Great Rivers Biennial 2026 is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator, and Misa Jeffereis, Associate Curator, with support from Grace Early, Exhibitions Assistant.

The Great Rivers Biennial is made possible by the Gateway Foundation. The artist talk is generously supported in part by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

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About the artists

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr. (b. 1995, St. Louis, MO) has exhibited work at Romer Young Gallery, San Francisco; Nazarian / Curcio, Los Angeles; Dimensions Variable, Miami; The Luminary, St. Louis; 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 Aronson Fine Arts Center. Davis is an exhibiting artist for Counterpublic 2026: *Coyote Time*, and holds a BFA in Sculpture from Webster University in St. Louis.

Lauren dela Roche (b. 1983, Santa Rosa, CA) 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 at Bard College, among others. She has resided in the Midwest since young adulthood and currently lives and works near St. Louis.

Vincent Stemmler (b. 1989, St. Louis, MO) presented a 2023 solo exhibition, *Doom Scroll*, at The Gallery at The Kranzberg, part of the Kranzberg Arts Foundation in St. Louis. That same year, he was 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.

Related Programs

Free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For a complete list of programs, please visit camstl.org

Artist + Juror Panel Discussion
Saturday, September 12, 11:00 am–12:00 pm

First Friday: Celebrating Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr.
Friday, October 2, 5:00–9:00 pm

First Friday: Celebrating Lauren dela Roche
Friday, November 6, 5:00–9:00 pm

Artist Talk: Lauren dela Roche + Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr. at Webster University
Friday, November 20, 12:00–1:00 pm

First Friday: Celebrating Vincent Stemmler
Friday, December 4, 5:00–9:00 pm

Learn More

Visit our website for more information about *Great Rivers Biennial 2026*, including **audio guides**.

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

Museum
Wed–Sun 10:00 am–5:00 pm
Open until 7:00 pm Thu

Café
Wed–Sat 10:00 am–3:00 pm

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Great Rivers Biennial 2026

Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

September 10, 2026–February 7, 2027

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr.
Lauren dela Roche
Vincent Stemmler

Photo: Izaiah Johnson.

The Great Rivers Biennial is a collaborative initiative established in 2003 between CAM and the Gateway Foundation. Every two years, the program grants three emerging or under-recognized artists working in the greater St. Louis metropolitan region with a significant honorarium and a major exhibition opportunity. This initiative, now in its 12th edition, has recognized the standout creative voices of 36 local artists and contributes to the cultural ecosystem by supporting artists in our region.

Great Rivers Biennial 2026 features new works by Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr., Lauren dela Roche, and Vincent Stemmler.

These three award winners were unanimously chosen in the summer of 2025 by a distinguished panel of guest 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 Pyś, Curator of Visual Arts and Collections Strategy at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The jurors selected these artists after visiting the studios of ten semi-finalists chosen from an overall pool of 93 applicants.

This year's selected artists explore figuration, gesture, materiality, and color through painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, video, and digital media. Their thoughtful considerations of repair and regeneration offer visions of resilience.

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr., *Runaway*, 2023. Acrylic, pigment, aerosol, and dye on canvas. 104 × 77 × 55 inches. Installation view, *Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr.: Black Orchids*, Romer Young Gallery, San Francisco, 2025. Photo courtesy Romer Young Gallery.

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr.

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr. produces vibrant, expressive, shape-shifting works that hover between painting and sculpture. While Davis builds on principles of painting movements like Abstract Expressionism, he challenges painting's traditional methods by shunning stretcher bars, tearing apart the canvases, and draping and folding the materials instead of presenting them flat against the wall. In doing so, he not only tests the two-dimensionality of painting but also calls attention to the performative nature of its making, meditating on the passage of time and change. As a fan of jazz music, his "freestyle" methodology is similar in spirit, thriving on improvisation.

To create his works, Davis pours richly pigmented acrylic paint onto raw canvases, soaking them with layer upon layer of saturated color. To achieve intensity, he also paints with fabric dyes. On the floor of his studio, paint pools and colors bleed into one another. Blending together, color suffuses the fabric with a sense of energy, gravity, and depth. After the resulting paintings dry, Davis returns to them using blades to cut lines, shred, and unravel warp from weft. Flaps hang down and holes emerge. The lines between creation and destruction begin to blur before reaching towards resolution.

Challenging painting's conventional flatness, Davis's canvases establish an architecture of their own. Like paintings free of their stretcher bars, they can relax, drape, and sag. Works soften the hard angles between walls and floors, or reach into the air. Organic and open-ended in form, the pieces are shaped by gravity and tension and embody ideas of rupture, transformation, and resistance. Davis's inventive process offers viewers dynamic encounters with painterly forms.

Lauren dela Roche

Lauren dela Roche is a self-described queer punk feminist artist whose approach integrates a broad range of references, including zines, European modernisms, and autobiography. She draws upon long artistic traditions, remixing diverse sources ranging from Egon Schiele's line work and transgressive cinema to Persian miniatures, Greek mythology, and folklore.

In many of dela Roche's paintings, female figures lounge together in stylized architectural spaces animated by dynamic patterns and color. A closer look reveals that dela Roche paints on vintage feed sacks that are quilted together; their surfaces reveal patches, printed logos, and patinas of use. The worn fabric offers a tactile counterpoint to the vibrancy and the languidness of dela Roche's imagined figures.

Lauren dela Roche, *Domino*, 2025. Acrylic on found cotton feed sack. 36 × 44 inches. Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery.

Lauren dela Roche, *Chain of Rocks* (detail), 2024. Acrylic on found cotton feed sack. 67 × 95 inches. Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Eric Firestone Gallery.

Here dela Roche experiments with new forms and mediums. In one series, linear drawings of figures appear alongside cutout tissue paper shapes, pressed leaves and flowers, and treasured collage elements collected by the artist over many years. She sandwiches these items in layers of encaustic wax whose rippling surfaces suggest layers of history accumulating or peeling away. Alongside these paintings, dela Roche presents a sculpture fabricated from vintage dollhouses, and dimensional figurative work in cast bronze—a first for her. Throughout the bodies of work on view, dela Roche returns to notions of intimacy and safety, the home, agriculture and the land, and systems of caretaking.

Vincent Stemmler

Vincent Stemmler 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, transformation, and identity. Stemmler's practice is rooted in collecting and recontextualizing what the world leaves behind.

In this exhibition, Stemmler uses common building materials like concrete and rebar to create sculptures and an installation that simultaneously suggest construction and ruin. To produce his concrete sculptures, Stemmler sought participation from friends who sat for life-casting sessions: Molds from their bodies were used to create this group of figurative sculptures. Stemmler's incorporation of digital animations into the sculptures offers a material counterpoint to weathered construction materials.

By adapting a Victorian-era parlor trick called a "Pepper's Ghost," Stemmler hides video projections in these sculptures. Images reflected in the acrylic housings appear to hover in mid-air, like ghosts or specters. The artist populates his multimedia installation with dried stalks of mullein—a plant that often pops up where soil has been disturbed. A live video feed infinitely multiplies images of the dried mullein stalks, signaling both growth and disappearance. 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.

Vincent Stemmler, *Stillness*, 2018. Concrete, rebar, dried plant specimen, plastic bottle, butterfly. 10 × 18 × 8 inches. Installation view, *Sticks in the Mud*, Florissant Valley Contemporary Art Gallery, 2020. Photo: Chris Bauer.