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9-28-2011

American Commemorative Panels: Romare Bearden

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Romare Bearden

THERE IS FRIENDLY disagreement about how to correctly pronounce Romare Bearden's first name. He answered to "Rome-air" and "Rome-uh-ree" with an accent on the first syllable in both cases. But there is little disagreement in judging him one of the greatest American artists of the 20th century.

Bearden (1911–1988) was a prolific and versatile artist, celebrated for his groundbreaking approach to collage along with his efforts in watercolors, oils, and other media. His work eloquently expresses universal human themes, embracing the rich complexities of the African-American experience while framing them within a broad historical and cultural context.

This important artist was also a respected scholar who wrote or collaborated on numerous essays and books. He wrote reviews and did much to support the careers of other black artists—for instance, joining with associates in 1969 to open a gallery, Cinque (named for the leader of the revolt on the slave ship *Amistad*), where many young artists were given their first exhibitions.

Music, in particular jazz and the blues, was a strong influence on Bearden's art. He also wrote lyrics for songs, including the hit "Seabreeze."

His many varied accomplishments make him something of a Renaissance man. In his journal, Bearden described art as "a kind of divine play." Four of his collages are shown in the stamp art.



Conjunction (1971) is a large work showing a Southern social scene, reflecting the artist's recollections of his early childhood in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

Odysseus: Poseidon, The Sea God—Enemy of Odysseus (1977) is one of many images based on literary sources.

Prevalence of Ritual: Conjur Woman is one of a series of important collages Bearden made in 1964. The power and dignity of the black woman was a central theme in his work, and the spiritual and mysterious "conjur" woman was a recurring subject.

Falling Star (1979) juxtaposes the ordinary, a domestic interior, with the marvelous, as seen through its windows.



Romare Bearden



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