

*Like Water* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator.

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*Like Water* is the second in a series of four exhibitions collectively entitled *The Weather Inside*. The first exhibition in the series, entitled *Ecstatic Land*, was co-curated by Daderko with Daisy Nam for Ballroom Marfa in Marfa, Texas. It included artworks by Laura Aguilar, Genesis Báez, Teresa Baker, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Christie Blizzard, Frank Duncan, Nancy Holt, Katherine Hubbard, Isuma, Benny Merris, Alan Michelson, Laura Ortman, Elle Pérez, Sondra Perry, and David Benjamin Sherry.

#### Related Programs

For a complete list of programs, please visit [camstl.org](http://camstl.org).

#### *Horn Beam Sacrament: A Performance by Jamal Cyrus*

Saturday, March 8, 11:00 am–12:00 pm

#### First Friday: *Like Water* Celebration

Friday, April 4, 5:00–9:00 pm

#### Artwork and Arias

Friday, May 2, 8:00–9:00 pm

#### Resonant Waters: Music in Motion with St. Louis

##### Symphony Orchestra

Thursday, May 15, 7:30–8:30 pm

#### First Friday: Season Wrap Party

Fri, Aug 1, 5:00–9:00 pm



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#### Learn More

Visit our website for more about *Like Water*, including an audio guide from the curator.



