

ANDRE THIBAUT ORAL HISTORY

Interviewer: Camara Holloway	Interviewee: Andre Thibault	Date of interview: November 5, 2021
Location: Remote (NY, NY)	Transcribed by: Josie Naron	Interview length: 01:31:46

CAMARA HOLLOWAY: My name is Camara Holloway and I'm the project manager for the Romare Bearden Catalogue Raisonné. As a part of the Wildenstein Plattner Institute's Oral History Project, we're here today to speak with Andre Thibault, Bearden's studio assistant from 1980 to 1988. It's November 5th, 2021, and we're also joined by Josie Naron, who is the WPI's oral historian. So, thank you, Andre, for joining us. We really appreciate you taking the time. And to start off with, I'd like to get a little bit of background information from you. So, could you tell us when and where you were born?

ANDRE THIBAUT: [sighs] 1948, and I was born in a town called Rivière-du-Loup, "river of the wolf," in Quebec, north of Quebec City.

CH: Oh great, wonderful. So, you're Canadian. So, are your parents also Canadian?

AT: Yes.

CH: Can you tell us where they were from -- so they were from Canada as well.

AT: It's the same city I just mentioned -- or town.

CH: Okay. And what were their names?

AT: Leopold, and my mother, Lorraine. Lorraine Camila Thibault.

CH: Okay, that's pretty. And what did they do for work?

AT: Um, my mother chased me around a lot, and my father was a carpenter.

CH: Oh, that's exciting. So, what was it like growing up there, where you were?

AT: I was there [sighs] for about four years. And at that point, we moved to North Montreal. My memories of it was -- long cold winters, the cherry jam that my grandmother made in her backyard. I still remember that. About five years ago, my wife and I took a trip to that region of Quebec and I showed her the house that my father had built that I was born in. And we stayed on the St. Lawrence Seaway, and I remember we -- we had bought some items for lunch, and while we were on the balcony of our hotel room that we were in, there were beluga whales going up and down the river. It was an unusual sight. White whales. And when we saw them popping out of the water, it was the first time I'd ever seen that. I never saw that as a child, but --

CH: You never saw it as a child.

AT: No.

CH: So, what did you have -- besides your grandmother's jam, what else did you remember? Do you have any memories of art, besides your father's work?

AT: No, nope. I, uh -- even when we moved to outside of Montreal, it -- my father was always busy working. So, I just spent a lot of time mostly by myself. Entertaining myself. [laughs] And then, at the --

CH: And what did you do to entertain yourself?

AT: Uh, went out in the woods around the neighborhood and just chased animals, squirrels, you name it. I kept busy. I was outdoors quite a bit. And then, at the age of nine, my father and my brother and mother moved to Manchester, New Hampshire.

CH: Okay.

AT: And the reason was that he had more work there. And that's how my existence in the United States started. I didn't speak a word of English. And I remember they put us in a parochial school, where I had to skip a grade just to make up for the English I didn't know. And fortunately, the school -- the morning sessions were in French, the afternoon sessions were in English. And that's how I became acquainted with the language.

CH: And is that where you learned about art?

AT: No. If you really want to know what -- where and what I learned about art, that was at Boston University. I had a bachelor of science degree in communications. And during those courses, I had to do courses on visual communications. And I didn't realize that I had the ability to do it so easily, where it was probably one of the most difficult courses at BU. A lot of students failed it. And our presentation of our visual thought would be to an auditorium. So there were about 80, 90 students in this auditorium, and I always made something with a bit of humor attached to it. *Stolen Kisses*, I remember that particular work I made. And my professor, dean -- she eventually became the dean of the school of communications of BU -- Donis Dondis, what a name. And she was tough. She would, you know, if

any student went in there thinking, Oh, visual communication, how easy can that be? It wasn't easy. But, I always made -- the auditorium, they laughed. They enjoyed my stuff. And the professor started realizing that when I would go there, they were saying, you know, Andre, we want to see what you have. What do you have? And uh, eventually that professor, Dondis, said, "Wherever you want to go in the country," she says, "I'll get you the job that you want." In art director for advertising communications. And I just was not interested at the time. I wanted to work in the tennis industry. A friend of mine, David Garvey, worked in the tennis industry, traveled all over the world, and I was just fascinated by his lifestyle. And that's where I wanted to go.

CH: Okay.

AT: But I knew I had an ability to put visual thoughts together quite easily and quite clearly.

CH: Okay. So, did you have any other artistic training besides that course?

AT: No.

CH: No. So, you're --

AT: Romare realized it. He realized it from day one. That it wasn't --

CH: Just that you had this natural aptitude.

AT: Right, right. And as I stated earlier, out of all the artworks that I made, I sold everything I've made, basically. Other than maybe 20 pieces which I have around the house. And it supported me from 1980 to now. Can't complain about that, I mean, when I see -- when I was in New York City, going back and forth to Romare's studio, I'd see a lot of young people with portfolios in their hand going here, there, different galleries. Felt sorry for them. It's -- it was not -- it's not easy.

CH: Yeah.

AT: I just --

CH: So, how did you end up coming to New York and deciding to pursue art?

AT: [sighs] I had worked in Europe. I worked in Paris for Yves Saint Laurent, men's suits. I was their quality control director in three different locations: Anine, Poid Du Nord, and Valencie. I lived in Valencie. Wasn't enthralled by it all. I mean, I didn't spend all that much time there. And when I came back to the United States, a man in northern Maine had a grocery wholesale business. And I remember when I was in college, my last year, I interviewed with him. He came to business college at BU and he was looking for a manager. And during that interview, he realized that in northern Maine, it's close to Quebec, so there are a lot of French-speaking business people. So, I had that advantage. And I ended up becoming his general manager. Again, northern Maine is -- it's not an easy place to take year-round. I mean, the winters start in September and they end in April. And then, you have a month and a half of summer conditions.

So, when I left there, I went back to northern New Jersey to a town called Palisades Park. And there was a man there who wanted me to manage his discotheque. And this was in '78, '79 -- which I did. And during that time I -- spent a lot of hours in that place. God, I'd get there at 10 in the morning and I wouldn't leave until maybe 2:30, 3 the next morning. So, it was -- it was something I really wasn't pleased with. In the meantime, I went to -- I was living with a lady that assisted me in managing this nightclub. The Giraffe Club and Restaurant, that's what it was called.

CH: And this was in New Jersey?

AT: Right.

CH: Okay.

AT: One day, she said to me, she goes, "You know, there's an art show coming up. Van Saun Park in Bergen County." Big, beautiful park. She says, "They're having an art fair." And she looked at the pieces I had made at Boston University, which I had kept in a folder. All of these visual communication things. And she said, "You know, you could do well there. Enter three, four, five pieces." And I wasn't too keen on it, but we did. I entered five pieces that day at this particular art fair, and it was Fair Lawn University, different colleges in the area that juried this particular show. I got third place, sold three pieces, I think for fifty dollars apiece. And I thought, Wow, that was easy. People just want to buy this. So, that's what triggered something in my mind. I said, Well, maybe I should consider making an occupation out of this. And what I did is I

rented a studio down the road from where we were living and just started making artwork. And I didn't know really what I was doing. But what happened when I was there, I received -- I don't know if you remember or are aware of Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York City --

CH: Yes.

