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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Make the River Present* exhibition encourages creative engagement with the mighty rivers that surround us, opening March 7 in CAM's Education Galleries**



Monique Verdin, *ReIndigenized 1861 Mississippi Watershed Map* (detail), 2022. Inkjet on canvas, 186 x 46 inches. Courtesy the artist.

**January 23, 2025 (St. Louis, MO)**—The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) announces an interactive exhibition that encourages creative engagement with the mighty rivers that surround the St. Louis community: the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. ***Make the River Present*** invites visitors to strengthen our connections to these enduring waterways through works of art, resources, and activities that highlight present-day and ancestral stewardship of the river and its environments, especially focusing on Indigenous and African American perspectives. ***Make the River Present*** will be on view in CAM's Education Galleries from **March 7–August 10, 2025**.

Although St. Louis is physically bordered by these rivers—the two longest in the US which come together at the confluence a few miles north of downtown—their presence is often obscured by industrialization, urban planning, and erasure of Indigenous culture. Taking inspiration from themes in [Like Water](#), which will be on view in the Museum's main galleries concurrently, this interactive exhibition provides a physical space to explore contributions of artists and cultural stewards whose work respects and engages rivers. Works by Black

Heritage Water Trail, Allena Brazier, Dail Chambers, Galen Gritts (Cherokee), Native Women's Care Circle, Monique Verdin (Houma), and selected writings by other authors and contributors will be on view.



"*Make the River Present* shines a light on the natural world and the stories that come from it—both in art and in our region's history," says Michelle Dezember, Director of Learning & Engagement at CAM. "We're thrilled to showcase the diverse voices of artists and cultural stewards who help us reconnect with the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. This exhibition provides all of us the chance to reflect on how these waterways impact our lives and to think about how we can nurture and protect them together."

As a complement to the exhibition, a series of gatherings will uplift how artists and cultural stewards can align our relationship to the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and reinforce communal relations and interdependence of human beings and nature. These events invite opportunities to reorient our positioning as contemporary urban dwellers as part of a longer historical arc that is shaped by the presence of the rivers. For more details about the *Make the River Present* Gatherings and to register, please visit [camstl.org](https://camstl.org).

*Make the River Present* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Michelle Dezember, CAM's Director of Learning & Engagement and Allena Brazier, independent curator. The exhibition and symposium are presented in partnership with the Missouri Humanities and with support from the Missouri Humanities Trust Fund.



#### About the artists and contributors featured in *Make the River Present*:



**Allena Marie Brazier** is an artist, curator, and writer from East St. Louis, IL. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois. Allena has been recognized for her artistic achievements and community contributions, including serving as the 9th Katherine Dunham Fellow with the St. Louis Arts and Education Council in 2018 and receiving the 2021 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award from the International Sculpture Center. Alongside her art endeavors, she is a curator. Appointed the inaugural Curator in Residence at Washington University 2021-2023, under her curatorship with four notable exhibitions, namely, "Belonging: Cross River Art Exhibition" at

TechArtista UCity, MO.; "Existence of Coziness" at Maryville University; "Turn Upon Them: Reveal to Heal" at Gallery 210@FAB UMSL, and many co-collaborated events. Allena has also self-published several faith-based books, including *Making Faithful Habits*. Her honors include the 2023 Sam Fox Graduate Commencement speaker, Judge for the NAACP East

St. Louis Chapter annual regional high school art competition, and recently, panel speaker for *If It Wasn't for the Women* 2024 St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO.



**Dail Chambers** embodies sustainable living through visual and conceptual art making. Her community art/agricultural studio space and public health support campaigns are rooted in storytelling and inspired by Harriet Tubman, Ella Baker, Ntozake Shange and many rematriating contemporary artists. Chambers uses an inquiry-based engagement model as a land steward. Her social and public art practice is focused on public health, the environment, and collective memory. She keeps an archive practice, found object exploration, and ecological/food production that is honoring migration, culture and folklore. Chambers has created preventative healthcare support for resilient urban environments.

She is a fine artist, mother, caregiver, scholar, educator, and neighbor across our shared landscape, with a high emphasis on healing practice and ancestral veneration. She is also a seedkeeper, waterkeeper, and personal items appraiser.



**Galen Gritts** (Cherokee) is a registered member of the Cherokee Nation. He has a degree in history from University of Missouri-St. Louis, and holds memberships with STL City Indigenous Working Group, \*Disparities Elimination Advisory Committee (DEAC), Program for the Elimination of Cancer Disparities (PECaD), under the partnership of Siteman Cancer Center, Washington University School of Medicine, and Barnes-Jewish Hospital, representing the local Native American community, and is a Board member of the Missouri Chapter of the National Trail of Tears Association. A prolific writer and speaker, Galen has presented at prestigious events including the State Historical Society of Missouri, the American College Personnel Association National Convention, and Indigenous Education, Inc.. His written

contributions extend to publications like *The St. Louis Anthology* and the Missouri Humanities Council annual magazine. Through his advocacy and engagements, Galen Gritts remains a prominent figure in promoting Native American culture and history.