#### Gallery Guide

Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

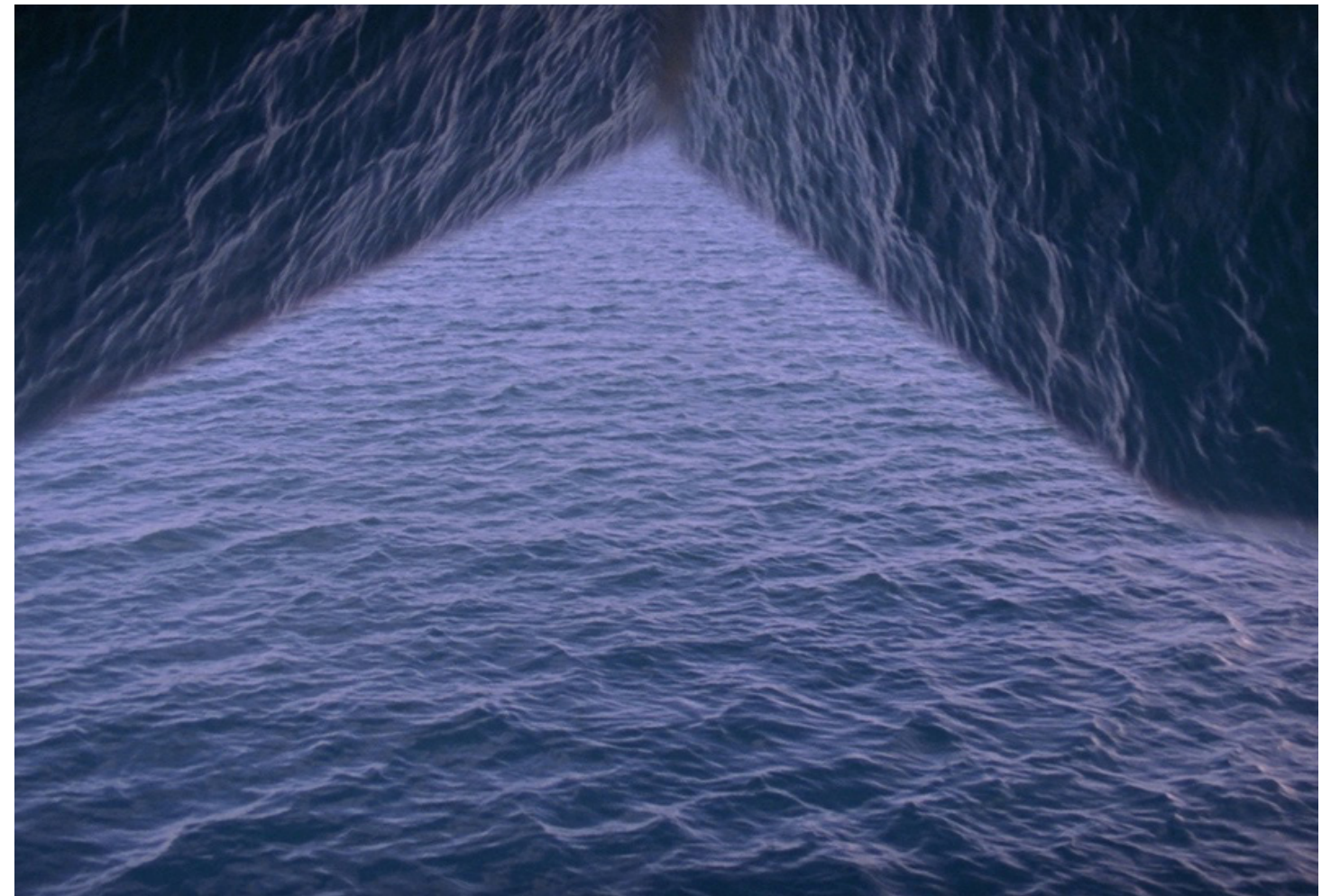
March 7–August 10, 2025



# Like Water

Jamal Cyrus  
Simone Fattal  
Dionne Lee

Candice Lin  
Beatriz Santiago Muñoz  
Vivian Suter



Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, *Otros usos* [Other Uses], 2014. Single channel video (color, sound), 6:52 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Sociedad del Tempo Libre, San Juan, Puerto Rico.



Simone Fattal, *Fish*, 2015. Glazed stoneware, 14 9/16 × 6 4/16 × 12/16 inches. Courtesy the artist and Karma International, Zurich.

*Like Water* views landscape simultaneously as a physical material condition and an interior, emotional state. Across this exhibition, water is material, poetic, narrative, and abstract. CAM’s galleries include substantive selections of works by each artist that encompass a broad range of media—from painting and sculpture to video, photography, textile, collage, and drawing. The selected works by Jamal Cyrus, Simone Fattal, Dionne Lee, Candice Lin, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, and Vivian Suter animate this exhibition with constellations of connections, offering works of art that consider the vestiges of colonial power in the United States and further afield. Abstraction, poetry, and gesture are other undercurrents. The material, formal, and emotional range of the works reveal water’s metaphoric and poetic capacity, its elemental and environmental necessity to all living beings, and its powerful ability to fundamentally alter the land and the ways we inhabit it.

It is poignant that we talk about “floods of emotion” when navigating complex and layered emotional terrain. Like terrestrial sources of water that arrive from unknown origins, experiences of profound physical emotion seem to exceed the physical limitations of our bodies. By extension, it is not surprising that the phrase “fountains of inspiration” refers back to the Latin word for spring—*font* or *fons*. And there are a host of other examples: We say we feel “under water” or that we’re struggling to keep our heads above it when we feel challenged. We shed tears when we’re sad. We also shed tears of joy. Water offers metaphors for a wide range of emotions.

Water follows the path of least resistance. It can flow through our fingers, soak into the ground, hydrate what it touches, or evaporate into the air. Life as we know it on Earth is dependent on ample sources of clean, uncontaminated water. And while human exploration has touched most of our dry lands, the depths of the Earth’s oceans are mysterious and elusive. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association reports that only 25% of ocean floors have been mapped with sonar, leaving the

majority of this place “largely unknown.” Evolutionary scientists believe that ancient oceans spawned and hosted the first life on this planet. Oceans are *that deep*.

Before my move to St. Louis, I expected I would use the Mississippi River to orient myself as I navigated this city. So, when I moved here a couple of years ago, it was surprising to recognize how *invisible* this great river is in this urban landscape. Part of this is, of course, geographic. Surrounded by relatively flat plains, the River cuts a deep channel, so it’s not often looked upon. Its absence from view is equally the result of the privatization of its banks by modern industry.

