

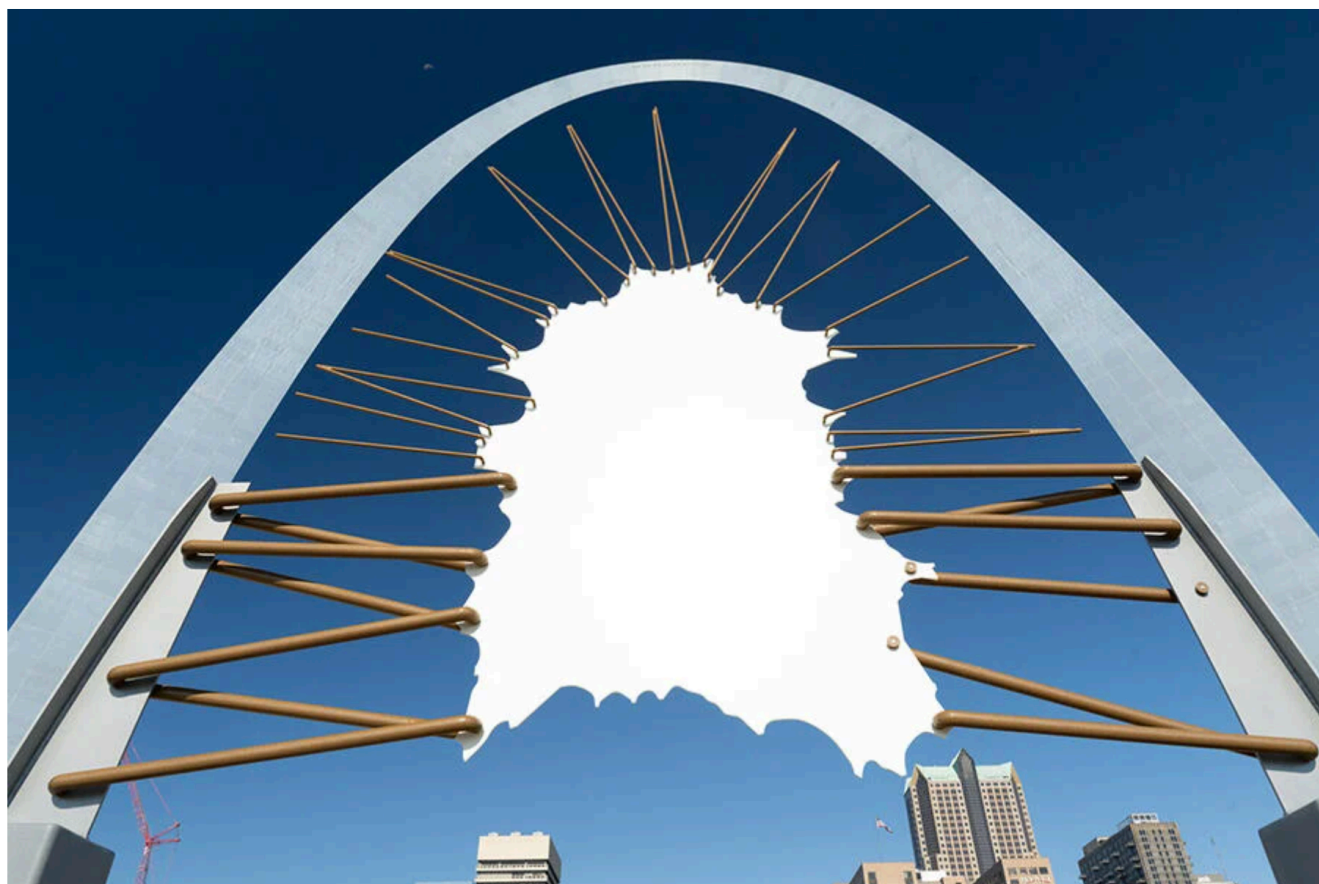
EXHIBITION REVIEWS

‘Coyote Time’ Presents Public Art for Trying Times

Across St. Louis, the third edition of the Counterpublic triennial reckons with climate disaster and political upheaval