**Monique Verdin** (Houma) is an transdisciplinary artist and storyteller who documents the complex relationship between environment, culture, and climate in southeast Louisiana. She is a citizen of the Houma Nation, director of The Land Memory Bank & Seed Exchange and is supporting the Okla Hina Ikhish Holo (People of the Sacred Medicine Trail), a network of Indigenous gardeners, as the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network's Gulf South food and medicine sovereignty program manager. Monique is co-producer of the



documentary *My Louisiana Love* and her work has been included in a variety of environmentally inspired projects, including *Cry You One* the multiplatform performance, *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*, and the collaborative book *Return to Yakni Chitto: Houma Migrations*.

**The Black Heritage Water Trail of St. Louis** explores and commemorates African American community stories through the rivers of greater St. Louis. Through remembrance and preservation of these connections we engage the natural and social world, including the arts, issues of migration, environmental justice, the wakes of slavery and colonialism, and stories of community resistance, resilience, place-making, and well-being. This resource is an initiative of the WashU & Slavery Project.

**Native Women's Care Circle** (NWCC) is a grassroots, matriarchal, inclusive, and Indigenous-led prayer group. It supports the health and welfare of Native American families and communities and practices stewardship of the lands and waters. Members contributing to NWCC's collaboration with *Make the River Present* are: Terry Bergeron (Bekaaniba and Sinnissippi rivers), Juleta Burrell (Mississippi and Missouri rivers), Andi Gaither (Running Water Creek and Black River), Saundi McClain-Kloeckener (Gichi Ziibi and Biiganakii Ziibi), Jane Neidhardt (Michigami), Rafael Sousa-Sommo (Lake Wallenpaupack and Delaware River), and Basmin Red Deer (child of the Confluence of the Middle Waters and performance artist of diverse experience and versatile expression).

### **Related Events**

#### **Friday, March 7**

Patron and Press Preview, 10:00–11:30 am (RSVP required)  
Member Preview, 6:00–7:00 pm  
Public Opening, 7:00–9:00 pm

#### **Sunday, March 23**

##### **Native Women's Care Circle Water Blessing, 10 am–11am**

As part of World Water Day celebrations, honor the river by joining Saundi McClain-Kloeckener and fellow Native Women's Care Circle members near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to offer blessings to the waters.

#### **Saturday, May 31**

##### **Downstream Discourse: An Ongoing Conversation about Watershed and Human Health, 10 am–1pm**

Convene at the Mississippi River for intergenerational conversations and activities that explore the connections of plant, river, and human life, and honor Indigenous stewardship of our watersheds, led by Rafael Sousa-Sommo and Andi Gaither of the Native Women's Care Circle.

#### **Friday, June 13**

##### **Water Ceremony and Conversations, 5:30 pm–9:00 pm**

This extended, multipart gathering begins with a water ceremony led by Dail Chambers followed by a shared meal and conversation with artists and cultural stewards dedicated to the river.

**Saturday, June 14**

**River Excursion, 10:00 am–12:00 pm**

Join a river boat excursion that visits and recalls memories along sites of consciousness on the Mississippi River.

**Saturday, August 2**

**Eads Bridge Gathering, 5:30 pm–7:30 pm**

For the final gathering of the season, meet at the Eads Bridge to hear from speakers and walk the bridge across the Mississippi River.

*CAM will host a press preview on March 7, 2025. For press inquiries, including access to the preview or interview opportunities with the artists or curators, contact Alexia Majors at [amajors@camstl.org](mailto:amajors@camstl.org)*

**Related Exhibition**

Featuring artworks by an international and multigenerational group of artists, [Like Water](#) considers landscape simultaneously as a material, physical condition, and an interior emotional state. The exhibition addresses water in multiple ways—from its life-giving and destructive powers, to the Mississippi River and its tributaries, fonts (of inspiration), floods (of emotion), climate change, leakiness, and the Middle Passage. *Like Water* will fill the museum with sculpture, video, ceramics, drawing, textiles, collages, and paintings—each artist approaching the subject of water and fluidity in deeply individual ways.

*Like Water* includes artists Jamal Cyrus, Simone Fattal, Dionne Lee, Candice Lin, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, and Vivian Suter. The exhibition is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator.

Major support for *Like Water* is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. This exhibition is generously supported in part by Etant donnés, a program of Villa Albertine; Independent Curators International; Alison Sieloff and Sam Foxman; Emily Rauh Pulitzer; Ann R. Ruwitch and John Fox Arnold; Mary Ann and Andy Srenco; Pat Whitaker and Dick Miles; and Whitaker Foundation.



**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](http://camstl.org).

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