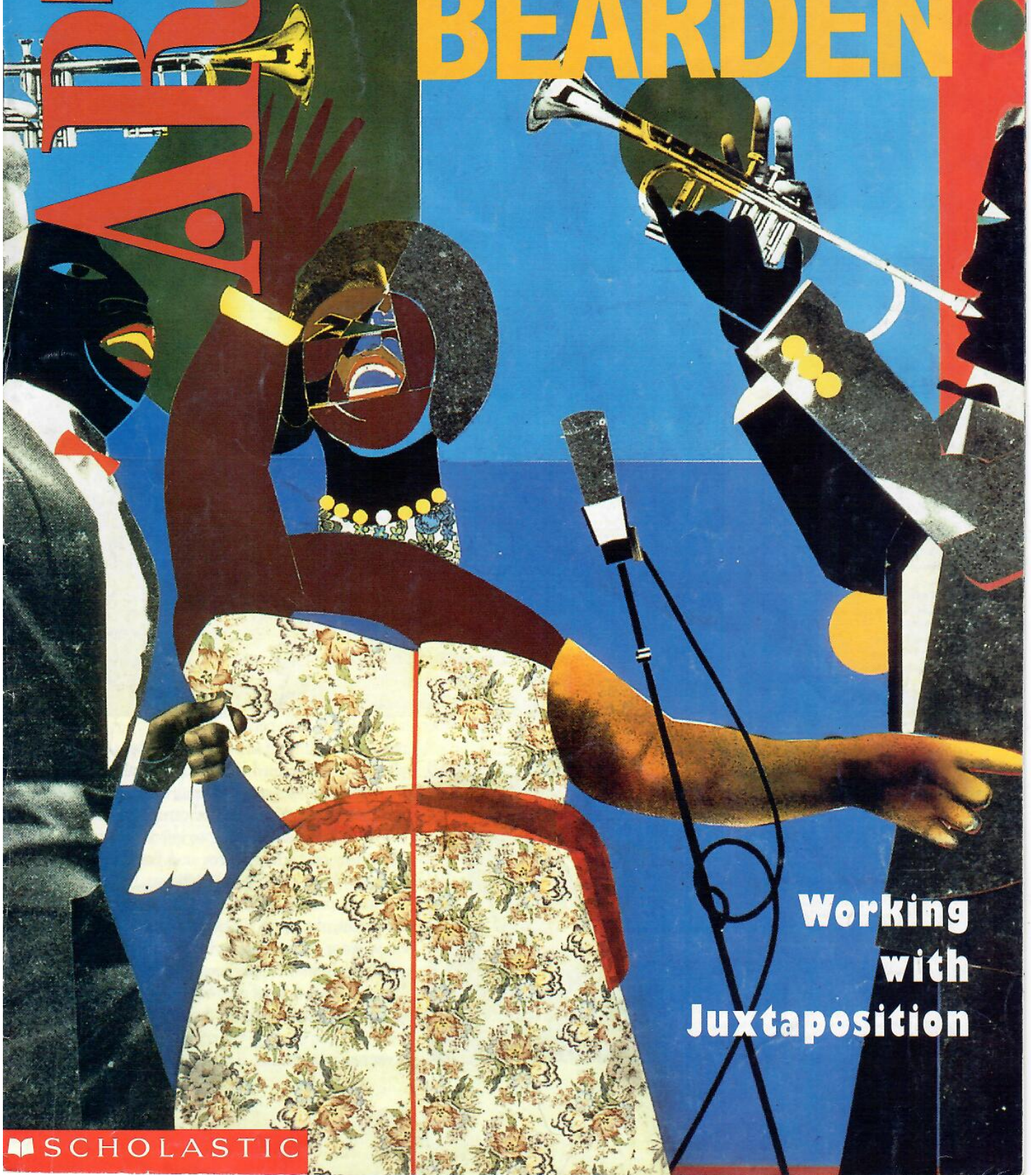


SCHOLASTIC

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ROMARE BEARDEN



**Working
with
Juxtaposition**

 SCHOLASTIC



Cover: Romare Bearden (1911-1988)
Showtime, 1974. Mixed media, 50" x 40"
 Private Collection.
 All works by Romare Bearden © The Romare Bearden Foundation

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Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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A LIVING ART

“My purpose is to paint the life of my people as I know it.”

—ROMARE BEARDEN

AS A YOUNG man, Romare Bearden had a flair for drawing. He was also a gifted athlete and star pitcher for Boston University's baseball team. He was so good he was recruited by the legendary Connie Mack, owner of the Philadelphia Athletics. Mack offered Bearden a bonus and a chance to join the major leagues if the light-skinned 21-year-old African-American was willing to pass for white. Bearden refused.

The year was 1932. During the period of economic hardship known as the Great Depression, conditions were especially difficult for African-Americans. Prejudice made it doubly hard for blacks to find jobs and they were even banned from certain professions—such as major-league baseball. Bearden saw no future for himself in the game and turned his attention to art.

