

Andrew Kreps  
Gallery

22 Cortlandt Alley,  
New York, NY 10013

Tue–Sat, 10 am–6 pm  
andrewkreps.com

Tel. (212)741-8849  
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# Ernie Barnes

September 24 - October 30

Opening Reception:

Friday, September 24, 6 - 8 pm

Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by Ernie Barnes at 55 Walker, organized in collaboration with Ales Ortuzar, and the artist's estate.

Ernie Barnes was born in 1938 in segregated Durham, North Carolina. Encouraged from a young age by his mother to pursue arts and music, Barnes developed a knowledge of art history through books and catalogues, while he was legally barred from entering the museums that held the paintings he admired. Barnes sought refuge in his sketchbooks before pursuing sports late in high school, which would secure him a full athletic scholarship at North Carolina College at Durham (now North Carolina Central University), where he studied art. Football, and painting remained dual passions for Barnes as he joined the NFL, playing for the San Diego Chargers and Denver Broncos.

Barnes painted throughout his career at the NFL, and began giving interviews as an artist as early as 1962. In 1965, Barnes retired from football, proposing to become the league's official painter, after which he would relocate to Los Angeles, and begin painting full time. Barnes quickly developed his signature style, which he referred to as "neo-mannerist", marked by elongated, fluid figures set in motion, focusing on scenes of joy in everyday life. By the 1970s, Barnes would rise to national prominence as his works were featured in the television show *Good Times*. His seminal 1976 painting *The Sugar Shack*, a version of which is included in the exhibition, was chosen by Marvin Gaye as the cover of his album *I Want You*, from the same year. Painted from Barnes' memory, the work is richly layered, with its dense composition filled with revelers and dancers exaggerated in their movements and form, creating an exuberant depiction of Black life.

Dating from the early 1960s, when Barnes was active in the NFL, to the early 2000s, the works included in the exhibition at 55 Walker focus on Barnes' paintings of football, a subject he'd return to throughout his career. Brought together for the first time, these works demonstrate Barnes' consistent interest in creating multi-faceted portrayals of the human experience. Energetic compositions depict players mid-game, as they tackle, pass, and run, nearly filling the paintings' frames, while *Untitled: Locker Room, Player Sitting*, 1969, which portrays a solitary figure leaning with his head hung downwards, perhaps in a moment of

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exhaustion, suggest the games' physical, and mental toll. Throughout, Barnes focuses on the importance of a collective experience, most notably in works like *Bronco Locker Room*, 1982 - the players here are set in various stages of repose, as they are tended to by coaches, and by each other. This motif carried through Barnes' work, as he sought to reaffirm a layered understanding of humanity, stating in a 1971 interview: "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."

This is the first exhibition of Barnes' work in New York since the 1990s. In 2020, UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles presented *Liberating Humanity from Within*, a survey exhibition of Barnes' work. In addition, a retrospective of his work was exhibited at the California African American Museum in 2019, and at the North Carolina Museum of History in 2018-2019. Barnes' work is currently held in the collections of the African American Museum in Philadelphia, California African American Museum, the Pro Football Hall of Fame, BYU Museum of Art, North Carolina Central University Art Museum, the American Sport Art Museum and Archives in Daphne, Alabama, among others.

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ENTRANCE



ERNIE BARNES  
*The Sugar Shack II*, 1976

36 × 48 inches (91.4 × 121.9  
cm.); framed: 41 × 52 inches  
(104.1 × 132.1 cm.)  
(EB21-085)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Study for Steps*, 1998

Acrylic on paper  
32 × 26 inches (81.3 × 66 cm.);  
framed: 37 ½ × 28 inches (95.3  
× 71.1 cm.)  
(EB21-083)

MAIN GALLERY



ERNIE BARNES  
*Study for To Know Defeat*, 1979

Acrylic on paper  
38 × 25 inches (96.5 × 63.5  
cm.)  
(EB21-019)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Red Runningback*, 1963

Acrylic on paper  
18 × 23 inches (45.7 × 58.4  
cm.); framed: 26 × 32 inches  
(66 × 81.3 cm.)  
(EB21-026)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Fumble in the Line*, 1990

Acrylic on canvas  
48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4  
cm.)  
(EB21-007)



ERNIE BARNES  
*From the Pocket*, 1990

Acrylic on canvas  
48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4  
cm.); framed: 49 × 61 inches  
(124.5 × 154.9 cm.)  
(EB21-008)

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ERNIE BARNES  
*Untitled: Locker Room, Player Sitting*, 1969

Acrylic on canvas  
16 × 20 inches (40.6 × 50.8  
cm.)  
(EB21-013)



ERNIE BARNES  
*The Big Lineman*, 2003

Acrylic on paper  
26 × 20 inches (66 × 50.8 cm.)  
(EB21-020)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Blood Conference aka Three Red Linemen*, 1966

Acrylic on canvas  
47 × 49 inches (119.4 × 124.5  
cm.); framed: 50 × 48 inches  
(127 × 121.9 cm.)  
(EB21-009)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Stored Dreams*

Acrylic on canvas  
36 × 48 inches (91.4 × 121.9  
cm.)  
(EB21-088)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Bronco Locker Room*, 1982

Acrylic on canvas  
24 × 48 inches (61 × 121.9  
cm.); framed: 28 ½ × 52 ½  
inches (72.4 × 133.3 cm.)  
(EB21-005)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Study Sketch: Player Running Holding Ball*, 1963

Ink on paper  
framed: 15 × 15 inches (38.1 ×  
38.1 cm.)  
(EB21-028)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Study Sketch: Profile in Helmet Facing Left*, 1961

Ink on paper  
framed: 17 × 15 inches (43.2 ×  
38.1 cm.)  
(EB21-029)



ERNIE BARNES  
*Climatic Conditions*, 1995

Acrylic on canvas  
48 × 60 inches (121.9 × 152.4  
cm.)  
(EB21-006)