

# Great Rivers Biennial 2024

Gallery Guide  
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis  
September 6, 2024–February 9, 2025



## Saj Issa



Saj Issa, *Plein Air Performance*, 2024. Single-channel digital video (color, sound), 4:35 minutes. Courtesy the artist.

The Great Rivers Biennial Arts Award Program is a collaborative initiative established in 2003 by CAM and the Gateway Foundation. Every two years, the program grants emerging and mid-career artists working in the greater St. Louis metropolitan region with a significant honorarium and major exhibition opportunity. This initiative—now in its 11th edition—has recognized the creative voices of 33 local artists, and contributes to a larger cultural ecosystem supporting artists in our region.

*Great Rivers Biennial 2024* features new works by Saj Issa, Basil Kincaid, and Ronald Young. These three award winners were unanimously chosen in the summer of 2023 by a distinguished panel of independent jurors: Rita Gonzalez, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and

Department Head of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Jamillah James, Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Caroline Kent, a Chicago-based artist and Assistant Professor of Painting at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University. The jurors selected these artists after visiting the studios of ten semi-finalists chosen from a pool of 96 applicants.

Saj Issa is a Palestinian-American artist who draws on her experience living between St. Louis and Ramallah. Her multidisciplinary practice extends across painting, sculpture, ceramics, and video to consider the Palestinian landscape through environmental, historical, and contemporary lenses.

Through her work she invites viewers' internal reflection on personal values and perspectives while simultaneously "bringing awareness to viewers of their own similarities to the side they position themselves against."

Issa's work conveys concerns around cultural resilience and perseverance. With her hand-thrown ceramic vessels, Issa references the history of earthenware forms common throughout the Mediterranean region. Ceramic items are some of the few objects that can survive fire by vitrifying under intense temperatures. In other works on view here, Issa draws our attention to flora, including the poppy, a symbol of Palestine. Rendered here in a grid—a field of seeping poppies—each of these paintings was originally created as a daily meditation and later used in anti-war protests. Held by Issa and others in place of a sign or text, the paintings were a form of protest as artistic activism.

Issa's video *Plein Air Performance* pictures the artist engaging the tradition of painting outdoors, including in the hillsides of the West Bank, near where her family lives in Beitin, Palestine. Exhibited alongside these works is a selection of modestly-scaled paintings that capture images of quotidian scenes: a pot of geraniums, cut flowers in a vase, and a hollyhock growing near a crumbling wall. Issa's work reflects her changing notions of belonging and a sense of home, while honoring Palestinian culture and flora.

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GATEWAY FOUNDATION



**Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis**  
3750 Washington Blvd  
St. Louis, MO 63108  
314.535.4660

Wed–Sun 10:00 am–5:00 pm  
Open until 8:00 pm Fri

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**Saj Issa** (b. 1994, St. Louis, MO) received a BFA from Webster University, St. Louis, and a MFA at the University of California, Los Angeles. Growing up between St. Louis and Ramallah, Palestine, her practice is an exploration of displacement, identity, social issues, and consumerism. Issa provokes, informs, and entertains viewers with her work, which has been exhibited at *Felix Art Fair* in Los Angeles, *Materials Fair* in Mexico City, the exhibition *Many* at the Craft Contemporary Museum, Los Angeles, and most recently, *Your Refuge* installed on the exterior of The Luminary as a part of *psa-stl*. Issa is a recipient of the 2022 NCECA Graduate Student Fellowship, and has been selected to appear in *New American Paintings*, No. 159 & 165 MFA Annual Issue. She has been an artist-in-residence at Craft Alliance Center of Art and Design, St. Louis, and Belger Crane Yard Studio, Kansas City.

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### Related Programs

Free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For a complete list of programs, please visit [camstl.org](http://camstl.org)

