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For Press Inquiries Only:
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353
ds-ziska@nga.gov

Sarah Holley, Publicist
(202) 842-6359
s-holley@nga.gov

MOST COMPREHENSIVE SHOW EVER OF ART BY ROMARE BEARDEN PREMIERES AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, SEPTEMBER 14, 2003 - JANUARY 4, 2004; NATIONAL TOUR INCLUDES FIVE U.S. CITIES

Washington, DC--**The Art of Romare Bearden**, the most comprehensive retrospective ever assembled of the large and diverse body of work by one of America's preeminent 20th-century artists, will be presented by the National Gallery of Art in its East Building, September 14, 2003 - January 4, 2004. Approximately 130 works--paintings; drawings and watercolors; monotypes and edition prints; collages of diverse materials, including fabrics; photographs; wood sculpture; and designs for record albums, costumes and stage sets, and book illustrations--will explore the complexity and scope of the artist's evolution and will feature many rarely exhibited and/or never before reproduced works from private collections.

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, the exhibition will also be seen with slight variation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, February 7 - May 16, 2004; the Dallas Museum of Art, June 20 - September 12, 2004; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 14, 2004 - January 9, 2005; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, January 29, 2005 - April 24, 2005.

"Romare Bearden's art is richly layered, both figuratively and metaphorically, and speaks to people on multiple levels. This exhibition will be a wonderful opportunity to view the full range of his artistic genius," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful for the generosity of AT&T and the many private and public lenders, as well as for the invaluable assistance of the Romare Bearden Foundation."

Support

The exhibition is made possible with generous support from AT&T.

"As the world's networking company, AT&T is committed to satisfying customers and serving society. Because we live by our values in good times and bad, AT&T has become one of the world's most-trusted corporate citizens," said AT&T Chairman and CEO Dave Dorman. "It is in this spirit that we are delighted to sponsor **The Art of Romare Bearden** at the National Gallery of Art, as well as its national tour.

"As the most experimental African-American artist of his generation, Romare Bearden incorporated the broader social and artistic currents of his time into his extraordinary art," Dorman added. "With this exhibition, we all will learn something new about the power of art and communication to connect people, places and ideas."

The Exhibition

Bearden's oeuvre of approximately 1,500 known works in many media reveals the diverse influences of earlier Western masters ranging from Duccio, Giotto, and de Hooch to Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse, as well as his fascination with African art (particularly sculpture, masks, and textiles), Byzantine mosaics, Japanese prints, and Chinese paintings.

Presented thematically in a roughly chronological sequence, the works in the show represent the places where Bearden lived and worked: the rural south; northern cities, principally Pittsburgh and New York's Harlem; and the Caribbean island of St. Martin. They also reflect his wide range of interests and explore often overlapping themes of religion, ritual practice, everyday life, jazz clubs, brothels, history, mythology, and literature. The sections of the exhibition and highlights are as follows:

Origins: Christian iconography plays a role throughout Bearden's oeuvre and is evident from the start in two of his gouaches from c.1941, *The Visitation* and *The Family*, the latter never before exhibited or reproduced. Works representing literary themes based on the Passion of Christ and Federico Garcia Lorca's 1935 poem, *Lament for a Bullfighter* (Lamento por Ignacio Sanchez Mejias), will be on view along with two early abstract collages, *Harlequin* (c.1956) and *North of the River* (1962).

Circa 1964: Approximately 20 small collages from 1964 made almost entirely of magazine and newspaper clippings were inspired by the Civil Rights movement and Bearden's participation in *Spiral* (a group of African-American artists). One of Bearden's most important motifs, the train, appears in works such as *Train Whistle Blues: I*, *Train Whistle Blues: II*, and *Watching the Good Trains Go By*.

Expulsion from Paradise; *Pittsburgh Memory*; *The Street*, depicting Harlem; and *Prevalence of Ritual: Conjur Woman* are among other collages on view along with four powerful Projections, which are photostatic enlargements of the collages. Bearden's Projections were a radical departure that brought him increased attention from the art world and press. A selection of later works revisits this early imagery, a form of Bearden's "call and recall."

Mecklenburg Memories: In the mid- to late-sixties, Bearden began using a wider array of papers, as well as foils and fabrics in his collages, and began to incorporate extensive use of spray paint. Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (where Bearden was born and spent many summers), defined his pictorial direction at this time. Among the large collages shown here will be *Three Men* (1966-1967); *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away* (1966/1967); *Sunday Morning Breakfast* (1967), based on

a painting by Horace Pippin; and *Three Folk Musicians* (1967), which pays homage to a cubist painting by Picasso.

