Romare Bearden
A BLACK ODYSSEY

DECEMBER 14, 2013–MARCH 9, 2014
In 1977, Romare Bearden (1911–1988), one of the most powerful and original artists of the 20th century, created a series of collages and watercolors based on Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*. Rich in symbolism and allegorical content, Bearden’s *Odyssey* series created an artistic bridge between classical mythology and African American culture. The works conveyed a sense of timelessness and universality, but their brilliance was displayed for only two months in New York before being scattered among museums and private collections.

Curated by Robert G. O’Meally, Zora Neale Hurston Professor of Comparative Literature and founder and former director of the Jazz Studies Program at Columbia University, and organized by the Smithsonian, *Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey* reunites the 1977 series but expands the scope of the original exhibition with splendid watercolors and other relevant works from the artist’s œuvre. Included is a rare grouping of mid-1940’s Bearden drawings based on Homer’s other great epic *The Iliad*.

Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, Bearden moved with his family to Harlem as a young child, part of the Great Migration of African Americans from the inhospitable South to greater opportunity in the North. Throughout his career, Bearden created images of the lives of travelers on their way to and from home, a theme no more powerfully explored than in his *Odyssey* series. Bearden had examined classical themes before, but the *Odyssey* series expanded his exploration of literary narratives and artistic genres by presenting his own personal reinterpretation of the subject.

The exhibition simultaneously expands our view of the Bearden canon and his influence as an artist, while reinforcing Homer’s continuing relevance as a poet. It also proclaims that to be black in America—and indeed to be American in our new global village—is to participate in a culture that knows no boundaries.

Thursday, December 12, 7–9 pm, Level Three

**Members’ Opening**

Carlos Museum members are invited to the member preview of *Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey* and *Southern Connections: Bearden in Atlanta*. RSVP online at carlos.emory.edu/preview or by phone 404-727-2635 by December 6. Note that your membership permits two adults to member opening events. If you would like to bring additional guests, the fee is $20 per guest. You may pay for your guests online or by phone.
Programs for Children and Families

Saturday, December 14, Noon–4 PM, Reception Hall, Level Three

**Drop-in Collage-making Activity**

In the exhibition *A Black Odyssey*, ancient Greek mythology and Bearden’s modernist sensibility unite in a colorful series of watercolors and collages that convey an epic journey of the human spirit. In this afternoon drop-in workshop, make a collage from brightly colored paper with local artist, writer, and curator Kevin Sipp. For ages 6 and up. Free with museum admission; no registration required.

Saturday, January 11, 10–11 AM, Greek Galleries, Level One

**Artful Stories**

Listen to one of Odysseus’ most exciting adventures from a new retelling of Homer’s *Odyssey* by Carnegie Medalist Gillian Cross, stunningly illustrated by Neil Packer. After hearing about Odysseus and the Cyclops Polyphemus, children will create a collage image of the hero Odysseus. For ages 3 to 5 years and accompanying adults. This program is free; however, a reservation is required by calling 404-727-0519.

Sunday, January 12 and 26, 2–4:30 PM, Tate Room, Plaza Level

**Collagraph Workshop**

African American artist Romare Bearden brought the spirit of collage-making to a printmaking technique in which cardboard, string, glue, and textured materials are attached to a surface and then printed. In this two-part workshop, artist Leslie Kneisel will teach children how to make the low-relief collage plate from which the children will print a collagraph in the second part. For ages 10 to 18 years. Fee: $12 for Carlos Museum members; $15 for non-members. Registration is required by calling 404-727-0519.

Saturday, February 8, 10–11 AM, Exhibition Galleries, Level Three

**Artful Stories**

As a child, Romare Bearden’s family left the Jim Crow South and moved North, as did so many African Americans. *My Hands Sing the Blues* tells the story of his childhood journey by train to the vibrant city of New York. As an adult artist living in New York, he made collages and paintings influenced by jazz and the blues as a way of honoring his past, African American culture, and the human odyssey. Children will see Bearden’s colorful collages and watercolors and make a collage of their own. For ages 3 to 5 years and accompanying adults. This program is free; however, a reservation is required by calling 404-727-0519.

