

Introducing *The Romare Bearden Papers* on the WPI Digital Archives

OCTOBER 12, 2022 - NEW YORK, NY — The WPI is pleased to announce the inaugural release of materials in the [Romare Bearden Papers](#) (1900–2008, bulk 1940–1988).

Vital to this initiative is The Romare Bearden Foundation, a non-profit organization established in 1990 by the estate of the artist to preserve and perpetuate his legacy. The WPI is honored to partner with the foundation in helping to shape tomorrow's art historical discourse.

"This is an exciting moment for the Romare Bearden Foundation and the perfect opportunity to leverage all of the research, resources and collective knowledge accumulated over the course of 30-plus years since the artist's passing."

—Diedra Harris-Kelley, Co-Director, Romare Bearden Foundation

The archives consist of documents and materials collected and maintained by African-American visual artist, writer, and composer, Romare Bearden.

This initial launch of the archives includes three prominent series: *Murals and Public Art*; *Photographs*; and *Sketches, Sketchbooks and Cartoons*.

...

[Murals and Public Art](#) features an assortment of materials, including news clippings, printed materials, blueprints, and correspondence related to Bearden's development and presentation of public art projects.

Regularly admired as a master collagist in museums and private collections, Bearden also created important public art works during his later career that allowed him to translate his signature style into bold, large-scale graphic statements.

This series provides access to rare documentation on his involvement with art projects in public places across the United States.

Offering glimpses of Bearden's planning process for the public art projects, these archives include images of sketches and test materials that would later be realized. Also notable is documentation for a now destroyed major commission from 1976 for "Urban Walls Atlanta," in downtown Atlanta, Georgia.

[Photographs](#) is composed of prints, snapshots, contact sheets, film negatives, 35mm slides, and transparencies which offer an exclusive look into the extraordinary life and career of Bearden.

This series includes photographs taken by notable photographers such as Sam Shaw, Frank Stewart, and Chester Higgins, Jr. The images consist of professional portraits and candid shots that capture the artist at work in his studio and record his attendance at key events with important luminaries of his era, including artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Ernest Crichlow, and Norman Lewis, writers such as Sir Derek Walcott, James Baldwin, and Albert Murray, as well as jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Jackie McLean.

Personal photos chronicle Bearden and his wife Nanette's visits to their home in St. Martin, and feature their many beloved cats.

[Sketches, Sketchbooks, and Cartoons](#) shed light on Bearden's artistic processes, showcase his draftsmanship, and reflect the breadth of his engagement with art history.

This series contains loose sketches, cartoons, complete sketchbooks and journals produced by Bearden. The subjects of his sketches include landscapes, portraits, human anatomy, and still lifes. Particularly noteworthy are preparatory works related to his collaborations with choreographers, Talley Beatty and Gary DeLoatch.

In addition, the collection features a variety of Bearden's cartoons. While studying at New York University, he took extensive courses in art and was a lead cartoonist and then art editor for the monthly journal *The Medley*. From 1935–1937, he worked as a weekly editorial cartoonist for the *Baltimore Afro-American*.

Now accessible to the public on the [WPI Digital Archives](#), this major archival collection is fundamental to the research and development of the forthcoming *Romare Bearden Digital Catalogue Raisonné*.

...

The Romare Bearden Foundation is the non-profit organization that perpetuates the artistic and intellectual legacy of the artist. Founded in 1990 by the artist's wife Nanette Rohan Bearden, the Foundation has produced exhibitions, symposia, publications, and k-12 curriculum based on Bearden's life and work, and has formed collaborations, educational exchanges, and free public programs based on his ideals.

The Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc. (WPI) is a non-profit foundation dedicated to the study of art history and to fostering the accessibility, cataloguing, and digitization of archival materials that support critical research in the field.