His decision had a major effect on contemporary American art. For over half a century, Bearden did his playing with pens,

paintbrushes, inks, paints, scraps of paper, and old photographs. He used these “scrap” materials in a new way to deliver powerful messages about African-American life. As you can see in the work above, Bearden used collage to express his feelings about the conflicts, barriers, and hardships faced every day by most African-Americans. By juxtaposing many photographic images of varying size and viewpoint, the artist is able to visually communicate a sense of disorientation and alienation.

Bearden's first collages were done during the mid-1960s, at the time of the first civil rights movements. African-Americans, angry at having been



© 1988 Newsday/Bill Davis

Text by Denise Willi



treated as second-class citizens, were asserting their rights by holding marches and sit-ins. They were also redefining themselves—names, hairstyles, clothes—to reflect pride in their African heritage. Bearden based *Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism* (above) on a ceremony he remembered from his childhood in North Carolina. Done in 1964, this work reflects many of the social and political issues of the time. Bearden juxtaposes African masks and sculptures with oversized fragments of body parts like mouths, teeth, hands. The “accusing eyes” and “anguished faces,” as the artist called them, suggest hostility and sadness but also express a sense of pride.

Bearden’s deep feelings about his people, his family, and his childhood memories are reflected in his works. For the artist, creating a collage was a very personal form of artistic expression. Each image, like *Showtime* on the cover, suggests a scene from his past. The shiny trumpets that form an arch over the gesturing performer express Bearden’s interest in jazz—a passion he developed as a boy growing up in New York City. Asked if he created art to escape from reality or social tensions, the artist said, “To escape from reality you have to get to the heart of it. Confronting it, moving to the core is the only way.”

Baptism is a Christian ceremony that often requires a person to be covered with water. In Romare Bearden’s collage (above), can you find the baby that is being baptized?

Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism, 1964. Collage, 9 1/8" x 12" Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST

“The artist needs to be like a whale swimming along with his mouth wide open, absorbing everything that happens along the way.”

—ROMARE BEARDEN



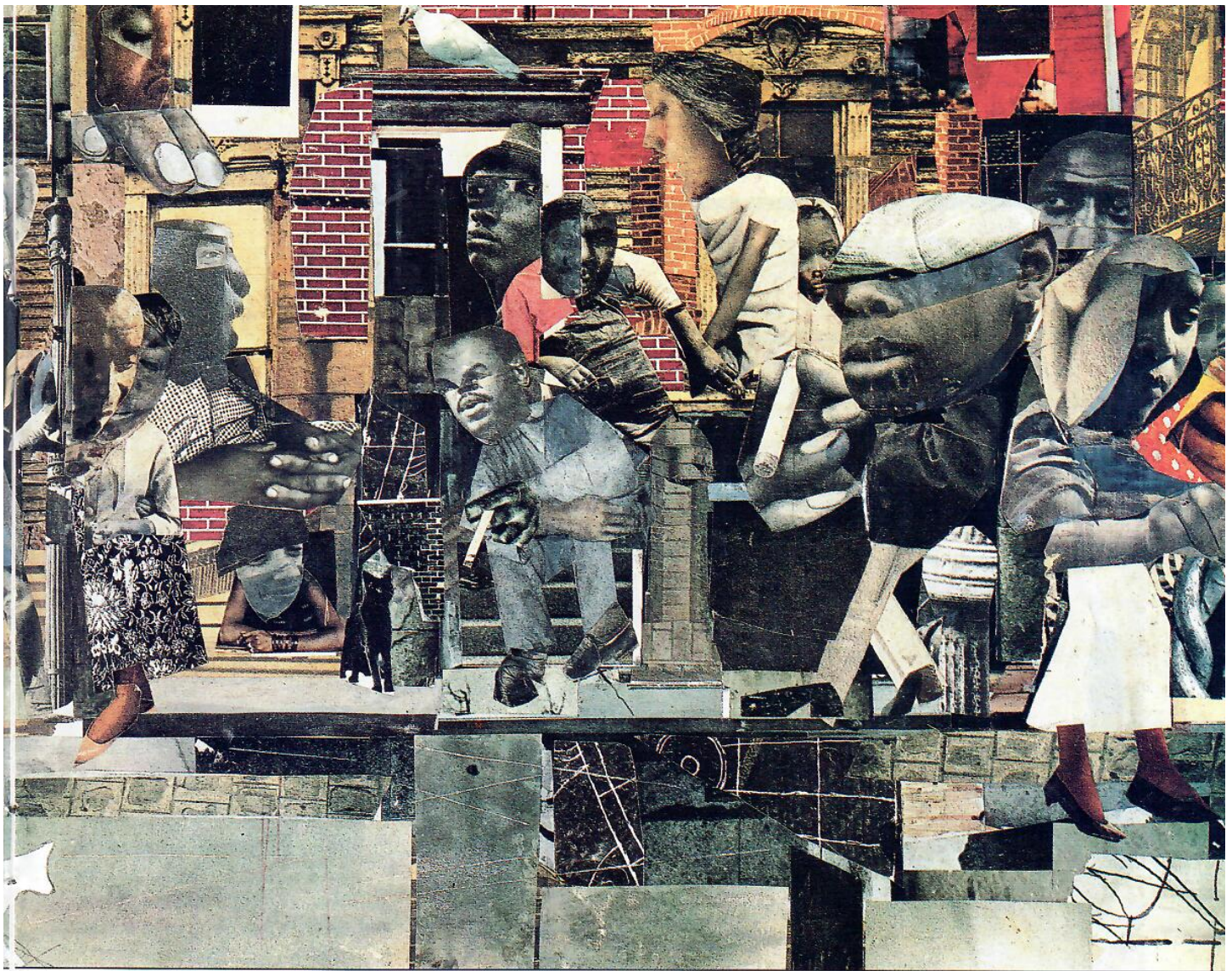
This collage is based on Bearden's memories of life in a small Southern town. Compare its atmosphere with the mood created in *The Dove*, above right.

