

Press contact: Alexia Brown
314.535.0770 ext. 313
abrown@camstl.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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, *Triskaidekaptych*, 1986, Oil on linen, 13 panels, overall: 72 × 624 inches, installation view, James Fuentes, New York, 2020.

August 12, 2026 (St. Louis, MO)—The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Ferguson-born artist **Juanita McNeely** (1936-2023), marking the late painter's first-ever solo presentations in her hometown. 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. ***Juanita McNeely will be on view at CAM from September 10, 2026–February 7, 2027 and from September 9–February 28, 2027 at the Saint Louis Art Museum.***

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. Faculty introduced her to German Expressionism and she continued developing this practice during graduate studies at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Conveyed 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 Artists in Revolution and Redstockings. In the years preceding *Roe v. Wade*, McNeely's cancer returned and continuing treatment during her pregnancy was considered life-threatening. She sought an illegal abortion, an experience that 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 doctors' suggestion that creating large-scale paintings would be a challenge, the artist continued to produce works 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 CAM, a focused presentation centers on a monumental 13-panel painting, *Triskaidekaptych* (1986), among McNeely's largest works. Rendered in a vivid chromatic palette and animated by rapid brushstrokes, the painting stages a surface in flux. Unfolding like scenes in a film, the oil on linen panels bring together human and animal forms pushed to their emotional and physical limits: limbs contort at strange angles, figures appear upside down and are hoisted into the air by chains, and a horse balances precariously on stilts. The final panel, depicting a shrieking monkey, clinches the work's emotional tenor. Also on view is a selection of McNeely's preparatory drawings for the painting, which reveal how she considered and adjusted the connections between panels, tempering its urgency and emotional rawness with reflectiveness and objective distance.

Meanwhile at the 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.

Juanita McNeely is a collaboration with Counterpublic. Together with a presentation at Saint Louis Art Museum, this is McNeely's first solo exhibition in her hometown.

Juanita McNeely is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis as a part of Counterpublic 2026: *Coyote Time* by Raphael Fonseca, Counterpublic 2026 co-curator, with assistance from Dean Daderko, Ferring Foundation Chief Curator.

COUNTERPUBLIC

This exhibition is generously supported in part by Counterpublic and Whitaker Foundation.



WHITAKER FOUNDATION

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 Brown at abrown@camstl.org.

Related Events

Thursday, September 10

Patron and Press Preview, 10:00–11:30 am (RSVP required)

Member Preview, 5:00–6:00 pm

Public Opening, 6:00–8:00 pm

Thursday, November 19

Talk: Jane Panetta on Juanita McNeely, 6:00–8:00 pm

Visit camstl.org and counterpublic.org for other events.

About the artist



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 possibilities of art in public life. Located in St. Louis, MO, 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, supporting 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 is a 501c3 nonprofit founded in 2021. For more information, visit counterpublic.org.

For press inquiries, contact Cultural Counsel via email at counterpublic@culturalcounsel.com.

About *Coyote Time*

Opening this fall, Counterpublic 2026: *Coyote Time* spans the storied City of St. Louis, engaging historic sites, world-renowned art institutions, and beloved community spaces. The title derives from artist Alice Bucknell's 2026 Triennial commission, marking the moment in a video game when a character leaps off a cliff and is suspended in midair, unsure of what comes next. This moment of anticipation guides the exhibition, positing uncertainty as a space for experimentation and possibility.

Collectively curated by Jordan Carter, Raphael Fonseca, Stefanie Hessler, Nora N. Khan, and Wanda Nanibush, the exhibition builds on Counterpublic's mission to connect art with lasting systemic change. *Coyote Time*, Counterpublic's third edition, presents new commissions and historical reinterpretations by nearly 50 contemporary artists, free and welcoming to all across key St. Louis sites from September 12–December 12, 2026.

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.

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.