The City and Its Music: Bearden spent much of his life in cities, primarily New York. He immersed himself in the varied street life, especially of Harlem, as may be seen in the packed particulars of *The Block II* (1972; an unusual multi-panel piece with some panels inset and others built out), the more abstract celebratory aura of *City Lights* (c.1970), or the subtle and intimate *Untitled* (c.1971), composed from multiple vantage points and depicting a gridded hopscotch game on a water-soaked sidewalk interrupted by a shadow-like figure hopping mid-air, a child, and two cats.

Berkeley-The City and Its People (1973), to be seen for the first time outside of the Berkeley City Council chambers where it was installed in 1974, is an extraordinary complex of photographs and colored papers on seven panels that together measure ten by sixteen feet. One of Bearden's largest known works on paper, it depicts the many facets of this university city which was new to the artist, although he quickly came to understand it in all of its aspects. The composition includes four heads representing the city's racial diversity that later became Berkeley's logo.

Bearden's world of jazz is one of clear forms and brilliant color, unlike the smokey images depicted by many others in word, film, or paint. Works from Bearden's 1974 exhibition, *Of the Blues* (Cordier & Ekstrom), that are included in this retrospective--all with titles that begin with the phrase *Of the Blues*--are *At the Savoy*, *Wrapping it up at the Lafayette*; *Mecklenburg County*, *Saturday Night*; and *Carolina Shout*. An aspect of his attention to music may be seen in the album covers for jazz artists he knew, including the collages *Thank You...For F.U.M.L. (Funking Up My Life)* (1978) for Donald Byrd, and *J Mood* (c.1985) for Wynton Marsalis.

Stories: The exhibition includes Bearden's only known work of sculpture, *Mauritius* (1969), alluding to a martyred Roman soldier, an African recruited from upper Egypt. *Captivity and Resistance* (1976), a dramatic textile collage measuring approximately 6 x 10 feet, was created by Bearden for the opening of what is known today as the African American Museum in Philadelphia. The major theme is the 1839 Mende rebellion aboard the slave ship *Amistad*, with numerous references to the Civil War. Biblical references include *Noah, the Third Day* (1972) and *Delilah* (1973). Several of Bearden's 1977 Odysseus collages as well as related small watercolors reveal his lifelong fascination with Greek mythology.

Women: Bearden cited "the beauty of the black woman" as a subject of immense importance to him and it was a motif he used throughout his career. He depicted nude women in the academic tradition, as in *Two Moons of Luvemia* (1970) and *Reclining Nude* (c.1977), an homage to the work of Matisse; as prostitutes in collages such as *The Apprenticeship of Jelly Roll Morton* (1971); as lovers in *Down Home, Also* (1971); and as one with nature, as in *Madeline Jones' Wonderful Garden* (1977). Bearden also celebrated the mother-child relationship in such works as *Mother and Child* (c.1972) and *Woman and Child Reading* (1977). Another significant female motif is the Conjur Woman

(a magic woman or sorcerer in African-American culture), who appears in several works throughout the exhibition.

Monoprints: Bearden was introduced to a hybrid process that conflates aspects of drawing and painting with printmaking by his longtime friend Robert Blackburn, founder of New York's Printmaking Workshop. Bearden's monotypes picture a variety of motifs, primary among them are the blues, as in *Mirror and Banjo* (c.1983); jazz, as in *Zach Whyte's Beau Brummell Band* (1980) and *Celebrations: Trumpet Spot, Wynton* (c.1983); portraiture, as in *Blues Singer* (1975); and lush landscapes, as in *Rain Forest - Pool* (c.1978) and *Waterfall* (c.1980).

Ballet Costumes: The exhibition includes 16 designs for costumes, masks, and sets that have never been exhibited or reproduced that Bearden created for a ballet "Conjur: A Masked Folk Ballet." They will be exhibited with related collages of similar motifs.

Late Work: Interviews with Calvin Tomkins in preparation for a fascinating 1977 *New Yorker* "Profile" inspired two series of works: Profile/Part I, The Twenties, which referenced characters and situations associated with Bearden's early life, and Profile/Part II, The Thirties, which focused on his life in Harlem plus Mecklenburg County images. The exhibition includes four works from the first series and three from the second. Other major late works include lush landscapes such as *Birds in Paradise* (c.1982) and *Mecklenburg Autumn: October-Toward Paw's Creek* (1983); urban life such as *Pittsburgh Memories* (1984); Caribbean scenes, such as *Obeah in a Trance* (1984); and such domestic interiors as *Piano Lesson* (1983), a version of which inspired August Wilson's stage play by the same name. Also in the show are three illustrations (never before exhibited or reproduced) for a book, *L'il Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*, for which Bearden also wrote the text. It will be published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers to coincide with the exhibition.

