# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**Status:**
Laureate

**Year:**
2013

**Organization Name:**
The Smithsonian Institution

**Organization URL:**
http://www.sites.si.edu/romarebearden/apps/

**Project Name:**
Audio Tour: "Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey"

**Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:**
Mobile Access

**Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)**

This app, for both iOS and Android, is a 20-stop audio tour that gives listeners new intellectual routes into the works of Romare Bearden and into Homer's Odyssey. The app was released in conjunction with the traveling exhibit "Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey." It functions as both an exhibition companion and as an engaging standalone introduction to Bearden's work. The five sections of the app are coded with vibrant colors that seem drawn from Bearden's palette and offer intuitive navigation. Voices on the tour include Dr. Robert O"Meally, exhibition curator and professor of literature at Columbia University. He is joined by Diedra Harris-Kelley, Bearden's niece and the co-director of the Romare Bearden Foundation. Artist, writer and musician, Paul Miller, aka DJ Spooky, provides additional perspective, contributing his own thoughts about Bearden's genius. Jazz musician Branford Marsalis contributes to the audio tour with the song "Sea Breeze," originally composed by Bearden himself. This app uses a uniquely creative approach to deliver insight to the end-user. Through the comments of DJ Spooky, other narrators, and the background audio, listeners are invited to consider the similarities

between jazz and blues improvisation, the often-extemporaneous audio layering and mash-ups inherent in DJ remixing, and Bearden's techniques and approaches to his themes. Music, and specifically jazz, blues, and DJ mixes, become springboards to attract users to explore Bearden's work further; the familiar is used to contribute sense-making of Bearden's work. The app's three sections are comprised of the 20-stop tour, a search feature, and information about the app and the exhibit. Included in the latter is a "Where is the exhibition now" feature. Also included are links to the full website and the Bearden collage app.

**When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)**

November 2012. No changes have been made to the app since then.

**Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)**

Yes, implementation is complete.

**Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)**

"Now this is an odyssey that I can endorse." -Bret Mulligan, professor of classical mythology, on the "Romare Bearden: A Black Odyssey" app. This app has provided exhibition visitors with an enriched experience they can keep and refer to in the future. This traveling exhibition represents the first full-scale presentation of these works outside of New York City. More importantly, the app extends the exhibition "space" to the world. (To date, on its first "leg," the exhibit has been at the Reynolda House Museum of American Art in Salem, North Carolina. The tour has six other stops, and ends on October 5, 2014.) The app is free, making it accessible to all who have access to the Internet. It offers to those unfamiliar with Bearden's work and unable to attend the exhibit access to an immersive and thought-provoking visual and audio tour. The app offers new intellectual routes into Bearden's work via familiar concepts of jazz and blues improvisation, and for younger audiences, the concept of DJ mixing. The app links to its companion app, the Bearden collage app (nominated separately). Users of the free companion app can create collages in the style of this important modernist artist and then upload their "works" to the public gallery, further extending the "reach" of the traveling exhibit. User-generated collages have been submitted from as far away as China.

**Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)**

While museum mobile tour apps are not new, this particular app represents some best practices. This is most notable in the creative approach and particular content deployed to offer insight to the end-user. As noted above: Through the comments of DJ Spooky,

other narrators, and the background audio, listeners are invited to consider the similarities between jazz and blues improvisation, the often-extemporaneous audio layering and mash-ups inherent in DJ remixing, and Bearden's techniques and approaches to his themes. Music, and specifically jazz, blues, and DJ mixes, become springboards to attract users to explore Bearden's work further; the familiar is used to provide sense-making of Bearden's work. This is one of two apps produced in conjunction with the Bearden traveling exhibit. The other app, "Romare Bearden: Black Odyssey Remixes" is nominated separately. This app, colloquially referred to as the "Bearden collage app" takes the above creative approach further by offering users a hands-on experience of improvisation, creating their own collages in Bearden's style and layering in jazz riffs, environmental sounds, and DJ mix samples. Both apps were created in support of the traveling Bearden exhibit, but they were designed to work just as well singly, and in isolation from the exhibit. This dual-app approach can be used by organizations and other museums and research centers within the Smithsonian Institution. Both apps encourage discussion, participation, and further learning far beyond the walls and time spans of the traveling exhibit.

**If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)**

In consonance with Dr. Proctor's mobile strategy, a growing base of skilled, enthusiastic, and committed volunteers have been recruited to operate in a variety of roles within the mobile technology programs of the Smithsonian Institute. These have included programmers, marketers, students, communications professionals, event planners, and more. Volunteers also contributed their skills towards the advancement of this project. This strategy of "recruiting the world" is a very interesting experiment to watch, as it may hold the key to solving some critical resource constraint challenges that museum mobile programs will continue to face in the foreseeable future, even as mobile programs become increasingly critical for the success of museums and cultural institutions.