Morning of the Rooster, 1980. 18" x 13 3/4". Private Collection



ROMARE BEARDEN WAS born in 1911 in his great-grandfather's house in a small town in North Carolina. It was on the porch of this house that Romare first began to dabble in painting and music while listening to the locomotives rumbling into the nearby train station. When he was 3, Bearden's parents moved to Harlem in New York City. There his mother edited a newspaper and entertained well-known black musicians such as Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway, and writers like Langston Hughes.

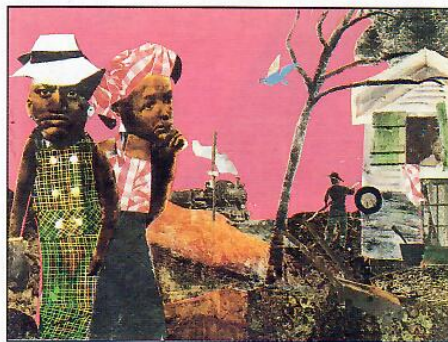
Bearden's early memories of *Southern sharecroppers*, *Black urban life*, *family gatherings*, and *jazz music* became the subjects of the collages for which he later became famous. Two of the works shown here capture the slow pace of life in a small Southern community. The mournful sound made by the *Southern Limited* (bottom right) is echoed in the eerie pink sky and desolate gray landscape it passes through. **Distorted, patched figures and rough textures** frame the work's focal point—the tiny train in the distance. The **simplified shapes and bright fabrics** in *Morning of the Rooster* (left), convey a sense of peace and joy despite the bare surroundings. The **unsettling fragmentations, scale changes, overlapping shapes, shifting perspectives, and jarring angles** in *The Dove* (above right) suggest life in a poor, overcrowd-



ed but vitally alive big-city neighborhood.

Bearden traveled a long, varied road before becoming a well-known artist. After graduating from New York University in 1935 with a degree in math, he decided to become an artist. To earn a living, he worked for the New York City Department of Welfare while going to the Art Students League. Bearden studied everything he could—Byzantine mosaics, Renaissance painting, Chinese calligraphy, and African art. After serving in the army from 1942 to 1945, he lived in Paris where he got to know the work of many European artists. In 1951 he returned to New York and wrote songs for two years. In 1964, during the peak of the civil rights movement, Bearden pieced together his first photomontages. Because they made a unique statement about black pride, Bearden's "montage paintings" were immediately popular and critically acclaimed.

He had his first show in 1965 at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., the first of many museum exhibits held over the next twenty years. In 1967, Bearden was able to retire from his job and spend all his time creating the collages for which he was best known. Bearden continued doing the work that he loved up until the day he died in 1988.



Can you find the bird that gives the collage above its title, *The Dove*? What does this work say about Bearden's experiences in his urban neighborhood?

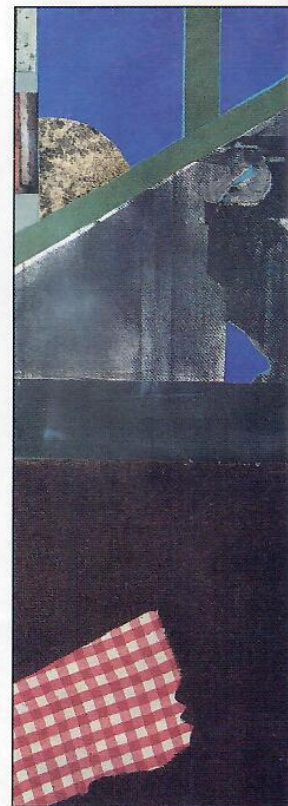
The Dove, 1964, 13 3/8" x 18 3/4".
Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.
Blanchette Rockefeller Fund. Photo ©
1996, The Museum of Modern Art, NY.

In the collage on the left, what might the train—the *Southern Limited*—symbolize?

Southern Limited, 1976. 18" x 24".
Private Collection.

COLORFUL HARMONIES

“Music has been so important in my life that I use musical images in my work as often as I can.” —ROMARE BEARDEN



Compare the mood Romare Bearden creates in the collage above with the one on the left. What kind of music is being played in each of these works?