Thousands of years ago, before the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers were controlled by manmade locks and dams, these two rivers (and many others) flooded their banks seasonally. In the spring, melting snow and rains muddied tributary creeks and smaller streams, flowing onward into increasingly larger and more powerful rivers. The Mississippi is popularly known by the more recent nickname “Big Muddy,” but for some Indigenous peoples, the word *Mississippi* meant “the great river” or “the gathering-in of all waters.” The word *Missouri* derives from *semessourit*, an Algonquian term that refers to “people with canoes (made from logs).”<sup>1</sup> Rivers functioned as liquid highways and oriented the way-finding by scores of Indigenous peoples who gathered here permanently and seasonally. Periodic flooding by the Mississippi and Missouri rivers certainly brought destruction, but it also fed the land by laying down the sedimentary layers creating the alluvial plains that made this area agriculturally fertile and fostered human habitation. This is a region that has always been rich in flora and fauna.

The Mississippi’s vast circulatory system connects more than half of the United States, resulting in an enormous amount of lands and communities situated next to these waterways. While this riparian landscape directly affects the lives of those living in and around it, it also functions as a mirror for physical and emotional wellbeing: How we care for the river and our environment is a demonstration of our holistic priorities. How we care for our environment shows how we care for ourselves.

The artists in *Like Water* share stories about and through this vital substance. Through their works, viewers are offered opportunities to actively consider regional ecologies, material and environmental realities, history, and the changing cultural, natural, and sociopolitical ecosystems in which we circulate.

Dean Daderko  
February 2025

<sup>1</sup> Lance, Donald M. in “The Origin and Meaning of ‘Missouri’” from *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, Vol. 47, no. 33, 1999.

### Vivian Suter

b. 1949, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Lives and works in Panajachel, Guatemala.



Vivian Suter, *Tintin, Nina, & Disco*, installation view, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2023. © Vivian Suter. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery. Photo: David Regen.

Vivian Suter’s use of acrylic paint may be the most immediate way that her work evokes fluidity, but it is one of many. Suter lives and paints in outdoor studios on a former coffee plantation in Panajachel, Guatemala, where her work is subject to rain, humidity, and unpredictable weather—she has even dug paintings out of the muck after a mudslide. Bits of leaves blow across and attach to wet surfaces, as do insects, which she embraces in her paintings.

Suter’s works also suggest fluidity as she slides between abstraction and representation. In other ways, her signature dense arrangements of canvases straddle a line between elegance and riotousness, and create immersive architectures all their own. Unique among painters, Suter does not title or date her canvases; instead, the artist lets her paintings speak for themselves and harmonize with each other. This approach is both decidedly punk and respectful of

her medium and its material, spatial, and conceptual possibilities.

CAM’s presentation of Suter’s work brings together more than eighty paintings displayed on the walls and suspended from the ceiling. Suter’s spatial strategy differentiates her work from peers for whom painting is a more two-dimensional affair. For *Like Water*, this varied selection of Suter’s works will establish a unique, immersive architecture within the larger exhibition, creating spaces for contemplation and discovery.

**Beatriz Santiago Muñoz**

b. 1972, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Lives and works in San Juan.

Beatriz Santiago Muñoz’s single-channel video *Otros usos* [Other Uses] (2014) mines a fractured history. To create it, Santiago Muñoz made a mirrored housing for her camera, effectively turning it into a kaleidoscope. Shot on and around a pier at a former United States military base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, she captures images of the sea, local fisherman, the pier, and abandoned Naval property. Projected on a large wall, *Otros usos*’s formal qualities create a fascinating—if occasionally disorienting—marine portal. Santiago Muñoz’s film formally amplifies the complex and fragmented relationship between the mainland United States and this Caribbean territory. *Pájaro, cómeme* (*Filoctetes*) [Bird, Eat Me (Philoctetes)] (2023) also digs into the complex, colonial relationship between the mainland United States and Puerto Rico.

This multi-channel installation unfolds across three screens. Shot on film and transferred to video, this work recalls the myth of a Greek hero who was bitten on the foot by a snake as he traveled to wage war. With an infected wound, Philoctetes would cry out in pain, causing his fellow soldiers to grow increasingly disturbed. When they sailed for Troy, they stranded him on the island of Lemnos. For her film, Santiago Muñoz cast a friend—rather than a professional actor—to play the mythical stranded warrior. Her approach, which she calls the “sensory unconscious,” draws parallels between Philoctetes’s abandonment on Lemnos and Puerto Rico’s left-behind status, especially in light of the island’s economic, political, and infrastructural challenges following damages from recent hurricanes and weather events.



Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, *Pájaro, cómeme* (*Filoctetes*) [Bird, Eat Me (Philoctetes)], 2023. Three-channel video installation (black and white and color, sound), 6:44 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Sociedad del Tempo Libre, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

**Candice Lin**

b. 1979, Concord, MA. Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

Candice Lin creates opportunities for buried, overlooked narratives to be unearthed and teased. Unfolding in alchemical and (pseudo)scientific ways, Lin refers to her works as “tactile theaters.” *La Charada China* (2018) is one such installation. In the center of a room covered with soil sits an earthen mound into which a human silhouette has been excavated. Small altars ring the room and another appears at its base. The surrounding walls are covered in silver Mylar that reflects and amplifies a pink grow light hanging from the ceiling. The light nurtures the germinating seeds present in the earthen ground, including indigo. Periodic watering initiates the disintegration of this central form, even as it encourages plant growth.



Candice Lin, *La Charada China* (detail), 2018. Earth, red clay, guano, cement, poppy seeds, sugarcane, seeds of various poisonous Caribbean plants, grow light, Mylar, wooden and metal armature, soaker hoses, irrigation system, tinctures in glass bottles, ceramics, toy boat, gourds, pencil on paper drawings, teapots, teacups, photographs, dried flora, chain, hardware, video (color, sound), 13 minutes. From 11th Taipei Biennial: *Post-Nature—A Museum as An Ecosystem*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018. Image courtesy François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

This work has been realized in multiple locations around the world, and previous iterations have included a video. This presentation at CAM, however, incorporates a new audio soundtrack. In it, Lin nods to Louisa May Alcott (1832–88), the American author who was born in Concord, Massachusetts, nearly a century before Lin herself was born there. Across fluid identifications, the narrator imagines herself as a horse and a dismantled Chinese house being shipped overseas. Lin was drawn to Alcott’s historical moment

as a time in which objects from Asia were being imported into the United States, fueling fantasies of unknown lands and people.

*La Charada China* is equally an homage to scores of Chinese indentured laborers who were brought to the Caribbean and the American South in the 1800s to replace or supplement enslaved workers. The altars filled with ceramics, teapots, a toy boat, drawings, photographs, dried herbs, and bottles of herbal tinctures suggest these lives and experiences. With *La Charada China*, Lin conjures future transformation by crafting a narrative in which unwelcome, oppressive systems are made material, and their dissolution and exorcism is welcomed.

**Jamal Cyrus**

b. 1973, Houston, TX. Lives and works in Houston.

The trio of textile works in Jamal Cyrus’s *Blue Alluvial Glue* series are made from denim, the common workwear material whose dependence on indigo dyeing implicates it in histories of colonial trade in the United States, the Middle Passage, and antebellum Southern cotton production. The appearance of these works in St. Louis is also notable since they function as an homage to the renowned saxophonist and composer Julius Hemphill (1938–95), who lived here from 1966–73. During this time, Hemphill was instrumental in the founding of the Black Artists Group of St. Louis which facilitated collaborations between musicians, actors, dancers, visual artists, educators, and community organizers. His vision of multidisciplinary collaboration resonates with Cyrus, whose own work bridges visual and sonic realms. Raised in a musical family, Cyrus “channels the power of sound as a vehicle for transcendence and identity-building, particularly in relation to Black culture.”



Jamal Cyrus, *Sstrum* (detail), 2022. Helmet conch shell, wood, carpet, speaker stand, tambourine zills, corn grits, India ink, 75 × 18 × 15 inches. Photo: Allyson Huntsman.



Jamal Cyrus, *Blue Alluvial Glue 1 (Shape)*, 2022. Denim, cotton thread, cotton batting, 56 × 42 inches. Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Gift of the Director's Council and Museum purchase, 2022. Courtesy the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. Photo: Kevin Todora.

