



# Mississippi Riverscapes:

## The 2026 Rivers Project Plein Air Art Competition

Please review the information provided below to ensure you have a full understanding of the operations of this art competition. Any additional questions can be addressed by contacting the National Great Rivers Museum. Proper communication outlets can be found at the bottom of this document.

### CONTEST REGULATIONS

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#### Eligibility

This is a Plein Air (open air) art competition open to all professional and amateur artists ages 16+.

#### Medium

Any 2D painting or drawing medium may be used, including but not limited to: charcoal, colored pencil, pastel, watercolor, acrylics, oil paint, etc. Works must be ready to hang without any additional work on the part of museum staff and paints must be completely dry. No photography, computer-generated images, or sculpture will be accepted.

All unframed works must not exceed 16"x20". If framed in addition to these dimensions, frames must not be more than 3" thick.

#### Subject

Only landscapes will be accepted. No still life, portraits, or other subject matter. All landscapes must reflect the real-life scenes as viewed at that particular location, at that particular time. Scenes should not be posed or physically altered in any way. People and animals may be included in the scene if present but must not be the main focus.

#### Location

All paintings/drawings must be completed at one of 8 Rivers Project locations, indicated on the official contest map. The map will be available at <https://www.mtrf.org/plein-air-art/> beginning May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026. **Please look at the map carefully once it is made public; while some locations may be the same as last year, others will not.**

Locations are subject to closures based on high water levels and other unforeseen circumstances and it is the responsibility of the artist to verify the accessibility of any site before attempting a visit.

Each painting/drawing must be completed in one single outdoor session at a single designated location. Artists may visit multiple locations but are limited to one submission per location, per artist, for an allowed total of 8 submissions. Artwork is not permitted to be completed in a studio setting or drawn from a photograph or other reference material besides the live location.

**The location for each work must be specified upon submission, or the work will not be included in the contest.**

### **Time Frame**

All paintings/drawings must be completed during the designated time period of May 1<sup>st</sup> – May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026 and must be delivered in-person to the National Great Rivers Museum **no later than 5:00 p.m. May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026**. Any submissions received after this time will not be included in the contest or following exhibition.

Judging will take place the week of June 8<sup>th</sup>, with an awards ceremony to announce the winners on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026 at the National Great Rivers Museum. The reception will begin at 5:00 p.m., and winners will be announced at 5:30 p.m.

All submitted works will be exhibited in the classroom of the National Great Rivers Museum starting Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, with the exhibit running through Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

All submissions must be picked up between August 31<sup>st</sup> and September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026 unless an alternative date has been scheduled with the contest coordinator. Artists may not remove their work from the exhibit prior to the pickup week. All requests for alternative dates must be scheduled prior to the end of the pickup week.

### **Judging**

The exhibit will be juried by the Jacoby Arts Center Exhibition Committee and guest judges including prominent artists, art educators and gallery owners. Information on guest judges can be found at the end of this document.

The following criteria will be used:

**Visual Impact** — overall attraction and impact, eye catching, intriguing, compelling.

**Craftsmanship** — Drawing, values, skill of the medium, paint handling, presentation.

**Composition** — The unity of a painting, effective use of elements and principles.

**Color** — Not just bright color, but color harmony. Color relationships. Color balance. It can be subdued color or strong color. The effect of light permeating a piece. You say, “I like the color; it feels right.”

**Creativity** — innovative use of imagery or technique, originality. Stands out from other works.

### ***Follows all Criteria in regulations***

All judging will take place the week of June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Best of Show, First Runner-Up, and Honorable Mention winners will be selected. Winners will be announced during the Awards Ceremony at the National Great Rivers Museum on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026. The reception will begin at 5:00 p.m. and winners will be announced at 5:30 p.m.

