



## NATIONAL SPORTING LIBRARY & MUSEUM

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### **“BIG RACE: THE CONTEMPORARY VISION OF CLARICE SMITH” at the National Sporting Library & Museum**



Clarice Smith (American, 1933–2021), *Gallop*, 2009, oil with gold and copper leaf on canvas, on 5-panel screen, 50 x 77 ½ inches, National Sporting Library & Museum, Gift of Clarice Smith, 2015

**MIDDLEBURG, Virginia – January 8, 2024** – The National Sporting Library & Museum (NSLM) is pleased to announce *Big Race: The Contemporary Vision of Clarice Smith*, a focus gallery contemplating the impact that Clarice Smith’s (American, 1933–2021) artistic vision had on equine art. On view from January 11 to March 31, 2024, four compelling paintings by the artist are on loan to complement the three-dimensional horse racing screen in the National Sporting Library & Museum’s collection. “I see the horse as a dynamic beautiful form; a combination of power and grace,” noted Smith in 2014.

*Gallop*, 2009, a 5-panel screen, was donated by the artist after her solo exhibition of over 30 artworks at the NSLM in 2014, *Clarice Smith: Power & Grace*. It depicts horses neck-and-neck and thundering hooves rushing at the viewer in a halo of vibrant burnt sienna and flying gold and copper metallic dirt. This screen melding Smith’s fine art into a three-dimensional object is the only one she created with this subject matter.

To provide context to the screen, three of the paintings are generously on loan from the artist’s son, David Bruce Smith, the founder and president of The Grateful American Foundation: *Le Vainqueur*, 1995; *Dead Heat*, 1999; and *Leaving the Gate*, 2011. The largest painting in the focus gallery is a 36 ½ x 76 ½-inch oil on canvas from the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM). It is titled, simply, *Big Race*, 2001, and is the inspiration for the exhibit.

These artworks were all selected by George L. Ohrstrom, Jr. Deputy Director & Head Curator Claudia Pfeiffer to highlight Smith’s depictions of racing. Pfeiffer interviewed the artist extensively for the 2014 NSLM

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exhibition and its accompanying catalogue and wrote, “Motivated by a moment and the challenge of exploring new and innovative ways of approaching a composition, she [Smith] returns to her racing scenes with changing perspectives and variations in palette;” Pfeiffer continued, “Choices for jockey silk patterns and colors are usually not literal interpretations but rather the design of a color scheme, and her horses are composites against made-up backgrounds.”

“I paint my life,” Smith often noted. The contemporary artist first became known for her figurative, floral, and landscape subject matter. She began incorporating equine art into her oeuvre in 1983 when she and her husband, Robert H. Smith, purchased Heronwood Farm in Upperville, VA, and a portion of the Upperville Colt and Horse Show grounds, which they maintained for over 30 years. He developed a Thoroughbred breeding program, and they also regularly attended American, British, and French horse sales and races. These experiences led Clarice Smith to incorporate her stylized portrayals of motion and figurative portraiture into equine and equestrian subject matter.

When painting, Smith consciously fused different artistic inspirations into her own unique expression of motion, texture, light, and color—all informed by her classical training. She studied at George Washington University where she earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in studio art. She became a faculty member in their Art Department in 1980, remaining in that position until 1987.

Smith’s career as a contemporary artist spanned over four decades with exhibitions at numerous museums and galleries including the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; the New-York Historical Society Museum & Library; and National Museum of Women in the Arts, Cosmos Club, and the Kreeger Museum, all in Washington, D.C. In 2012, she was awarded an honorary doctorate of fine arts from George Washington University, and in 2015, she received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from University of Maryland, for her achievements.

The NSLM’s Chair Dr. Manuel H. Johnson noted of Smith’s racing imagery, “Artists like Clarice Smith remind us that sporting art is a genre neither undertaken nor understood only by sporting enthusiasts, nor is it relegated to the past.”

A Members Reception will be held on Saturday, February 10, 2024, from 5:30–7:30 pm. To join membership at the NSLM to attend, or to RSVP if you are already a member, please contact Development & Events Manager Emily Tye at [etye@nationalsporting.org](mailto:etye@nationalsporting.org) or 540-687-6542 x 26.

*The National Sporting Library & Museum is located in Middleburg, VA, the heart of beautiful horse country. Founded in 1954, the renowned research Library and fine art Museum highlight the rich heritage and tradition of country pursuits. Angling, horsemanship, shooting, steeplechasing, foxhunting, flat racing, polo, coaching, and wildlife are among the subjects one can explore in the organization’s general stacks, rare book holdings, archives, and art collection. The NSLM offers a wide variety of educational programs, exhibitions, and family activities throughout the year, and is open to researchers and the public. There is no admission fee to the Library. The Museum charges \$10 for adults, \$8 for youths (age 13–18), and \$8 for seniors. NSLM members and children age 12 and under are admitted free of charge. Library & Museum hours are Thursday–Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.*

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Clarice Smith (American, 1933–2021)  
*Dead Heat*, 1999  
oil on canvas  
58 x 36 inches  
On loan from David Bruce Smith, The Grateful American Foundation

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Clarice Smith (American, 1933–2021)  
*Leaving the Gate*, 2011  
oil on canvas  
22 x 56 inches  
On loan from David Bruce Smith, The Grateful American Foundation

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Clarice Smith (American, 1933–2021)  
*Le Vainqueur*, 1995  
oil on canvas  
24 x 36 inches  
On loan from David Bruce Smith, The Grateful American Foundation

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Clarice Smith, (American, 1933–2021)  
*Big Race*, 2001  
36 1/2 x 76 1/2 inches  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Melvin and Ryna Cohen  
and the Fungler Foundation, Norma Lee and Morton Fungler