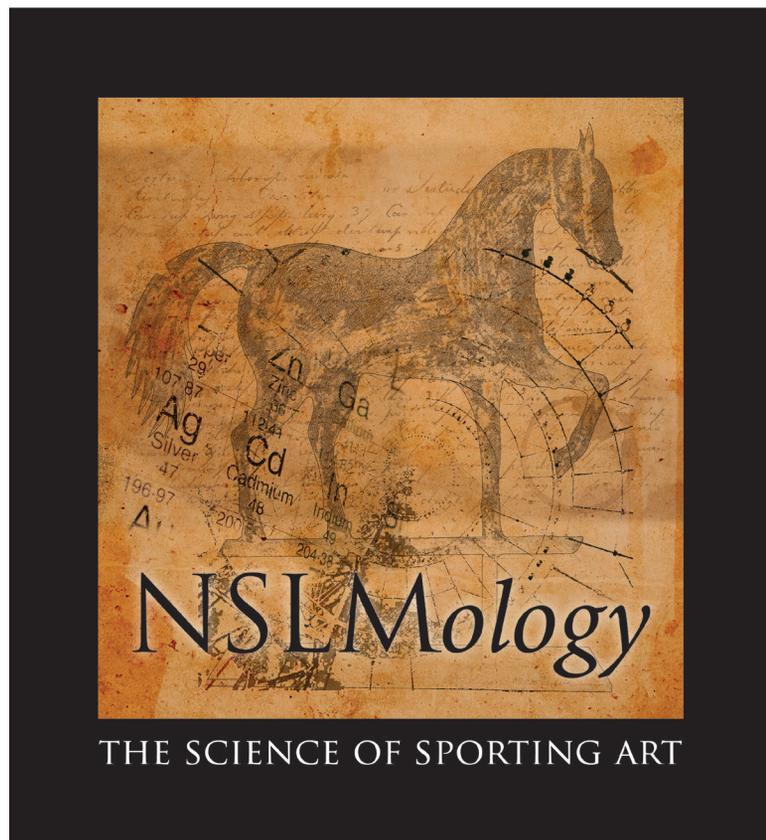


# Sporting Art Meets Science

*New NSLM Exhibit Includes Examination of Equine Locomotion*

By Anne Marie Paquette



The phrase “sporting art” likely conjures classic scenes of race horses, foxhunts, fly fishing, and wingshooting. Sporting artwork typically includes one or all of the following: a portrait, an animal portrait, and a landscape. For a sporting enthusiast, a work might evoke a kinship to the sport represented or an appreciation for the details of tack and turnout.

In the same work, an art lover might connect with the painterly aspects of the composition or the art movement that influenced its creation, and a historian might enjoy analysis of the event.

The new exhibition, *NSLM-ology: The Science of Sporting Art*, at the National Sporting Library & Museum (NSLM) in Middleburg, Va., takes a step beyond these traditional views and drills down to scientific principles. The viewer is invited to consider weather, ecology, motion, color theory, and chemistry in works of art. This selection includes favorite paintings, sculptures, and works on paper from the NSLM’s permanent collection, many of which have not been on view for some time.

For example, one of the scientific topics presented in the exhibition is *motion*. From the days of Lascaux’s cave paintings through today, artists have struggled to represent the movement of horses on a two-dimensional surface.

One reason for this difficulty is that when a horse is moving at its fastest gait, the gallop, its legs are moving too fast for the human eye to discern. Because of this, paintings of races and hunts completed up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century depict horses in a “rocking horse” or “hobby horse” position, with front and back legs outstretched to show speed.

But do horses gallop that way? With the advent of the camera in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artists and scientists learned how to freeze time on film. In the 1870s, Leland

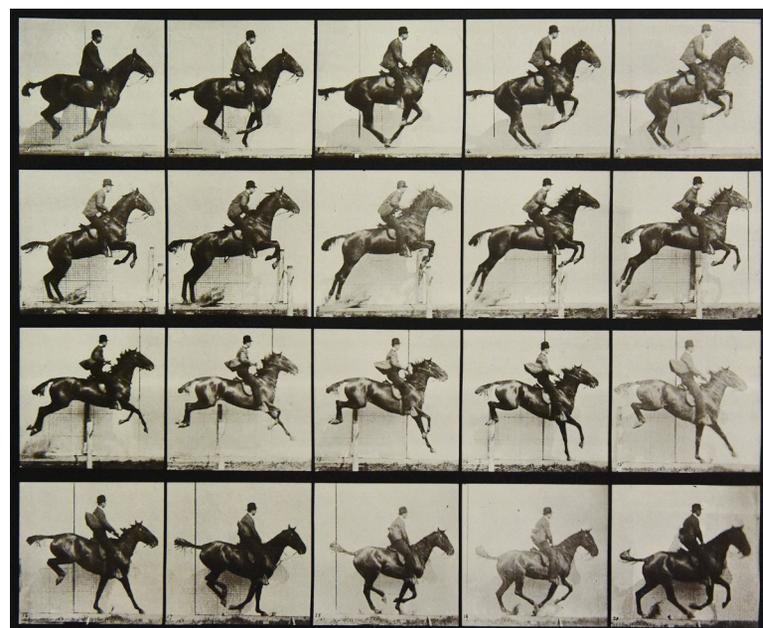


This 18th century oil painting, titled *A Hare Hunting Scene*, shows how horses were depicted as galloping in a “hobby horse” position before photography showed how they actually move.

Stanford decided to uncover the mystery of the horse’s gallop once and for all. He hired the pioneering English photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, to capture images of horses galloping mid-stride to see whether the “hobby horse” position was correct.

To capture these split-second images, Muybridge assembled twelve cameras around the outer ring of a race track, attaching a tripwire across the track in front of each camera. As the test horse galloped around the track it tripped each wire in turn, which then closed the shutter of each camera as the horse went by. The result was a series of crisp photographs showing the progressive image of a horse galloping, using cutting edge technology to see what the human eye cannot.

In the exhibition, visitors will see examples of “hobby horse” style paintings and an original Muybridge photograph series highlighting this important discovery. There will also be an activity area at which you can make your own zoetrope (moving picture device) based on Muybridge’s own, which inspired filmmakers only a generation later. Of course, this is only one of the scientific principles revealed in *NSLMology: The Science of Sporting Art*, which opens April 12. In addition to regular public viewing, group and educational STEM tours can be arranged by contacting the National Sporting Library and Museum.



Eadweard Muybridge’s pioneering photos (taken in 1890) captured split-second images of horses galloping and jumping. Before photography, it was impossible to see how their legs move at speed.