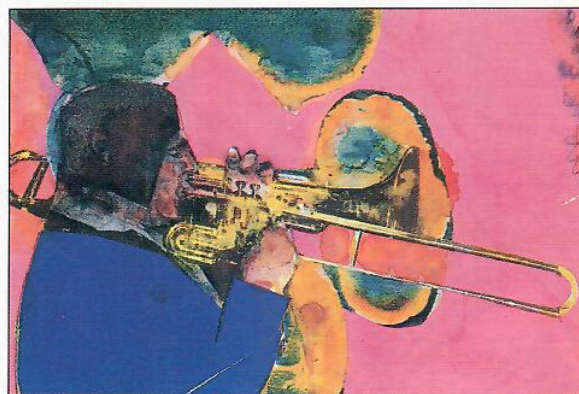
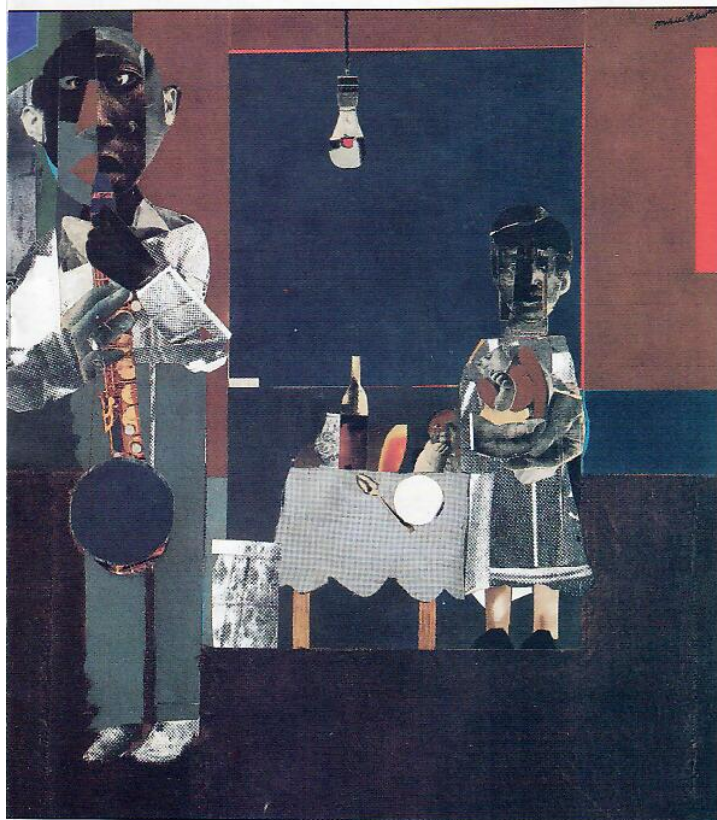
The Woodshed, 1970. 40 1/2" x 50 1/2". © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY. George A. Hearn Fund.

“To me, music gives ordinary life a sense of color, fire, and elemental emotion.”

— Romare Bearden

Blues at the Crossroads, 1985. Private Collection.

Preview



Compare the colors Bearden uses in the works at left with the work above. Which musician would you rather listen to?

Solo Flight, 1970. Private Collection.

IF ROMARE BEARDEN had not become an artist, he might have been a musician. For a brief time in the 1950s, he tried to make a living as a songwriter. He went back to art, but music was always very important in his work.

Bearden is best known for his collages, and creating a collage is like making music. A collage artist works with everyday materials—paper scraps, photos, fabrics—arranging and rearranging them as a musician would arrange musical notes. Like a musician, Bearden was able to create a definite mood with all these fragments. Which of the images here and on pages 8-9 communicate feelings of joy and happiness? Which suggest a darker mood?

How many materials can you find in *Blues at the Crossroads* (left)? The complex images and textures—wallpaper, fabric, photos, sheet music—on the left of this asymmetrical composition balance the bright negative space surrounding the singer on the right. Bearden uses enlarged details—fingers, mouths, saxophones, piano keys, trumpet parts—to suggest the way the sounds are woven together. The diagonals and curves suggest the dynamic, passionate nature of the music being created.

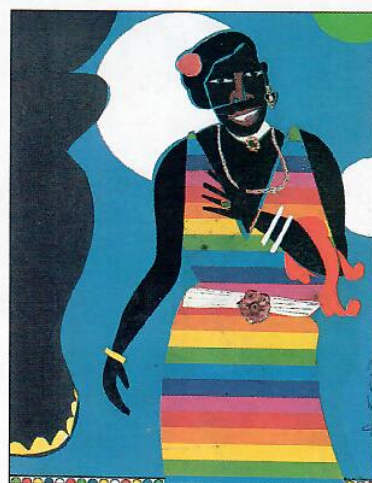
What mood do the two small works on this page communicate to you? In *Solo Flight*

(above right), what kind of sound does the brilliant pink color suggest? The single photo used in this work is the composition's focal point—the trombone. The freely painted watercolor wash surrounding the instrument echoes the spontaneous, magical sounds the musician is creating. In *Encore* (right), stylized shapes, bright colors, and sharp edges suggest a soulful, polished jazz performance.

