



## NEWS RELEASE

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### THE FRICK PITTSBURGH PRESENTS **ROMARE BEARDEN: ARTIST AS ACTIVIST AND VISIONARY**

April 30 – September 18, 2022

PITTSBURGH, PA, April 22, 2022 – The Frick Pittsburgh is pleased to present **Romare Bearden: Artist as Activist and Visionary**, an exhibition of original artworks, limited edition prints, and archival materials through which innovative artist Romare Bearden (1911-1988) celebrated African American subjects, beginning Saturday, April 30 at The Frick Art Museum. Drawing on his own experiences, Bearden created narratives that reflect both the nostalgic rural North Carolina of his childhood and the vibrant urban life of places like Pittsburgh and Harlem. Bearden spent portions of his youth with his grandparents in Pittsburgh, and his 1984 mural **Pittsburgh Recollections**, installed at the Gateway T station, honors the city's history and its residents' work ethic. The artist's work layers themes from art history, literature, and religion with everyday rituals like family dinners to create visual stories that depict and elevate the Black experience while agitating for social change.

Manager of Exhibitions and Registrar, Melanie Groves, curator of the Frick's presentation of this exhibition, commented, "The opportunity to present **Romare Bearden: Artist as Activist and Visionary** not far from where the artist first took up drawing in his early years, and in a city that inspired and informed much of his work, is an honor for the Frick." Elizabeth Barker, Ph.D., executive director of The Frick Pittsburgh remarked, "This exhibition, in conjunction with **SLAY: Artemisia Gentileschi & Kehinde Wiley**, and Vanessa German's **Reckoning: Grief and Light**, represents a celebration of Black creative excellence not previously seen at the Frick on this scale."

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

For over 50 years, Romare Bearden depicted, defined, and celebrated the life that surrounded him. The exhibition begins by looking at Bearden's early work—editorial cartoons of the 1930s, **Soup Kitchen**, a rare surviving painting, and commercial work—examples that highlight Bearden's interest in issues of politics, race, and social justice. A major section of the exhibition, **Visualizing the African American Landscape**, emphasizes Bearden's efforts to depict a layered vision of Black America, held together by history, ritual, and a pursuit of justice. A section titled **Bearden and Women** features powerful images of women, who appear as healers, protectors, goddesses and conjurers in the world Bearden created, undoubtedly inspired by the strong influential women in his life. The last section of the exhibition, **Li'l Dan: the drummer boy, A Civil War Story**, presents original illustrations in collage and watercolor from the only children's book written and illustrated by Romare Bearden. The rediscovered story, published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers in 2003, tells the story of Li'l Dan, an enslaved drummer boy who uses his art to save a company of Union soldiers.

Unique to the Frick's presentation of the exhibition is a focus on Bearden's connection to Pittsburgh. Bearden spent a significant portion of his childhood in Pittsburgh, staying with his maternal grandparents, who operated a boarding house for migrant workers employed in the steel mills. Over dinners with tired steel workers, the artist developed an appreciation and fascination with labor, and Pittsburgh appears frequently in his work.

The exhibition includes 50 works of art and is made possible by generous loans from the Romare Bearden Foundation, the Estate of Nanette Bearden, and the DC Moore Gallery, NY. Additional works were kindly loaned by local collectors.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Romare Bearden was born to R. Howard and Bessye J. Bearden in Charlotte, North Carolina on September 2, 1911. He received his higher-level education from Lincoln University, Boston University, Columbia University, and New York University, from which he graduated in 1935. That year, he joined the Harlem Artists Guild and began contributing political cartoons to the **Baltimore Afro-American**. In 1938 he became a case worker with the NYC Department of Social Services, a job he held through the 1960s. Bearden's career as an artist was launched in 1940 with his first solo exhibition in Harlem. A solo show in Washington, D.C. followed four years later. In 1942 he entered the Army, and in 1950 he traveled to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. He married Nanette Rohan in 1954.

