**Bearden Plays Bearden.** Third World Cinema Production, 1980/2012. 2 DVDs. 144 minutes + extras. $69.95 (includes group viewing license; purchase at www.beardenplaysbearden.com)

*Bearden Plays Bearden* is a new DVD set that includes the award-winning 1980 documentary of the artist Romare Bearden (1911-1988) created by filmmaker, Nelson E. Breen, and narrated by the oh-so-familiar but rich and wonderful voice of James Earl Jones. The set is a two-disc DVD (ca. 144 min.); disc one includes two versions of the documentary, the original sixty-minute film and a thirty-minute abbreviated piece.

The style is a cinematic collage heightened with soulful music and peppered with quotes from the artist’s writings, (*The Painter’s Mind*, 1969) and from his own conversations with the filmmaker. This project was a culmination of a three-year collaboration in which Breen interacted with Bearden and interviewed colleagues and friends.

The documentary sweeps across the geographies of Bearden’s life from rural North Carolina to the Negro Renaissance of Langston Hughes’s Harlem to the pulse of New York in the seventies. It highlights Bearden’s personal iconography, such as trains, circus imagery, guitars, and conjure women, and even shows the artist creating one of his famous collages, as he narrates his motivations and his influences. Bearden says during the film that he tries “to bring the Afro-American experience into art and give it a universal dimension.”

The documentary is filled with surprising cameos, such as Dr. Richard A. Long speaking to Bearden’s art themes and James Baldwin discussing mythology. While the focus is visual arts, the interdisciplinary context of the work touches on dance, jazz, blues, and the literary. Bearden did the costumes and set for *Ancestral Voices* (choreographed by Diane McIntyre, 1977) and the DVD features long clips of the Alvin Ailey dancers performing this piece in front of Bearden’s art. Playwright and poet, Ntozake Shange, talks eloquently about the blues and Bearden’s ability to capture all the complexities of his environment.

Users should not miss out on the wealth of material offered on disc two, containing background information Breen used to create the documentary, as well as new material about the Bearden Foundation’s mission and the Cinque Gallery, founded in 1969 by Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, and Norman Lewis. A December 1978 conversation Bearden has with friends in New York City as they reminisce about their years in Paris is especially enthralling. Bearden, Alvin Ailey, James Baldwin, and Albert Murray sip wine and bring history to life. If nothing else, it underscores something viewers will have already learned from watching *Bearden Plays Bearden*, that Bearden loved to tell a good story and he did it quite well.

Highly recommended for library collections supporting programs in twentieth-century American art.

Kim Collins, Art History Librarian, Robert W. Woodruff, Emory University, kcolli2@emory.edu