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Robert Fishko, *Director*

ERNIE BARNES

(1938-2009)

No Time for Church, 1972

acrylic on canvas

18 x 24 inches

signed lower right "ERNIE BARNES"



Provenance

The Artist

Collection of Burt Lancaster, 1972

Roland Kibbee and Lucille Meredith Kibbee (gift from the above)

Jefferson Kibbee (by descent)

The Estate of Ernie Barnes

Private Collection, Rye, New York (purchased from the above)

Note

Born in Durham, North Carolina in 1938 at the height of the Jim Crow era, Ernest Eugene Barnes, Jr. ("Ernie") is known for his paintings depicting Southern life and Black Joy in which he animated the lyricism of the human body at sport, work, and play. Barnes' characters - stylized and sinuous - were expressive of the soul and spirit of the South described by the Artist as the "spiritual currency of the ghetto." His neo-mannerist style was influenced by Italian masters and 20th Century American artists including Thomas Hart Benton, Andrew Wyeth and Charles White.

Ernie Barnes attended Carolina College on a football scholarship but he studied art. Drafted by the National Football League, Barnes played for six years before retiring in 1965 to concentrate on his art. In the 1970s, Barnes' paintings became known across the country when his work was featured on the cover of Marvin Gaye's 1976 album, *I Want You*, and in the credits of the groundbreaking television series, *Good Times*. His impact on popular culture has led the art of Ernie Barnes to become synonymous with contemporary African American creative expression for multi-generational audiences from all walks of life.

Created in 1972, *No Time for Church* was made at the time Barnes' series *The Beauty of the Ghetto* embarked on a seven-year tour of major American cities hosted by dignitaries, athletes and celebrities. The series was Barnes' response to the "Black is Beautiful" cultural movement of the 1960s and the iconic 1968 James Brown song, *Say it loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud*. His focus shifted towards the beauty and joy of mid-century Black southern life at a time that dismissed the work of Black artists and when Black culture was not represented in the pictures hanging in public collections. Barnes remarked, "I am providing a pictorial background for an understanding into the aesthetics of Black America. It is not a plea to people to continue to live there (in the ghetto) but for those who feel trapped, it is...a challenge of how beautiful life can be." With the simple act of instilling his canvases with positivity, earnestness, striving, celebration and pride, Barnes' depiction of Black life imparted a principled, even defiant, message accessible to all.

No Time for Church is a self-portrait portraying Barnes with eyes closed. Describing the symbolism of this expression, Barnes explained "...I began to see, observe, how blind we are to one another's humanity. Blinded by a lot of things that have, perhaps, initiated feelings in that light. We don't see into the depths of our interconnection. The gifts, the strength and potential within other human beings. We stop at color quite often. So one of the things we have to be aware of is who we are in order to have the capacity to like others. But when you cannot visualize the offerings of another human being you're obviously not looking at the human being with open eyes."

Legendary film actor Burt Lancaster (1913-1994) was the first owner of *No Time for Church*, acquiring the work in the year it was made. Lancaster gifted the painting to screenwriter and frequent collaborator Roland Kibbee (1914-1984) and his wife Lucille Meredith Kibbee. Together with Lancaster, Roland Kibbee notably worked on films including *The Crimson Pirate* (1952), *Vera Cruz* (1954), *The Devil's Disciple* (1959), and *Valdez Is Coming* (1971). Earlier in his career, Kibbee was a radio writer, with impressive credits that included *The Fred Allen Show* and *The Groucho Marx Show*.

Both Lancaster and Kibbee had social progressive backgrounds, and Kibbee was named as a Communist by several witnesses before the House Unamerican Activities Committee in the early 1950's. Forced to testify (or lose his livelihood), Kibbee reluctantly appeared, and later said he named only those that had named him. He retained his friendship and association with Lancaster, who was a vocal critic of the Committee and its effect on the business of Hollywood.