

COUNTERPUBLIC

Juanita McNeely

Juanita McNeely's posthumous first solo exhibition in her hometown of St. Louis and co-curated by Counterpublic, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and the Saint Louis Art Museum opens September 10, 2026



Juanita McNeely in front of one of her paintings, 1977. Courtesy Jeremy Lebensohn

(ST. LOUIS, MO – May 28, 2026) – Counterpublic, a Triennial exhibition based in St. Louis, Missouri, in partnership with **Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis** and the **Saint Louis Art Museum**, is pleased to present a two-venue exhibition of work by Ferguson-born artist **Juanita McNeely** (1936-2023). Bringing together more than **five decades of work across painting, drawing, and ceramics**, the exhibition foregrounds McNeely's distinct approach to figuration and her sustained focus on the body as a site of vulnerability, desire, and resilience.

Curated by **Raphael Fonseca**, Counterpublic 2026 co-curator and curator-at-large at the Denver Art Museum, with assistance from **Dean Daderko**, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and **Simon Kelly**, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum, the exhibition marks the late painter's first-ever solo presentations in her hometown.

Born in Ferguson, MO and educated in the St. Louis region, McNeely studied at the School of Fine Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, where she began to develop a practice grounded in lived experience. Rendered through direct and unflinching depictions of the human form, her work addresses the intensity and scale of pain, pleasure, and the complexities of embodiment through a frank and forthright visual language.

Profound personal experiences shaped the direction of McNeely's practice. A cancer survivor in her youth, the artist later moved to New York, where she was active in feminist circles including Women

COUNTERPUBLIC

Artists in Revolution and Redstockings. In the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*, her experience seeking an abortion informed a body of work that directly and viscerally engages with the politics of womanhood.

McNeely sustained a spinal injury in the 1980s that left her using a wheelchair. Despite her physical challenges, the artist continued to produce large-scale paintings that depict the body in states of tension and transformation. Across all of her work, figures remain elastic and precarious, resisting containment within the picture plane.

At the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, **a focused presentation centers on a monumental 13-panel painting, *Triskaidekptych* (1986)**. Among McNeely's largest works, these canvases bring together human and animal forms pushed to their emotional and physical limits. Rendered in a vivid chromatic palette and animated by rapid brushstrokes, the painting stages a surface in flux.

Meanwhile at Saint Louis Art Museum, **a broader selection of paintings, drawings, and ceramics traces the evolution of her practice**. During her lifetime, McNeely often cited the museum's collection, particularly works by Max Beckmann, Paul Gauguin, and Henri Matisse, as formative to her development. Presented in dialogue with these references, her work benefits from additional depth and context.

Produced by Counterpublic in partnership with both institutes, the presentations reflect the triennial organization's commitment to expanding the role of art in public life. By presenting McNeely's work in St. Louis at this scale, the exhibition offers long-overdue recognition of a practice that both reshaped the possibilities of painting and the representation of the female body.

On view at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis: September 10, 2026 - February 7, 2027

On view at the Saint Louis Art Museum: September 12, 2026 - February 28, 2027



COUNTERPUBLIC

Juanita McNeeley, *Moving Through*, 1975, Oil on canvas, 9 panel, overall: 84 × 408 inches, Installation view, James Fuentes, Los Angeles, 2023

ABOUT JUANITA MCNEELY

Over the course of a six-decade career, Juanita McNeely (1936–2023) conveyed the extreme physicality and movement of the human figure. Shaped by her own experiences of sexism, abortion, illness, and disability, her work engages the human condition through radiant color and dynamic contrasts of light and shadow—driven by what she described as the need to “make the ugly and the terrible beautiful for myself.” Born in St. Louis, she moved to New York in 1967, where she became an active member of feminist artist collectives, including Fight Censorship (founded by Anita Steckel), alongside Louise Bourgeois, Joan Semmel, Hannah Wilke, Judith Bernstein, Martha Edelheit, and Eunice Golden; as well as Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R.) and Redstockings. Her work is held in major collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Rubell Museum, Palacio de Bellas Artes (Mexico City), and the National Museum of History (Taipei), among others.

ABOUT COUNTERPUBLIC

Counterpublic is a Triennial exhibition reimagining the role of art in public life. Located in St. Louis, Counterpublic connects art with lasting impact by bringing together bold ideas with the region’s most pressing challenges. As one of the largest public art exhibitions in the nation, Counterpublic celebrates and spotlights the St. Louis region as an epicenter of art and culture through ongoing partnerships and artistic programming. The focal point is a three-month, citywide exhibition with dozens of the world’s leading artists.

Working in public places, cultural institutions, historic houses, and community gathering spaces, Counterpublic commissions artists, and cultural leaders, and civic stakeholders to make and present artworks and ideas that engage history and imagine new futures. In addition to presenting artworks, programs, and publishing, Counterpublic rethinks the model for art exhibitions, seeding civic initiatives that extend beyond the exhibition. Guided by community engagement, each three-year cycle focuses on a new set of dynamic sites and questions, remaining responsive to the moment and aligning with the most impactful opportunities in the region to cultivate generational change.

Counterpublic was founded as a 501c3 nonprofit in 2021. For more information, visit counterpublic.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.



Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

COUNTERPUBLIC

ABOUT THE SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

The Saint Louis Art Museum is one of the nation's leading comprehensive art museums with collections that include works of art of exceptional quality from virtually every culture and time period. Areas of notable depth include Oceanic art, ancient American art, ancient Chinese bronzes, and European and American art of the late 19th and 20th centuries, with particular strength in 20th-century German art. Admission to the Saint Louis Art Museum is free to all every day. For more information, visit www.slam.org.

SAINT LOUIS
ART MUSEUM

PRESS CONTACT

Cultural Counsel

counterpublic@culturalcounsel.com