



NATIONAL SPORTING LIBRARY & MUSEUM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Romantic Bronzes” Exhibition Opens at the National Sporting Library & Museum

MIDDLEBURG, Virginia – January 31, 2023 – The National Sporting Library & Museum is excited to announce the upcoming exhibition of bronze sculptures from the Romantic Era, opening April 14, 2023 and on view until August 20, 2023. The NSLM will host several events for the exhibition, including a Members Opening on Friday, April 14, 2023; Public Open House on Saturday, April 15; 2023, and a Coffee with the Curator on Saturday, April 22, 2023 with Dr. Sylvain Cordier, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art.

Organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Romantic Bronzes from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* showcases more than 30 extraordinary works by the 19th-century French sculptor Antoine-Louis Barye that Mrs. Nelson L. St. Clair Jr. generously donated to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) over the past 20 years. Each of the works in the St. Clair collection of Barye bronzes has been meticulously selected with an admirable degree of expert connoisseurship. These works are not only among the finest that the artist produced but also illustrate distinctive aspects of the medium, style, and historical period in which they were realized. The exhibition, curated by Dr. Cordier is both a celebration of this special donation and an invitation to learn about the various motivations and techniques involved in the art of bronze casting in the age of Romanticism.

Beginning in the 1820s, many artists began creating works that defied the rigid figurative conventions of France’s Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Bored with the classical principles and influences from ancient Greek and Roman art that the Neoclassical school had perpetuated to the point of exhaustion, these artists devised figurative means for expressing more directly emotional and subjective approaches to their subject matter. The tension, movement, and dynamism of this new aesthetic would characterize the Romantic movement in French art and literature that became prominent over the course of the 19th century.

Antoine-Louis Barye is among the most original artists to emerge from the Romantic movement in France, and today he is recognized as one of the most important sculptors of the period. At the beginning of his career, Barye worked under the close guidance of his goldsmith father while simultaneously apprenticing with some of France’s most preeminent sculptors. At the age of 23, Barye was admitted to the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts. The young artist started sculpting and casting bronzes in his distinctive and expressive style while working

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in the studio of sculptor François Bosio. The majority of these three-dimensional works were modeled on the detailed drawings of animals that he frequently sketched in Paris's zoological gardens.

“What distinguishes Barye's bronzes from those of the majority of his contemporaries is the predominance of the animal figures that enliven his subjects and convey diverse extremes of passion capable of moving his audience. With his obsessive scrutiny of animal behavior, Barye was hunting for innovative ways of representing heroism, dignity and similar perennial themes. Human figures most often appear as minor accessories to the visions of bestial nature that each of his compositions stage. Today, a growing sense of our responsibility for the health and conservation of our planet's ecosystems underscore our appreciation for the beauty of uncivilized nature and the nobility of the animal kingdom that are always present in Barye's oeuvre.”

- Dr. Cordier.

Romantic Bronzes is made possible by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' Statewide Exhibition Program. Elizabeth von Hassell, Executive Director of the National Sporting Library & Museum, expanded on the importance of this program, “It affords museums across the Commonwealth the opportunity to share VMFA's expansive collections. The National Sporting Library & Museum is excited to be a venue for the exceptional French sculptures in this exhibition which tie in so beautifully to the NSLM's mission.”

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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Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1796–1875)
Horse Surprised by a Lion, ca. 1850
Bronze (atelier) 15 3/8”H × 5 1/8”W × 15 1/4”D
(39.05 cm × 13.02 cm × 38.74 cm)
Marks: inscribed front center of base, BARYE

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Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1796–1875)
Pheasant, ca. 1845, bronze (atelier)
4 ¹⁵/₁₆"H × 8"W × 2 ¹/₂"D
(12.54 cm × 20.32 cm × 6.35 cm)

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Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1796–1875)
Percheron, ca. 1870, Bronze (atelier)
7 ³/₄"H x 7"W x 2 ³/₄"D
(19.69 cm × 17.78 cm × 6.99 cm)
Marks: incised signature on base lower left, BARYE

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Antoine-Louis Barye (French, 1796–1875)
Turkish Horse (Left Leg Raised), ca. 1844
bronze (atelier)
11 ³/₄"H x 4 ⁵/₈"W x 12 ¹/₄"L
(29.85 cm x 11.75 cm x 31.12 cm)
Marks: stamped on base BARYE

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