In 1962, Bearden, Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, and others formed the Spiral Group, a New York group dedicated to supporting emerging Black painters and artists participating in the Black freedom movement. It was with these aims, too, that Bearden, Lewis, and Ernest Crichlow would later establish the Cinque Gallery. Bearden was a founding member of the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Black Academy of Arts and Letters in 1964. He was appointed the first art director of the Harlem Cultural Council, and was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1972.

Bearden's work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and The Studio Museum in Harlem. Since 1980, numerous retrospectives of his work have been presented nationally and internationally. In 1987, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts shortly before his death in New York City in March of 1988.

## EXHIBITION ADMISSION

Admission fees to **Romare Bearden: Artist as Activist and Visionary** are \$15 for adult non-members; \$13 for seniors/students; \$8 for youth 6-16; and \$1 for those using Pennsylvania's EBT ACCESS card. Children 5 and under are admitted for free. Members of The Frick Pittsburgh receive free admission. Timed tickets are recommended, and can be reserved by visiting [TheFrickPittsburgh.org/tickets](https://TheFrickPittsburgh.org/tickets), or calling 412-371-0600. The Frick Pittsburgh is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

## EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

**Romare Bearden: Artist as Activist and Visionary** was organized by the Romare Bearden Foundation, New York, NY. Exhibition Tour Management by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA. Originally curated by Diedra Harris-Kelley, C. Daniel Dawson, and Robert G. O'Meally as **Artist as Activist**, this exhibition has been revised and updated for the present tour. The Frick's presentation of this exhibition is curated by Melanie Groves, manager of exhibitions and registrar, in cooperation with consulting curator Cecile Shellman.

Major support for the Pittsburgh presentation is provided by PNC. Please visit the [exhibition web page](#) for a complete list of the more than 50 individuals whose contributions made the exhibition possible.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Frick will offer a variety of both in-person and virtual programs related to **Romare Bearden: Artist as Activist and Visionary**, including exhibition tours, curators' talks, artmaking workshops, a free Family Fun

Day, an educator workshop, an artists' panel discussion, and an evening with guest labelists for the exhibition. Of particular note, the Frick is honored to present **An American Odyssey: Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell on Romare Bearden** in partnership with the August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC) on Tuesday, August 30, hosted by the AWAACC. Dr. Schmidt Campbell is the 10<sup>th</sup> president of Spelman College, a biographer of Bearden, and a noted museum curator and arts educator.

Further program details are available at [TheFrickPittsburgh.org](http://TheFrickPittsburgh.org).

## ABOUT THE ROMARE BEARDEN FOUNDATION

The Romare Bearden Foundation preserves and perpetuates the legacy of this influential American artist of African American heritage by supporting educational programs, special projects, exhibitions, critical scholarship and seminal publications that deepen appreciation of and access to Bearden's extraordinary art and life. In addition, the Foundation acknowledges the professional and personal encouragement Bearden generously provided other artists, as well as his broad intellectual and scholarly interests, by supporting the creative and intellectual development of up-and-coming African American artists and scholars.

## ABOUT THE FRICK PITTSBURGH

Located on the estate of 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrialist Henry Clay Frick, The Frick Pittsburgh offers authentic experiences with art, history and nature that inspire and delight. Visitors of all ages and backgrounds are warmly welcomed to explore The Frick Art Museum, offering world-class collections of European art and Chinese porcelain alongside an active schedule of temporary exhibitions; Clayton, the Frick family's French château-style mansion (remodeled by architect Frederick J. Osterling in the 1890s); the Car and Carriage Museum; and a large working greenhouse designed by architects Alden & Harlow—all nestled on six acres of beautifully landscaped lawns and gardens in Pittsburgh's East End. Amenities include an Education Center, the Frick children's playhouse (also designed by Alden & Harlow), The Café at the Frick, and the Grable Visitor Center, which houses the Frick Museum Store. Information about The Frick Pittsburgh is available online at [TheFrickPittsburgh.org](http://TheFrickPittsburgh.org).

**For additional information or images, please contact Kaitlyn Clem, Marketing and Communications Associate, at [KClem@TheFrickPittsburgh.org](mailto:KClem@TheFrickPittsburgh.org) or 412-342-4025**

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