AT: Mr. Ekstrom, Arne Ekstrom. Okay. [clears throat] From his -- I had gone there one time for a show, just to look at it, and I had left my name, address, and everything for mailings. And I received an invite for a Romare Bearden show. To his gallery. That particular month, Romare ended up on a cover of *Art/News* magazine. This was 1980; I don't know if you saw that publication, or -- I had it, but the Smithsonian grabbed it from me. They -- Romare autographed it for me, and on the back, he put his phone number. And I'll mention how that happened.

So, I'm looking in this magazine and I see Romare's work, and I was -- [exhales] I was amazed. I mean, he was doing what I would have loved to have made, to do, in collage -- and that's all I worked in, was collage. And I remember going to the show, I brought the catalog with me when I went in and I just stuffed it down my pants. So, as I'm in the gallery -- the place was very crowded. To the far corner, I see Romare's head, his profile, and I said, "Oh, that's the guy on the cover of this catalog." And I'm walking up to where he was and he's talking to people. There are a lot of very well-dressed people, furs, jewelry. All the baubles were out that day.

As I'm walking towards him, I'm pulling my catalog out, and he turned around and he looked at me in my direction. And at first,

he wasn't sure what this crazy person was doing coming towards him pulling this catalog out. And as I get closer, I put it in front of him like this and I said, "Guess what?" And he smiles, he starts looking, he goes, "That's me!" I says, "I know!" And you could hear the people around him saying -- one woman said, and I heard this, to her husband, "I told you, George, we should have brought ours." Because they were afraid to, I guess, so they didn't. And I said, "Mr. Bearden," I said, "I would really enjoy an autograph from you on the cover of this." And as he's signing it, I said, "By the way," I said, "like you, I make collages." And he said, Oh!" He goes, "What kind of collages?" I said, "Well, I don't know much of what I'm doing. I'd, you know, I'd love to learn more." And he said, "How serious are you?" I said, "It's all I do. I quit everything else. That's all I'm making, is collages." He flips the catalog page over, and on the back, I see -- he pulls a pen out of his pocket and he inscribes his phone number on Canal Street where he was living. And he said, "Give me a call. Maybe we can arrange something for you to come by my studio, and I'd like to see what it is that you do." He said, "I don't want you coming there thinking that you're going see what I'm doing, because you're not." He said, "I want you to bring a work, a completed work. Maybe two, if you can."

Which I did. And I remember calling him at home. Nanette answers the phone, and she goes, "Romare, [unclear]," she goes, "there's a young man on the phone. His name is Andre Thibault, and he said that you mentioned to him that he can come by your studio." And he said, "Oh, I remember." Like that. Then he gets on the phone and he said, "I'm going to give you directions to my studio, and we can make it this coming Wednesday." Remember, I called him on a Monday. And he gives me directions -- take the 7 train. He said, "The minute you get out of the tunnel," he goes,

"first exit out of the tunnel is where you get off." And then, he said, "Come into the building." Gave me directions to the building where he was in. He said, "I'll be on the third floor." I remember getting there. I get on this elevator. Slowest elevator I've ever taken in my life, I mean, this -- oh god, I didn't think I'd make it to the third floor. But finally do, and I walked out of the elevator. I walked to the hallway. And there was a door with a little plastic plate with his name on it. Just said Romare Bearden. And I knocked on the door, and the door slowly opened, but the man on the other side was not Romare. It was Barrie Stavis, which I --

CH: Okay.

AT: -- later met. I have a lot of correspondence from Barrie in regards to the experiences he had. And Barrie says to me, and he goes, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Well, you can't really do much other than let me in, 'because I'm here to see Mr. Bearden." And he shows me in. Romare is sitting down at the round table that eventually we all sat at. That's where we held lunch, conferences, everything. He said, "Place your pieces up along that board over here," and he said, "I'll be with you in about ten minutes."

So, he completes his business with Barrie. And then, I was up against the wall not saying anything. I was very nervous. I'm thinking, Oh my god, what's the worst that can happen here? He'll look at the pieces and then he'll say nice work, talk to you later. I had all these thoughts flowing in the back of my mind that things might not go as well as I expected. He spent 15 minutes, 20 minutes going from one piece to the other. And he's going back and forth. And then, he turns around and he looks at

me, and he goes, "Have a seat." So, I sit down, and he said, "Nice." He goes, "I like what I'm looking at." He goes, "How many of these do you make a month?" And I'm not sure, I said, "Sometimes I don't have any ideas, you know, just go blank." He said, "Next time you come here, I want you to bring at least four brand new pieces that you made." And he goes, "What I can do is I can make you a far better artist than what you currently are." And he said, "When you come here. I just want to see what it is that you do." So, from 1980 to 1984, that's mostly what I did, is bring in completed works. It was one day a week, then it became two days a week.

And he was fascinated by the boards that I made these collages on. There's a man by the name of Hans -- Bavarian, he's from Bavaria. He was a master cabinet-builder in northern Jersey, not far from where my studio was. And as a matter of fact, when the Pope came to the Meadow grounds [Meadow Lands] in New Jersey, Hans was the one that designed all of the seats, the furniture, the whole staging for -- this Pope's visit. And I remember going to Hans, telling him what I did and asking if he could make me some boards that I can make these works on. The boards were 18 by 24 inches, 11 by 14, 30 by 40, 40 by 60 inches. But they were made so well. And it was marine plyscore that he used. Now, marine plyscore does not warp, or it won't. Because they use it on boats. And he would back those with poplar, the poplar tree, that kind of wood. And the reason why -- poplar is one of the strongest materials you can use that will not warp on you, the boards. And Hans mentioned to me, he said, "You know, you should glue some papers on the back of these, all of them." He said, "That'll strengthen the front." He goes, "So when you make a work, it'll be perfectly laid flat."

At that point, I realized -- Romare was having problems with what he was working on. He was using masonite. Masonite's a heavy product, and it's difficult to -- to back. But every time I would bring a piece to his studio, he was examining the whole thing. The back, the board. He said, "Where do you get these?" You know, he was fascinated. In 1984, my relationship with Romare changed dramatically. I brought a collage that I had to borrow a car, a roof rack. This was a 40 by 60 inch collage which I still have in storage. And I remember when I brought it to his studio and I put it up against his work stand, and he was sitting at the table. And I had it covered with a sheet, and I said, "Are you ready for this?" He said, "Hit it." And I uncovered the piece and I watched him. He just stood there, looking at that completed work and [sniffles] --

CH: Do you remember the subject matter of the work?

AT: Oh, it reminded him a lot of Fernand Léger, that artist, Fernand Léger.

