

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 11, 2024**

**Tickets for VMFA's Two-Day Symposium *Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary* Now on Sale**  
**Award-Winning Author and Scholar Dr. Clint Smith to Deliver Keynote Address**



*Untitled (James River)* from the series *Stony the Road*, 2023, Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953), gelatin silver print. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Alfred duPont, by exchange. Image © Dawoud Bey

**Richmond, VA** — Tickets are available for a two-day symposium, [Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary](#), which will be held in the Leslie Cheek Theater at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) on Friday, Jan. 26, and Saturday, Jan. 27, 2024.

Inspired by VMFA's exhibition *Dawoud Bey: Elegy*, the symposium will explore the complexities of the Black experience in United States and draw parallels between past and present histories. Tickets for each day of the symposium are sold separately and seating is limited. Those who cannot attend Friday's keynote in person may register through Zoom to watch the address via livestream. The livestream of Saturday's symposium panels will be hosted on [VMFA's website](#).

"We are delighted to welcome such outstanding speakers to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for our upcoming symposium *Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary*," said the museum's Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. "This is an important opportunity to explore the profound and enduring legacies of history and how we can shape our collective future."

To kick off the symposium, renowned writer, poet and scholar [Clint Smith, Ph.D.](#), will deliver a keynote address titled [How the Word Is Passed: Reckoning with Our Past to Build a Better World](#) on Friday, Jan. 26, 2024, from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Smith's address will shed light on the hidden ties between contemporary economic and socio-political landscapes and the history of African American enslavement. Drawing from his award-winning book *How the Word Is Passed*, Smith will emphasize the importance of documenting, learning from and accounting for this history as citizens. Admission to the keynote address is \$20 or \$15 for VMFA members.



Author and scholar Clint Smith, Ph.D., will deliver the keynote address the evening of Friday, Jan. 26, 2024, at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

On Saturday, Jan. 27, 2024, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the symposium will continue with an engaging [program](#) featuring leading scholars, artists, community activists and writers. Inspired by the exhibition [Davoud Bey: Elegy](#), an impressive panel of participants will delve into the intersection of history, art and the contemporary realities of Black experiences. Distinguished panelists will include contributors to the publication [Elegy](#) — [LeRonn Brooks](#) will engage in conversation with [Imani Perry, Ph.D.](#); [Claudine Rankin](#) and [Christina Sharpe, Ph.D.](#) They will be joined Saturday by [Omilade Janine Bell](#); [Rashida Bumbray](#); [Ana Edwards](#); [Lauranett Lee, Ph.D.](#); [Brian Palmer](#) and [Todd Waldo](#). Admission for day two of the symposium is \$8 or \$5 for VMFA members, and students can attend free with their IDs.

VMFA's symposium *Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary* is made possible through the generous support of the [Terra Foundation for American Art](#) with additional support from the [Community Foundation for a greater Richmond](#). This collaboration enables the museum to provide a platform for critical conversations and engage the community in exploring the rich tapestry of Black history and culture.

For more information about VMFA's two-day symposium, *Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary*, and to purchase tickets, please visit the museum's website at [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum).

# # #

### **About the Featured Keynote Speaker Clint Smith**

[Clint Smith](#) received his PhD in Education from Harvard University. He is the New York Times best-selling author of *How the Word Is Passed* and *Above Ground*. He is also a staff writer for *The Atlantic*. Smith has received fellowships from several prestigious institutions, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. His essays, poems and scholarly writing have been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry Magazine*, *The Paris Review*, the *Harvard Educational Review* and many other magazines and journals. He is a former National Poetry Slam champion and a recipient of the Jerome J. Shestack Prize from the American Poetry Review. In his forthcoming book, *Just Beneath the Soil*, Smith will explore the little-known stories behind World War II sites and discuss how they shape our collective memory of the war.

### **About the Terra Foundation for American Art**

The Terra Foundation for American Art, established in 1978 and having offices in Chicago and Paris, supports organizations and individuals locally and globally with the aim of fostering intercultural dialogues and encouraging transformative practices that expand narratives of American art, through the foundation's grant program, collection and initiatives. For more information, please visit [www.terraamericanart.org](http://www.terraamericanart.org).

### **About the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond**

As a resource for philanthropy and volunteer service in the Richmond region, the Community Foundation is the trusted steward of more than 1,300 donor established funds, a leading convener and thought partner around critical

community issues, and an advocate for increasing access and opportunity so that all individuals and families can thrive and prosper. Its mission is to bring people together to transform our community through informed and inspired philanthropy. In 2022, the Community Foundation awarded more than \$50 million in grants to local, regional and national organizations and connected 10,000 individuals, families and corporate teams with meaningful volunteer opportunities in the Richmond area. Learn more at [www.cfrichmond.org](http://www.cfrichmond.org).

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, and French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history. A new expansion, the McGlothlin Wing II, is planned to open in 2028. Comprising more than 170,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum's history and will make VMFA the fifth largest art museum in the United States.

**The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone (804) 340-1400 or visit [www.vmfa.museum](http://www.vmfa.museum).**

### **Media Contacts**

Jan Hatchette | (804) 204-2721 | [Jan.Hatchette@vmfa.museum](mailto:Jan.Hatchette@vmfa.museum)  
Amy Peck | (804) 773-1791 | [Amy.Peck@vmfa.museum](mailto:Amy.Peck@vmfa.museum)  
MacLaine Bamberger | (804) 204-2717 | [MacLaine.Bamberger@vmfa.museum](mailto:MacLaine.Bamberger@vmfa.museum)

200 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd., Richmond, VA 23220