

My Odyssey: Conversations with Romare Bearden

Myth is a type of speech. . . made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication.

Myth is speech stolen and restored. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place, . . . this brief act of larceny.

Roland Barthes, *MYTHOLOGIES*



Romare Bearden, *Cattle Of The Sun God*

Edgar Lacy Lounge
Helen C. White Hall
University of Wisconsin
February 18, 2019

Artists

Drew Coe

Priscilla Contreras

Laura Cullinane

Michael Fink

Liangyan Hou

Ebenezer Ketema

Taesun Kim

Brock Knautz

Gangbin Lee

Shinuo Liu

Xinyi Liu

Kaden Locey

Jordan Longseth

Steven Min

Phillip Nowak

Joey Peterson

Mitch Ross

Alexandra Sachs

Dylan Wohlfiel

Jiaxi Zheng

The collage paintings embody attempts, personally and collectively, to answer a question, “What does Homer’s *Odyssey* look like from where I stand?”

Romare Bearden famously retold Homer’s *Odyssey* from the place of African American culture:

What struck me about the *Odyssey* is that all of us, from the time we begin to think are on an odyssey....And I think this is what makes the story so lasting, so classic, and applicable to everyone, . . . so if a child in Benin or in Louisiana . . . sees my paintings of Odysseus, he can understand the myth better.

Our artists engaged in conversations with Romare Bearden about how to interpret Homer’s *Odyssey*.

We entered into the conversation by reading Homer and Bearden side-by-side, with an intensive study of one of Bearden’s collages. The goal was to study Bearden’s interpretive methods and materials by means of reproducing his image.

In the next stage of the conversation, artists interpreted a passage from Homer that Bearden did not, following Bearden’s methods.

Artists explored their own identity through a series of personal writings about their lived experiences, associating each writing with a color or pattern. While artists may or may not share their writings, each color palette forms a fragmentary self-portrait, each swatch informed by lived experience.

Continuing the conversation, artists reinterpreted their earlier studies using their personal pallets. The personal palette swatches, the experiences of their lives, become the materials by which they continue their conversations with Bearden and Homer.