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Robert Fishko, *Director*

ERNIE BARNES

(1938-2009)

Study for The Dream Unfolds, 1995

graphite and acrylic on paper

37 7/8 x 25 3/8 inches

inscribed and signed lower right

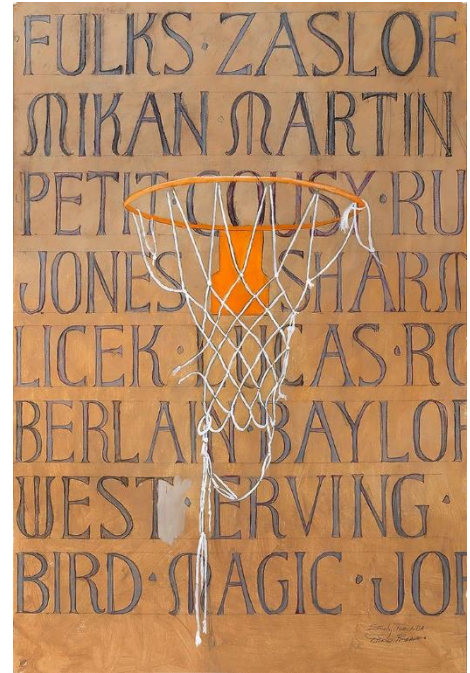
"Study: For NBA / Ernie Barnes"

Provenance

The Artist

The Estate of Ernie Barnes

Private Collection, Rye, New York



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.

Barnes' mother worked for a prominent Durham attorney and Board of Education member, Frank L. Fuller, Jr., where she oversaw the household staff. On days when Ernie accompanied her to work, Mr. Fuller encouraged a young Ernie to peruse art books and listen to classical music. Later, he was mentored by his high school masonry teacher, a weightlifting coach and former athlete, who encouraged the emerging talent he observed in Ernie's drawings. Barnes soon became an accomplished athlete himself and went on to attend North Carolina College in Durham on a full sports scholarship, but he studied art. After graduation, he was drafted by the National Football League and played for the Baltimore Colts, Titans of New York, Denver Broncos, and Canadian Football League from 1959 to 1965.

After six years playing in the National Football League, Barnes retired in 1965 to concentrate on his art. In his lifetime, Barnes credited his years as an athlete and advice from his college art instructor Ed Wilson that helped him understand the importance of painting from his own life experiences. Barnes acknowledged Wilson saying, “He told me to pay attention to what my body felt like in movement. Within that elongation, there’s a feeling, an attitude and expression. I hate to think had I not played sports what my work would look like.”

Shortly after his final football game and with the endorsement of San Diego Chargers owner Barron Hilton, Barnes crashed the 1965 American Football League owners’ meeting in Houston to make a pitch to become the first official painter of a professional sports franchise. New York Jets owner Sonny Werblin was impressed with Barnes as an artist and person and offered to pay him a player’s salary to become the team’s official painter. Sooner after, Werblin financed the transportation of Barnes’ paintings to New York and brought three art critics to view them, who agreed that Barnes was “the most expressive painter of sports since George Bellows.” Soon thereafter in November 1966, Grand Central Art Galleries in New York debuted Barnes’ first solo exhibition, which was critically acclaimed and rapidly sold out.

His experiences as an athlete served as rich fodder for Barnes’ subject matter, and he later received two *Sports Artist of the Year* award in 1984 and 1985. In addition, Barnes was commissioned to produce paintings for the Los Angeles Olympic Committee (1984), the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team (1987), and the Carolina Panthers football team (1996).

In 1996, the National Basketball Association commissioned Barnes to create a work for its 50th Anniversary on the theme “Where we were, where we are, and where we are going.” Barnes’ answer to the challenge was *The Dream Unfolds* which hangs in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The graphite and acrylic work, *Study for The Dream Unfolds*, was created in preparation for the commission, and features the last names of notable NBA players, such as Elgin Baylor, Julius Erving, Larry Bird, Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan. It is signed lower right and inscribed “*Study: For NBA*”.