

# Elder Gallery in Charlotte, NC, Features Works by Willie Kohler

The Elder Gallery in Charlotte, NC, will present a solo exhibit of oil paintings by Chicago artist Willie Kohler, on view from Sept. 2 through Oct. 1, 2011. A reception will be held on Sept. 2, from 6-8pm.



Work by Willie Kohler

Kohler's dramatic landscape paintings are a direct result of the artist's walking and communing with nature.

"I was immediately captured by the beauty, mystery, and obvious intellect of Willie's paintings," says gallery owner Larry Elder. "There is true artistic talent lying behind each painting that I selected for our exhibition."

Kohler was born in 1962 in Boston and has been painting since he was thirteen years old. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania, earned a Bachelor of Art De-

gree from Maryland Institute College of Art, did a Yale Norfolk Summer Residency, and obtained a Master of Fine Arts Degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Kohler's work has been enthusiastically exhibited in the United States and Europe.

"My paintings often have their genesis in a walk somewhere that resonates powerfully for me," says Kohler. "This is usually nature, but could be urban and definitely includes visits to art museums. Walking in these magical places feels like a celebration of being alive, being in a body in this marvelous world of creation."

Speaking of Kohler's paintings, Stephanie Burke of *Art Talk Chicago* says, "the composition could easily belong to any number of great painters from 40 years ago, or 100, or 400, and the fact that it was painted in 2010 does nothing to detract from its classical qualities. The paint handling is decidedly Modern, having much in common with Matisse as well as some of the more figurative works of Grace Hartigan, a second-generation abstract painter."

The artist has agreed to conduct a one-hour discussion of his work at Elder Gallery on Friday, Sept. 2, beginning at noon. The public is invited to this session as well as the reception later that same day.

On Saturday, Sept. 3 from 11am - 1pm, Elder Gallery will host a coffee with Kohler who will walk throughout the exhibition to discuss his painting style and to answer questions about his artwork.

For further information check our NC Commercial Gallery listings, call the gallery at 704/370-6337 or visit ([www.elderart.com](http://www.elderart.com)).



Work by Camille Billops

contemporaries, whose creative expression

was inspired by Bearden or whose use of collage was affected by his work.

Painters, sculptors, printmakers and mixed-media artists represented in the exhibition include Betye Saar, Camille Billops, Brett Cook, Louis Delsarte, Howardina Pindell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Kerry James Marshall, Nelson Stevens, Maya Freelon Asante, and Nigerian artist Moyo Okediji.

For further information check our NC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Center at 704/547-3700 or visit ([www.ganttcenter.org](http://www.ganttcenter.org)).

# Mint Museum Uptown in Charlotte, NC, Offers Major Retrospective of Romare Bearden

This fall, The Mint Museum presents a major retrospective of the work of Romare Bearden (1911-1988), widely regarded as one of America's most pre-eminent African American artists and foremost collagists, as well as a noted writer and musician. The exhibition *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections* surveys 50 years of the artist's work, from his early abstract paintings to the influential collages that dominated his later body of work. Opening on the centennial of Bearden's birth, the exhibition will be on view at the Mint Museum Uptown, at Levine Center for the Arts, in Charlotte, from Sept. 2 through Jan. 8, 2012. An opening reception will be held on Sept. 2, from 6-10pm.



*Folk Musicians*, 1942, Gouache with ink and graphite on brown paper, 35 1/2 x 45 1/2 inches. Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

"Romare Bearden broke new ground with his innovative collages and left a powerful legacy to generations of American artists," said Curator of Contemporary Art and exhibition curator Carla Hanzal.

"Given the long association between Bearden and the city of Charlotte, the Mint has a special interest in bringing this important career overview to the public."

*Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections* will include approximately 100 works of art drawn from The Mint Museum's extensive holdings, as well as national public and private collections. This exhibition examines how the South served as a source of inspiration throughout his career, a theme which has not been explored previously. Among the large thematic groupings will be selections from the *Prevalence of Ritual* series, which includes many works referring to Bearden's childhood home in North Carolina.

Born in Mecklenburg County, NC, Bearden lived there until the age of four. Although his family settled in New York, the artist's brief childhood in the South and return visits to Charlotte made a noteworthy impact on his art. During these visits, Bearden absorbed stories and observations about the rituals of daily Southern life - the relentless toil of crop cultivation, women tending gardens and mixing herbal remedies, fish fries and other community gatherings, and religious activities. These experiences, which stood in stark contrast to the urban rhythm of his parents' New York City household, left a lasting impression on him.

The exhibition's loosely chronological structure traces critical themes in Bearden's work such as music, religion, social change, and family, particularly informed by an African-American experience. The earliest group of works, from the 1940s, focuses on his memories of the rural South, painted in tempera on brown paper and characterized by strong colors,

flattened perspective, and stylized, highly formal compositions. Works such as *The Visitation* (1941) and *Folk Musicians* (1942) depict scenes of agrarian life yet also portray universal emotional bonds.