Sunday, February 9, 2–4 PM, Tate Room, Plaza Level

**Watercolor and Collage Workshop**

Bearden’s *Odyssey* series of watercolors and collages linked classical mythology and African American culture. Local artist, writer, and curator Kevin Sipp will introduce children to the exhibition and, employing the same techniques and materials by Bearden, will teach them to paint with watercolors and then transform their painted image into a cut-paper collage. For ages 8 to 12 years. Fee: $12 for Carlos Museum members; $15 for non-members. Registration is required by calling 404-727-0519.
**Programs for K-12 Teachers**

**Evening for Educators**

K–12 teachers are invited to enjoy wine and hors d’oeuvres, tour *A Black Odyssey*, and hear an introduction to the themes of the exhibition by local artist and writer Kevin Sipp. The Bookshop will offer a 10% discount for teachers this night only. This is a free event. Reservation is required by emailing jgree09@emory.edu.

**Bearden and the Black Odyssey Workshop**

Rich in symbolism and allegorical content, Bearden’s *Odyssey* series created an artistic bridge between classical mythology and African American culture. Join Atlanta artist Kevin Sipp on a journey through the exhibition, exploring the universality of Odysseus’ search for home. While Bearden experimented with many different media and artistic styles, he may be best known for his richly textured collages. In the studio, teachers will participate in a collage workshop and learn techniques to adapt this art form to classroom learning. Fee: $7 for Carlos Museum members; $10 non-members. Registration is required by emailing jgree09@emory.edu.

**Romare Bearden and Homer’s Odyssey Workshop**

Join Jasper Gaunt, curator of Greek and Roman art, for a look at Odysseus’ journey in *A Black Odyssey* and in sculpture and Greek vase painting in the museum’s permanent collection. Fee: $7 for Carlos Museum members; $10 non-members. Registration is required by emailing jgree09@emory.edu.

**Homeschool Day at the Carlos**

Carlos Museum docents will tour homeschool families through *Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey* and the classical collection of Greek and Roman art through the lens of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Families will see images of Odysseus, the Sirens, and the Cyclops, as well as images of the gods and goddesses who play a role in the epic in Bearden’s collages and in sculpture and vases in the museum’s permanent collection. After viewing the images, families will have the opportunity to create a colorful collage using the same techniques and Color Aid paper that Bearden used. This event is free with museum admission. A reservation is required by emailing jgree09@emory.edu.

**Programs for Adults**

**Carlos Reads Book Club**

In conjunction with the exhibition, Dr. Louise Pratt, chair of the Classics Department, will lead readers through contemporary reinterpretations of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. *The Penelopiad*, by Margaret Atwood, retells the *Odyssey* from Penelope’s point of view, offering a humorous, feminine perspective and reevaluating many of Homer’s interpretations of Helen, Penelope, her maidservants, and, of course, Odysseus himself. Fee: $20 for Carlos Museum members; $25 for non-members and includes the cost of the book. Space is limited and advance registration is required by calling 404-727-6118.
Tuesday, January 14, 7:30 pm, Reception Hall, Level Three

Lecture
Dr. Robert O’Meally, Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English and Comparative Literature, founder and former director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University, and curator of A Black Odyssey gives a lecture titled Drawing Us Together: Bearden, Homer, and the Tradition of the Improviser. In this lecture, Dr. O’Meally will emphasize improvisation as a strategy both for making art and for moving through the briar-patch of our modern world. Homer was an improvising teller of very old tales. So were James Joyce, Toni Morrison, and Bearden’s buddy Ralph Ellison. The Odyssey’s hero is no less a shape-shifting improviser than Melville’s Confidence Man or Ellison’s Rinehart. Bearden, who was as strongly influenced by jazz music—by the pianist Earl Hines in particular—as by literature, revise the Dutch Masters, the Cubists, and the Harlem Renaissance painters to suit his artistic project. As a collagist, what parts and pieces did Bearden add to art history that were not there before?

