

## Children's Guide

*Best for ages 8 and up*

### The Art of Romare Bearden

National Gallery of Art, Washington  
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## The Art of Romare Bearden

### Welcome to the National Gallery of Art.

This guide is a children's tour through the exhibition *The Art of Romare Bearden*. Have fun, and please remember not to touch the art.

Detail, Bearden family photograph. Romare Bearden was born on September 2, 1911. Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York

### > Meet Romare Bearden.

His friends called him Romie. Like many African-American families living in the south, the Beardens moved north and settled in the Harlem section of New York City about 1914. Bearden graduated from New York University and became a social worker. For many years he could only work on his art during his free time.



> **Bearden loved cats.** Among his pets were Tuttle (short for the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen), Rusty (named after the Persian Hercules Rustum), Mikie (short for the Renaissance artist Michelangelo), and Gypo.

Bearden read all the time. His life, like his studio, was crammed with books—poetry, philosophy, politics, works about myth, religion, art, and ancient literature.

He also wrote books and articles, especially about African-American art and life.

Romare Bearden, Canal Street, New York, 1976.  
Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York.  
Photograph by Blaine Waller; copy photograph by Beckett Logan





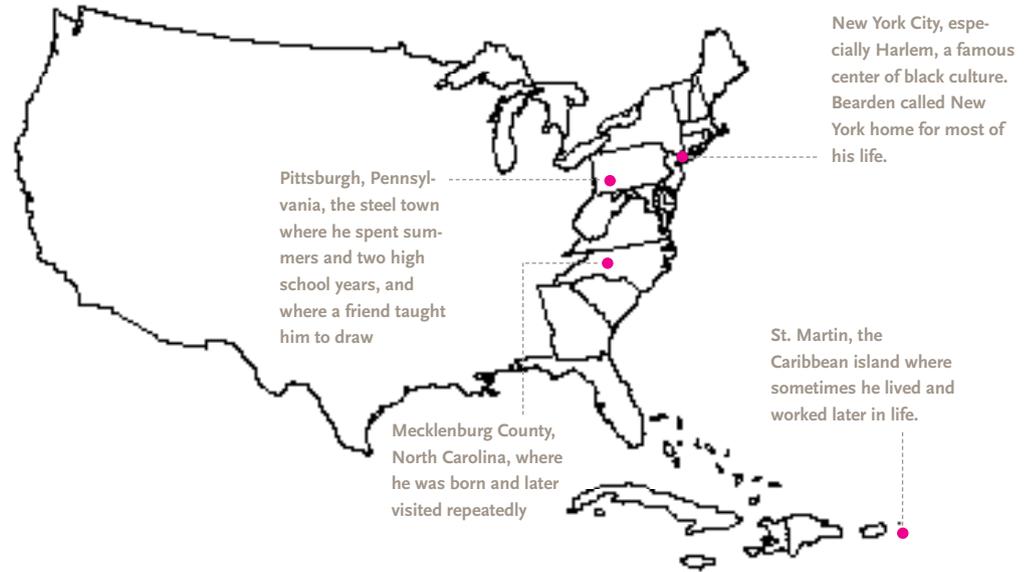
< [Bearden made art](#) using many different materials, but he was most famous for his collages. Snippets from magazines, photographs, painted papers, foil, posters, and art reproductions were among his materials. These were his “paints.” Bearden arranged them on paper or board and then glued them down.

Bearden working in his Long Island City studio, early 1980s. Photograph by Frank Stewart

Be on the lookout for these:

- trains
- cats
- roosters
- birds
- musicians, singers, musical instruments
- rural shacks
- large hands
- city streets, row houses, stoops
- windows
- sun and moon
- hills
- smokestacks
- African sculpture

## The Places Bearden Painted



## The Subjects Bearden Painted

- African-American life and traditions
- stories from religion, history, literature, and myth
- blues singers and jazz musicians
- landscapes

## ORIGINS

Piero di Cosimo, *The Visitation with Saint Anthony Abbot* (detail), c. 1490, oil on panel.  
Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington



Romare Bearden, *The Visitation*, 1941, gouache with ink and graphite on brown paper. Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York



< Bearden's pictures sometimes tell two stories at once—one personal, related to his life experience and African-American heritage—another universal, a subject that just about anyone could relate to and understand.

