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Press Release

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**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**

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[Li'l Dan, The Drummer Boy](#)
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For Press Inquiries Only:

Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353
ds-ziska@nga.gov

Cathryn Keller, Publicist
(202) 842-6804
c-keller@nga.gov

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



Romare Bearden
Piano Lesson, 1983
collage of various papers with
paint, ink, and graphite on
fiberboard, 73.7 x 55.9 cm (29
x 22)
The Walter O. Evans
Foundation for Art and
Literature
© Romare Bearden
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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 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.

Paintings; drawings and watercolors; monotypes and edition prints; collages of diverse materials, including fabrics; photographs; wood sculpture; designs for record albums, costumes, and stage sets; and book illustrations reveal 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.

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; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 14, 2004 - January 9, 2005; and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, January 29 - April 24, 2005.

"This exhibition will be a wonderful opportunity to view the full range of Romare Bearden's 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."

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 is sponsored in part by Chevy Chase Bank.

The Exhibition

Romare Bearden's oeuvre of more than 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.

The sections of the exhibition are *Origins, Circa 1964, Mecklenburg Memories, The City and Its Music, Stories, Women, Monotypes, Ballet Costumes, and Late Work*.

Highlights include *Berkeley-The City and Its People* (1973), which measures 10 x 16 feet and will be seen here for the first time outside of the Berkeley City Council chambers where it was installed in 1974; *The Block II* (1972), an unusual multipanel piece depicting the varied indoor and outdoor life of Harlem; and *Mauritius* (1969), his only known work of sculpture, which alludes to a martyred Roman soldier, an African recruited from upper Egypt. 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 in September.

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.

The Artist

Romare Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, the seat of Mecklenburg County, on September 2, 1911. About 1914, his family joined in the Great Migration north, settling in New York City, which remained Bearden's base for the rest of his life. He became 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. His many awards and honors include the National Medal of Arts he received from President Ronald Reagan in 1987, one year before he died in 1988.

Related Activities, Catalogue, and Resources

A wide range of films, brochures, concerts, lectures, tours, and family and school programs for all ages will be offered free of charge throughout the run of the exhibition. A fully illustrated exhibition catalogue and other exhibition-related books and items will be sold in the Gallery Shops and there will be special restaurant offerings, including a weekend jazz brunch. The audio tour, which will be available for rent, will feature Gallery director Powell, exhibition curator Ruth Fine, David C. Driskell, and Wynton Marsalis. A video documentary on Bearden produced by the Gallery will be shown continuously in a theater adjacent to the exhibition in a ten-minute format; a 30-minute version will also be available for viewing in the East Building auditorium and for sale in the [Gallery Shops](#).

National Gallery of Art, Press Office

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For additional information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office
National Gallery of Art
2000B South Club Drive Landover, MD 20785
phone: (202) 842-6353 email: pressinfo@nga.gov

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