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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAM to Receive \$105,000 in Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to support resident-led initiative in North St. Louis and the exhibition of Japanese ceramicist Shinichi Sawada

May 15, 2024 (St. Louis, MO)—Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) is pleased to announce it has been approved for two major grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The **Our Town award of \$65,000 and the Grants for Arts Projects award of \$40,000—totaling \$105,000**—will support CAM’s community initiatives in North St. Louis and the presentation of *Shinichi Sawada: Agents of Clay* opening at CAM on September 6, 2024.

The \$65,000 Our Town award from NEA will support a resident-led initiative in North St. Louis that uses art as a vehicle for community building, revitalization, and self-expression. This is one of 68 grants nationwide, totaling \$5 million, that the NEA has approved in the Our Town category. These creative placemaking grants support projects that integrate arts, culture, and design activities into local efforts to strengthen and authentically engage communities, center equity, advance artful lives, and lay the groundwork for long-term systems change.

CAM and the City of St. Louis' Planning and Urban Design Agency's Cultural Resources Office are collaborating to engage North St. Louis artists and residents in a series of trainings and art activities at local community gardens, under the artistic leadership of prominent St. Louis artists and community builders Dail Chambers and Juan William Chávez. The initiative aims to address disinvestment, discriminatory real estate practices, and environmental inequities faced by predominantly Black neighborhoods in North St. Louis. The trainings will cover equity-centered community design, historic preservation, environmental stewardship, and art education to build participants' capacity for leading community activities.

“Projects like CAM’s resident-led initiative exemplify the creativity and care with which communities are telling their stories, creating connection, and responding to challenges and opportunities in their communities—all through the arts,” said NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD. “So many aspects of our communities such as cultural vitality, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, and the economy are advanced and improved through investments in art and design, and the National Endowment for the Arts is committed to ensuring people across the country benefit.”

“This grant will allow us to build on our commitment to our immediate neighborhoods, which we have worked to develop through community-centered partnerships,” said Michelle Dezember, CAM’s Director of Learning and Engagement. “We are excited to expand this work with our neighbors—using art to shape how we make sense of history, how it has shaped this place, and how it can help us preserve the stories and visions we

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have for it.”

In addition to the Our Town grant, **CAM has also been approved by the NEA for a Grants for Arts Projects award of \$40,000 to support the exhibition of [Shinichi Sawada](#), a self-taught ceramic artist from Japan.** In total, the NEA will award 1,135 Grants for Arts Projects awards totaling more than \$37 million as part of its second round of fiscal year 2024 grants.

Shinichi Sawada: [Agents of Clay](#), was developed in collaboration with the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, where it is currently on view through August 11, 2024 and will make its debut in the midwest at CAM—marking Sawada’s first solo museum exhibition in the United States. The exhibition will feature eighteen sculptures made over the last decade in the tradition of wood-burning Shigaraki kilns. The sculptures are a fusion of various creatives combining features from mammals, fish, birds, insects, and the artist’s own fantastical creations. These intricate works of art often boast multiple faces, an abundance of eyes, and intricate patterns of incised lines, bumps, horns, and scales.

"It is a great honor to not only support an artist debuting their work in St. Louis and bringing fresh ideas to CAM, but to witness communities being inspired by new ways of thinking and building strength through system-wide initiatives integrated with the arts," expressed Lisa Melandri, CAM’s Executive Director. "Thanks to the generous support of NEA, the Museum has the unique opportunity to engage with our communities more intentionally through art and culture, and to serve artists, students, and families in the greater St. Louis area by presenting new perspectives on the world through Sawada's inventive and imaginative work."

The exhibition will also be accompanied by a publication, *Shinichi Sawada: Agents of Clay*, featuring images of works in the exhibition, an introduction and acknowledgments by co-organizers Lisa Melandri and Jen Sudul Edwards, Ph.D., and an scholarly essay by independent curator, writer, and arts administrator of contemporary art and craft, Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy. The exhibition will be on view at CAM from September 6, 2024–February 9, 2025.

Shinichi Sawada: Agents of Clay is organized by Lisa Melandri, Executive Director, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and Jen Sudul Edwards, Ph.D., Chief Curator, The Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC.

This exhibition is generously supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibition publication has been generously supported in part by Jennifer Lauren Gallery and James Cohan Gallery.

About Shinichi Sawada

Shinichi Sawada (b. 1982) lives and works in Japan's Shiga prefecture. Sawada’s artistic training began in 2000 through the Nakayoshi Fukushikai Welfare Association through a program aimed at assisting neurodivergent individuals in finding employment and fostering independence. Drawing inspiration from the millennia-old tradition of wood-burning Shigaraki kilns and Japanese imagery, Sawada’s creations embody his environment—from the history of Japanese figuration to the mountainous region where he resides. His work has featured prominently in major group exhibitions including *The Encyclopedic Palace*

curated by Massimiliano Gioni for the 55th Biennale di Venezia, and *The Doors of Perception* at Frieze New York in 2019 and held in the permanent collections of public institutions including the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne; the abcd collection, Paris; and Halle Saint Pierre, Paris.



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About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis creates meaningful engagement with the most relevant and innovative art being made today. Founded by civic and cultural leaders in 1980, the Museum transformed from a small gallery into an internationally recognized arts institution, now permanently housed in a flexible, open, and inviting building designed by renowned American architect Brad Cloepfil. CAM's distinct architecture reflects the organization's values and supports a dynamic range of exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and community collaborations. The only museum in the region solely dedicated to contemporary art, CAM is one of the preeminent non-collecting institutions of its kind in the United States. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all. For more information, visit camstl.org.

For more information on other projects included in the NEA's grant announcement, visit arts.gov/news.

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