The Artist

Romare Bearden was born to (Richard) Howard and Bessye Bearden in Charlotte, North Carolina, the seat of Mecklenburg County, on September 2, 1911 (according to a baptismal record that will be published in the exhibition catalogue). Due to Jim Crow laws, life became increasingly difficult for African Americans, even for such college educated and economically successful families as the Beardens. Therefore, about 1914, Howard, Bessye, and Romare joined in the Great Migration north, settling in New York City, which remained Bearden's base for the rest of his life.

Bessye became a social and political activist and was the New York correspondent for the African-American newspaper, *Chicago Defender*, while Howard worked as a city sanitation inspector, played the piano in his off-hours, and, according to Bearden's close friend author Ralph Ellison, was "a teller of tales." Their life was centered in the intellectual, artistic, and political mainstream of the Harlem Renaissance: among their friends were writer Countee Cullen; musician Duke Ellington; actor, activist, and athlete Paul Robeson; the founder-president of the National Council of Negro Women, Mary McLeod Bethune; and the first African-

American surgical intern at Harlem Hospital, Dr. Aubré de L. Maynard.

Bearden's interest in art was sparked by experiences with a childhood friend in Pittsburgh and by his experiences and observations in the studio of Harlem artist Augusta Savage. After extensive studies in art, he graduated with a degree in education from New York University (NYU) where he had been a lead cartoonist and then art editor for the college's monthly journal *The Medley*. He published the first of many journal covers during his university years and the first of numerous texts he would write on social and artistic issues. In 1935 he became a weekly editorial cartoonist for the Baltimore *Afro-American*.

Employed by the New York City Department of Social Services, Bearden drew and painted on weekends and evenings, and took additional classes from German-born artist George Grosz at the Art Students League. He had his first solo exhibition in Harlem in 1940, his first solo show in Washington, D.C., in 1944, and his work was exhibited in Paris before the end of the decade. Bearden enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942, was assigned to the First Headquarters, Fifteenth Regiment, the all-black 372nd Infantry Division, and was honorably discharged. After the war he joined the prestigious Samuel Kootz Gallery in Manhattan, which represented prominent artists including William Bazotes, Alexander Calder, Fernand Léger, and Robert Motherwell.

In 1950, Bearden used the G.I. Bill to travel to Paris, France, where he studied literature, philosophy, Buddhism, and art, and made side trips to Italy and Spain. Back in New York, he returned to his job at the Department of Social Services and worked as a songwriter. In 1954 he married Nanette Rohan, with whom he spent the rest of his life.

Bearden continued to be a prolific artist whose works were exhibited throughout the United States and Europe. He was also a respected writer and an eloquent spokesman on artistic and social issues of the day. He was active in many arts organizations: after his Spiral association, he was appointed in 1964 as the first art director of the newly established Harlem Cultural Council, a prominent African American advocacy group with several hundred members; and was elected to the American Academy of Design and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He retired from his full-time position at the Department of Social Services in 1966, but continued working there part time until 1969.

Bearden's collages appeared on the covers of *Fortune* and *Time* magazines in 1968, and he was active in the founding of the Studio Museum in Harlem. With seed money from the Ford Foundation, Bearden with artists Norman Lewis and Ernest Crichlow founded Cinque Gallery, in support of younger minority artists. Bearden designed costumes and sets for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and programs, sets, and designs for Nanette Bearden's Contemporary Dance Theatre. In the early 1970s he and Nanette established a second residence on the Caribbean island of St. Martin, his wife's ancestral home.

Bearden's many awards and honors include the National Medal of Arts

he received from President Ronald Reagan in 1987, one year before he died. Among his numerous publications is *A History of African American Artists: From 1792 to the Present*, which was coauthored with Harry Henderson; it was published posthumously in 1993.

A retrospective exhibition and national tour of Bearden's work was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1971. After several other museum shows during his lifetime, a posthumous retrospective was organized by the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1991.

Bearden at the National Gallery of Art

Works by Bearden are in dozens of museums throughout the United States. The National Gallery of Art's collection includes several works such as the major collage *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away* (1966/1967); *The Street (Composition for Richard Wright)* (c.1977), an ink drawing reproduced in the *New York Times* in 1977; *The Fiddler* (1965), an unusual screenprint on canvas based on a photostat; *Circe*, a collage design for a Modern Masters tapestry; three examples of his distinctive collagraph prints; and *The Caribbean Poetry of Derek Walcott and the Art of Romare Bearden* (1983), an illustrated book that includes an original lithograph.