## Prizes

**Best of Show:** The Best of Show winner will receive an opportunity to showcase their art for a month at Mooneyham Art, alongside regional, national, international and celebrity talent. This will include:

1. Free artist reception at Mooneyham Art, open to the public with live band and refreshments
2. Opportunity for sales. Additionally, Mooneyham Art is waiving their 35% gallery commission, so the artist featured retains 100% of their profit.
3. Mentions by name on FM radio.
4. Press releases with various media outlets with opportunity for both print and digital.
5. Mentorship on selling art and getting started in print sales.
6. Mass social media representation across various platforms.

**First Runner-Up:** The First Runner-Up will receive a wheel-throwing clay class at Jacoby Arts Center and a \$50 art supply gift certificate.

**Honorable Mention:** Honorable mention will receive a gift bag from Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, including a pottery item from Mississippi Mud Pottery (also courtesy of Great Rivers and Routes) and a \$25 gift certificate to the Great Rivers Treasures gift shop located in the National Great Rivers Museum.

**Best of Each Location:** The best artwork from each of the 8 selected locations will receive a gift bag of Great Rivers and Routes merchandise.

## Sales

Artists may choose to list their works for sale, at their own discretion. Artists who are interested in selling their work must specify upon registration which works are for sale, as well as their price and contact information for interested buyers. Prices will not be listed next to works in the exhibit; however, there will be a separate display at the entrance to the exhibit listing artist names, works that are for sale, prices, and contact information. All arrangements between buyers and sellers are entirely up to the artist and will not involve the National Great Rivers Museum, Mooneyham Art, Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, or Jacoby Arts Center.

## SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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Submissions will be accepted May 1<sup>st</sup> – May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Each artist must pay their submission fee at the following link prior to bringing their artwork to the museum:

<https://www.mtrf.org/plein-air-art/>

Physical entries must be brought to the museum (open 9-5 daily) by 5:00 p.m. on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Artists will fill out a physical entry form upon arrival.

## Entry Fee

The entry fee is a one-time, non-refundable fee of \$25.00 per artist. This entry fee will serve as a donation to Meeting of the Rivers Foundation, the nonprofit organization that supports the National Great Rivers Museum. Each artist may submit up to one artwork per location, for a total of 8 possible submissions. Fees may be paid through the registration link above.

## Framing/Hanging

All works on paper or board must be framed in a professional manner with braided wire attached for hanging and will be hung from a single hook as part of the display. Do NOT use saw-tooth hangers, string, or single strand aluminum wire. Use braided wire specifically made for your picture/frame weight. Wire must be attached using screws or another mechanical form of attachment. Command strips, tape, or other forms of adhesive are not sufficient. Frames may not be more than 3" thick (ie. should not add more than 6" total to the width or length of your artwork)

Works on canvas may be hung without frames but must be finished on the edges (ie. painted) to a display-level quality.

Paint must be dry to the touch. In the interest of protecting the walls on which the paintings are displayed, as well as other artists' work, any submitted paintings with wet paint will not be accepted.

The National Great Rivers Museum, Mooneyham Art, Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, and Jacoby Arts Center are not responsible for any damages to submitted works; make sure all hanging hardware is secured in such a way that artwork will not fall off of the wall and break.

Each artwork must have the **artist's name, location depicted, and title of work** written on, or attached to, the back of the picture frame (if framed) or the canvas (if unframed). This information must be attached securely; business cards tucked into the back of the frame easily fall out and are not sufficient identification unless taped to the frame. If you are using a business card as identification, ensure that the title and location of your work is also clearly written on the back of the frame.

## DISCLAIMER

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Photographs of submitted artwork will be used in future promotional materials. By submitting your artwork, you are giving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/National Great Rivers Museum permission to photograph your work for this purpose.

Contest partners, including the National Great Rivers Museum, Jacoby Arts Center, Mooneyham Art, and Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, are not responsible for any damages to art entries.

Participants take full responsibility for ensuring that their entries are framed appropriately and equipped with sufficient hanging hardware to prevent damage to the artwork.

Any artwork not picked up within the specified time frame or at a later, previously agreed-upon date will be forfeited to the National Great Rivers Museum and become a donation to the Meeting of the Rivers Foundation. These works will not be returned outside of this time frame.