Robert O’Meally’s visits to campus have been made possible by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Wednesday, January 22, 7:30 pm, Reception Hall, Level Three

Lecture
The idea of the conjurer—someone who, through a combination of spiritual interventions, psychology, and herbalism, transforms the world—was a recurring theme in the work of artist Romare Bearden (1912–1988). “A conjur woman,” wrote Bearden, “was an important figure in a number of southern Negro rural communities.” “A conjur woman,” Bearden stated, “was greatly feared, and it was believed that she could change her appearance.” One might add to Bearden’s description another, more theoretical reading: the conjurer “as a recourse, a form of power available to the powerless in mortally intolerable situations” (Brodhead 1993).

From his references to Caribbean folk types such as the “Obeah,” to his stage sets and costume designs for the unperformed Conjur: A Masked Folk Ballet (1970), Bearden was fascinated with the notion of African American folk knowledge and metaphysical dominion. These preoccupations were also shaped by Bearden’s experimentations in collage. A McLuhanesque vision of a society shaped by mass media and its profusion of signs, synapses, and summaries captivated Bearden and, marrying these interests to black vernacular culture, he created works that reflected the reality-defying ruptures, figural surprises, and improvisations of the “conjur woman.” In a lecture titled Conjuring Bearden, Richard J. Powell, John Spencer Bassett Professor of Art and Art History at Duke University, examines the artist’s visual musings on African American and Caribbean expressive mysticism, his enthrallment with a woman-engineered authority over the spiritual and, finally, his magical reinvention—via the collage and photomontage—of pictorial space and time.

Friday, January 24, 7 pm; Saturday, January 25, 7 pm; Sunday, January 26, 2 pm; Reception Hall, Level Three

Live Reading of Homer’s Odyssey
Theater Emory and the Carlos Museum present a live, three-day reading of Stanley Lombardo’s award-winning translation of Homer’s Odyssey. Dr. Lombardo will be on hand to open and close the reading. Readers include some of Atlanta’s finest actors, such as E. Roger Miller, Chris Kayser, Tiffany Mitchener, Lisa Paulsen, Tom Key, Janice Akers, and Tim McDonough; former Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin; local television and radio personalities Jovita Moore and Valerie...
Jackson; and faculty members and students from Emory’s Departments of Classics, English, Theater Studies, and the Woodruff Library.

Books 1–8 will be read Friday, beginning at 7 pm. Books 9–16 will be read Saturday, beginning at 7 pm. Books 17–24 will be read Sunday, beginning at 2 pm.

For a complete schedule of the event, including approximate times for each book and reader, visit carlos.emory.edu/HOMER.

Zoe’s Kitchen will offer Mediterranean snacks for sale during the event and Greek chicken and slaw wraps.

This program has been made possible through the generous support of media sponsor, wabe 90.1.

Monday, January 27, 7:30 PM, Board Room, Level Two

Carlos Reads Book Club

In conjunction with the exhibition A Black Odyssey, Dr. Louise Pratt, chair of the Classics Department, will lead readers though contemporary reinterpretations of Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey. Ransom, by one of Australia’s preeminent novelists, David Malouf, retells the story of Iliad 24, Priam’s ransoming of the body of Hector from the hero Achilles. It echoes familiar Homeric themes of war, fatherhood, mortality, and humanity, but with modern attention to the internal reflections of both major and minor characters, including the lowly carter who brings Priam to the camp of the Greeks. Fee: $20 for Carlos Museum members; $25 for non-members and includes the cost of the book. Space is limited and advance registration is required by calling 404-727-6118.