CH: Yes.

AT: And he just -- all of a sudden, took me -- he clapped his hands really loud, [claps]. And went -- he said, "That's it, Teabs." He said, "We're done." And I'm looking and I'm thinking, What do you mean, done? He said, "I've taught you everything I possibly can." [cries] "This is it." He goes, "You've done it." I'll get over it. [blows nose]

CH: Well, that sounds like a very special moment, that you feel that you were --

AT: Oh, it was. It was. It was. I was so elated, I floated all the way home, I just floated. You know, I kept thinking, Wow. He finally totally approves of what I'm doing. And that changed me dramatically. I started putting out stuff that just dazzled him. He just gushed at every one I brought. You know, he said, "Oh, wow, this is unbelievable." But I still have that piece that I brought to him. *Tollgate to Passion* was the title of it, made in 1984. And the subject matter is it -- it looks like steel tubes coming down, but they meet in the middle, and it's open slightly. And then, the background of that are reds and different colors that really pop out in the middle of that large piece. And there's a -- just a set of lips, women's lips, and eyes. And that's it. That's the *Tollgate to Passion*. So, if you get past that, you're in a world of passion. [laughter] He really -- I know that that just struck him.

And then, I started making three-dimensional collages. What -- how that occurred was in Nyack, New York, where I would ride my bicycle to, was a place called "Sew what's new." And it was a fabric store that this woman ran. S-E-W what's new. And in her window was a wooden mannequin, which was a -- I asked the lady what it was, and she goes, "Well, they used that in the early 1900s for wedding gown forms." But it was the shape of a woman. Without a head, no arms, just that shape on a pedestal. And when I looked at that, I kept thinking, Wow, if I had something like that, I could really make a wonderful piece of artwork. It would be striking.

So what I did is I -- after three trips to her store, I finally convinced her to sell me the work, that piece. And she did. Brought it home in my studio and realized that -- eh, it's gonna be difficult to work on, because the slats of wood were starting

to peel a little bit, and I didn't think I could really adhere something to that. What was amazing -- underneath was a label, and the label was in -- not far from Romare's studio in Long Island City was where this was made. I called that number that they had. A man picks up the phone. I said, "I have a wedding gown form that you made, blah blah blah." He says, "Yeah, now --" he said, "we make those out of fiberglass." I'm thinking, Oh that's great. Fiberglass, what an easy surface. Went to his place and there, around the shop that he had -- which was a rather sizable studio -- were three, five different forms in fiberglass, which all of them I could use. Some were heads that were about 20 inches in height, then the form that I really liked was right about up to here, to me. That's how tall they were. So, I bought, oh god, a half a dozen pieces. And they weren't cheap. Brought them to my studio and finally collaged one.

And then, when Romare saw what I was doing, I brought him some photos, he goes, "This is what Nanette's been looking for. He says, "She's gotta see this. And I remember, he wanted me to take one of the pieces to his home on Canal Street, which I did. And carrying that thing up his stairs to go to his second-level studio apartment that they had, [pauses] it was daunting. But he just couldn't believe that someone could make a three-dimensional collage like that, and Nanette was just amazed at it. He was talking about trading. He said, "I'll give you one of mine, you give me one of yours." And I think, That's fair. You know, that's basically what happened.

CH: So, how did you go from showing him examples of your work to working with him on his pieces?

AT: I remember the first work that he and I worked on, *Storyville Mirror* is the name of it. I'll give you a lot of titles of the pieces that we worked on, but *Storyville Mirror* was of the New Orleans red light district, *Storyville* pieces that he made of the prostitutes in the area, et cetera. Well, this was a 30 by 40 collage. And, you know, *Bostonia Magazine* has that in photo.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

AT: And it's the one that they did for this story, this was after he had passed away --

CH: Okay.

AT: -- talks about my experiences with the FBI. I don't know if you realize that the FBI came to my studio. And the reason why -- the reason why, a lot of forgeries came up in the mid-'90s from ACA Gallery to a lot of small galleries around Manhattan. And they were all forgeries, which I saw. I went to see. I was invited to come and take a look. And the FBI asked me to come to their headquarters in Queens, New York, which I did. There in a room they had approximately [sighs] 15 works that they wanted me to look at, which were supposedly all Bearden's, but they weren't. Immediately, when I looked at 'em, I mean -- I know I wouldn't make something like that and Romare wouldn't make something like that. The boards were not right, just wrong.

They found who was doing this. Now, the agent, Kathy Begley, was the woman who came to my home to pick me up in northern New Jersey, drive me to Queens, drove me back. Did not arrest these people. I was surprised, that shocked me. Why? The man was too

old, she said. He was too old and frail, he won't make it in jail. But they were a Spanish couple, from Spain. And I remember her earlier than that calling me at my home, and I was wondering how she got my number. Had an accent, strong Spanish accent, and wanted to know if they could come to my studio in Englewood, New Jersey, where it was located at the time, and I said, "No, I really don't have time for that." They wanted to come to see how the work was being made, what they could do to improve the lousy product that they had. And I remember that phone call; I told the FBI about that. And these -- I'm pretty sure they traced it, [laughter] because every time I'd pick up my phone, I would hear funny clicks. Yeah, so they were investigating everything. They checked out my bank accounts. You name it, they were there.

CH: So, in your opinion, what was the distinguishing characteristic of a Bearden piece that could tell people that it was the real thing?

AT: [exhales] I remember Romare telling me one time -- he goes, shaking me in the studio, he goes, "Teabo, don't be afraid of color." He wanted me to use more color. "Don't be afraid to use color and incorporate it more." I was using a lot of grays and blacks and things like that in some of the works. You look at a Bearden, even the cover of this, [gestures to catalog] and what stands out more clearly than any other collages is the color. He makes a piece that pops. It's just so different. This Spanish man that was trying to fake Beardens -- he was copying what Romare had made. But the cuttings, the way he cut it, the way he put it together, was not the way Romare would want it.

Why Romare liked to see my work -- I did completely different than what he did. I had the -- there's a piece that -- Myron,

it's in Myron Schwartzman's book, *The Life of Romare Bearden & His Art*.¹ It's in his book, and I'm standing. There's a big 40 by 60 inch piece. It's a jazz piece, large piece, and on that board, when he took that photo, you're gonna see a little blue -- what I call a scraper, about this big, and it's right there on the board. Romare had no clue what that was when I first brought it to his studio. But what it does, it takes the air out. If you put glue on the back of a piece of paper and you lay it down, you're gonna get bubbles. What this would do is take the bubbles out.

Now, Romare had problems with a lot of his works early on. Even Mr. Ekstrom had shown me some works asking me if I could fix 'em, because the bubbles would come out and that section of paper would sometimes dry out, so it wouldn't lay flat. All of my works were dead flat. You could look at it from the edge to side, no bubbles. What that little blue scraper did was take the bubbles out and I would use an Xacto knife, number 11 Xacto knife with a point, and I'd prick a hole in that bubble, and just ease out the air. So, the collage was dead flat. The faker in Spain didn't know that. His pieces, [laughs] you'd look at it and you'd say, "What? There's a bump here. There's a lump here. There's something wrong."

