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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CAM and Gateway Foundation announce the winners of the
2026 Great Rivers Biennial Award**



August 12, 2025 (St. Louis, MO)—The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) and the Gateway Foundation are proud to announce the winners of the [Great Rivers Biennial 2026](#) (GRB) program: **Vaughn Davis Jr., Lauren dela Roche, and Vincent Stemmler**. Their ambitious project proposals involve a range of media including sculpture, painting, installation, and multimedia assemblage. The award winners were selected by a distinguished panel of independent jurors who visited the studios of ten semi-finalist artists chosen from a pool of 93 applicants. The Great Rivers Biennial—a collaborative initiative between CAM and the Gateway Foundation—recognizes and fosters artistic talent in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area. Now in its 12th edition, the Gateway Foundation has generously raised its artist honorarium to \$25,000, up from \$20,000, to be awarded to the three finalists who will be featured in the Great Rivers Biennial 2026 exhibition, on view at CAM from **September 11, 2026–February 7, 2027**.

Ten semi-finalists received in-person studio visits over a two-day period in July 2025 with the three jurors: **Leslie Hewitt**, artist and Associate Professor of Art at Rice University in Houston; **Margot Norton**, Chief Curator at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley; and **Pavel Pyš**, Curator of Visual Arts and Collections Strategy at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. After completing in-person studio visits, deliberating, and selecting the three finalists, the jurors reflected on the depth, range, and ambition of the proposals.

According to Margot Norton, “While Davis, dela Roche, and Stemmler each have unique practices, they share a resourceful inventiveness and rigorous dedication to the layered histories of St. Louis.” All three artists, she noted, are at pivotal points in their careers—moments where the support and visibility offered by the Great Rivers Biennial could meaningfully expand the trajectory of their work. Leslie Hewitt echoed that sentiment,

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describing the studio visits as a rare opportunity to be in meaningful dialogue with artists whose practices are both responsive to the current moment and rooted in deep material and conceptual inquiry. "It exposed that sculpture serves the artists based in St. Louis as a set of processes to contend with the complex historical, economic and environmental projections of a future," she shared. Beyond selecting the winners, Pavel Pyš emphasized the importance of continued institutional support and community investment in the region's artists—many of whom, he said, "are producing work as bold and compelling as what's seen in national and international art hubs."

CAM's Ferring Foundation Chief Curator Dean Daderko and Associate Curator Misa Jeffereis will act as organizing curators for the Biennial, with assistance from Grace Early, Exhibitions Assistant. CAM staff will work with the finalists towards the realization of their exhibitions and related programming.

"St. Louis has a vibrant and visionary creative community," said Ferring Foundation Chief Curator Dean Daderko, "and Davis, dela Roche, and Stemmler's practices exemplify this richness. Associate Curator Misa Jeffereis and I look forward to collaborating with the finalists to bring their projects to life. We are grateful to the Guest Jurors for spending time with this cohort of artists, and for recognizing the strength of creative practices in our city. And we're incredibly thankful to the Gateway Foundation for the ongoing commitment that makes this exhibition possible."

Established in 2003, the Great Rivers Biennial is a collaborative initiative that grants three emerging and mid-career artists working in the greater St. Louis metropolitan region with an unrestricted cash award, and elevates their profiles through an exhibition and programming at CAM. The Great Rivers Biennial takes place every two years and has recognized the standout creative voices of 33 local artists since its founding, contributing to the larger cultural ecosystem supporting artists in our region.

About the Great Rivers Biennial 2026 Award Winners



Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr. (b. 1995, St. Louis, MO) is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in St. Louis. His practice expands the language of painting by engaging directly with its physical deconstruction. His works embody ideas of rupture, transformation, and resistance, often suspended or draped from wall to floor—existing between painting and sculpture. Organic and open-ended in form, the pieces are shaped by gravity and tension, revealing new structures through acts of distressing, tearing, and removal. Davis builds from what is taken away as much as what remains, exploring the relationship between destruction and creation. His surfaces—marked by exposed canvas, visible cuts, and frayed edges—disrupt traditional notions of beauty, resolution, and

control. Davis holds a BFA in Sculpture from Webster University in St. Louis, MO. His work has been exhibited at Romer Young Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Nazarian / Curcio, Los Angeles, CA; Dimensions Variable, Miami, FL; The Luminary, St. Louis, MO; and Tripoli Gallery, Wainscott, NY, among others. In 2023, Davis created a torn flag sculpture to be

hoisted outdoors at Laumeier Sculpture Park in Sappington, MO, in tandem with his solo exhibition in the museum's gallery.