In *The Visitation*, we see two African-American women holding hands and having a conversation in a **hilly landscape**. There is a **wooden shack** behind them. What could they be talking about? The title gives us a clue. Here, the artist reenacts a story from the Bible when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. Bearden often cast African-American characters in stories from the Bible and other important books.

As you walk through the first room of the exhibition, see other examples of Bearden's early paintings. Many of them are based on books.

CIRCA 1964



Romare Bearden, *The Street*, 1964, collage of various papers on cardboard. Milwaukee Art Museum, gift of Friends of Art and the African American Art Acquisition Fund

Romare Bearden, *The Street*, 1964, photostat on fiberboard, Edition 1/6. Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York

^ Find two pictures, both titled *The Street*. They are similar, but not the same. Both scenes show the same busy street. However, the smaller collage—made first—was photographically enlarged and printed in black and white to create the second work. In the

small collage, which person would you most like to talk to, and why? Is your answer the same for the larger work? Before you move on, did you find the cat?

## MECKLENBURG MEMORIES

> Let's travel south to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, where Bearden was born, a place he visited often throughout his life. It was also the inspiration for *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*. What is going on in this collage? What was the first thing to catch your eye, and why?

The three people are probably on a farm. How can you tell that they are in the country and not the city?

For the seated man's face, Bearden used as many as fifteen different magazine cuttings. Because the cuttings were taken from different faces and other sources, the scale, color, and points of view are always changing. Imagine what the man is thinking. What do you think will happen next?



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

## THE CITY AND ITS MUSIC

> Bearden loved music, especially jazz and blues. He described jazz as “finger-snap-ping, head-shaking enjoyment.” Many well-known jazz performers, such as Duke Ellington and Fats Waller, visited his home when he was a child. For years Bearden lived and worked near world famous music clubs, such as the Lafayette and the Savoy. See if you can find the collages in this gallery inspired by these places (*Of the Blues: Wrapping It Up at the Lafayette* and *Of the Blues: At the Savoy*). Jazz not only influenced his subjects, but also the way he worked. “One of the things I did was listen to a lot of music. I’d take a sheet of paper and just make lines while I listened to records—a kind of shorthand to pick up the rhythm and the intervals.”

Try that at home with your favorite music.

Romare Bearden, *The Blues*, 1975, collage of various papers with paint, ink, and graphite on fiberboard. Honolulu Academy of Arts, gift of Geraldine P. Clark, 1977 (4451.1)

Now find the small collage called *The Blues*. On the left, the band plays. On the right, a singer, who looks a lot like the famous blues singer Billie Holiday, moves to the music and sings. This joint is jumpin’! Would you describe this collage as having no energy, some energy, or a lot of energy? Why do you think so?



### Can you find?

- trombone
- piano
- saxophone
- trumpet
- drums
- sheet music
- microphone
- stage lights
- flower
- curtain

When Bearden made collages, he often added paint and other materials. Can you find the areas of soft, diffuse color around the singer, where Bearden used spray paint? You can also see the pencil lines that form a grid underneath the paint.

## STORIES

Romare Bearden,  
*Odysseus: Odysseus  
Enters at the Door  
Disguised as an Old Man*, c. 1977,  
watercolor, gouache,  
and ink over carbon-  
paper line on paper.  
Evelyn N. Boulware

Pintoricchio, *Penelope  
with Her Suitors*, 1509,  
fresco on canvas.  
National Gallery,  
London



< Bearden sometimes borrowed ideas from other artists and then mixed those ideas with his own to create something new. In the collage, *Odysseus: Odysseus Enters at the Door Disguised as an Old Man*, he borrowed from Italian artist Pintoricchio, who worked about 500 years ago.

Compare the two works. List three things Bearden has changed from the older painting.

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Did you catch these changes?

- Bearden's characters are black; Pintoricchio's characters are white.
- Bearden's colors are vivid and strong (expressive); Pintoricchio's colors are natural and soft (descriptive).
- Bearden's space and figures are flat (two-dimensional); Pintoricchio's space and figures are round (three-dimensional).