As Bearden developed his iconic collage technique in the mid-1960s, he made use of a wide range of art practices, both Western and non-Western. His use of collage, with its distortions, reversals, and Surrealistic blending of styles, enabled Bearden to convey the dream-like quality of memory, and was, therefore, a perfect vehicle for recording of his memories of the South.

After helping to found an artist's group in support of civil rights in 1963, Bearden's work became more overtly socially conscious. One of his most famous series, *Prevalence of Ritual*, concentrated mostly on southern African American life. Works like *Baptism* (1964) examined the changing nature of African Americans' rights. Illustrating the movement of water being poured onto the subject being baptized, Bearden conveyed the temporal flux of society during the civil rights movement. In *Carolina Reunion* (1975), the subject matter is emblematic of the longing for a better life and the comforting familiarity of home embodied in the northern migration of African Americans from the South during the early part of the 20th century.

Bearden returned to Mecklenburg County in the 1970s just as his career was beginning to gain momentum. This Southern homecoming proved bittersweet. Charlotte was undergoing urban renewal, and already traces of Bearden's past had been erased. This nostalgic experience imbued Bearden with a greater sense of urgency to both celebrate and eulogize a lost way of life, a theme that would inform his artwork for the remainder of his days.



*The Train*, 1974, Collage on paper, 15 1/4 x 19 1/2 inches. Collection of The Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina. Gift of Bank of America. 2002.68.2. Photography by David H. Ramsey, Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

During the 1970s, Bearden developed a complex iconography that spoke to these new developments. Drawn to "journeying things" - trains and birds - his inclusion of these recurring motifs implied a movement from one way of life to another. He increasingly used richer colors and more decorative patterns to mediate ideas about African American community and culture, as in *Of the Blues: Carolina Shout* (1974), *Back Porch Serenade* (1977), and *Sunset Limited* (Mecklenburg County) (1978).

A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition with contributions by Mary Lee Corlett, Jae Emerling, Glenda Gilmore, and Leslie King-Hammond. The exhibition will tour nationally

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# MESH Gallery in Morganton, NC

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has donated to such organizations as the American Red Cross, the Cancer Society, Centro Latino of Caldwell County, Latino American Women's Association and Aids Leadership Foothills Area Alliance, Inc.

For further information check our NC Commercial Gallery listings, call the gallery at 828/437-1957 or visit ([www.meshgallery.com](http://www.meshgallery.com)).

# Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture in Charlotte, NC, Presents Romare Bearden Centennial Celebration

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Romare Bearden's Mecklenburg County birth, the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture in Charlotte, NC, will present three exhibitions, opening on Sept. 2, 2011, and continuing through Jan. 22, 2012. They include: *Paper Trail: Romare Bearden Works on Paper*, *Romare Bearden: The Life*, and *Beyond Bearden: Creative Responses*.

The exhibits will offer a look at Bearden's richly textured work; a glimpse into his life and personality; and a sampling of the artistic impact he has had, and the respect and high regard he is given by artists who were his contemporaries and successors. All three will expand upon the exhibition of Bearden's collages coming to Charlotte's Mint Museum by covering different territory within Bearden's artistic output, while exploring the African American cultural elements that persisted in his collage-era work and the impact his success and creative excellence has had upon African American artists.

*Paper Trail: Romare Bearden Works on Paper* features rarely seen watercolors and prints by Bearden on loan from Charlotte-area collections. These works on paper explore several themes relative to African American cultural experiences as well as Bearden's personal experiences in North Carolina and in the Caribbean.

Often Bearden's southern roots appeared in works themed with cabins, conjure women, blues musicians, and

rural landscapes. His urban life in Harlem and Pittsburgh showed up in jazz clubs and musicians, family interiors, and street scenes reflecting community life. Eventually his visits to the Caribbean led to lush landscapes.

Though Bearden worked as a modern artist aware of the contemporary canon and its major artists and developments, much of his work was rooted in the specifics of his personal experience as an African American. This exhibition is organized to explore the complex, cultural being that Romare Bearden was.

*Romare Bearden: The Life* shows that Frank Stewart had remarkable access to the personal life of Bearden and has documented - in photographs - Bearden's associations with prominent artists and the political and cultural figures of his day. Stewart also captured moments of introspection, studio work, and Bearden's personal experiences with his wife and family. The work gives great visual insight into Bearden, the man behind the art.

The exhibition, *Beyond Bearden: Creative Responses* shows that as an artist, Bearden was able to master his craft in a singular and virtuosic fashion while - from his roots in African American life - he explored the intimate details of his culture and the grand, enduring themes and interests of the larger art world. Bearden's influence was wide and this exhibition presents artists who succeeded him, or those who were his

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