

Yowshien Kuo

Sufferingly Politely



Yowshien Kuo, *Two Right Feet, Snake Eyes and Cherry Pie*, 2022. Acrylic, bone ash, chalk, synthetic fibers, iridescent pigment, plastic, and glitter on canvas, 46 x 70 inches. Courtesy the artist and Luce Gallery, Torino, Italy.

About the Great Rivers Biennial

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents the tenth Great Rivers Biennial, featuring new works by St. Louis artists Yowshien Kuo, Yvonne Osei, and Jon Young. The Great Rivers Biennial Arts Award Program, a collaborative initiative between CAM and the Gateway Foundation, recognizes talented emerging and mid-career artists working in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area, providing each award recipient with a \$20,000 honorarium and a major exhibition at CAM. Now in its tenth edition, this joint initiative has awarded 30 artists with more than \$600,000 in service of supporting the local arts community.

Three distinguished jurors selected the 2022 winners from more than 100 submissions. This year's jurors include Carmen Hermo, Associate Curator for the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; Jen Liu, a New York-based visual artist

working in video, painting, dance performance, and biomaterial; and Hamza Walker, Director of LAXART, a nonprofit art space in Los Angeles, and adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

About the Exhibition

Yowshien Kuo's new glimmering, candy-colored paintings utilize the visual language of Americana, reinterpreting popular cultural tropes to consider themes of racial inequality, identity, discrimination, cultural structures, sexuality, and assimilation. These works confuse the lines between fact and fiction,



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reality and dream, in order to question what it means to be American.

A blend of memoir, history, and criticism, the large-scale and intricate paintings in *Sufferingly Politely* depict figures of Asian descent in front of collaged, dream-like landscapes. The central figures take inspiration from Baroque paintings and cinematic inspired gestures—revealing the characters’ referential relationship to the physical world, culture, and their own imaginations. By combining flattened and almost comical imagery with more ominous depictions of ritual and cult practices, the works revise history to reframe commonly held beliefs about American cultural dynamics.

Kuo’s work finds aesthetic influence from folk art-making practices, American television and film, and the traditional display of 15th- and 16th-century European paintings. The large, detailed paintings are made even more immersive through the addition of faint, ambient noise, glowing rays of neon light emerging from behind the paintings, and the use of carpet in the space. These atmospheric choices encourage viewers to contemplate each work and take time for self-reflection.

Kuo’s paintings are dense with symbolism. He draws upon and reclaims popular storytelling motifs that seemingly represent a homogenous American culture. By reframing tropes—such as the American cowboy persona—through the lens of his Asian American identity, Kuo addresses the dissonance between “the stories and characters presented in literature and media and...my own identity and the identity of those who occupy my environment.” The work is both a personal meditation on the artist’s own cultural identity and an invitation for the viewer to reflect on dominant systems of power. Through the use of allegory, *Sufferingly Politely* reveals the “bitter truths” hidden within what appears to be fiction.

This exhibition is made possible by the Gateway Foundation.

GATEWAY FOUNDATION

Great Rivers Biennial 2022 is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

Yowshien Kuo (b. 1985, St. Louis) was educated in both Taiwan and the United States, receiving his MFA from Fontbonne University in St. Louis in 2014. His recent solo exhibitions include James Fuentes online gallery (New York) and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis as part of an exhibition organized by the Teen Museum Studies program. Other notable exhibitions include Art Taipei 2021 with Artnutri Gallery; Praise Shadows Gallery, Boston; and LVL3 in Chicago. Kuo’s work was featured on the cover of *New American Paintings*, among other publications, and has appeared on Artsy. He has been a recipient of an award from Critical Mass for the Visual Arts and has received a grant from the Regional Arts Commission in St. Louis.

Related Programs

Artist and Juror Panel Discussion

Saturday, September 10, 11:00 am

Confluence: Celebrating the Tenth Edition of the Great Rivers Biennial

Thursday, January 26, 5:30 pm

Artist Suggested Resources List

Selected by Yowshien Kuo to share insights into his art and ideas.

Films

Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. 2012. Drama.
Christensen, Benjamin, director. *Häxan*. 1922. Horror/
Fantasy.

Denis, Claire, director. *Beau Travail*. 1999. Drama.

Eggers, Robert, director. *The Witch*. 2015. Horror/Fantasy.

Keaton, Buster, director. *The Cameraman*. 1928. Comedy/
Romance.

Kwan, Daniel and Daniel Scheinert, directors. *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*. 2022. Adventure/Sci-Fi.

Malick, Terrence, director. *The Tree of Life*. 2011. Drama/
Fantasy.

Tarkovsky, Andrei, director. *Stalker*. 1979. Sci-fi/Adventure.

Literature

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 1963.

Berger, John. *The Shape of a Pocket*. 2001.

Carpentier, Alejo. *The Kingdom of This World*. 1949.

Eng, David L. and Shinee Han. *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation*. 2018.

Joshi, S. T. *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*. 2014.



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Yvonne Osei Brainchild



Yvonne Osei, *Africa Clothe Me Bare*, Bloomington, 2019. Photograph courtesy the artist.

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Feminist Art; Jen Liu, a New York-based visual artist working in video, painting, dance performance, and biomaterial; and Hamza Walker, Director of LAXART, a nonprofit art space in Los Angeles, and adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

About the Exhibition

Yvonne Osei is a multidisciplinary artist whose work spans the mediums of performance art, video, photography, textile design, site-specific installations, and garment construction. Her new and immersive



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video installation at CAM addresses structural racism that continues to produce fractures in childhood innocence, generational trauma, and a lack of stewardship of African American contributions and sacrifices in US history. Osei uses her creative voice to redefine and disrupt dominant narratives that shape contemporary cultural identities. Her work amplifies our awareness that the prevalence of racial atrocities within the US have become normalized. Through her public interventions, Osei pushes against cultural amnesia and reimagines public space to include the perspectives of those who have been silenced.

