

Ernie Barnes
Homecoming
October 30 - December 4, 2009

The North Carolina Central University Art Museum is honored to present an exhibition during the university's Centennial celebration devoted to the art of Ernie Barnes. It is only fitting that the artwork of the university's greatest and most recognized painter be seen in his hometown, a place whose life and finest values Barnes' art enduringly expresses. This exhibition also memorializes the Neo-mannerist tendency, which Barnes work epitomizes, and provokes thoughts about its place in the annals of American art. His artwork is characterized by elongated figures, usually in motion and draws heavily from his childhood neighborhood on Willard Street here in Durham. Barnes excelled in track and field and football in high school, and attended North Carolina Central University on an athletic scholarship to play football. Barnes played offensive guard in the American Football League (AFL) for three teams: the New York Titans in 1960, the San Diego Chargers (1961–1962) and the Denver Broncos (1963–1964), and was designated as "*Official Artist of the American Football League*".

Barnes painted *The Sugar Shack* which is featured on the cover of the Marvin Gaye album *I Want You* and in the credits of the 1970s U.S. sitcom *Good Times*. He also created many other paintings which were featured throughout the show. Barnes found time to act and had featured roles in the films *Don't Look Back*, *The Story of Satchel Paige*, *Doctor's Wives*, and *Number One* with Charlton Heston. He appeared on the ABC television series *Doctor's Hospital* for one season and created the *CBS Comedy Bowl* which aired from 1969-1970. The 1984 Summer Olympics named Barnes the Official Sports Artist and he received the 2004 Sports Artist of the Year Award presented annually by the American Sport Art Museum and Archives. Perhaps his most significant accomplishment outside of football and painting was writing his autobiography *From Pads to Palette* in 1995. Barnes found great success in Hollywood, and the entertainment community simultaneously embraced him as an artist by avidly collecting his work. In 2004, rapper and record producer Kanye West commissioned Barnes to paint *A Life Restored*, an interpretation of West's recovery from a 2002 near fatal car crash. In October 2007, the late Honorable Jack Kemp, along with Donna Brazile, Susan Taylor, and Brig Owens hosted in association with the National Football League *A Tribute to Artist and NFL Alumni Ernie Barnes* at the Time Warner Center, New York, NY.

In later years the state of America, and African American youth in particular caused Barnes to pause and to reevaluate his art, or at least to think through its essential premise again. A reflective note that was not present before begins to appear, one which indicates that he was measuring more carefully his values against those of others, that he was exploring more profoundly his own attitudes about art, and that he was assessing his place and role in the history of American art. As Warren Robbins, founder of the National Museum of African Art stated, "Few careers, in either art or athletics, have been as remarkable as that of Ernie Barnes who has bridged so successfully and effectively two worlds ordinarily considered so remote from one another."