

FROM THE GREAT LAKES TO THE GREAT PLAINS THE VISIBLE CURRENTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

June 13–September 14, 2025

Curated by Rachel Adams, Chief Curator + Director of Programs

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Teresa Baker
Jess Benjamin
Nadia Botello
Andrea Carlson +
Rozalinda Borcilă
Hoesy Corona
LaToya Ruby Frazier

Timothy Frerichs
Dana Fritz
Sky Hopinka
JeeYeun Lee
Dylan AT Miner
Trey Moody
John Pfahl

Platte Basin Timelapse
Asad Raza
Karen Reimer
Anna Scime
Bently Spang
Colleen Thurston
Tali Weinberg

BEMIS × CENTER



While distinct in geography—one marked by immense freshwater resources, the other by sweeping grasslands, river networks, and the Ogallala Aquifer—both the Great Lakes and the Great Plains serve as essential vantage points for understanding water’s significance across environmental, political, and social dimensions.

Bringing together artists with deep ties to these areas, including by birth, residence, or past experience, the exhibition underscores the pressing nature of water-related climate issues including altered water quality, water scarcity and supply, and overall impact on diverse ecosystems both regionally and globally.

Frequently overlooked and stereotyped, these two regions hold critical ecological and cultural value. These landscapes illuminate the multifaceted role of water in nurturing ecosystems, shaping identities, driving industry, and contributing to environmental decline. The twenty-one artists and a collective in this exhibition confront these layered realities: delving into how water is honored, misused, defended, and, at times, appropriated. Their work engages deeply with Indigenous perspectives, historical injustices, industrial impacts, and emerging visions of climate adaptation.

More than a reflection, this exhibition offers a call to action. The featured artists draw from interdisciplinary methods—blending environmental science, activism, documentary practices, technology, and historical research—to showcase alternate ways of thinking and acting in the face of water scarcity and climate change. Working across varied materials and practices, they present bold, thoughtful interventions that invite us to reevaluate our relationship with water and with the fragile ecosystems we inhabit.

– Rachel Adams, Chief Curator + Director of Programs

It is important, in this space, to include the voice of the exhibiting artists. I asked each artist about their personal connection to the regions this exhibition focuses on, and how that connection has shaped the way they approach the theme of water, whether as a subject, a material, or a metaphor. Some of their responses are reproduced here.

TERESA BAKER

I understand the traditional and historical importance water plays in my Mandan/Hidatsa culture, based on a source for irrigation, hunting, transportation, and especially important to us, trade. It’s also always been viewed with reverence from a spiritual perspective. So, in the ways that I explore and nod to various geographies of my work, water is present both in form and embodiment of importance for culture.



Teresa Baker
Buffalo Bird Woman, 2024
Willow, buckskin, yarn, cottonwood bark on AstroTurf
Courtesy of Broadway Gallery, LLC

JESS BENJAMIN

My imagination was trained in the irrigation ditches on the 100th Meridian, and I am one of the last to be educated in a two-room rural schoolhouse. I built lakes and dams on the turnrows of cornfields as a child and now use clay to create objects that explain levels of water and drought. I build clay intake towers and maps that focus on the U.S. Drought Monitor and the Ogallala Aquifer. My ceramic artworks reference the increasing struggles over water rights and are battered reminders of these problems. I hope my artwork serves as a warning to protect and preserve Nebraska’s most valuable resource, water.



Jess Benjamin
Dried Up on the Ogallala Aquifer 1-25, 2025
Stoneware
Courtesy of the artist

NADIA BOTELLO

I grew up in the southernmost tip of the Great Plains in Texas, where my family has been since 1733. My hometown, San Antonio, would quite literally not exist if it were not for the San Antonio River. People have been convening and settling along this river for more than 10,000 years, and its centrality to our city continues to this day. (Most people are aware of the River Walk, which was a WPA project that began in 1939.) Our drinking water also comes from the Edwards Aquifer, one of the most substantial aquifers in the world. Growing up here, the river, water, and drought are part of our daily lives. I visited the river often with my parents, we learned about our local water system in school (from elementary through high school), and all of our local news channels report on the level of the aquifer along with the weather daily. Our water is an ever-present reality, but I didn’t recognize how rare that is until I lived in other cities in the US alongside their own rivers. I realized that very few people actually knew where their drinking water came from or the history, impact, and health of their local waterways. I ultimately became obsessed with the question that has largely been the focus of my practice for over a decade now: what does it mean to pay attention to what water might be saying for itself?