Brainchild engages video and textile design to reckon with countless instances of systemic violence against Black bodies. Osei's approach to textile design is decidedly place based—she takes photographs of different St. Louis neighborhoods, turns these into digital patterns, and has the fabrics produced. Eventually culminating in handmade garments that she designs and wears, Osei uses her body as a vessel to reflect on the interconnectedness of the self, place, and structures of power. The dimension of time figures prominently throughout the work as Osei travels to racially charged historical sites across six cities in the Midwest and the South: St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Memphis, Selma, and Money, Mississippi. In these places she bears witness to the persistence of injustice, asking “how [do] we acknowledge, atone for, and collectively remember racial atrocities?”

Inspired by her Ghanaian heritage as well as the physical and political landscapes of St. Louis, Osei's new six-channel video installation considers the roles of legacy-building, motherhood, and birth, both physically and metaphorically, amid social structures that perpetuate racial violence. Osei uses her pregnant body as a tool to reflect on how premature death cuts off the promise and potential of Black youth, destabilizing Black communities within and across the country. Her voyages through public space urge the viewer to consider what a more equitable future can look like by recalling the past.

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Yvonne Osei (b. 1990, Hamburg, Germany) is a German-born Ghanaian multidisciplinary artist, art educator, and arts advocate living and working in St. Louis. Osei was the 2016–17 Romare Bearden Graduate Minority Fellow at the Saint Louis Art Museum and the 2017–20 Curator-In-Residence for the Millstone Gallery at the Center of Creative Arts (COCA). She is the recipient of the 2018 Saint Louis Visionary Award for Emerging Artist, the 2018 Creative Stimulus Award by Critical Mass for the Visual Arts, the 2019 Futures Fund Grant by The Luminary, and the 2022 Stone & DeGuire Contemporary Art Award. She has attended residencies at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, Fountainhead in Miami, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, among others. Osei received her MFA from Washington University in St. Louis, where she was a Chancellor's Graduate Fellow, Mr. and Mrs. Spencer T. Olin Fellow, and Danforth Scholar. She holds an MS in Fashion Design and Business and currently serves as the Vice President of Surface Design Association, an international organization focused on textile and fiber arts.

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Films and Music

Free, Travon, director. *Two Distant Strangers*. 2020. Drama/ Sci-fi.

Peck, Raoul, director. *Exterminate All the Brutes*. 2021. Documentary series.

Robinson, Jeffery, director. *Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America*. 2021. Documentary.

Simone, Nina. “Four Women.” Written and performed by Nina Simone. Released April 1966.

Ward-Brown Denise, director. *Jim Crow to Barack Obama*. 2014. Documentary.

Literature

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 1963.



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Jon Young

The Other Side of Quicksand



Jon Young, *Out of the Blue*, 2021. Iridescent fabric, wood, batting, sand from Happy Jack Wyoming. 44 × 60 × 7 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

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About the Exhibition

Jon Young constructs bright and iridescent wall works and sculptures to explore the enduring mythology of the American West. These works, which he refers to as "waymarks," utilize symbols commonly found on road signs to consider the interconnection between



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nostalgia for an imagined American past and Indigenous erasure.

The Other Side of Quicksand invites the viewer on a journey through the culturally pervasive iconography of the American frontier. Young's sculptures are characterized by their elusiveness: recognizable natural forms, such as fires, fruits, birds, and grasshoppers, become disorienting through an iridescent aesthetic. In *Heat Haze* (2021)—a reference to the hot heat phenomenon of shimmering in the air or a mirage that distorts distant views—a bright, glittering picnic table is simultaneously an invitation to sit and an oasis that reveals itself to be an illusion. *Slight Turn 1* (2022), and the two wall works accompanying it, are both mystifying and recognizable as the works use perplexing images of scorpions that come together to resemble an instrument panel on a car's dashboard. The works call to the viewer, inviting an urge to touch and interact while hiding a darker underside. To create their puffy, scarred, and bodily quality, Young combines the furniture-making processes of stuffing and upholstering with *trapunto*, the Italian quilt-making technique of producing a decorative raised surface.

For a few works, Young incorporates sand gathered from locations significant to his life: growing up on an air force base in the Mojave Desert, attending art school in proximity to Vedauwoo, Wyoming, and being a citizen of the Catawba Indian Nation, located along the banks of South Carolina's Catawba River. Permeable, yet in place, the sand signifies the ongoing settler colonial process of Indigenous genocide and displacement while referencing the work of Indigenous people to reclaim their origin, heritage, and history. In the sculpture *Winds from the East* (2022), Young represents this tension by depicting a cactus shaped by the movement of the wind yet still grounded in place.

Complicating dichotomies of place and placelessness, Young's waymarks serve as a rhetorical map to return "to a homeland that no longer exists." They operate as signposts intended to convey direction and misdirection, destination and meandering, challenging the viewer to question both where they come from and where they are going.

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Jon Young (b. 1981, Winston-Salem, NC) is a citizen of the Catawba Indian Nation in Rock Hill, South Carolina. His recent solo exhibitions include Carl Kostyál at Intersect Art Fair, Aspen; J Hammond Projects, London; LCCC, Cheyenne, WY; and No Place Gallery, Columbus, OH. Young holds a BFA from the University of Wyoming. He was a Chancellor's Graduate Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis, 2018–19, and was awarded a Lighton International Artist Exchange Program Grant in 2020.

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Calvino, Italo and William Weaver. *Cosmicomics*. London: Abacus, 1968.
Orange, Tommy. *There There*. New York: Vintage, 2019.



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