If you could ask Bearden one question about this work, what would it be?

## WOMEN

> Bearden was also a poet. Compare his poem to his collage *Madeline Jones' Wonderful Garden*. Then, circle the words and phrases below that describe both the poem and the collage.

memories	happy	warm
in the country	flowers	affection
long ago	trains	sad
outdoors	bright	family
	in the city	



Romare Bearden,  
*Madeline Jones'  
Wonderful Garden*, 1977,  
collage of various  
papers with ink,  
graphite, and surface  
abrasion on fiberboard.  
Frederick L. Brown

Sometimes I remember my grandfather's house  
A garden with tiger lilies, my grandmother  
Waving a white apron to passing trains  
On that trestle across the clay road.

## LATE WORK



Romare Bearden,  
*Mecklenburg Autumn:  
October—Toward  
Paw's Creek*, 1983,  
collage of various  
papers with paint, ink,  
graphite, and bleached  
areas on fiberboard.  
Estate of Romare  
Bearden, courtesy of  
Romare Bearden  
Foundation, New York

In the last room, visit the places that inspired Bearden's art: Mecklenburg County, North Carolina; Pittsburgh; New York City; and the Caribbean island of St. Martin.

^ **Crackle, crackle, crunch.** Can you hear the leaves crunching under foot? Imagine walking through the woods on this crisp autumn evening. How can you tell the season and the time of day?

> **Bellow, bellow, blaze.** Smell the smoke, and see the flames blazing from the **smokestacks** of Pittsburgh's steel mills. Does all the smoke come from the smokestacks? Look carefully. There's also a **train** engine on the left side of the collage. Despite the smoke and flames, does this painting make you feel hot? If not, here's why: Bearden used lots of cool colors, especially in the blue **windows** and gray **row houses**. Also, the man walking down the steps is wearing a hat and jacket, suggesting a chilly day.

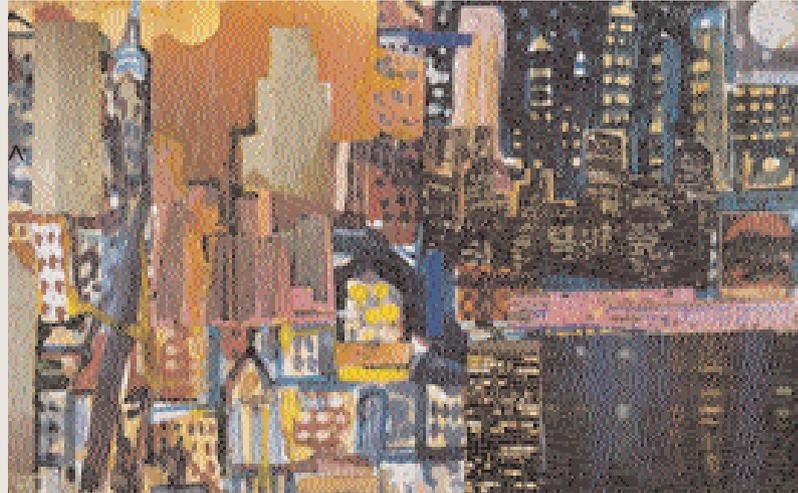
In this collage, Bearden shows us outside and inside at the same time. Perhaps the warmer indoor scene is Bearden's grandmother's boardinghouse, where he spent time as a teenager. What is happening inside the house?

To help organize his pictures, Bearden often divided the picture into many rectangles. How many rectangles can you find?



Romare Bearden,  
*Pittsburgh Memories*,  
1984, collage of various  
papers with fabric, foil,  
paint, ink, color pencil,  
graphite, and bleached  
areas on fiberboard.  
Carnegie Museum of  
Art, Pittsburgh; gift of  
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald  
R. Davenport and Mr.  
and Mrs. Milton A.  
Washington, 1984

▼ *Twinkle, twinkle, twilight.* Bearden described this scene as “my last view of daylight as I entered the subway on the way home from N.Y.U. [New York University].” The picture is divided into two rectangles. On the left the sun is about to set, and on the right the moon has risen. The many buildings are made from both paint and collage. What else can you find in the picture? What do you think Bearden is telling us about New York City? Picture your neighborhood at sunset.