## GUEST JUDGE BIOGRAPHIES

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**Jenna Muscarella-Godair** is a Southern Illinois–based painter and arts educator whose work is deeply rooted in place, memory, and community. A native of Alton, Illinois, she earned her Bachelor of Art Education with a concentration in Drawing and Painting from the University of Kansas in 2012.

Muscarella-Godair spent five formative years in Corpus Christi, Texas, where she served as both a public school art educator and Resident Artist at K Space Studios. During her residency, she actively exhibited, mentored emerging artists, and participated in community arts initiatives ranging from mural projects to festival programming. In 2018, she juried, coordinated, and installed the exhibition *YARD SALE: Objects of Nostalgia* at K Space Studios' Schaudies Gallery, overseeing artist selection, curatorial direction, and final installation.

Her personal painting practice is informed by travel, observation, and a strong sense of regional identity. Muscarella-Godair draws inspiration directly from her surroundings, capturing the emotional and historical resonance embedded in landscapes and everyday environments. Themes of rootedness, transition, and environmental storytelling consistently influence her compositions.

After returning to Illinois in 2019, Muscarella-Godair became Education and Exhibitions Coordinator at the Jacoby Arts Center, where she organized, curated, and installed numerous exhibitions while also developing accessible arts programming for the broader community. She now serves on the Board of Directors and Exhibitions Committee, continuing her leadership in regional arts development. She has also been a Resident Artist at Souldard Art Gallery in St. Louis, expanding her exhibition presence throughout the Midwest.

In addition to maintaining an active studio practice, Muscarella-Godair teaches ceramics, painting, sculpture, photography, and design in a local public school. Muscarella-Godair's work has been exhibited locally and nationally. Through painting, arts education, and community arts leadership, she remains dedicated to fostering meaningful connections between artists, environment, and audience.

**Charles Mooneyham** is a multidisciplinary artist, curator, and arts advocate whose career spans more than thirty years of creative practice and community leadership. Trained in fine arts at Southwestern Illinois College under the mentorship of Dale Threlkeld, he developed a distinctive visual language, known for his "surrealist-pop" creations that explore themes of politics, religion, and mental health.

As the founder and curator of Mooneyham Art LLC in historic downtown Alton, Illinois, Mooneyham has established a respected studio gallery and creative hub dedicated to elevating emerging and established artists. His curatorial work includes large-scale community exhibitions, arts-driven fundraising initiatives, and educational programming that integrates creativity with wellness. His *Art Is Healing* workshops and public lectures reflect his long-standing commitment to the role of art as a vehicle of perseverance.

Charles also conceptualized and founded the Alton Art Expo and Alton Art Expo 2, an indie art fair designed to normalize conversations around behavioral health, promote artistic expression, fundraise for mental health initiatives and champion the healing benefits of art.

Mooneyham's artistic accomplishments and community impact have been cited across multiple media platforms, including regional newspapers, business journals, radio interviews, and television news features. His exhibitions and arts initiatives have been covered by outlets such as the *Illinois Business Journal*, *The Telegraph*, *Out In STL*, *Riverbender.com*, and other regional media, alongside appearances on radio and televised segments highlighting his contributions to cultural development and art accessibility.

In addition to his studio and curatorial practice, Mooneyham is an experienced educator, keynote speaker, and mentor to developing artists. His previous work in behavioral health further informs his belief that creativity is an essential human tool for expression, connection, healing and most importantly resilience.

*"I can think of no better way to lift a community than through the empowerment of art"*- Charles Mooneyham

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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Physical entries must be delivered to the following address:

National Great Rivers Museum  
2 Lock and Dam Way  
East Alton, Illinois 62024  
Open Daily 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

For questions, please contact the contest coordinator, Elise Ratcliff, at the National Great Rivers Museum by calling **618-462-6979**, or by email at [elise.m.ratcliff@usace.army.mil](mailto:elise.m.ratcliff@usace.army.mil).