Nadia Botello
Other Channels (still), 2021
Mixed media
Courtesy of the artist

TIMOTHY FRERICHS

As a child, I lived for four years in Northern Germany near the North Sea. I was impressed by the land reclamation projects integrated into the dike systems protecting the lowlands. The reclamation goal was to extend the arable land from the Sea utilizing the tide processes. Additionally, I was fascinated by the remaining bogs and wetlands crucial to the culture and history of the North Sea areas. It was a very impressionable experience which created a deep affinity for me with water landscapes.

During secondary school, I lived in North-West Iowa near the Big Sioux River. I was always struck by the differing landscape near the river – as intensive agriculture eased there were (more) trees, variance of landscape, wetlands, and wildlife. While living there, I hired out as an agriculture and road construction worker in my teens and early 20s, this immersed me directly in the plains landscape. This time period coincided with the significant reduction of the family farm and the emergence of the dominant industrial, genetic, and chemical agriculture. Until 2006, I lived primarily in Iowa and Minnesota.

I currently live within 5 minutes of Lake Erie. Living next to 20% of the world’s fresh water is to be impacted by the weather, micro-climate agriculture, and geography associated with a Great Lake. This includes Lake Effect snow and rain, as well as fish kills and algae blooms. The Great Lakes are described in actuality as a Great River flowing from Upper Minnesota/Ontario through to the Atlantic Ocean.

Water systems directly impact and connect with the quality of life and living that I value. Wetlands, whether near a large body of water, river, or a prairie pothole, are crucial to water health and wildlife systems. Our quest to acquire as much arable area has led to tiling, drainage, and water extraction for larger crop production and urban development. This has impacted both the agriculture business and also had profound impacts on the established ecosystems.

ROZALINDA BORCILĂ

I live on the shores of Lake Michigan. The ground I walk upon was engineered through a vast hydrological project that produced dry land – and settler-owned property – at the expense of the lake and inland waterways. The ongoing power of this terraforming project is felt as a daily reality, or rather, underlies the possibility of daily life in so-called Chicago. It persists even within recent visions of climate resiliency, despite the apparent shift in our relationship to water. The Great Lakes are being reimagined as central to cartographies of climate change colonialism—the vast repository of potable water is a new kind of target for visions of climate resiliency. But what is being envisioned as resilient? And how do imaginaries—and policy frameworks—of resiliency mask a new form of extractive, violent relationality, and the extension of colonial logics?



Rozalinda Borcilă + Andrea Carlson
Hydrologic Unit Code 071200 (still), 2023
5-channel video installation (color, sound) and printed matter
Courtesy of the artists

My work included in this exhibition focuses on the Hazardous Algae Blooms experienced on Lake Erie. HAB Cyanobacteria blooms are occurring worldwide due to excessive nutrient inputs into our water systems. The toxic blooms negatively impact aquatic life, water quality, and human health. Conversely, they are also incredibly beautiful. Especially visualized from a distance, for example, when viewed from satellite imagery. The amazing cyan and green dispersed with wind and water currents display variations of color and movement.

The Black Swamp was an enormous wetland in the Western Basin of Lake Erie. The swamp acted as a filter for the Lake system. With the improvement of tiling technology, the swamp was converted into arable land during the mid to late 19th century. The former swamp area is now very productive agricultural fields that leach phosphorus and nitrates into the Lake. This, along with residential runoff and rising temperatures, are creating the toxic Cyanobacteria blooms, known as HAB, in Lake Erie.