Romare Bearden,  
*Profile/Part ii, The  
Thirties: Midtown  
Sunset*, 1981, collage  
of various papers with  
paint and bleached  
areas on fiberboard.  
Private collection

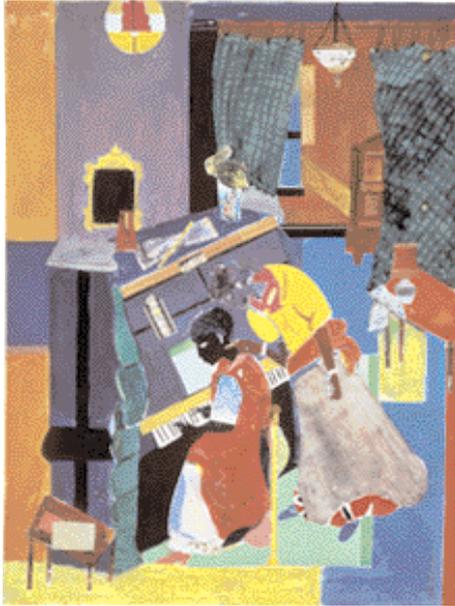
Romare Bearden,  
*In a Green Shade*  
(Homage [sic] to  
Marvell), 1984, collage  
of various papers  
with paint, ink, and  
graphite on fiberboard.  
Yvonne and Richard  
McCracken



< *Shhhhhhh*. Imagine diving down into the cool blue water, strolling along the gentle green hills, and watching the beautiful plants and animals of this island paradise. How did Bearden create this work's cool, calm feeling? Is this a place that you would like to visit? Why or why not?

Make up a story about one of Bearden's special places that you would most like to visit.

Before you leave the exhibition, you can see a twelve-minute film on Bearden.



Romare Bearden,  
*Piano Lesson*, 1983,  
collage of various  
papers with paint, ink,  
and graphite on  
fiberboard. The Walter  
O. Evans Foundation  
for Art and Literature

## Activities

Try these activities, following your visit.

1.

**Imagine climbing right into the collage, *Piano Lesson*.** How do things look and sound? Use your senses to create a list of words and phrases you can include in your own poem or story about the collage.

2.

**Make your own collage.** Bearden's subjects were the people, places, and stories he knew. Now it is your turn. Create a collage of the people, places, or stories in your life. To begin, find old magazines, newspapers, gift wrap, shopping bags, foil, fabric, colored paper (you can even use this guide). You will also need glue, scissors, and a sheet of heavy paper or cardboard as a base. Next, cut out your shapes, arrange them on your base, and glue them down. You can add paint, crayon, or marker to your creation. You could also collage an old shoe box to create a special place for your memories.

3.

**Draw like Bearden!** Put on your favorite music, then work to the beat. Try drawing along to jazz or blues music. If your music is fast, you might end up with a jazzy design.

Visit NGAkids at  
[www.nga.gov/kids](http://www.nga.gov/kids)  
to make a collage online.

## Book Nook

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

### **Li'l Dan, The Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story**

By Romare Bearden

Ages 6 and up

Published for the first time in 2003, 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.

### **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.



Romare Bearden, *Li'l Dan, The Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*, c. 1983, children's book that Bearden wrote and illustrated; watercolor, gouache, and ink with paper collage on paper. Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York

### **Me and Uncle Romie**

By Claire Hartfield, illustrated  
by Jerome Lagarrigue

Ages 6 and up

Inspired by the life of Bearden, this fictional story chronicles a young boy's discovery of new places and how to capture them in collage.

### **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.

### **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.

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National Gallery of Art  
September 14, 2003 to January 4, 2004

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
February 7 to May 16, 2004

Dallas Museum of Art  
June 20 to September 12, 2004

Whitney Museum of American Art  
October 14, 2004 to January 9, 2005

High Museum of Art, Atlanta  
January 29 to April 24, 2005

The exhibition is organized by the  
National Gallery of Art, Washington

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