Romare, eventually, when I started making that piece, *Storyville Mirror*, he was amazed at how perfectly flat it was. And how that was made was using a Sears and Roebuck catalog, a 1932 Sears and Roebuck catalog. You'd open this catalog and they had all the things that Sears and Roebuck sold: dressers, beds, lamps. All the material that Sears and Roebuck would handle. And he would say to me, he goes, "Teabo," he says, "take the catalog. Find me

¹ *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art* (Myron Schwartzman, 1990).

a mirror." Now, *Storyville Mirror* took me half a day to find a perfect mirror to put in the center of that piece, from that Sears catalog. So, what I would use is tracing paper. I would take the tracing paper and trace it up there, and then Romare had a bin in the corner of the studio with discarded prints. Robert Blackburn, do you know who I'm talking about?

CH: Yes, sir.

AT: Okay. Robert would come to the studio bringing big, beautiful papers that he would run inks through prints, do the rainbowing effect where you don't have a strong edge, but what you have is a melding of colors together. And I would find the right source of paper that Robert Blackburn would bring, and I traced out this frame for that mirror. You'll see it if you see the piece, you'll see how distinctive that is. And that's how we started working. So, he would just say to me, "I need a chair." There's a piece called *Autumn* and there's this woman, she's a voodoo queen, and she's sitting in a chair. Well, the chair was from the Sears and Roebuck catalog, which I cut out with a lot of Robert Blackburn's material. It just was so different than anyone else, anything. And when he would say to me, he goes, "Teabo," he goes, "lay this down." And what he meant by that is, no bubbles. No air. He liked that. He was fascinated by that. He'd say, "Lay this down; I need a chair. I need a ribbon for the lady's hair." That's how we worked. You know, he died of bone cancer, and there were days in the studio that really weren't very pretty. You know, the painkillers he was using disabled him in so many ways, and I'd have to watch him. Russell would bring him in the morning. He'd say, "Teabo, today, keep an eye on him." You know, he's --

CH: Who was Russell? Excuse me? Who was Russell?

AT: Russell Goings?

CH: Russell Goings, okay.

AT: Yeah, well there's a man -- he's an enigma, to say the least.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: Okay, so tell me how you took on the name Teabo.

AT: Yeah, [sighs] that's a crazy story. Early on in my career, I entered a lot of national art shows. Won most of them. Um, but every time I was asked to come to the podium, they would say, "Andre -- THIGH, THEE, THI-BOLT?" They couldn't pronounce my name, and it really frustrated the hell out of me. I'd say, "It's Thibault!" I get up on the podium and I'd go, "Look, it's Thibault." And someone said, "Well, change the spelling." And I thought, well, what's the closest thing? Coffee, tea? T-E-A? Bo Derek, B-O? That's it. TEA-BO.

CH: Oh, alright.

AT: But Mr. Ekstrom, Arne Ekstrom, he called me on occasions to come by and visit with him, which I did. And one day, he said to me, he goes, "What's Teabo?" He says, "Are you Spanish, are you --" I said, "No," I said, "my real name is --" and I spelled it out for him. And he goes, "Why don't you use that?" He said, "Makes more sense to me than just TEA-BO." I thought it was gonna simplify things, so I went back to as it -- and in Myron's

book right here, if you see my name, it's spelled T-H-I-B-A-U-L-T, which is the correct spelling. I'm looking for that piece I was talking to you about.

CH: With *Storyville Mirror*?

AT: No, the large collage Romare had made that Myron had taken a photo of about ten years -- oh, page 300. [points to page]

CH: Okay. Yeah, that is quite big. Yes.

AT: See that piece that Romare's -- yeah, when Myron came in the studio to interview Romare, he looked at that piece and said, "Holy --" couldn't believe that we were creating such a large work. Romare couldn't do that by himself. I mean, they -- we propped him up just so he could take that photo with him there. But I can see that little blue piece I was mentioning to you, the scraper. It's almost at the edge of that -- you see a little blue thing there. That was the scraper.

CH: Okay, yeah, I think I see it.

AT: Okay, and then on page 302, there's that photo of Romare and I together behind *Storyville Mirror*, and see the frame? I wish you could see the full color piece of that. But I had to make -- get those chairs that are in that piece and the lamp that's in there, came from the Sears Roebuck catalog.

CH: Were there other magazines or catalogs that you remember using?

AT: Um, no, the Sears really -- god, I made full use of that. I -- because it stayed with the timing of the works. *Storyville* was in the late 1800s, and the catalog displayed furniture, lamps and things of that era. So, mostly it was that catalog that saved our butt on millions of occasions. Some of the other pieces that we made; I had slides of what we had, but I don't know if it's at the Smithsonian, I can't find them. I can't find them. But what I have -- these pieces of scrap paper that when I would finish, I'd write the title down. *Eden Noon*, it's a 30 by 40 inch collage. Have you -- do you remember seeing that?

CH: I've heard of it, yes.

AT: Yeah, there's *Eden Midnight* and *Eden Noon*. There was *Autumn*.

CH: How did you come up with the titles?

AT: Ah, we just looked at the piece, saw what was in it. *Eden Midnight*, there was a star that was incorporated in that piece. That was the last piece to go on that work and Romare says, "We need something to distinguish the night." And he cut out a star, and he said, "Here, Teabo, lay this down." And that's when we came up with that title. *Fancy sticks*, collage on board. That's a 24 by 36 inch collage; something he could not make of that size. Yeah, and especially the one I showed you on page 300 where he's leaning on that. I have to get to the center of that piece, I have to get to all of the edges. It wasn't easy. It took us a while. *Opening at the Savoy; Blues singer from the Delta* -- another 30 by 40 inch piece. *Opening at the Savoy* is a 40 by 60 inch piece. *Blue morning rain*, one of my favorites. That's a 30 by 40 inch piece. I'll show you something that is

made from all the material that went into *Blue morning rain*. I love that piece so much that I thought, I have to make one of my own. You know, it's just something -- I remember when the FBI came to my studio and they saw this. My signature is clearly on the front of it. That's made from the same materials that were done on the original, the large piece, the 30 by 40. But I love this work. I make -- I don't sell these.

CH: So, when you were working on a collage, how did you know that the collage was finished?

AT: Um, we had some debates about that. There's one piece that has -- shows a train trestle and a train going on this trestle, and there's a guitar player down below playing guitar, laying on the bank. That flew out of Romare's window in Long Island City about half a dozen times. It was so frustrating; just couldn't get it. And finally, when I said, "Let's just put a guitar player down in the field. And that'll be the whole gist of the piece." And it worked; it worked out perfectly. You just know. You just say, What else can we do here? And yeah, we just instinctively knew that that was it. *Deep River Quartet*, the 24 by 36 inch collage of the jazz pieces. *Eden Guitar; Gospel Morning*.