Lauren dela Roche (b. 1983, Santa Rosa, CA) is a self-described queer punk feminist artist whose autodidactic approach integrates a broad range of references, including zines, European modernisms, and autobiography. Though largely self-taught, her consumption of visual culture and art history allows her to draw upon long artistic traditions, remixing diverse sources ranging from Egon Schiele's line work, transgressive cinema, Persian miniatures, Greek mythology to folklore. Dela Roche's recent work—painted on found, mended, and repurposed cotton feed sacks—shows multiplying, echoing views of a nude woman, a recurring central character. In her iconic, fresh style, her work ties deeply to the land, agriculture, ecology, and systems of caretaking. For nearly a decade, dela Roche lived off the grid

in Northern Minnesota, building a cabin from found materials and becoming fully self-reliant through farming. She is the recipient of several grants and residencies, including a 2024 Joan Mitchell Center residency in New Orleans. Dela Roche is represented by Eric Firestone Gallery in New York. Her work is found in the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the North Dakota Museum of Art, and the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, among others. She has resided in the Midwest since young adulthood and currently lives and works near St. Louis, MO.



Vincent Stemmler (b. 1989, St. Louis, MO) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work engages with found materials—ranging from manmade objects and detritus to natural elements like sticks and stones—to explore the complex relationships between environment, identity, and transformation. Working across mediums of sculpture, installation, photography, collage, and mold-based processes, Stemmler's practice is rooted in the act of collecting and recontextualizing what the world leaves behind. Guided by interests in ecology, psychology, history, and architecture, Vincent Stemmler examines how our environments shape our inner worlds—using themes like shadow work and repressed memory integration to reflect

the collective unconscious. By combining organic and synthetic remnants, Stemmler's work invites viewers to consider the narratives embedded in discarded materials, and the ways in which decay, preservation, and perception intersect. Stemmler's most recent solo exhibition, *Doom Scroll*, was presented by the Kranzberg Arts Foundation in 2023. That same year, they were featured in *Counterpublic*, St. Louis's citywide public art triennial. Stemmler holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, with a record of exhibitions spanning local, national, and international venues.

Previous Great Rivers Biennial Recipients

2024: Saj Issa, Basil Kincaid, and Ronald Young
2022: Yowshien Kuo, Yvonne Osei, and Jon Young
2020: Kahlil Robert Irving, Tim Portlock, and Rachel Youn
2018: Addoley Dzegede, Sarah Paulsen, and Jacob Stanley
2016: Lyndon Barrois Jr., Nanette Boileau, and Tate Foley
2014: Brandon Anschutz, Carlie Trosclair, and Cayce Zavaglia
2012: David Johnson, Asma Kazmi, and Mel Trad
2010: Martin Brief, Sarah Frost, and Cameron Fuller
2008: Juan William Chávez, Corey Escoto, and Michelle Oosterbaan
2006: Jason Wallace Triefenbach, Moses, and Matthew Strauss
2004: Jill Downen, Adam Frelin, and Kim Humphries

The Great Rivers Biennial is made possible by the Gateway Foundation.

GATEWAY FOUNDATION

About the Gateway Foundation

Founded in 1986, the Gateway Foundation seeks to enrich life and culture in the St. Louis area by supporting efforts to acquire, create, or improve tangible and durable art and urban design. In 2009, the Foundation's largest project, a two-block sculpture park called Citygarden, opened in downtown St. Louis in the Gateway Mall. From prominent public sites downtown to community college campuses in St. Louis County and a substantial installation site within the Missouri Botanical Garden, the Foundation has purchased and installed more than 70 sculptures in the area. Additionally, the Foundation has designed and funded the lighting of the Gateway Arch, City Hall, the Old Courthouse, the Civil Courts Building, the City's three landmark Water Towers, and other historically and architecturally significant structures. More information is available at gateway-foundation.org and citygardenstl.org.

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.

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