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SCP Auctions Proudly Presents Original Works of Art by the Late NFL Player Ernie Barnes in its 2017 Fall Premier Auction

Lineup of paintings includes 'The American War Game' and 'The Pass'

Laguna Niguel, Calif. (Oct. 26, 2017) – SCP Auctions is proud to present an array of original works of art from the late NFL player-turned-painter, Ernie Barnes, as part of its current 2017 Fall Premier Auction. Each of the original pieces originates from the recently closed San Diego Hall of Champions museum and online bidding runs through Sat., November 4, at www.scpauctions.com. Proceeds from the online auction will benefit the Hall's ongoing awards and recognition programs, community outreach initiatives, and the Breitbard Hall of Fame, which was recently relocated to the Western Metal Supply Co. Building in Petco Park. The story of Ernie Barnes is one worth telling.

Ernest Eugene Barnes, who was born in 1938, would come to be celebrated as a great painter and charcoal illustrator, well known for his use of elongation and movement within his works. An African-American, he grew up in Durham, North Carolina and although he started at an early age, opportunities for black artists were unheard of in his youth. A self-described chubby kid, Barnes was bullied by classmates and often sought refuge in his sketchbooks, hiding in the less-traveled parts of campus. One day, young Ernest was found drawing in a notebook by the masonry teacher, Tommy Tucker, who was also the junior high school's weightlifting coach. Tucker was intrigued with Barnes' drawings so he asked the aspiring artist about his grades and goals. Tucker shared how bodybuilding improved his strength and outlook on life. That one encounter would change Barnes' life. In his senior year at Hillside High School, he became captain of the football team and won a state title in the shot put. By the time he graduated, he had no less than 26 college football scholarship offers.

The six-foot-three, 250-pound Barnes went on to not only play college football and graduate from North Carolina College at Durham – where he majored in art – but made it to the AFL where he competed for five seasons (1960 to '64) as an offensive lineman for the New York Titans, San Diego Chargers and Denver Broncos. This up-close perspective of the game he loved would soon translate to his art.

"My drawings portray the moods and excitement of the game of football – a game that does strange things to men," Barnes once said. "It makes them lose their heads. It makes them hate."

In December of '59, Barnes was drafted by the then-World Champion Baltimore Colts. On Dec. 27, the offensive lineman watched his new team in person beat the New York Giants, 31-16, to win its second straight title. A couple of nights later, Barnes pulled out a canvas and began painting. At age 22, while at

Colts training camp, Barnes was interviewed by N.P. Clark, a sportswriter for the Baltimore News-Post newspaper. Until then Barnes had always known by his birth name, Ernest. But when Clark's article appeared on July 20, 1960, it referred to him as "Ernie" Barnes, which changed his name and life forever. As it turns out, Barnes was the last cut of the Colts' training camp that summer. After Baltimore released him, the newly formed New York Titans immediately signed him.

In 1965 a fractured right foot ended Barnes's pro football career and with that development he attended the NFL owners meeting in Houston with the hopes of becoming the league's official artist. It was there he was introduced to New York Jets owner Sonny Werblin, who was intrigued by Barnes and his art. He paid for the artist to bring his paintings to New York City. They met at a gallery and unbeknownst to Barnes, three art critics were there to evaluate his paintings. They told Werblin that Barnes was "the most expressive painter of sports since George Bellows." Werblin paid him a year's salary to get started.

"One day on the playing field I looked up and the sun was breaking through the clouds, hitting the unmuddied areas on the uniforms, and I said, 'That's beautiful!'" Barnes once wrote. "I knew then that it was all over being a player. I was more interested in art. So I traded my cleats for canvas, my bruises for brushes, and put all the violence and power I'd felt on the field into my paintings."

His work, which mostly depicts black people, is kinetic and often vividly bright. The strain of competing bodies is evident in the curves, stretches and muscular exertions of the figures. His most famous painting, "The Sugar Shack," is a jubilant dancing scene that appeared not only on the cover of recording artist Marvin Gaye's 1976 album "I Want You" but was also shown during the closing credits of the TV show "Good Times." Though it's not sports-related, it's nonetheless a characteristic work of Barnes with its distinct vibrant tumble of bodies.

In 2009, Barnes died of complications caused by a rare blood disorder at the age of 70. In 2014, the Pro Football Hall of Fame hosted an exhibit featuring Barnes's work. For the occasion, Bernie, his wife of 25 years, donated her husband's prized painting entitled "The Bench" to the museum. It hangs there today, an example of Barnes's ability to find beauty in an otherwise brutal game.

SCP Auctions is proud to present Barnes' originals within its 2017 Fall Premier auction. Bidding is open to registered bidders only at www.scpauctions.com and initial bidding ends on Sat., Nov. 4, at 5 p.m. PDT. For more information on how to participate and take part in the bidding, please call 949-831-3700 or visit www.scpauctions.com.

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