### Artist and Juror Panel Discussion

Saturday, September 7, 11:00 am–12:00 pm

### First Friday: Celebrating Saj Issa

Friday, February 7, 5:00–9:00 pm

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### Learn More

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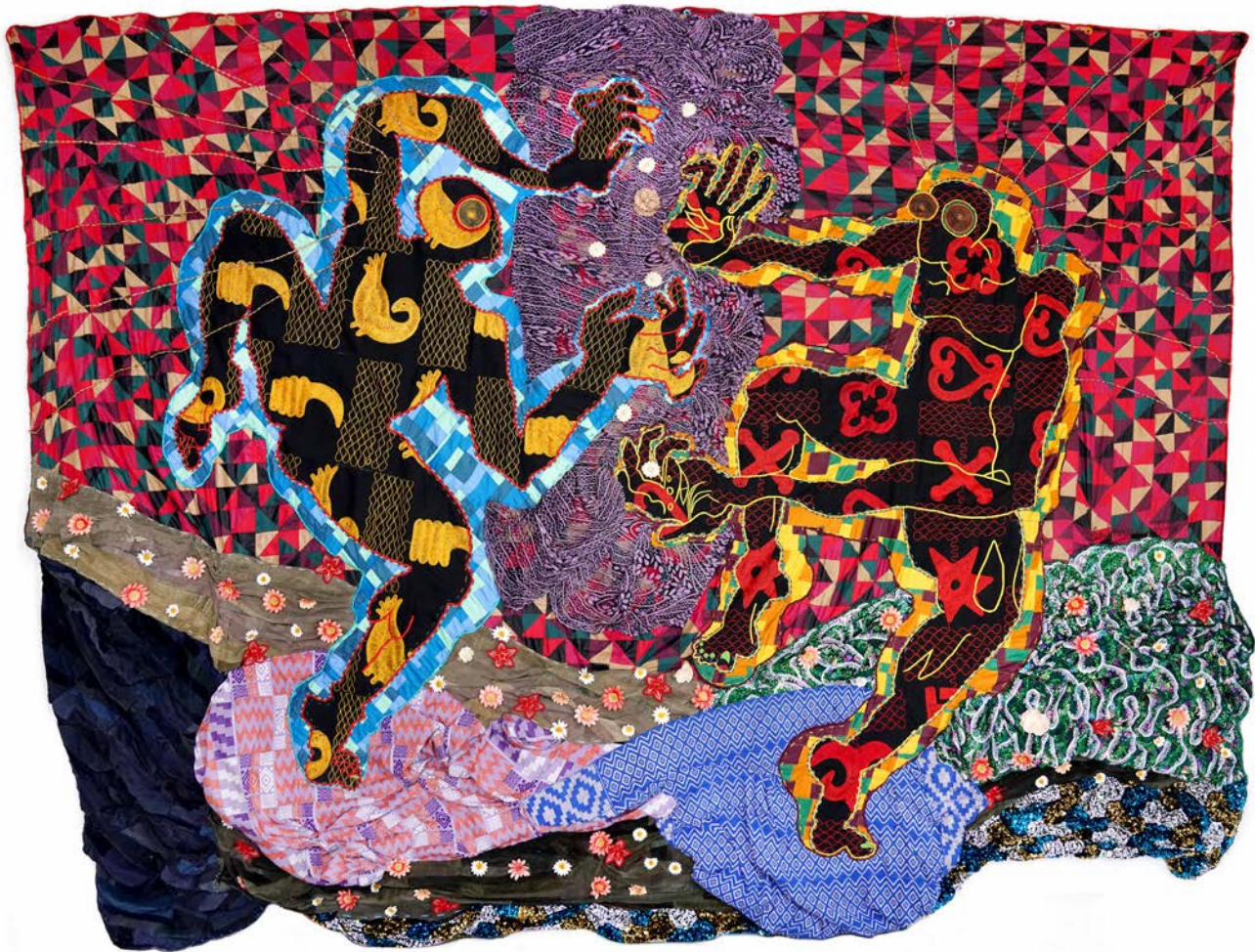
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## Basil Kincaid



Basil Kincaid, *Within This Seed is the Gift of a Thousand Forests*, 2024. Ashanti Kente, patchworked Ghanaian fabrics, embroidery thread, batting, sequins, beads, silk flowers, paper flowers, 109 × 144 × 5 inches. Courtesy of Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami.

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Professor of Painting at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University. The jurors selected these artists after visiting the studios of ten semi-finalists chosen from a pool of 96 applicants.

Basil Kincaid developed his practice in his hometown of St. Louis and in Klagon, Ghana, where he maintains a studio. Impressively-scaled, Kincaid's quilts mix vibrant patch-working with elaborate embroidery, appliqué, beading, and embellishment. He incorporates fabrics gifted to him by friends and family alongside textiles like handwoven Ashanti Kente and sees the shirts, bedsheets, curtains, and housecoats he repurposes as imbued with the spirit of previous owners. Giving these textiles new life, Kincaid connects materials and individuals, stitch by stitch while paying homage to undersung African American quilters, influential artists like Alma Thomas and Paul Klee, and Color Field painting.