Sunday, February 2, 4 PM, Reception Hall, Level Three

Nix Mann Endowed Lecture

The acclaimed artist Romare Bearden, whom The New York Times calls the nation’s foremost collagist, known for his raw and vivid depictions of African American life in the rural South and the urban North, was born in 1911, in Charlotte, North Carolina, to Bessye and Howard Bearden. The family journeyed to New York during the Great Migration when their son was three years old, where their home became a gathering place for artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Isabel Wilkerson, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration, explores the Great Migration through the life of Bearden and the lives of his family and contemporaries in this year’s Nix Mann Lecture titled Romare Bearden and the Great Migration. The Warmth of Other Suns will be available for sale at the event and Wilkerson will sign copies after the talk.

In 1992, the architectural firm of Nix Mann and Associates (now Perkins and Will) generously endowed this lecture series to bring distinguished speakers to campus on an annual basis.

Thursday, February 6, 7:30 PM, Greek and Roman Galleries, Level One

Gallery Talk

Dr. Jasper Gaunt, curator of Greek and Roman art, leads visitors through the Greek and Roman galleries exploring images from Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, then though A Black Odyssey viewing Bearden’s treatment of the subject in watercolor and collage.

Monday, February 10, 7:30 PM, Board Room, Level Two

Carlos Reads Book Club

Louise Pratt of the Department of Classics continues the discussions of contemporary retellings of Homer with Big Fish. Much like the film O Brother Where Art Thou, Big Fish: A Novel of Epic Proportions by North Carolina writer Daniel Wallace offers a very modern take on The Odyssey. The wandering, storytelling, philandering father, now on his deathbed, is considered through the eyes of his less aspiring son. Like
The Penelopiad, Big Fish complicates our perspective on Odysseus with humor and imagination. Like Ransom, it examines major themes of father-son relations, mortality, the journey, and, of course, storytelling. Fee: $20 for Carlos Museum members; $25 for non-members and includes the cost of the book. Space is limited and advance registration is required by calling 404-727-6118.

*Tuesday, February 18, 7:30 PM, Reception Hall, Level Three

**Lecture**

In his watercolors and collages based on *The Odyssey*, Romare Bearden turns Homer’s epic manhood rites into a galaxy where women shine at the center. Indeed Bearden’s *Black Odyssey* sends us back to Homer, where the nearly invisible women spark almost every significant action taken. The ancient epic is by no means feminist; but it fascinated the early moderns. The modernist/postmodernist artist Bearden invites us to look again, and to reread Homer—to see women of power, ancient and contemporary: shining wife, protective goddess, brilliant intellectual, faithful servant, artist, drop-dead beauty, killer, trickster, savior. What influences shaped Bearden’s revisions of Homer? What goddesses influenced his wide-lens perspective? Dr. Robert O’Meally, Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English and Comparative Literature and founder and former director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University, and curator of *A Black Odyssey*, explores these questions in a lecture titled *Love and Gender: Homer, Bearden, and Eros*.

Tuesday, February 25, 7 PM, Reception Hall, Level Three

**Laszlo Excalibur Lecture**

British poet Alice Oswald, winner of the Warwick and Hawthornden Prizes, discusses and reads from her most recent book *Memorial: A Version of Homer’s Iliad*. Oswald strips away the narrative of *The Iliad*—the anger of Achilles, the story of Helen—in favor of attending to its atmospheres: the extended similes that bring so much of the natural order into the poem and the corresponding litany of the war-dead, most of whom are little more than names but each of whom lives and dies unforgottably and unforgotten in the copious retrospect of Homer’s glance. The resulting poem is a war memorial and a profoundly responsive work that gives new voice to Homer’s level-voiced version of the world. Through a mix of narrative and musical repetition, the sequence becomes a meditation on the loss of human life.