The dark, empty areas and fragmented faces in *The Woodshed* (above) create a more downbeat mood. What do you think of this musician's surroundings and his haunted expression?

Bearden emphasizes his poverty by incorporating torn photos and ripped bits of cloth. The musician's isolation is intensified by placing him outside. His wife is seen at a distance framed in the doorway, visually and emotionally cut off from him and his music.

In *Three Folk Musicians* (pp. 8-9), Bearden's fragments, scale changes, rough textures, dislocation, and bright colors convey the rough, raw, powerful feeling of genuine folk music. The masklike faces and hint of striped uniforms give the musicians a sinister, mysterious quality.



"To make art, you must become a blues singer—only you sing on the canvas. You improvise—you find the rhythm and structure as you go along—then the song is you."
— Romare Bearden

Encore, 1980. Collage. 18" x 14"
Private Collection.





SCHOLASTIC

ART

MASTERPIECE

OF THE

MONTH #4

THREE FOLK MUSICIANS

Romare Bearden

Romare Bearden (1911-1988). *Three Folk Musicians*, 1967. 50" x 60". Private Collection. © The Romare Bearden Foundation.

ART SPOTLIGHT

VISUAL SURPRISES

Artists who have turned scraps of paper into works of art.



"Buy me. I'll change your life." — Barbara Kruger

Barbara Kruger b. 1945. *I Shop Therefore I Am*, 1987. Photographic silkscreen. 120" x 120" Private Collection, Zurich.



◀ The First Collage

While artists have been creating paintings, drawings, and sculptures for thousands of years, no one even thought of doing a *collage* until the beginning of this century. One of the first collages was made by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso, considered the most famous artist of the 20th century.

In the early 1900s, discoveries in science, technology, and communications were changing the world. Artists like Picasso knew that new art forms had to be created to express these changes. Picasso began painting the objects he saw around him every day—tables, glasses, newspapers, bottles. One day, just for a change, he tried pasting a few of these objects directly onto his painting. Soon he was constructing whole pieces, like *The Bottle* (left), from scraps that were usually thrown away—labels, newsprint, string, wallpaper.

**“I can make a work of art out of the contents of this wastebasket!”
—Pablo Picasso**

Pablo Picasso, (1881-1973). *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, 1912. Washington University Gallery of Art, Saint Louis.

A World of Shapes ▶

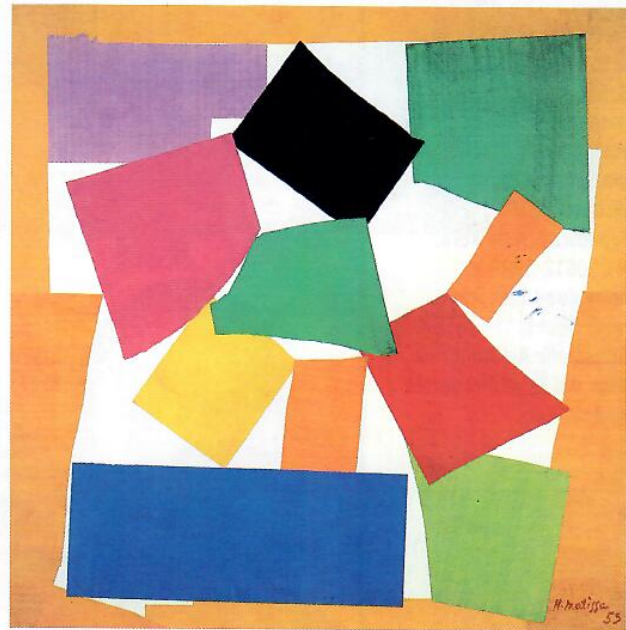
What do you see when you look at the work (right) by 20th-century French artist Henri Matisse (on REE ma TEESE)? As the title tells you, the shapes suggest an animal. Matisse did this and many other works when he was very sick and in his 80s.

Henri Matisse is best known for the many colorful paintings he created during the first half of this century. Then, at 73, Matisse became so sick he was told he'd have to spend the rest of his life in bed. He couldn't paint, so the artist began working in a new medium—cut paper. His assistants would bring him brightly colored sheets of paper and he would cut out

shapes of everything that came into his mind—dancers, clowns, birds, animals, plants, even snails. His assistants would pin the shapes to the wall and, from his bed, Matisse would arrange and rearrange them—forward, backward, upside down, reversed, shapes within shapes. As in this work, he even included the **negative shapes** made from discarded pieces of paper.

“Doing a cut out is like giving life to a form—in fact, I become the form.”—Henri Matisse

Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *The Snail*, 1953. Tate Gallery, London.



◀ Visual Shocks

In the contemporary work on the left, a hand holds the message “I Shop Therefore I Am.” What could this mean? What might the artist be saying?

In 1912, when Picasso did the work at the top of this page, the whole *idea* of collage—making art with throw-

away materials—was new and radical. In the 1990s, we are all exposed to a stream of media images nearly everywhere we go. So artists who work with collage have to be very creative even to get our attention. One contemporary American artist who does just that is multi-

media artist Barbara Kruger.