*Be as a stranger or traveler (Make Me a Pallet on the Floor)* (2022), includes a unique piece of textile Cyrus made by gluing together strips of reclaimed denim. With its varied blues, the textile resembles a quilt, rows of agricultural plantings, and waves rippling the surface of water. Displayed atop an earthen plinth, this work references the alluvial soil deposited by flooding rivers that enriches agricultural land. Cyrus's work is profoundly layered: While referencing indigo as a cash crop that fueled the Transatlantic slave trade due to hunger for this lushly colored dye, he is simultaneously summoning the Blues as a unique American musical tradition with deeply spiritual undertones.

Such resonances extend to Cyrus's sculptures incorporating musical instruments. Though they may be unplayable in the traditional sense, the artist sees them as "opportunities to connect Afro diasporic musical and spiritual traditions." Resembling an ear, the helmet conch shell in Cyrus's sculpture *Sstrum* (2022) seems to be listening in on deeper historical and divine reverberations.

**Dionne Lee**  
b. 1988, New York, NY. Lives and works in Columbus, OH.

Dionne Lee's photographs and videos establish connections between water, landscape, drawing, and time. Across the black-and-white gelatin silver prints in her series *Rock Drawing III* (2024), the artist paints a spiral onto a rock and then photographs its changing states. Working in and out of the darkroom, Lee plays with photography's materiality. For *Breaking Wave* (2018) she photographed and printed an image of swelling waters that she later tore in two and rephotographed. This decidedly physical approach to the medium appears again in *Untitled Rock Drawing VI* (2024), a solarized gelatin silver print. To make such a print, a light-sensitive emulsion is applied to photographic paper, which is exposed to light through a negative. The process affects the tonality of the image, making light areas appear dark and vice versa. Here again, a spiral draws our attention inward, the knots in the rope establishing an elemental rhythm.

Furling—and unfurling—spirals appear in Lee's videos *Currents* and *Untitled* (both 2024). Shooting with a handheld camera, Lee follows a coiled piece of rope as it floats down a stream. On its meandering journey, it eventually encounters resistance that causes it to unwind like a living line drawing. *Untitled* is also projected on CAM's façade every evening from dusk to midnight as part of the Street Views series.

Diving into photography's orchestration of light with time, Lee's photograph *Untitled* (2023) and her video *Walking Stick IV* (2024) both incorporate divining rods—the forked sticks traditionally used to locate underground sources of water. These branching forms resemble the hands of a ticking clock. Both works also offer viewers an opportunity to consider invisible underground currents.



Dionne Lee, *Untitled*, 2024. Single channel video (black and white, silent), 2:03 minutes. Courtesy the artist and P.Bibeau, New York.

**Simone Fattal**  
b. 1942, Damascus, Syria. Lives and works in Paris, France.



Simone Fattal, *Fix Your Gaze On Saturn's Rings*, installation view, 2020. Photo: Thor Brødreskift.

Simone Fattal's ceramic sculptures walk a line between history and modernity: Appearing both ancient and modern, Fattal's sculptures remain unfixed in time. Her sculptures include figures, animals, architecture, and even natural phenomena, as in *Wave* (2023). We might imagine them being unearthed in an archeological dig as much as from a contemporary artist's studio. For Fattal, this is wholly intentional. She states: "I am trying to position myself in this line that started with ancient Sumer, and is uninterrupted through today."

This presentation includes some of Fattal's earliest ceramic works, which have never been publicly exhibited. One of them—*Goddess of the Springing Water* (1988)—references an 18th-century BCE Amorite Spring Goddess in the collection of the Aleppo Museum in Syria, the country of Fattal's birth. She made the sculpture soon after her arrival in California, where she had emigrated with her partner, the artist and poet Etel Adnan, when they left Beirut to escape the Lebanese Civil War.

Fattal's collaged paper works showcase the artist freely mixing historical and contemporary registers. In *Le Grand Renversement 1948* [The Great Reversal 1948] (2012), viewers will encounter a broad range of cut-out images—from utilitarian objects like bowls and vases, to images of works by other artists, animal and human figurines, snapshots of a whale's tail, Arabic calligraphy, and architectural structures that come together in a cohesive composition atop roiling waters. Fattal's work reminds us that time's constant forward movement, both graceful and relentless, is unending and that we are its subjects.