



NILS-UDO/NEST earth, stones, birches, grass Germany 1978 pigment print 150x150 cm. ED.10. (nest), Nydia Bias (Smith)

NOR'EASTER

The great limbs crashed down
Under the weight of wet snow.
Like a civilization letting go.

Down across roads, onto wires,
Darkening whole neighborhoods
For days. Limbs thick as hams

Snapped off clean and heaved
Onto lawns, onto low roofs
And a single unlucky sedan left

Overnight at the curb. Inside,
It's plastic men, wee trucks, a toy
Lizard gnawed to just a tail. What

Chases me back and forth down
The long hall after one last shoe,
One last balled sock, one last

Tumbleweed of phantom dust?
And when can I lie or fall onto
The clean bed in the dim room

Waiting like all the poor trees
For the teeth of some merciful saw?



In 2003, when Tracy K. Smith's debut collection, *The Body's Question*, won the Cave Canem Prize for the best first book by an African-American poet, it was lauded for its intense physicality. As Kevin Young wrote at the time, in poems of "grief and loss, of lust and hunger, of joy and desire," her work "speaks a body language" all its own.

If anything has changed in the 15 years since her first collection, it's that Smith, now in her second year as the U.S. poet laureate, increasingly finds herself addressing the body politic. Her third book, *Life on Mars*, which in part contemplates her father's work on the Hubble Space Telescope, won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize. This spring she was honored by the Poetry Society of America for her advocacy on behalf of the art. And in March, as part of her role as laureate, she undertook a journey bringing poetry to communities across the nation, many often overlooked on book tours, in the hope that it might serve as a balm for our partisan ailments.

In "Nor'easter," an original poem for *The National*, she serenades the body once more, her words evoking the exhaustion of tempest-tossed young mothers at the close of day. Yet for all her speaker's weariness, it's a happy fatigue, one that comes from a manifestly fulfilled and cherished life. At the eye of Smith's storm, you'll find an equanimity only rare spirits possess. —Alice Quinn