BY CHARLENE K. LAU | 25 SEP 26

‘Coyote Time’, the third iteration of St. Louis’s civically engaged Counterpublic triennial, launches off a cliff like its namesake video game manoeuvre – where motion is briefly paused before resuming. In many Indigenous North American cultures, meanwhile, coyotes are shapeshifting tricksters; antiheroes who bring about change and teachings. Taking a thematic cue from the canine, Counterpublic’s curatorial ensemble (Jordan Carter, Raphael Fonseca, Stefanie Hessler, Nora N. Khan and Wanda Nanibush with James McAnally and Charlie Farrell) fills the city’s public spaces, parks and institutions with works by 47 participating artists. Spanning citywide sites from the International Institute of St. Louis – a recently defunded immigration centre – to the Mississippi riverfront, the triennial confronts colonial legacies and the interlinked issue of climate change.



Nicholas Galanin, *Land is never a gateway (Sightline / Lifeline)*, 2026, installation view. Courtesy: Counterpublic; photograph: Jon Gitchoff

Like many 20th-century monuments, St. Louis's iconic Gateway Arch stands as a testament to engineering and possibility. But in a trickster move, Nicholas Galanin intervenes with *Land is never a gateway* (*Sightline / Lifeline*) (2026), a public sculpture in the shape of an animal hide that, when viewed from a certain angle, stretches to fill the arch's negative space. It is a wry yet sharp reminder that we are on Indigenous land and that a monument is a matter of perspective. Close by, Glenn Ligon's *Who Builds Anything in This Country?* (2026) references the city's brickmaking past and the serpentine walls that Thomas Jefferson built at the University of Virginia to hide enslaved African American labourers from view. The low, partially submerged red-brick wall snakes towards the river. Each brick bears the handprints and names of local students that Ligon worked with, making visible their efforts for future generations.



Glenn Ligon, *Who Builds Anything in This Country?*, 2026,
installation view. Courtesy: Counterpublic; photograph: Izaiah
Johnson

Some of the most compelling works in 'Coyote Time' involve aural components. Freight trains rumble overhead an exhibition site within a former warehouse in Chouteau's Landing. After they pass, Anika Todd's sound-sculpture *Siren Song* (2026) fills the air with the sound of flowing water, emitted from municipal tornado sirens the artist installed near the neighbourhood flood wall. It is an unignorable sonic call to action that points to the 2025 tornado that tore a path of destruction through St. Louis and displaced thousands of residents. The Ville, a historically Black neighbourhood that has endured redlining, was badly affected by the disaster, and features as a site for several Counterpublic projects. It is also home to the storied Sumner High School with illustrious alumni including Tina Turner, whom Tony Cokes takes as

his subject in his sound and video work, *TT The River Won't Stop (or, A Stomping Horse)* (2026). A multicolour slideshow installed at the altar of the Antioch Baptist Church plays quotes and writing related to Turner, along with Cokes's own Marxist feminist texts on her life, to a soundtrack of the singer-songwriter's gut-busting vocals. It reads as a gospel to Turner's tenacity, laying bare her difficult yet legendary life and signalling the recovery that lies ahead for the tornado-ravaged neighbourhood.



Carolina Caycedo, *Fiesta de la Raíces*, 2026, installation view.
Courtesy: Counterpublic; photograph: Izaiah Johnson

What does it mean to make art in the public realm during trying times? Biennials and their ilk often face criticism for ‘parachute curation’, leaving little lasting impact on their host cities. However, some of Counterpublic’s larger-scale artworks – Sandra Brewster’s swing set in the Claver House Community Garden (*A Place to Put Your Things*, 2026), for example, or Rirkrit Tiravanija’s revamped canteen, (*open kitchen*) (2026), at the International Institute – are designed to remain in place to serve where they are needed most. ‘Coyote Time’ looks directly into the heart of the thorny predicaments of our moment. Its vast offerings push onwards to reckon with twin challenges of climate disaster and political upheaval, while also imagining new possibilities.

Counterpublic 2026, ‘Coyote Time’ is on view at various venues in St. Louis until 12 December

Main image: Lynne Smith, iThe Unloading Dock (receiving, holding); Provisional Loops; Nightshift, 2026, installation view. Courtesy: Counterpublic; photograph: Izaiah Johnson



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