Audio Guide Transcript

Romare Bearden: Resonances

May 3–September 15, 2024
Roxanne H. Frank Gallery 257

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM
I am Renée Brummell Franklin, chief diversity officer and manager of the Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellowship.

*Romare Bearden: Resonances* is an exhibition celebrating Romare Bearden and his relationship with artists who are part of the Museum’s permanent collection. His resonating influence was felt not only by contemporaries in New York where he lived, but by artists as far away as the Netherlands. This exhibition highlights the way Romare Bearden’s legacy exists outside a singular time and place.

The Romare Bearden Museum Graduate Museum Fellowship, named in honor of renowned artist Romare Bearden, is one of the oldest fellowships in the nation to give early career professionals hands-on experience in museums. Fellows work with various departments within the museum to build their skills and explore their professional interests. In curating this exhibition, Charlie Farrell, the 2022-2024 Romare Bearden fellow collaborated with her colleagues throughout the Museum. What a perfect opportunity for Charlie to develop this exhibition and for you to engage with Romare Bearden and his contemporaries.

The fellowship recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. 25 of the 31 fellows returned to the Museum. This reunion of talent clearly showcase how impactful the fellowship is for so many.

In the way that artist, Romare Bearden was supporting his contemporaries, the fellowship provides its fellows opportunities to not only learn from colleagues, but also to contribute to the discourse of cultural and academic institutions across our country and indeed the world.
Whether you are listening from home or in the gallery, I hope you enjoy this audio guide to *Romare Bearden: Resonances*. 
Hello, my name is Diedra Harris-Kelley, one of the co-directors of the Romare Bearden Foundation.

*Untitled (Portrait of Romare Bearden)* seems to capture a side of the artist not many viewers think of when they look at his pictures—Bearden as educator, or spokesperson, and activist. Though there’s a formal look to it, with Bearden centered and facing the camera, photographer Leroy Henderson says it was a candid shot taken at a convening of artists sometime in the early 1970s.

The black and white photo is tightly cropped framing Bearden seated, alone in the center. In the contrast of the picture his dark clothing disappears into the background, highlighting the light skin of his face and hands in motion. The photographer seemed to turn the camera to Bearden just as he began to speak and captures a gesture— one hand rests flat on his chest, the other comes forward, palm out as if offering something from his heart. Bearden’s round face is mature, and serious, but warm like a revered leader.

Known for a keen sense of memory and observation that he was able to translate into unique expressions, Bearden would often hold court telling stories and offering sage advice like a philosopher.

He involved himself with many of the movements of his day, particularly the struggles of African American artists for representation in museums and galleries. According to Henderson, when he took this, they were at a meeting of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (known as the BECC), an organization that first came together to protest the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exclusion of Black artists in their *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition of 1969.

Jacob Lawrence, in speaking about Bearden's attendance at the meetings of an earlier artist collective, the 306 Group, he said that Bearden was “an intellectually curious
person in regard to his paintings. He was experimental and scholarly. Very much involved and curious, and studied the old masters and moderns. He attended exhibitions outside of the Harlem community and he would come back and talk about these things, as everyone did about their own experiences.” Henderson’s portrait captures Bearden, in one such gesture, of generous offer.
STOP 3
Roxanne H. Frank Gallery 257
Togetherness

Speaker

Charlie Farrell
2022-2024 Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellow
Saint Louis Art Museum

I’m Charlie Farrell, the 2022-2024 Romare Bearden Graduate Museum Fellow and curator of Romare Bearden: Resonances.

Norman Lewis was born in 1909 in New York City. His early work leaned heavily into social realist themes. Social realism is an art movement was popular during the first half of the 20th century and focused on depicting the realities of the working class. Though Lewis moved away from figurative work into abstraction around the 1940’s he remained deeply invested in social change and activism.

He and Bearden were active members of the 306 Group, named after the space on 306 West 14th street. The group’s focus was on “reflect[ing] and represent[ing] the African American community’s standards for Black American art.” This group was active in the 1930s and 1940s. Lewis and Bearden went on to then found their own artist group, Spiral in 1963. Spiral’s membership included Emma Amos, Charles Alston, and Ernest Crinchlow, among others. The group’s objective was to interrogate the artist’s place within the civil rights movement. There was no pressure to create work through a single visual language. They had one exhibition titled First Group Showing: Works in Black and White before disbanding in 1965. Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Ernest Crinchlow then founded Cinque Gallery in 1969. This space provided an opportunity for African American artists to exhibit works. Cinque Gallery closed its doors in 2004, well past the founders’ deaths. Its robust programming and exhibition schedule highlights Bearden’s interest in supporting artists. I’m sure the artists who came through those doors can speak to the impact he and his colleagues had.