Kruger's art comments on the ways in which the media influence people. The artist develops her images by **reproducing other images**. She **enlarges** and **crops** familiar black and white photos, **juxtaposing** them with provocative messages set in

bright red boxes. A French philosopher once said, “I think, therefore I am,” asserting the intellectual ability that makes human beings unique. By stating “I Shop Therefore I Am,” what might Barbara Kruger be saying about modern values and today's consumer?

Molly McIver: TRANSFORMING PERSONAL IMAGES

Molly McIver created her Scholastic Art Award-winning collage (right) as a 17-year-old senior at Berkeley Carroll School in Brooklyn, New York. Now a freshman at New York University in Manhattan, Molly is majoring in cinema studies. "I'll probably go to graduate school, teach English, and pursue some kind of art," she says. Right now, Molly is an intern on a cable access show and is putting together her own video.

home. I did a collage with a subway map and magazine clippings. My teacher liked what I had started and encouraged me to keep going. I expanded my collage so that it's also a mobile with images on both sides. The whole thing moves if you touch it.

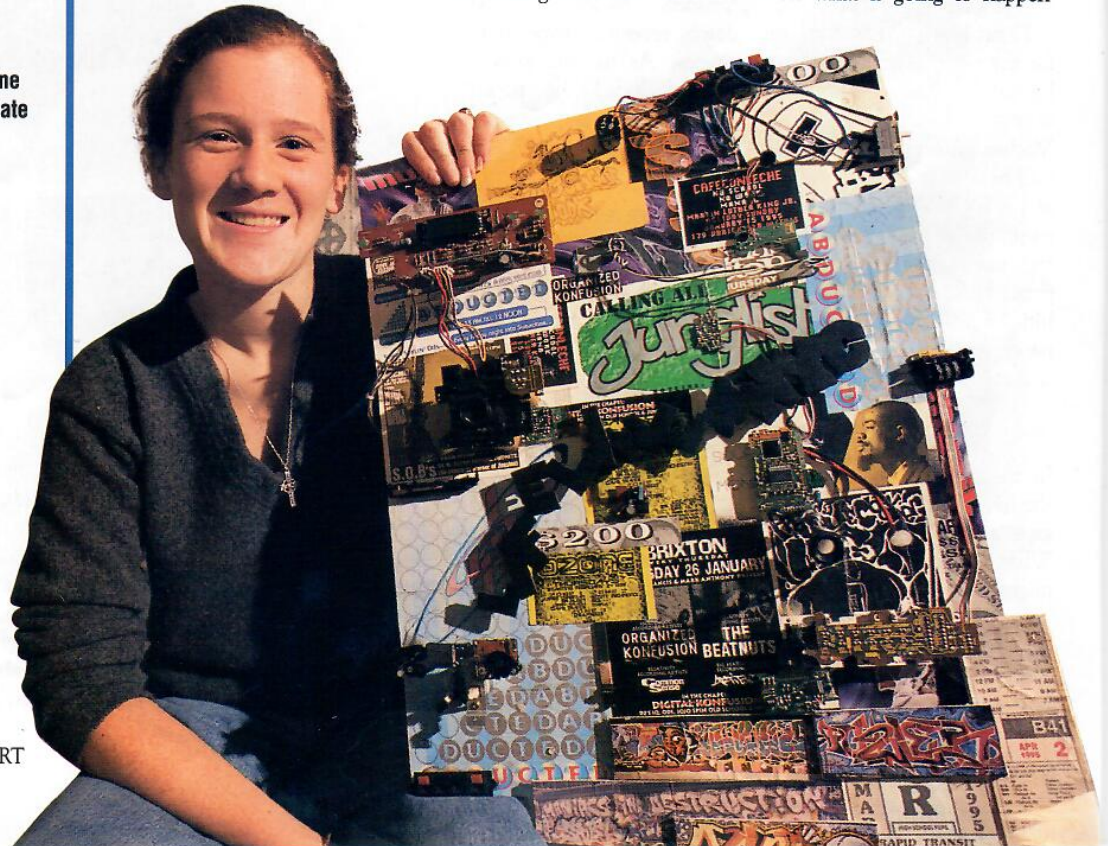
We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. Scholastic Art magazine does not have a separate competition.

■ What got you started in art?
I've been doing art as long as I can remember. I took my first art class in elementary school and continued through high school. I liked art because it was an escape from whatever problems I might have been

having at the time. It made me happy. My art was all mine.

■ How did you come to do this award-winning collage?
I did it for art class when I was a senior. It wasn't an assignment. I had finished my last project, and I was fiddling with some ideas at

■ Where did you get your idea?
As I remember, I was so mad about something I just couldn't sleep. I wanted to release my anger, so I ended up starting this collage. I had bought all these magazines, I had a piece of board, I even had glaze left over from another project, and I started to put a collage together. When I begin making something, I never know what is going to happen



until I get going. I'll have an idea in my head, something may be bothering me or I've been thinking about something. Then I try to express it somehow. That's what happened here.