*The John Laszlo, MD, Excalibur Lecture was established through the generosity of Dr. Laszlo’s family and friends in honor of his retirement from the American Cancer Society.*

“A lyrical masterpiece of lamentation, a concentrated war poem of startling beauty and terrifying clarity”

—Edward Hirsch

“The most remarkable and affecting book of poetry I encountered this year”

— James Wood, *The New Yorker*

Tuesday, March 4, 7:30 pm, Reception Hall Level Three

**Curatorial Conversation**

In conjunction with the exhibition *Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey*, exhibition curator Robert O’Meally, composer and Emory Associate Professor of Music Dwight Andrews, and Emory Playwright-in-Residence Paul Carter Harrison discuss the music that influenced Bearden and his influence on musicians. After the discussion, the Vega String Quartet will premiere a new composition by Andrews, inspired by Bearden’s work and by a suite of Bearden-inspired poems by Kevin Young.
Record Your Odyssey with StoryCorps, Atlanta

In conjunction with *A Black Odyssey*, the Carlos Museum has partnered with StoryCorps to offer members of the Atlanta community a chance to record, share, and preserve personal or family stories of the Great Migration, or of migration back to cities in the New South in recent years.

To make an appointment to record your story, visit carlos.emory.edu/StoryCorps. Appointments may also be made by telephone at 404-814-4188. StoryCorps, Atlanta is located in the Atlanta History Center, 130 West Paces Ferry Road NW, Atlanta, GA 30305.

Since 2003, StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 50,000 interviews with nearly 100,000 participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, and millions listen to its weekly broadcasts on NPR’s *Morning Edition*.

**Museum Holiday Closures**

The museum will be closed Tuesday, December 24, and Wednesday, December 25, for Emory University holidays and will reopen Thursday, December 26. The museum will be closed on Tuesday, December 31, and Wednesday, January 1, for university holidays and will reopen Thursday, January 2.

*Free admission and extended hours*

On January 14, February 22, and March 4, the Carlos Museum will offer extended hours. The galleries will be open until 7:30 pm and admission is free beginning at 1 pm.

**Southern Connections: Bearden in Atlanta**

Accompanying *A Black Odyssey*, this exhibition showcases Bearden’s significant ties to Atlanta, drawing upon many resources including the rich holdings in Emory’s Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL) and loans from Hammonds House Museum and Clark Atlanta University.
The Michael C. Carlos Museum is situated on the historic quadrangle of the Emory University campus.

**Join Us** Call 404-727-2623; email carlosmembership@emory.edu; visit carlos.emory.edu/join

**Hours** Tuesday through Friday: 10 AM–4 PM; Saturday: 10 AM–5 PM; Sunday: NOON–5 PM; Closed Mondays and University holidays.


**Public Transportation** MARTA bus line 6 Emory from Inman Park/Reynoldstown and Lindbergh stations or 36 North Decatur from Avondale and Arts Center stations.

**Parking** Paid visitor parking in the visitor sections of the Fishburne and Peavine Parking Decks and in the new Oxford Road Parking Deck, located behind the new Barnes and Noble @ Emory, 1390 Oxford Road.

**Handicapped Parking** Drop off for handicapped visitors at Plaza Level entrance on South Kilgo Circle. Handicapped-accessible parking spaces are available behind the museum after 4 pm on weekdays and on weekends. Handicapped parking spaces are also available in the Oxford Road and Peavine Parking Decks. A handicapped accessible shuttle runs from the Peavine Deck, weekdays every ten minutes.

**Tours** Advanced booking required for weekday or weekend groups of 10 or more. For reservations, please call 404-727-0519 at least two weeks before your group would like to visit.

**Public Tours** Depart from the rotunda on Sundays at 2 PM.

**Audio Tour of Permanent Collection** $2. Free for Museum members.

**Museum Information** 404-727-4282

**World Wide Web Access** carlos.emory.edu

**Stay Connected**

The Carlos Museum is located just minutes from Buckhead, Midtown, and Downtown hotels.

**Cover Detail**


Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey is organized by the Smithsonian, the Romare Bearden Foundation and Estate and DC Moore Gallery, and supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York.

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