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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Salvatore Scarpitta: Racing Cars presents a major overview of the late American artist's racing-themed artwork—drawings, paintings, collages—as well as the largest number of his race cars ever assembled in the U.S. On view January 19–April 22, 2018



Salvatore Scarpitta, *Racing Car*, 1990. Race car, steel, iron, sheet metal, plastic, 88 ½ x 157 ½ x 78 ¾ inches. Courtesy Galleria Niccoli, Parma, © Stella Alba Cartaino.

November 7, 2017 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents *Salvatore Scarpitta: Racing Cars*, a major reexamination of a seminal figure of post-World War II American art through his racing-themed artwork. Featuring work produced over a roughly thirty-year period, from the 1960s into the '90s, CAM's exhibition will be the first to focus on Scarpitta's life-long obsession with racing, providing new and significant perspectives on the artist's contributions to Pop and performance art. *Salvatore Scarpitta: Racing Cars* will be on view January 19 through April 22, 2018.

Scarpitta was represented by the Leo Castelli Gallery during a historic turn in American art from the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s to the cool sensibilities of Pop Art in the 1960s. Among Castelli artists such as Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol, Scarpitta was central to a burgeoning art movement that became emblematic of visual culture into the present day.

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Hours
10–5 Wed
10–8 Thu & Fri
10–5 Sat & Sun

CAM is free. Visit often!

Born in Brooklyn to immigrant parents, Scarpitta's formative years were spent in southern California, where his family moved when he was still an infant. As an adolescent he frequented dirt-track racing speedways, where he absorbed his early racing knowledge from such legends as Frank Lockhart, Ernie Triplett, and Wilbur Shaw—all future Indianapolis 500 champions. Following high school, Scarpitta traveled to Sicily, his father's ancestral home, in 1936. He remained in Italy over the next two decades, studying art in Rome and experiencing his first success as an artist. During the war years he was part of the Italian resistance, eventually enlisting in the U.S. Navy and becoming a member of the branch of service that sought out and retrieved art pilfered by the Nazis.



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After the war, Scarpitta returned to art-making. He became known for his determination to break the boundaries of painting, especially in his series of bandaged canvases, symbolic of the post-war period of recovery and healing in Europe. In 1958, the artist was approached by Leo Castelli and encouraged to return to the U.S. Scarpitta embraced a new freedom in the American arts landscape, and eventually found his way back to his early obsession, race cars.

CAM's exhibition chronicles Scarpitta's "Stop fooling around ... build a race car!" epiphany and follows its remarkable trajectory. Scarpitta's return to his childhood fascination aligns with the rise of the automobile, both as commodity and icon, in post-war America. But unlike many of his contemporaries, Scarpitta treats this exemplar of popular culture without irony. His racing-inspired creations are full of soul, wonder, and humor. His artistic exploration in object making leads to the dramatic expansion of his art practice into performance art. Scarpitta became a Sprint Cup team owner, with drivers and pit crew, racing his creations on dirt tracks in Maryland and Pennsylvania. CAM will exhibit five of Scarpitta's cars, including his Sprint Cup champion racer, No. 59, embossed with "Castelli Art" on its side.

The CAM exhibition includes works on paper, collage, sculpture, video, and installation, many from private collections in Italy and never-before seen in the U.S. *Salvatore Scarpitta: Racing Cars* provides a critical reassessment of an American original, re-establishing the artist as a major participant to a watershed moment in twentieth-century art.

Salvatore Scarpitta (b. 1919, New York City; d. 2007, New York City) lived an extraordinary life. He was an artist, filmmaker, World War II "monuments man," and race car driver and team owner. The Brooklyn-born son of a Sicilian father and Russo-Polish mother, Scarpitta established his artistic reputation in Rome before returning to the United States in 1958 to join art dealer Leo Castelli's legendary gallery. As an artist and racing enthusiast, Scarpitta was inspired by the speed, design, and performance of automobiles. Recent solo exhibitions include *Salvatore Scarpitta: Traveler*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Galleria Civica D'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italy; and *Salvatore Scarpitta-Outlaw Art at Racing Speeds*, Art Car Museum, Houston. His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including *Piston Head: Artists Engage the Automobile*, Venus Over Manhattan, Miami Beach; *Over, Under, Next: Experiments in Mixed Media, 1913–Present*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949–1962*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. After graduating from Hollywood High School, Scarpitta studied at the Academia di Belle Arti in Rome.

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Salvatore Scarpitta: Racing Cars is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Lisa Melandri, Executive Director.

The exhibition is generously supported by Joan and Mitchell Markow.

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis offers special thanks and gratitude to Stella Scarpitta Cartaino.



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Related Events

Press & Patron Preview

Friday, January 19, 10:00 am
Join CAM curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions.

*RSVP to Eddie Silva at
314.535.0770 x311.*

Opening Night

Friday, January 19
Member Preview 6:00 pm
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

Art Up Late: Faster

Friday, April 13, 9:00–midnight

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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