■ **How did this idea develop?**

I was thinking a lot about my family, my friends, where I came from. I wanted to show that the city was the only environment the people in this work could survive in. This collage is about how the city manipulates people. And how people manipulate the city. I was hanging out with people who are creative in a nonconventional way—dancers and graffiti artists. I was traveling around the city, going to different neighborhoods, riding the subways. I liked the subway maps and figuring out how a big city works.

■ **Where did you get the photographs you used?**

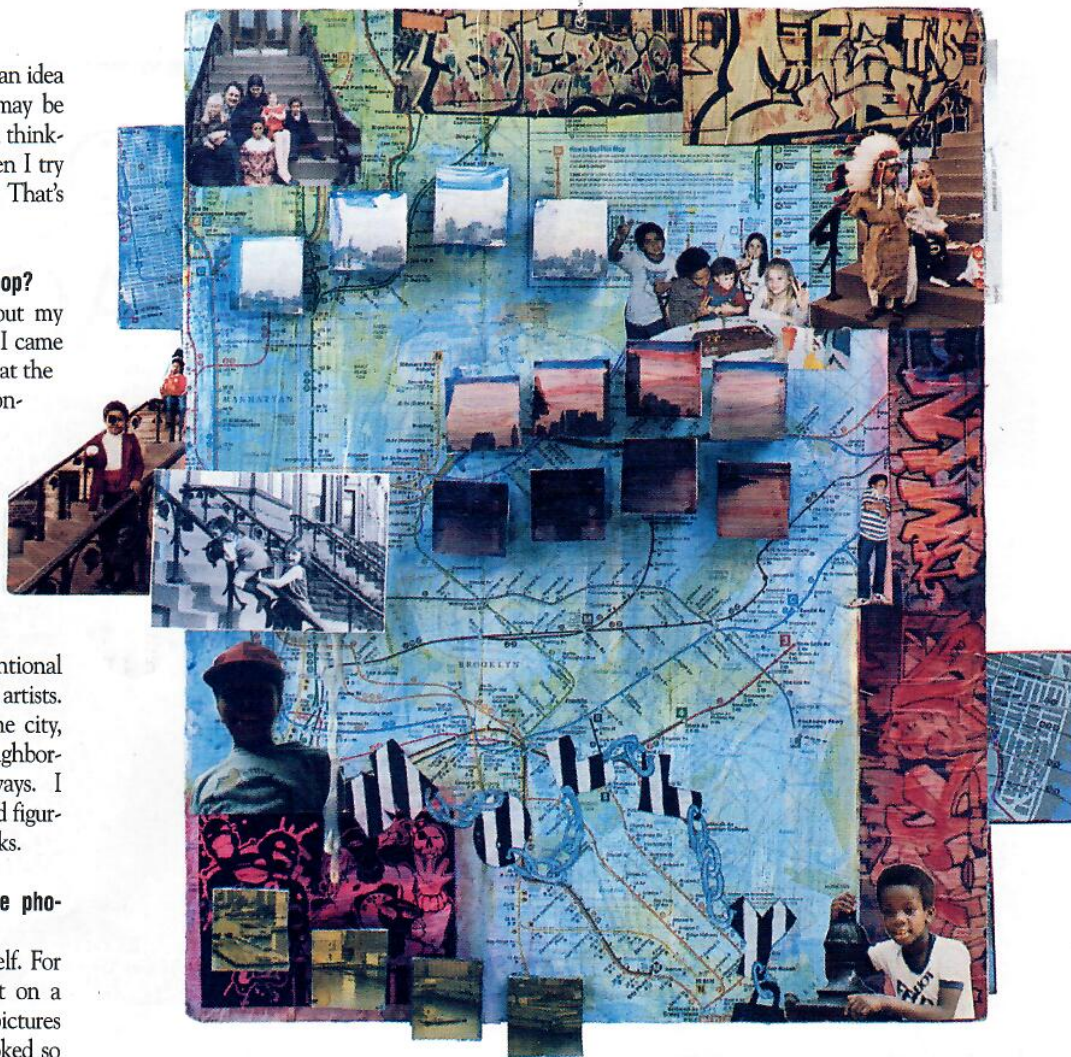
I took most of them myself. For my 16th birthday, I went on a helicopter ride and took pictures from the air. The city looked so small. All you could see were little yellow cabs everywhere. I used photos I took of my friends on the subway and added some warm yellow wild lettering.

■ **Who are the people featured?**

Some of the people are my relatives. Two pictures are of my sister and me when we were young, dressed up for Halloween. There's one of me at 3, sitting with all my siblings in front of my birthday cake. The other pictures are of people who I grew up with who aren't family, but I consider them family.

■ **Why did you juxtapose the photographs the way you did?**

I put the pictures together because they go together, in a way. But in another way, they don't. The relationships make sense,



but you have to put the meaning together for yourself, if you can. I arranged them to suggest a deliberate, random pattern.

■ **What sort of statement were you trying to express?**

I was hoping the collage would make people think about their lives. I wanted them to think about life in the city and all the kinds of people who live there. I wanted them to take things in, accept and enjoy them. Maybe they'll see a perspective or image they never saw before.

