



THE JAMES MUSEUM OF WESTERN & WILDLIFE ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stephanie Adamo
Director of Marketing
727.892.4200 ext.1037
stephanie.adamo@thejamesmuseum.org

Sarah Richardson
Communications Associate
727.892.4200 ext.1025
sarah.richardson@thejamesmuseum.org

Survival of the Fittest: Envisioning Wildlife and Wilderness with the Big Four to open at The James Museum on February 17

Survival of the Fittest will feature 45 masterworks with relevance to current conversations about land and wildlife conservation and insight into humanity's ever-changing relationship with the wild

St. Petersburg, FL (February 5, 2024) – *Survival of the Fittest: Envisioning Wildlife and Wilderness with the Big Four, Masterworks from the Rijksmuseum Twenthe and the National Museum of Wildlife Art* will open at The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art in downtown St. Petersburg, on February 17. The exhibition will be on view through May 26. The exhibition title references Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which had a revolutionary impact on how Western cultures envisioned their relationship with the other animals on Earth. In the post-Darwin era, a group of classically trained painters—now known as the Big Four—emerged and helped establish a vision of wildlife and nature that remains with us today. German Richard Frieze (1854–1918) is the Big Four's elder, followed chronologically by Swede Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939), German Wilhelm Kuhnert (1865–1926), and German-American Carl Rungius (1869–1959).

For more information about the exhibition, ticketing and related programs, please visit thejamesmuseum.org/survival.

“These four artists came at a point in Western history where they were able to travel into the field and study wildlife in its natural environment. Back in the studio, they transformed those experiences into works of art that rang true to nature,” **says exhibit curator Adam Duncan Harris, Ph.D.** “Earlier artists didn’t have that opportunity or the cultural impact of Darwin’s scientific work.”

Survival of the Fittest is the first major piece of scholarship to come out of the National Museum of Wildlife Art’s multiyear Carl Rungius Catalogue Raisonné project. Presented with an accompanying exhibition catalogue, *Survival of the Fittest* will feature 45 masterworks. While other institutions hold significant collections of work by individual members of the Big Four, the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede, Netherlands, and the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, are the only two museums in the world to hold masterpieces by each member of the group. *Survival of the Fittest* brings together the best paintings from these two esteemed institutions for the first time.

“It is a stunning exhibition that will visually impress visitors as it explores a range of topical subjects,” **says Harris, who is also the Grainger/Kerr Director of the Carl Rungius Catalogue Raisonné.**

“*Survival of the Fittest* contextualizes the work of the Big Four internationally within the frames of colonialism, Darwinism, art history, land and wildlife conservation, and Indigenous peoples’ ways of seeing nature,” **Harris says.** “It addresses current conversations about large-scale land conservation, hunting, endangered species, wildlife-migration corridors, rewilding efforts, Indigenous visions of nature and how alternate ways of understanding can provide valuable insight when thinking about humanity’s always-changing relationship with the wild.”

Survival of the Fittest premiered at the National Museum of Wildlife Art and is touring to five additional venues across the United States, including The James Museum.

“It’s exciting for us to have so many works by European masters exhibited at The James for the first time,” **said Emily Kapes, Curator of Art at The James Museum.** “Highlighting the best wildlife art is a core part of what The James Museum offers our guests. *Survival of the Fittest* is the perfect introduction to the Big Four artists who revolutionized art depicting nature and wildlife.”

Key Components of *Survival of the Fittest*:

- **Classic Wildlife Art:** Explore the emergence of the Big Four and their enduring impact on wildlife depictions and artistic vision.
- **Nature's Awe Unveiled:** This stunning exhibition captivates with the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and invites the viewer to transport themselves to the natural habitats of our world's most majestic creatures.
- **Masterworks Inspiring Conservation:** With 45 compelling masterworks, this exhibition comments on current conversations on land and wildlife conservation, offering profound insights into humanity's evolving relationship with the wild.
- **Community Engagement Programs:** Engage with The James Museum's diverse programs, including member exclusives, curator talks, film screenings and family events, fostering community interaction with the exhibition.

The James Museum offers unique programs to spark curiosity and conversation and enhance *Survival of the Fittest*. Programs include:

MEMBER EXCLUSIVES

[February 16](#) | *Survival of the Fittest* Exhibition Opening Reception

[February 27](#) | Special Exhibition Tour – Hosted by the Trailblazers

CURATOR TALK

[March 16](#) | A Closer Look at *Survival of the Fittest* with Curator Dr. Adam Duncan Harris

FILM

[February 20](#) | *There is a Place on Earth* (2021)

YOUTH & FAMILY

[March 1](#) | James Playdate – Color Safari

[March 5](#) | James Playdate – Color Safari (\$10 Tuesday)

[April 13](#) | Family Day – Birds of a Feather

COMMUNITY

[April 6](#) | Downtown Cleanup with Keep Pinellas Beautiful

Survival of the Fittest: Envisioning Wildlife and Wilderness with the Big Four, Masterworks from the Rijksmuseum Twenthe and the National Museum of Wildlife Art is curated by Adam Duncan Harris, Grainger/Kerr Director of the Carl Rungius Catalogue Raisonné and organized by the National Museum of Wildlife Art.



Sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts.

####

About The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art provides experiences that inspire human connection and transformation through art depicting the peoples, landscapes, and history of the American West, and wildlife of the world. More than 400 premiere works of art including sculpture, paintings and jewelry are on display in the museum's 26,000 square feet of gallery space. The museum engages the community through programs and educational opportunities, for all ages, that bring our history to life and amplify voices that are not often at the forefront of mainstream Western art. When The James Museum opened in April 2018 it became one of the newest additions to St. Petersburg's thriving arts community.