that incorporates photographs. In *Watching the Good Trains Go By*, Bearden used photographs to create another rural scene reminiscent of Mecklenburg. Cut-out pictures of trains, faces, and arms, combined with patterned papers, create a busy scene.

Create your own photomontage.

You will need:

scissors

glue stick

cardboard or tag board

assorted papers, wallpaper sample books, magazines, postcards

personal photographs

First, think of a place that is special to you. Like Bearden, use your memories of everyday life in that place as inspiration for your work. Think about what sights and sounds, people, and activities make that place special. Next, gather photographs and postcards that remind you of that place. Collect patterned papers such as wrapping paper or wallpaper. Look through magazines and remove pages that have images to help describe your place. Cut out patterns and images from your papers and arrange and glue them on the cardboard to form the background. Then, cut out photographs of people and objects and overlap and layer the pieces to create your scene.

To make a collage online, visit
www.nga.gov/kids