The Art of Romare Bearden is one of eight major comprehensive retrospectives of work in a variety of media by post World War II artists shown at the National Gallery of Art since it opened in 1941. The others are: **Georgia O'Keeffe 1887-1988** (1987-88); **Selections and Transformations: The Art of John Marin** (1990); **Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology** (1995); **Piet Mondrian: 1872-1944** (1995); **Alexander Calder 1898-1976** (1988); **Mark Rothko** (1998); and **Henry Moore** (2001-2002).

Among the many private collectors lending to the National Gallery of Art exhibition who knew Bearden personally are artist and art historian Professor David C. Driskell and Mrs. Driskell; musician and educator Wynton Marsalis; and Marion B. Javits, widow of the late Senator Jacob Javits.

Catalogue and Related Activities and Resources

The National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams are copublishing the hardcover version of the authoritative 352-page exhibition catalogue with 200 color and 100 black and white illustrations. It includes a poem, *To Romare Bearden*, by Derek Walcott, a comprehensive overview by Ruth E. Fine, curator of the exhibition and curator of special projects in modern art, National Gallery of Art, and essays on Bearden's sources in old master Western art by Sarah Kennel, curatorial and exhibition assistant, National Gallery of Art; on Bearden's sources in African art by Nnamdi Elleh, assistant professor of architecture at the University of Cincinnati; on the artist's writings by Jacqueline Francis, assistant professor of art history and Afroamerican and African studies at the University of Michigan; and on contemporary criticism of his work by Abdul Goler, Henry Luce Scholar, Seton Hall Masters in Museums Professions Program. In addition, the catalogue will include a detailed chronology by Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, assistant curator, Jersey City

Museum, New Jersey, and Kennel, with Carmen Higgenbotham, research assistant, National Gallery of Art; and a comprehensive bibliography by Mary Lee Corlett, research associate, National Gallery of Art.

The hardcover catalogue will be sold for \$50 and distributed by Harry N. Abrams in September 2003. The soft-cover version, published by the National Gallery of Art, will also be available in early September for \$35 in the Gallery's Shops, on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov, and by calling 1-800-697-9350. The Shops will also offer a large selection of books for children and adults, poster reproductions, postcards, note cards, calendars, and a holiday card.

Harry N. Abrams Books will also publish a new biography on Bearden for children. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers will publish *L'il Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*, written and illustrated by Bearden, with a personal foreword by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and accompanied by a CD featuring a reading of the text by Dr. Maya Angelou. It will sell for \$18.95. All books will be available through the National Gallery of Art Shops and nationwide outlets in September.

A full-color exhibition brochure and a *Bearden Exhibition Family Guide* will be available free of charge at the entrance to the exhibition. A large-print version of the exhibition brochure will be available free of charge from the audio tour desk and information desks.

An audio tour narrated by National Gallery director Earl A. Powell III, with commentary by curator Fine and other experts on Bearden, will be available for rent at the exhibition's entrance.

A 30-minute documentary film, *The Art of Romare Bearden*, produced by the National Gallery of Art and distributed by Home Box Office, will be shown in the Gallery's East Building large auditorium and will be available for sale in the Gallery Shops. A ten-minute version of the film will be shown continuously in the exhibition.

A wide range of educational and school programs will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition. Further information and a complete schedule of gallery talks, lectures, films, tours, and programs for all ages will be available on the Gallery's continually updated press Web site www.nga.gov/press as of March 21 and in greater detail in mid-August on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov, which will also have a special feature on Bearden and the exhibition.

The Art of Romare Bearden exhibition will be an anchor event for *Blues & Dreams: Celebrating the African-American Experience in Washington, DC*, a program coordinated by the Washington, DC, Convention and Tourism Corporation and the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, September 15 through November 30, 2003. Cultural venues throughout the city will showcase unique programs in the areas of African-American history, visual arts, literature, music, theater, and dance. A special package will also be offered to encourage visitors to come to the city during this period. For more information, call (202) 789-7099 (media only) or visit www.washington.org.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1.

Visitors are asked to present all bags for inspection as they enter the Gallery. Luggage or garment bags are not be permitted in either building and may not be checked.

General information: (202) 737-4215
Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD): (202) 842-6176
To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662

If you are a member of the press and would like more information or would like to be added to our press list, please contact the Press Office at pressinfo@nga.gov, call (202) 842-6353, or send inquiries to:

Press Office
National Gallery of Art
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

National Gallery of Art, Press Office

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