

Press Release Info:

**What:** Art Exhibition, "HORSEPOWER", Cedric Smith

**Where;** Leland Gallery, Ennis Hall GCSU

**When:** January 12, 2023- February 9<sup>th</sup> 2023

**Reception with the Artist: January 12, 2023 5-7pm**

The Art Department at GCSU is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by local artist Cedric Smith at The Leland Gallery, Ennis Hall, GCSU Milledgeville, GA. From January 12, 2023 through February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 with a reception and artist talk in February 12<sup>th</sup>, from 5-7pm.

About Cedric Smith:



## About

Cedric Smith was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1970. He resides in Macon, Georgia. He is a self-taught painter and photographer who draws on a wide range of influences and sources, traditional and contemporary, to express his poignant observations of African American life. Much of his work is inspired by an observation from his childhood: the absence and negative portrayals of African Americans in advertising and on the labels of popular brands during that of earlier times.

Smith has received extensive critical acclaim for his work both in the U.S. and abroad. His work is in numerous private and public collection.

## Artist's Statement

As a child of the 1970s and 1980s, the lack of black representation among haute couture and in print and television advertisements raised a lot of questions for me. Where were we among the beautiful people? Were we not worthy of luxury?

*The Cosby Show* featured an accomplished life and lifestyle that neither I nor many of my friends ever knew. *Good Times* was more like it, more relatable with the Evans' struggles to make ends meet, get an education, making their way any way they could. With few role models I followed the guys suffering from the same sense of hopelessness, which steered me on a negative path. Through art, I eventually got out of the mindset.

But, I still don't see the representation that will give kids living in the same situation I grew up in something to aspire to, to shoot for. And those couture designers, 40 years later, are still getting it wrong. In 2018, Gucci showed a white female model wearing a black turtleneck sweater with a collar that covered the lower half of the face with a cutout for the mouth that was rimmed in bright red. A not-so-subtle reference to blackface. Over at H&M, a young black boy donned a hoodie with the words "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" emblazoned across his chest.

Two series which I am currently working on are my response.

The "Couture" series is an answer to the blind spots in the fashion world. Blacks consume luxury goods and exert \$1.2 trillion in spending power. By appropriating luxury labels and recasting their advertisements with black people centered in them, I'm showcasing high fashion in a different light.

In "Southern Trees", I'm subverting Billie Holiday's 1954 lament to lynching, "Strange Fruit", by reclaiming the tree not as a place of public spectacle and death but as a perch upon which beautiful black "birds" may take flight. Although the song, written by Abel Meeropol, was inspired by a 1930 photograph of two black men murdered in Indiana, the trees in the paintings are staples of the Southern landscape—oak, poplar, cherry blossom, magnolia, and pecan.