



Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987

Mary Schmidt Campbell, Sharon F. Patton

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When the prolific African American artist Romare Bearden died in 1988 at age 76, there had not been a full retrospective of his work in seventeen years. In April 1991, however, The Studio Museum in Harlem is planning a major exhibition that will offer a survey of the entire spectrum of Bearden's paintings--from the cubist figurative pieces of the 40s, through the lyrical abstractions of the 50s and early 60s, to the brilliant later collages. After opening in Harlem, the exhibition will travel to Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.

It is especially appropriate that the retrospective is being organized by The Studio Museum. Throughout his life, Bearden loved and revered Harlem, and was closely connected with the Museum, serving on its Curatorial Council and attending many of its events and programs. Here, Bearden was able to interact with younger artists, as well as writers and musicians, and his influence is felt in much of their work (August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson*, for example, is named for one of Bearden's paintings). This catalogue--with a twenty-four page section of beautiful full-color plates--is very nearly as sumptuous a record of Bearden's life and work as the exhibition itself. The Museum's director, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, has written the Introduction, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, the foremost authority on Bearden, has written an essay, and Dr. Sharon F. Patton, the Chief Curator, has contributed an important essay focusing on the themes, styles, and iconography in Bearden's work. In addition to the color plates the text is supported throughout by seventy-eight black-and white illustrations. It also includes a biography of the artist and a selected bibliography, making it essential for scholar and museum-goer alike.

Romare Bearden: A Retrospective offers us an extraordinary opportunity to learn how a great artist developed over time. And it also allows us to see how Bearden's work, while thoroughly grounded in the values of the African American tradition, transcends cultural boundaries as it speaks powerfully as an art of its time.

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