■ **Why do you like collage?**

We get bombarded with images all the time. It's involuntary, we have no choice. Visuals—on TV, in a magazine or a billboard—are thrust on us. I like

“We get bombarded with images all the time . . . I like collage because it's a way to push those images back out—to redefine and take control of them.”

collage because it's a way to push those images back out—to redefine and take control of them. Working with collage gives me a sense of power and control.

■ **Do you have advice for anyone interested in an art career?**

If art is the only thing you feel satisfied doing, then you should continue no matter what people say. If you're an artist, art is something you need to do.

CREATE YOUR OWN PHOTOMONTAGE



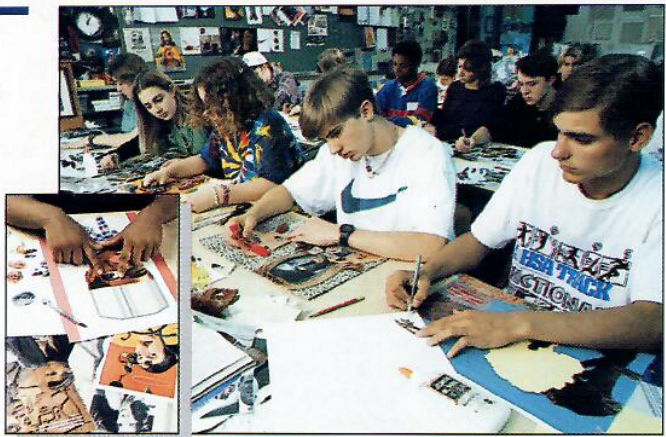
Use elements from your own life to create a personal visual statement.

Romare Bearden juxtaposed photo fragments and throwaway materials to make a point about the conflicts and hardships of life in the African-American community. His collages also express vitality, creativity, and support. In this workshop, you'll use photos and other materials to communicate a theme that is important to you. Will you show memories from your past? Or will your photomontage portray thoughts of the present or hopes for the future?



Materials

- 12" x 18" 150 lb. Tag board.
- Elmer's Glue-All.
- Scissors, X-Acto knives, and/or single-edge razor blades
- 12" x 18" construction paper, assorted colors
- Variety of picture magazines (*National Geographic*, *Life*, *Look*; nature, sports, etc.)
- White scrap paper
- Thick cardboard for cutting surface
- Variety of fabric scraps and/or old clothes
- Wallpaper sample books
- Personal photos (may be photocopied, enlarged, reduced, repeated)
- Assorted watercolor felt markers



Starting Out

1. Collect a variety of photographs, fabrics, or patterned paper such as wrapping paper or wallpaper. As you are collecting this material and as you look at Romare Bearden's collages, begin thinking of a theme on which you might like to base your collage. Go through any magazines you have collected; choose the images that will best express your theme and carefully remove the entire page on which the image appears.

Step 2

Once you have chosen your theme (possible themes might be: family, school, an experience or feeling from the past, a fantasy of your future life), decide on the techniques that will best express it. Smooth transitions and objects that are in realistic scale and proportion tend to give a **harmonious** feeling. Ripped fragments, tight cropping, and figures that are in the wrong place or are out of proportion suggest **contrast** and **conflict**. Start selecting and cutting out images and patterns.

Step 3

Begin arranging and rearranging materials into *background*,

middleground, and *foreground* areas. Consider incorporating your own personal photographs; they may be used directly or photocopied (try **reducing**, **enlarging**, **cropping**, and **repeating** images). You can also incorporate fabric, wallpaper, wrapping

paper, and construction paper. Keep your background simple so as not to distract from your theme. When the composition is finalized, carefully glue down all the elements using tiny, pin-point dots of glue to avoid any wrinkling.



Some Solutions

Romare Bearden used two main subjects—*figures* and *landscapes*—to visualize his themes. In these works, how have the artists **juxtaposed** collage images to create expressive figures and landscapes? Who combined elements of different **sizes**, seen from various **points of view** and from **shifting perspectives**, to communicate a feeling of disorientation? Which artists used **sharp-edged shapes**? Which used **torn fragments**? What feeling does each technique suggest? Who used **overlapping** shapes crowded together into a small area? Are there any **asymmetrical** compositions in which many elements are **visually balanced** by large, clear areas of **negative space**?

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School. Photos by Larry Gregory. Collages by (Left to right): Wesley F. Tharp; Nick R. Bonneur; Joe Iverson; Brandon S. Ogburn; John Kelly III.

UNDERSTANDING BEARDEN'S BLUES



Romare Bearden (1911-1988), *Blues at the Crossroads*, 1985, Private Collection. © 1986 The Romare Bearden Foundation.

Artist-musician Romare Bearden felt that creating a collage is very much like creating music. He used visual juxtapositions the way a composer uses musical notes. Can you name each of the collage techniques Bearden used to create his visual jazz composition *Blues at the Crossroads*?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organic (curved) shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> Rough texture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Negative space | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scale changes |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diagonal line | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Overlapping sizes and shapes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Torn edges | <input type="checkbox"/> Jump cut |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geometric shapes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shifting perspectives |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Lines, shapes, patterns |