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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAM presents *Great Rivers Biennial 2026: Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr., Lauren dela Roche, Vincent Stemmler* featuring new work by local artists, opening September 10



May 11, 2026 (St. Louis, MO)—The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) and the Gateway Foundation present the ***Great Rivers Biennial 2026*** featuring new works by local artists **Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr., Lauren dela Roche, and Vincent Stemmler**. Their ambitious presentations span painting, sculpture, ceramics, and video, pushing into new scales, materials, and forms of installation with works that consider abstraction, figuration, and resilience. ***Great Rivers Biennial 2026: Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr., Lauren dela Roche, Vincent Stemmler* will be on view at CAM from September 10, 2026–February 7, 2027.**

A collaborative initiative between CAM and the Gateway Foundation, the Great Rivers Biennial Art Award Program celebrates talented emerging and mid-career artists based in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area. Now in its 12th edition, the Biennial has become a cornerstone of the region's creative community—honoring 36 standout local artists since its founding in 2003 and amplifying the cultural ecosystem that sustains artistic life in St. Louis. This year, the Gateway Foundation deepened its commitment to that mission by increasing the artist honorarium from \$20,000 to \$25,000, giving selected artists greater freedom to take bold new directions in their work.

The three award winners were unanimously chosen in summer 2025 by a distinguished panel of independent 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. The jurors made the selection after visiting the studios of ten semifinalists who were chosen from a pool of 96 applicants. The jurors will return to St. Louis to celebrate the opening of the exhibition and participate

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Hours
10–5 Wed
10–5 Thu
10–8 Fri
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in the *Great Rivers Biennial 2026* panel discussion with the awardees on September 12, 2026 at 11:00 am, which is free and open to the public.

About the Great Rivers Biennial 2026 Exhibition

Vaughn Terrell Davis Jr. pours richly pigmented acrylic paint onto raw canvas, soaking it with layer upon layer of vibrant, saturated color. On the floor in his studio, paint pools and colors bleed, suffusing the fabric with a sense of energy and gravity. Once these canvases dry, Davis returns to them, using blades to incise, shred, and unravel the fabric's warp and weft. Holes, flaps, and fringes open up the painted surfaces, blurring the lines between destruction and renewal, offering detail and inviting curiosity. Challenging painting's traditional two-dimensionality, Davis orchestrates configurations that drape and sag, bridge walls and floors, and reach into the air. For this exhibition, Davis takes advantage of the double-height ceilings of CAM's gallery space to imagine how paintings can surround viewers with color and dynamic movement.

In many of **Lauren dela Roche's** recent large-scale paintings, female figures lounge together in highly stylized architectural spaces. The vintage feed sacks she quilts together and paints on are full of patinas of use. Dela Roche incorporates these holes, logos, patches, and mends into her compositions, creating depth, and suggesting renewal. This exhibition sees dela Roche experimenting with new forms and mediums. In one new series, linear drawings of figures appear alongside cutout tissue paper shapes, pressed leaves and flowers, and treasured collage elements collected by the artist that she sandwiches between layers of encaustic wax; their rippling surfaces suggest layers of history accumulating or peeling away. Alongside these paintings, dela Roche will present a sculpture fabricated from vintage dollhouses, and new figurative sculptures in cast iron.

Vincent Stemmler's art often excavates marginal histories and positions, sensing the possibility for rejuvenation among ruins. Dried stalks of mullein—a plant that pops up where soil has been disturbed—populate an installation of multimedia works that the artist has imagined for this exhibition. Stemmler asked friends and community members to sit for life casting sessions, using the resulting molds to create figurative sculptures in cast concrete. By adapting a Victorian-era parlor trick called Pepper's Ghost, Stemmler incorporates clear acrylic sheets and hidden video screens into these sculptures, with reflecting images appearing to hover in mid-air like ghosts or specters. Stemmler's accompanying video installation extends this narrative of regeneration.

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. In 2026, the Foundation will celebrate its 40th anniversary, marking four decades of support for public art, urban design, fellowships, and cultural grantmaking throughout the St. Louis region.

CAM will host a press preview on September 10, 2026. For press inquiries, including access to the preview or interview opportunities with the artist or curator, contact Alexia Majors at amajors@camstl.org

Related Events

Thursday, September 10

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

Saturday, September 12

Great Rivers Biennial 2026 Panel Discussion, 11:00 am

About the Artists



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. 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. Davis is an exhibiting artist for Counterpublic 2026: *Coyote Time*.



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 and transgressive cinema to Persian miniatures, Greek mythology, and 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 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) 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, Stemmler examines how our environments shape our inner worlds. 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, St. Louis 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 Anschultz, 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

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. This year, the Foundation will celebrate its 40th anniversary, marking \$136 million invested through grantmaking for public parks, playgrounds, lighting initiatives, and cultural



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organizations across the St. Louis metropolitan area. 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 about the Gateway Foundation and its 40th Anniversary year are available at gateway-foundation.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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