CH: We recently saw *Gospel Morning*. Can you tell us a little bit more about that one?

AT: Well, what I remember -- when you asked the question, when do we know that the piece is finished. We tried to jam quite a bit into that. But I just don't really remember how it started. Why, you know, it came to be. But we did that for the Segal Gallery in Boston, that solo show. *At Low Tide*. There's another

piece that we had made. Together, Romare and I created 24 large-scale collages. That's what he wanted to do. And evening -- let me see, oh, *Eden Noon* and *Eden Midnight*, we would -- those pieces were being completed for a show that we were gonna do in Berlin, Germany. There was a couple that came to my studio; I wish I could find their business card, but I think the Smithsonian grabbed that in my box. And they wanted Romare to have a show in Berlin, his first European show, that just never really got completed, because three, four months later, Romare finally succumbed to his cancer.

But what was amazing about that, and there's a piece you're probably gonna see -- *At Low Tide* is the title of this piece was the very last work he made. I would put the pieces down, and I'd say, "You want me to lay this down?" And he goes, "No, I'll do it." And he struggled to get it done, but *At Low Tide* -- and when I was giving this powerpoint presentation to the Museum of Modern Art at the ACA Gallery -- three years ago, four years ago -- that piece was on the wall. He completed that work, signed the front and the back, and said -- I never asked him for anything in my life, I just -- I never got, you know, I wasn't being paid. He said, "Teabo, I want you to have this. This is for your studio." Because I told him I wanted to build a studio eventually. And I saw it at the ACA Gallery. They had it on the wall. Eventually, I sold it for money. They had it for sale at \$350,000, and it sold at that. But what I had -- what assisted Jeffrey [Bergen] to sell that was the photo of Romare holding the piece when he finished it. He had it on his lap and I took a photo of him holding that. What was amazing, the following day, he didn't come back to the studio. That was it. *At Low Tide*.

CH: So, do you know what happened to the studio once he died?

AT: [sighs] I went back a half a dozen times. One was to complete two works that Nanette wanted. And the last time I was in the studio, it looked pretty much in disarray. It looked like somebody ransacked through it. There was stuff all over the ground, the area where I worked was gone. A lot of changes were coming up. And [coughs] Nanette wanted me to come by and bring the keys, which I did. But yeah, I have no idea if they're doing anything with that or what's going on there. I doubt that even the building's still there. Because someone told me that they're doing a lot of development in that area where he was.

CH: So, what were the works that you completed? Do you remember -- the works that you finished?

AT: What work -- oh, the last pieces? I don't -- I saw one that they said they used on an album cover for Wynton Marsalis.

CH: Oh, okay.

AT: So if you see a Bearden there, that's the one that needed to be finished.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

CH: So perhaps you could tell me what your favorite thing was about working with Bearden in the studio?

AT: Learning every minute of the time that I was there. I absorbed everything that he was telling me how to do and some of his stories that he would recount. I just enjoyed his company. And it worked out perfect. You know, Camara, the most difficult

thing an artist could do is have someone come into their space and assist, work. It's not easy, not easy at all. I remember that piece, *Storyville Mirror*, that we worked on, thinking that, How can this get completed? But once we did, we realized -- that photo that you saw of us holding our chins together -- we finally realized that this can work. And from that moment on, we just -- steady production. But I'd come mentally prepared to finish whatever it is that we would start, and that's crucial. And I enjoyed that; I enjoyed that feeling of being brought back to life every time we would finish something. We'd start something else and I couldn't wait to see the end result. So, the two minds. I couldn't do that by myself. Wouldn't know -- what would I do? Wouldn't know. But between he and I, and that ability to want to make something, finish it, and make a nice work of art -- that was exciting. That worked out very well. Much better than what I ever anticipated.

CH: Great. Earlier you mentioned Barrie Stavis and you mentioned Russell Goings, um, both who came to the studio. Do you remember other people who came to the studio to visit while you were there?

AT: Yeah, I have a photograph of Romare with Robert Blackburn at the table. There was -- people, some of his collectors would come by. Oh god, I -- there were quite a few, but we're talking 1983, way back. My mind is at times, not functioning in the -- [coughs].

CH: That's okay. Did Mr. Ekstrom come to the gallery -- to the studio, I'm sorry.

AT: No. Mm-mm. Towards the end of that relationship, it was -- well, once Romare passed away, I guess Nanette and June Kelly terminated the relationship between Mr. Ekstrom and Bearden. They wanted to get more money for the works and thought that someone else would get more. Mr. Ekstrom had a wonderful following. He was a well-noted dealer in Manhattan. But things changed.

CH: And what about you after Bearden passed? You returned to your own studio?

AT: Mm-hm. I had a studio in Englewood at St. Cecilia's church. It was the old parochial school that they had closed down, and I had a second-level room. Beautiful room, big room. Part of my studio in that room was sort of dwarfed by the size of it, but I had cheap rent. Couldn't say no. And then, eventually, I met my wife, and we decided to acquire a home in Leonia, New Jersey, right next door to Englewood. And there, in that house, in the attic area, is where I utilized Romare's gift: the money from that piece of art to build -- to blow out the attic. Which I put a roof, a balcony, beautiful french doors that opened up so I could have all that air coming in. And that's where I created a lot of works, in that space. I wish Romare would have seen it. I'm sure he probably did. You know, somehow, some way, said, my boy finally did it. You know, put his studio together. And that's -- that worked out.

CH: So, what is your favorite story about Bearden out of the many that you have?

AT: Boy. [sighs] I guess what I mentioned earlier, one of my favorites, is how he and I met at the show at the gallery, Mr.

Ekstrom's gallery. Other stories are -- he and I would go to lunch at times down the road from where the studio was. There was a place that he enjoyed. And there, he would just recount his childhood experiences, where he was living. One story that he had, I remember, we were in the studio working, and he gave -- he said to me -- [sighs] it was a story about an archer, about an arrow. And how that came about was, I guess, putting our thoughts together. He said, "It's as easy as --" -- said, "we can combine our ideas, and that'll work out great." And it always did. Most of the time, I was busy working. You know, if -- I didn't want to go there and just sit around and chat. I'd much rather go there and put something together. And he would sit at the table, the round table. Did you ever see photos of inside his studio?

CH: Not of the round table, no.

AT: Okay. There's a small table, about 36 inches in circumference, and that was where all of the meetings were held and all of the guests that would come would sit at that table. And he would just tell me stories about his childhood experiences. Working, when he went to Paris to hang out there. We would converse in French. He spoke French. So, it was just being there. Even being there, not even talking to him, but working, I mean, you could feel the energy. You know, it was there. That just worked out perfectly. Couldn't have asked for a better team in that regards, and that was exciting for us. We knew something good was gonna come about. Any one week, two week, or however fast we could make 'em.

