



The Train

Date

1975

Primary Maker

Romare Bearden

Medium

Photogravure and aquatint

Description

Romare Bearden was raised in Harlem during the neighborhood's cultural renaissance of the 1920s but also spent stretches of time with family members in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North

Carolina (his birthplace). Only after graduating from New York University in 1935 did he decide to become an artist—initially, an illustrator and cartoonist, but then, after studying at the Art Students League, a fine artist. In 1963 and 1964, Bearden began incorporating collage elements into his paintings, which gave rise to the style for which he is best known today. In his collages, Bearden used the photostat process to enlarge images from art-historical texts and popular magazines, revealing and embracing their graininess and imperfections. He drew from many cultural sources in creating his compositions, and his collages reference Cubism (itself inspired by African sculpture), Dada photomontages, and American Pop art. The Train, like much of Bearden's printed work, is based on a collage—in this case, Mysteries of 1964 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)—but differs from it in color and texture. The experimental process the artist used to create the print was akin to collage: the copper plates onto which his chosen imagery had been transferred through photogravure were cut apart, then some segments were inked in color and others in black to be printed separately onto single sheets of paper, like a puzzle. The print, like the collage, references the part of Bearden's childhood he spent in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and depicts an African American family seated at a table inside a house; however, it also alludes to certain popular stereotypes and his misgivings about them. The title of the print calls attention to the seemingly minor detail of a train seen passing through a window in the left background. According to the artist, trains “could take you away and could also bring you to where you were. And in the little towns it's the black people who live near the trains.” Thus, they can be seen as symbolic both of migration and of the persistent forces of segregation. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Composition: 17 9/16 × 22 1/16 in. (44.6 × 56 cm) Plate: 17 7/8 × 22 1/4 in. (45.4 × 56.5 cm) Sheet: 22 1/4 × 30 1/16 in. (56.5 × 76.4 cm)