Drawing is at the core of Kincaid's practice: Its immediacy opens up a space for Kincaid to discover and record emotionally resonant subject matter. In his drawings, otherworldly figures interact in dreamlike scenarios. Kincaid offers that while these beings may initially resemble monsters, he views them as protectors, calling into question preconceived notions of monstrosity.

Kincaid comes from a lineage of quilters—an aunt researching the family tree brought them and their creations to his attention. He is equally inspired by the scores of domestic quilters who brought beauty into their homes by turning scraps of fabric into vibrant compositions that could adorn beds and warm bodies. Kincaid's work honors both personal and ancestral histories, conjuring more inventive, expansive futures.

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**Basil Kincaid** (b. 1986, St. Louis, MO) is an artist who honors and evolves traditional practices through quilting, drawing, collaging, photography, installation, and performance. Kincaid received his BA in drawing and painting at Colorado College, Colorado Springs and has exhibited works with Hauser & Wirth, Mindy Solomon Gallery, Kravets Wehby Gallery, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Carl Kostyál, and others. Kincaid has received fellowships from the Regional Arts Commission, St. Louis, and United States Artists. Recent solo exhibitions include *The New Bend* at Hauser & Wirth, New York and Los Angeles locations; *New African Portraiture* at the Kunsthalle Krems, Austria; *All in One Feeling* at Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami; *Dancing the Wind Walk*, a semi-permanent fabric monument during Frieze Los Angeles 2023, with support from the Art Production Fund; and a ceremonial installation at Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis, among others. Kincaid's work is in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

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### First Friday: Celebrating Basil Kincaid

Friday, October 4, 5:00–9:00 pm

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## Ronald Young



Ronald Young, installation view, *Great Rivers Biennial 2024: Saj Issa, Basil Kincaid, Ronald Young*, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, September 6, 2024–February 9, 2025. Photo: Izaiah Johnson.

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Professor of Painting at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University. The jurors selected these artists after visiting the studios of ten semi-finalists chosen from a pool of 96 applicants.

Exploring sites throughout St. Louis, Ronald Young scavenges the items he incorporates into his multilayered sculptures. He combines objects like doorknobs and rusted tools with charred wood, rope, bricks, chains, and nails—always plenty of nails. Through his efforts, Young reveals local materials and economic realities: In St. Louis, Young finds these items in and around buildings that have fallen into disrepair, and he elevates them into compelling artworks that celebrate hard-won beauty. The *Totem Pole* sculptures are sited within a bed of dirt, referencing the West and Central African tradition of yard shows, typically located outside the home and containing sculptures made of discarded items. Like yard shows, Young's installation signifies survival amidst decay.

Young is also inspired by African *nkisi*, sculptural objects made by Kongo artists that are used in ritual ceremonies. *Nkisi* can refer to spirits and the sculptures in which they reside. Each nail driven into an *nkisi* is a spiritual vow between humans and non-human sources of power. Drawing inspiration from these ancient artworks, rituals and traditions, Young's sculptures focus his energy. Through his handiwork, Young offers gestures of reparation and restoration that signal his care for St. Louis, his home. His work demonstrates that even in the midst of crisis—or perhaps precisely because of it—we can find moments of beauty and reckoning.

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**Ronald Young** (b. 1956, St. Louis, MO) creates mixed-media assemblages from objects he finds in his immediate environment: aged doors, old tools, wood molding trim, rusty chains, ropes, bricks, and nails are among the objects he salvages and repurposes in his practice. His socially-conscious artworks celebrate the resourcefulness and resilience of African Americans. A retired art teacher with over 33 years of experience, Young received his MFA from the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Art at Washington University in St. Louis, where he was the recipient of a Chancellor's Graduate Fellowship. He received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Japan in 2007. Recent exhibitions of Young's work include the solo exhibition *The Prevalence of Ritual* at The Gallery at The Kranzberg and a group exhibition *Ferguson and Beyond: Artistic Responses to a Decade of Social Upheaval 2014-2024* at Webster University's Hunt Gallery. Young's works are in public and private collections across the US, including the St. Louis University Art Museum and Clark Atlanta University, where Young received his undergraduate degree.

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