CH: Yeah. So, besides the collages, we know that Bearden worked in watercolor sometimes. Did you ever see him make those? Can you tell us anything about that?

AT: It wasn't traditional on his part of how he applied the watercolors onto paper. And there's a piece called *Soul Player*. It was a jazz -- a saxophone player in the center of the work. But behind him, I had glued down Arches watercolor paper. It was 40 by 30 inches; it was a large piece. And then, he said, "Get me my watercolors." I did, and he said, "I want you to hold the board about six inches off the ground at one end." Which I did. So, I'm holding the board up, and he takes a cup of watercolors and he starts pouring it onto the paper. He says, "Okay, tilt up more, tilt up more," and I'm tilting it up more. He says, "Now come back down." And he created a beautiful abstract watercolor. But how he applied that was -- was genius. I mean, I was trying to figure out, Where's he going with this? And sure enough, that's how he worked on most of his watercolors. He would just -- not take a brush and go finite detail -- pour it on. And then, take the board and maneuver it so he could get what he wanted on that particular board. But this 30 by 40 inch *Solo Player*, the saxophone musician, was an eye-opening experience for me as to what one can do in collage and combining different materials. Yeah, he wasn't afraid. No fear; you screw it up? You can always cover it up again. But that's how most of the works got done.

CH: So, what is something like that, that is unexpected that people might not know about Bearden that you witnessed or felt about him?

AT: He never had children. And I think in many ways that benefited him somehow, because the child in him never left. And that's why his works are so vibrant, so lyrical because the kid in him wants to play every day. And that's -- that's what I got from him. Taught me a lot. More than any Harvard professor could. Yeah, his brilliance in art is indescribable in many ways. I mean, I was just fascinated. It's like, that first piece of his I saw in that catalog, before I even met Romare, and I looked at that work. I knew. I said, "Wow, that's -- that's brilliant." I just knew. And it's amazing how all of a sudden, we joined forces in that regard. And I learned. Every day, I learned. I'd go home and just say, Oh god, this is amazing. But I still had to create a piece and bring it to the studio. That was my key. That's how I got in at first. I'm sure he saw the same thing that I saw in many regards, seeing that we could combine these two minds together and create something even better. And if you get a chance and look at *Storyville Mirror* in full color and detail, you'll see what I'm talking about, the way it was all knitted. Knitting of the elements is what he called it. He said, "Let's put these together."

Yeah, fascinating time. I'm happy that Myron incorporated a lot of that in his book when he put it out. I was really happy to see that. And as Myron said when he was watching my working with Romare on that large 40 by 60 inch jazz piece, he said, "Somebody's gotta hear about this." You know, it's just -- but again, you know, Romare was getting very weak. Last year of his life -- I would not want bone cancer. I mean, he suffered. He did. There were days that I'd tell him, you know, "Sit down, put your head down on the table, relax a little bit. I'll finish that." But right up until the last day. Think about that, that last piece, *At Low Tide*. Amazing. [pauses] I wrote a manuscript

that I have, and it's the whole story about what transpired, what happened. I don't know what I'm gonna do with it, but it's there. And the title is *Call Me Teabo*. T-E-A-B-O. [laughter] Don't call me Thibault [pronounces phonetically]. Call me Teabo.

Yeah, yeah, it -- you know, Camara, it was such an experience. I have not created anything in quite a while, but to have had that opportunity, to have made the most out of it. It still amazes me that so much got done, [pauses] that we didn't waste time, didn't sit there chatting. We worked. And Russell Goings, I gotta thank him in many ways for having the consistency of getting Romare to the studio and getting him back. Not many people would have done that. So, yeah, I appreciate that, for sure.

And there were days, I remember early on, the first year, that I would come there with completed work and Romare wasn't there. I'd wait and wait. The park in front of his studio -- there was a bench. I probably wore down the wood on that bench, waiting for the light to go on on the third floor, knowing that he was in. Because he would come around the back, the side entrance. Those are memories that I have. [Good?] memories, I mean, but perseverance, you know, patience. I don't think many other people would have done what I -- what I put up with early on, you know, just to get in the door. Let him see what it is that I do and eventually, to have him say to me, I think you and I should work together. You know. Just hearing that was -- oh, wow. And what I had my cabinet builder do -- Hans, Hansi, I call him -- we made a whole slew of different boards, different sized boards. 24 by 20, 30 by 40, 40 by 60. We made five of those. Took 'em to the studio. That was great. He -- just to see the smile on his face when he saw those coming through the door. He

said, "Those are mine; those are ours." It wasn't the work that I'd done. Those were for us. He was very excited about that. Never had any more complaints from people saying, Hey, my work is peeling. It's bubbling. Can you fix it? No more problems.

CH: Those were the boards that were made of poplar and this special ply-score.

AT: Marine plyscore.

CH: Okay.

AT: Yeah, boat-building materials. And it's -- it really is critical, because if the board starts warping, there's nothing you can do about it. You know, you're in a mess. You can't straighten it out. You have to do something else. This never happened with these boards. It was a whole new world. Something we both looked forward to.

CH: What can you tell me about Bearden's signing of the works? You mentioned on one of them that he signed the front and the back. Did he do that often?

AT: No. I asked him to do that on the back. He titled it. He said, "This is gonna be *At Low Tide*." And then there was a piece of paper that he wanted me to glue on the back of that particular board that he was gonna put the title on, the date. And then, when he did that, I said, "Put your signature there as well." And he did. And then, on the front, you know, he signed that.

CH: And was there any significance to where he put his signature on the front?

AT: For him, there was. I mean, he split his name -- R, O -- and then he'd go M, A, R, E. And then, B, E, A, R -- then D, E, N. If you look at the signature on most of his works, they are broken down. And he would put that right in front for all to see. It wasn't a tiny little signature at the bottom; this was prominent. And if I was a collector of Romare's work, I would want that. Because that's what sells. That's -- the way the signature is applied and where it's positioned is critical on a piece. That's why people that try to forge his work weren't very successful. They didn't really know how to do that. [pauses] In the works I was telling you about at the FBI's facilities, they look very much like a Bearden -- that's why people would sell them, excuse me -- but that's it. There was no life to them. And if they tried to use their imagination on some of the pieces, it failed miserably. It stood out like a sore thumb. Others wouldn't be able to pick that up, probably, but the minute I saw them, I knew. Immediately, I said, "No, this is not a Bearden." And I was proven right. They admitted, Yep, we made those. Should have gone to jail [laughs] for what they did.

CH: Yeah. Can you define the special quality that you think made Bearden Bearden? I know that's a --

AT: Just [to think?] on any of the collage I would see, you know, all I can reflect on is the first piece of his that I saw. I had never seen anything like that. It was Miss Tilly or something in her garden [*In the Garden*], and it's in Myron's book. I had never seen art like that. You know, just the way the colors were put down, the way the imagery -- it was dreamlike.

You'd look at it and you could feel -- you'd say, "Oh, I'd love to be in that space." And that's the quality that he has. He invites you in. And that's not an easy thing to do, because most art -- don't have that capability. His did.

