

The Museum of Modern Art

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ROMARE BEARDEN: THE PREVALENCE OF RITUAL

"'Art celebrates a victory,' says Romare Bearden; 'I look for all those elements in which life expresses that victory.' In America's technological society, increasing numbers of people feel that man is becoming dehumanized. Bearden holds that the life style of the black in America is 'perhaps the richest because it is the one life style that is talking about life and about the continuation of life...and through all of the anguish -- the joy of life....'

"The ritual is the choreography of daily life, vibrant in movement and in the myriad shades of feeling and emotion common to humanity; it is nurtured by his knowledge of and experience in black America."

Carroll Greene, Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual

Fifty-six works by Romare Bearden will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from March 25 through June 7, 1971. Shown for the first time is an 18-foot collage-mural, The Block, accompanied by a recording of street sounds. The exhibition includes six photo-enlargements of key 1964 collages and six early (1940-42) works on brown paper illustrating the primal power of Bearden's imagery, which reappears in his collages of the 60's. These works, according to Carroll Greene, the exhibition's Guest Director, are laced "with allusions to both American and African origins that include spirituals and jazz, card-playing nights and church-going Sundays, family meals and blue Mondays, set against lush Southern landscapes and bleak Northern slums".

The Block, composed of six 3' wide x 4' high sections, interprets the physical and spiritual life of a block in Harlem. Houses made of colored paper are occupied by people and objects in various life situations. The figures are cut from magazines and altered by subtle washes of color. Children play on the sidewalk below a window where a woman sits, hands in lap, contemplating the fragments of her life. One house reveals its lovers

Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual by Carroll Greene with chronology compiled by April Kingsley. 24 pages; 17 illustrations (4 in color); bibliography and checklist of the exhibition. \$2.50

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and another, death. Tenuous life is illustrated by the picture of a rat trap superimposed on the image of three children. The work is accompanied by a tape-collage of street sounds created by Daniel Demkrosky and made possible by a generous contribution from the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey).

Having worked exclusively in collage for the past seven years, Bearden's works in this medium have become increasingly more sophisticated in color, design and technique. Such masterful works of 1970 as Patchwork Quilt and Mississippi Monday demonstrate Bearden's unique ability in using this medium to express his particular cultural heritage in a universal art.

Romare Howard Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1914. He graduated from New York University and then studied with George Grosz at the Art Students League. His first one-man show was in 1940 at the studio of Ad Bates in Harlem. The Museum of Modern Art acquired He Is Risen in 1945, marking the first museum acquisition of Bearden's work. He was a founder of The Spiral Group in 1963 which was formed before the civil rights March on Washington, and has had as its primary concern the problems of Negro artists. The following year Bearden became Art Director of The Harlem Cultural Council, a position he still holds. He has been included in many group exhibitions and has had innumerable gallery and museum shows in this country and Europe over the last thirty years. Last year Mr. Bearden received a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to write a book on the history of Afro-American art.

Carroll Greene, Guest Director of the Romare Bearden exhibition, is the former Curator of the Afro-American Cultural History Project at the Smithsonian Institution. He is now writing an historical survey of Black American Artists for Praeger Publications.

After the exhibition closes at The Museum of Modern Art, it will travel to:

The National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. - July 16 - Sept. 12, 1971

University of California Art Museum, Berkeley, California - Oct. 25 - Dec. 5, 1971

Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California - Dec. 20, 1971 - Jan. 30, 1972

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The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia - Feb. 27 - April 9, 1972

The North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, N. C. - May 1 - June 11, 1972

Additional information and photographs available from Joan Wallace, Coordinator of Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7297, -7501.