CH: So --

AT: Ooh, I have something to show you.

CH: Okay.

AT: Do you mind?

CH: I would love to see it.

AT: Did you ever see the cover of *ARTNews* magazine when he was on it?

CH: No, I haven't seen that issue, no.

AT: These are his coveralls that he had on.

JOSIE NARON: Oh, wow.

AT: It says here -- he called me Andy. "For Andy, Romare." And see, the -- R, B. He bought these from a company that sewed in his initials. And they're full-length work covers. He was in this all the time. When he would take the train to the studio, he'd have this on. When he came with Russell, he'd have his coveralls on. He never entered the studio without these on. I mean, he had about a dozen that he ordered. But I remember, this

was on his workstand. And he had gotten a new one, and I said, "Romare, can I have this?" And he said, "Okay," so he signed it.

CH: That's wonderful. It's nice to have such mementos.

AT: I've got boxes full. I've got stuff that he'd given me, but it's a lot of time just to bring 'em out. Yeah. [sighs] I thought about these the other day and said, "Oh, I've got to show Camara and Josie that coverall, because nobody else is gonna see that." Nobody has that. I didn't give it to the Smithsonian. [pauses] They wanted it, but no.

JN: Did you ever wear coveralls in the studio?

AT: No. [laughs] I said to Janet, I said, "Maybe today, I'll put these on." But I kind of feel that that would be somewhat disrespectful. I don't know. I just now remembered that I was gonna show you these.

JN: I was going to ask earlier -- like, when you think about him now. But you know, I don't know, like, seeing all these objects that you have and kind of being surrounded by them, I can imagine that, you know, maybe it's often.

AT: Yeah. It's about every day. I -- [sighs] God, I've got -- I'm in a lot of books. You know, encyclopedia -- couldn't believe that I was in that -- for painters and engravers in the United States. *Who's Who in American Art*. And every time I see some of these volumes, I think, Well, if not for Romare. But I earned every minute with him. I paid my dues. Believe me when I tell you that. [pauses] Yeah, a lot of sleepless nights. And then, I remember the phone call from Mr. Ekstrom, Arne. He

called me at home and he was the one that told me about Romare's passing.

[pauses] I remember Mr. Ekstrom asking me to show him some of my works. And it was Russ-- I mean, Myron, that mentioned that to Mr. Ekstrom. He said, "Have you ever seen Teabo's art?" He said, no. And then, I rented a trailer, put a whole pile of my works in the back, and drove to his studio on 72nd Street and I forget. But I parked the trailer in front of his place and brought up the works. And I didn't -- I wasn't asking him to represent me; not at all. He said -- he goes, "By the way," he says, "I'm too old at this point; I want to get out of here. So, I'm gonna sell everything and let my son have the building." And -- but he did love the work. He spent a lot of time that day just going from one to another, asking me, "How did you get this idea?" And then, he pointed out his favorite. He said, "I love this one. This is my favorite." And I don't know if I still have that piece. I'm not sure. Yeah, yeah, we were all sad at that time. You know, lost a good friend.

JN: How did your relationship to your art change after his passing?

AT: [sighs] I knew what it took to be a professional artist; I learned that from Romare. The "stick-to-it-tive-ness," you know, to stay on track. The goal is to create. What else are you gonna do? Do that or die. And he taught me well how to be that kind of person, that kind of artist. 'Cause it was always a question in one's mind when I was younger, you know, what do I have to do? What has to be done? How do I get from one week to another? I learned it from him. I never had a father, per se. My father left -- I was young. [pauses] So, [coughs] Romare's advice and

comments were well taken. I truly appreciated that kind of relationship between he and I. Something I never had. I only wish it was longer. Eight years, short time. Speck of sand. But if I see works that he and I completed, it makes me smile, because in those eight years, something good was accomplished.

CH: So do you feel that that's the -- one of the accomplishments that you're most proud of?

AT: Oh, yes. I'm happy I was able to help him, you know, the last years of his life, to make him feel good about getting up in the morning, coming to the studio. Because he knew we weren't wasting time. And when that couple from this German gallery and museum came by to his studio to visit with us, I could see in his face -- he relished the thought of exhibiting his work in Europe. He wanted that badly. Just bad timing. We always had a mission. I'm looking at a title here, Camara and Josie, that you might see. It's called *Evening Limited to Memphis*; that's the train on the trestle. When you see that piece, you'll understand how we were both at our wits' end, and making it real, making it work. Very complicated piece.

CH: And what's the --

AT: Something I wouldn't --

CH: -- I'm sorry to interrupt. What is the thing that you think clicked at the end?

AT: We hadn't given up, or at least he hadn't. I did a number of times. I'm thinking, Oh, this is not gonna work. But finally, I forget where we got the photo, but there was a photo of a

trestle. And when I showed him this photo, he said, "That's what I want. That's what I'm looking for." Then I knew the piece was finished. We had it. Yeah, those are always good feelings to know that -- to see the finish line and know that it's gonna get there. Worst thing is staring at something and you're thinking to yourself, Why am I working on this for? It's never gonna happen.

CH: You mentioned taking the air out of the pieces so they laid flat. Did you put anything on top of them? Any varnish or any kind of coating?

AT: Mm-hm. I do. Unfortunately, after Romare had passed away, I found a product that is water-based and it is UV-rendered, so sunlight won't affect it as much. And my cabinet-maker has -- had a spray booth, B-O-O-T-H, that you'd go in and he had an easel I could put the works on, and then he would spray for me; show me how to do it. And he would spread -- just like painting a car. And that's how this material is applied. Most of my work that I have around the house is coated like that, so it doesn't need framing. And what I do on the edge of the piece is I'll paint a color, either white or whatever, and that's -- that's the end result, the end product. I always wanted to get away from frames and framing. First, it was so expensive. Then, half the time, it didn't work right.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: Did he care about frames for his pieces?

AT: [sighs] He didn't want to bother with that, I might say, but once I showed him these frames, didn't have to worry about

it. We completed -- if the gallery wanted to put a frame on something, knock yourselves out. But it made life easy. And that's the -- that was the beauty of that. Again, two minds working together. You know, avoided having to bother with framing, paying, and then it's got a glass front that you don't want it to break, and if it does, it could ruin the artwork. This way, there was no -- no problems. The show in Boston at the Thomas Segal Gallery -- he framed the pieces that went into that show, because I remember walking in at the opening. Romare was there with Nanette, and said, "Ooh." He said, "A lot of money was spent here." The show didn't do that well. Boston is not a place for works like Romare. The minute he came back to the city, had a show with Mr. Ekstrom -- sold out. You know, funny story about Mr. Ekstrom. Do you -- have you ever seen photos of him?

CH: Yes.

AT: You have? [laughs] That's amazing, and I'll tell you why. *New Yorker* magazine used him on a cover of their magazine as the epitome of a New York City gallery owner. Had his nose up in the air. The caricature that they drew Arne -- really cracked me up. He wasn't that keen about that. But you know, after he passed away, there was a *New York Times* obituary about him. Things in that obituary I didn't know. Mr. Ekstrom was the inspiration for 007. He was the guide for [Ian] Fleming, the man who wrote the thing, used Arne -- because during World War II, Arne was the head of espionage against Germany. He headed that whole section of the war. Major hero. Nobody knew. He didn't want it known. And I remember a couple times, I came to his gallery, I had my camera with me. He wouldn't let me take a photo of him, and I didn't know why at the time. He said, "No," he used to call me

my dear boy. He goes, "No, my dear boy, you're not gonna take a photo today. Maybe some other time, but not today." But when I read that obituary and realized, Wow, this man was deeply involved. And that's how he got into the art world. A lot of finagling, you know, manipulation of things, money, artwork itself. That was Arne Ekstrom. Because I'd be in his Gallery and he'd hear the door open downstairs and he'd hear the footsteps coming up. He knew exactly who that person was. He said, "Oh," he said, "I don't want to see her today." So he'd go in the back room, and I'd have to say to the person coming up the stairs, "Oh, he's not in, he left about a half hour ago." And he'd be in a back room waiting for -- whomever he didn't want to speak to. Interesting man.

CH: What do you remember about Bearden's interaction with Mr. Ekstrom?

AT: You know, total respect. For one, he never called him Arne. Always called him Mr. Ekstrom, even when he would speak to me about him. He truly appreciated the man for his efforts and what he was doing. I'm sure if he knew after his passing that hands would change in regards to representation, Romare would be really upset about that. He wouldn't want that. Again, money rules. If they think they could get more, do it. But there's was a good relationship. Whenever the phone would ring in the studio and it -- and I would pick it up and answer it and I'd say, "Romare, it's Mr. Ekstrom." He'd be -- "Give me the phone." He was happy. He was happy to hear from him, no matter what. He was lucky. Very lucky, and he deserved the luck, but to have such a good representation at that time.

And I remember one day from his studio, I'll never forget this. He said, "Come with me to the bank." The bank was right around the corner. And as we're walking down, he shows me a check for a rather large amount, and he said, "You know what this is?" I go, "No." He goes, "Taxes. I had to pay this today." He goes, but, he said, "I'm happy doing it." It was the first time that he had to pay so much in taxes. He wanted me to know that. Never forget it. And he had this little beret on, and he's got the check and we're walking. He was -- he was feeling good at that time. He was doing much better than towards the end.

And early on in the '80s, '81, '82, when we would go to a restaurant together around the studio area. It was interesting to see him respond to the neighborhood. He knew the butcher, so he says, "I want to stop and just say hi to him," because Nanette would give him a shopping list sometimes. She'd say, "I want some chicken wings or whatever," and so, he introduces me to the butcher. He said, "Meet Teabo here." Then, he would take me to the diner, and he knew everybody in the diner. Downstairs was Dom's -- D, O, M, S -- bar. It was a bar. And he would walk in there now and then, and I was with him at least four times when he did this, and he would put a \$40 bill or a \$60 bill on the bar, and he would say, "Buy them all a drink." You know why he did that? Keep the bums out of the studio upstairs. They protected him. Smart, smart thinking. And I would have done the same thing. And the guys were happy when he would walk in. You'd see them all straddle up to the bar. [laughs] "I'll have this, I'll have that." Romare was paying for it. What a neighborhood. And it turned out that my mannequins that I use in my collages were right around the corner. I couldn't believe it.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: Did you and Romare ever discuss his legacy? Like, did he ever say, like, I want the foundation to exist, or anything like that?

AT: You know, that was problematic. I don't want to get into too much of the politics of that. But he wasn't sure. I think eventually, he and Nanette got together and they put a will together. I mentioned that to him, I said, you know, "Do you have a will?" And he said, "No, I'm working on it." And he never really went into great detail, if at all, about that situation. You know, how that would be handled. After he passed away, I guess it was between June Kelly, Nanette, and the attorney, [Gregory] Perrin, that got together and started putting -- I remember Perrin called me one day. He wanted to have lunch. I don't like attorneys that much, but he just wanted to do lunch to see if -- what I knew, if Romare had mentioned anything about wills or stuff like that. And I didn't say much. I just went to see what kind of person he was, and I was happy to get out of there.

Politics, Camara. After Romare passed away, a lot of stuff. I went to the funeral at St. John's the Divine in New York. That was an interesting experience. Sitting next to me was Mr. Ekstrom; behind me was Myron Schwartzman. A lot of the powers to be with there. June was down by the altar. As Mr. Ekstrom said to me, he goes, "She's where she likes to be now." [laughs] They had their thoughts. Interesting times.

CH: So, to wrap up, maybe you could tell us what you think Romare's legacy -- what he would want it to be? What you think he would want it to be.

AT: You know, as I said, he didn't have children, but he loved kids. And I'm sure young people that look at his work today and see what he's doing, they see the playfulness in it, the joy that it can bring. He accomplished something that he would like to do, leaving that kind of legacy behind. He was a worker. He was a man that didn't waste much time. He got things done. That's a tough question, Camara. I just think the artwork speaks for itself. That's the best conclusion I could come to. And he left a lot, which is great. He would have enjoyed meeting you, Camara, I can say that.

CH: [laughs] Thank you for that, that's a compliment.

AT: Yeah, definitely would have.

CH: Is there anything else that you think we should know?

AT: Um, I'm looking at my wife. [laughs] She's going -- you know, I'm sure after we depart, I'll say, "Oh, why didn't I mention this or that?" Thank you for the opportunity, by the way.

CH: Oh, you're welcome. Well, we really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us. It's been wonderful to hear your memories about Romare and --

AT: I hope I gave you enough, or something. You know, I'm -- I don't know how to put it all together sometimes. You know, there are just so many things that are in the background that pop up and all of a sudden, wow. I remember. If you have any questions or whatever, Camara or Josie, you have my number.

CH: Okay, thank you.

AT: You're always welcome to call. You're welcome. And maybe someday, if you're in the area -- you know, Romare grew up in Charlotte. I'm an hour away from that. An hour and a half? About an hour and a half.

CH: In South Carolina? I'm sorry, in South Carolina?

AT: I'm -- I'm in North Carolina. I'm almost on the South Carolina border on the west side. But they have a park, called the Romare Bearden Park, in Charlotte. And I didn't know that 'til I got here. There was -- one of the contractors we had that did an addition to this home, he said, "Oh," because he saw the book on Bearden I had by the table, and he goes, "There's a park." Romare Bearden Park. So, if ever you come by, we'll go visit Romare Bearden Park.

CH: Okay. Oh, yeah.

JN: Sounds lovely.

AT: Thank you, Josie.

JN: Of course, thank you so much. This has been really wonderful.

AT: Yeah.

[END OF AUDIO RECORDING]