Timothy Frerichs
Bloom Map Ball 2, 2020
Monoprint (etching, engraving, roulette), pulp painting with recycled linen, blowouts, handmade Mitzumata paper collaged on Vintage Lake Erie Maps
Courtesy of the artist

DANA FRITZ

I have spent most of my life on the eastern edge of the Great Plains in Kansas City and Lincoln, experiencing both flooding and drought. I approach water as a subject and a force that shapes our land and weather. Water is an even more complex natural force in the Nebraska Sandhills on the site of my Hybrid Landscape project, especially with respect to fire. The hand-planted forest stands in a windswept semi-arid, fire-adapted climate of grass-stabilized sand dunes that allow rain and melting snow to percolate through the surface into the great Ogallala Aquifer below. This leaves the air dry but the groundwater abundant. In years with plentiful rains, vegetation is profuse and green, with fires often burning out on their own. When followed by drought years, this now dry vegetation becomes an extreme fire hazard where lightning or human-caused fire moves more quickly. If driven by high winds, fire is very difficult to control. This combination of drought after wet years, ample fuel in the form of dry grass and trees and unburned thinning piles, high winds, and low dew points led to the recent catastrophic Bovee fire of 2022 that burned the fire tower, the historic 4H camp, and a quarter of the trees over nearly a week. My work at the Bessey Ranger District that spanned both the abundant rains of 2019 and the severe drought of 2022, makes these extremes visible.

PLATTE BASIN TIMELAPSE

Note: Responses written by Michael Farrell, co-founder of Platte Basin Timelapse

We created Platte Basin Timelapse to represent a watershed as a living entity. For me, that is a direct result of participating in a Native American Church ceremony conducted by the late Leonard Crow Dog during the period when the AIM Non-Leadership Trials were being held in Lincoln in Federal Judge Warren Urbom’s court. Water is a living thing, and a watershed is a complex web of equally and mutually interdependent living entities from across the web of life.

Counter to the geopolitical boundaries that indicate and depend on concepts such as ownership, resource management, and policy, if we adjust our conceptions to recognize a watershed as an equal being, much of what we have assumed must be re-imagined.

KAREN REIMER

I grew up on a farm in central Kansas. I moved to Chicago in my early 20s. When I first arrived, I was surprised to find myself very bothered in indefinable ways by seldom being able to see into the distance, the way I always had in Kansas. A kind of claustrophobia. The shore of Lake Michigan became the place I would go to be able to see out to the horizon. I got attached to the lake immediately for that reason. But I think everyone who lives in Chicago eventually develops a relationship with the lake. It’s a great beauty. It’s a huge presence. You can feel it even when you can’t see it. It changes the weather.



Karen Reimer
Percent Area for High Plains Drought, 2020
Embroidery on fabric
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, IL

TREY MOODY

Living in the Great Plains has taught me to attend to the wide beauty of this ecosystem, including its water—the surface water of rivers and lakes, and the underground water found in aquifers. Both this presence and absence speak to something central about this environment, and they speak to my poetic practice in the way language and silence continually reveal and conceal.



Platte Basin Timelapse
A Watershed in Motion (still), 2017
Single-channel video (color, sound)
Photography by the Platte Basin Timelapse team. Produced by Mariah Lundgren.
Courtesy of Platte Basin Timelapse

A number of years back, when I, and a lot of other humans, developed what we now call “climate anxiety,” I started to research what was happening to the Lakes. For a time, the Great Lakes region had been held up as a haven from the impending crisis of climate change, because the lakes hold approximately 20% of the fresh water in the entire world. The thought was that when everywhere else had run out, there would still be water here. But as we’ve come to know more about human effects on the lakes—toxic chemical contamination, oil spills, urban sewage overflows, rising water temperatures, hypoxic zones, invasive species, agricultural runoff, algae blooms, etc., etc.—that sense of them as a haven has gone. Forty million people in the US and Canada currently get their drinking water from the Great Lakes.

In Kansas, there is also a huge body of water, but it is not visible. The Ogallala aquifer lies under the Great Plains from Texas to Canada. Large-scale agricultural irrigation started in the 1950s. Since then, the aquifer has been depleted between 40–70%. That amount of water would fill Lake Michigan. Some spots in the aquifer under Texas and Kansas are completely dry. It would take some 6,000 years to refill, if the land above doesn’t collapse and make that impossible. Almost the entire population of the Great Plains gets its drinking water from the aquifer. The farm I grew up on had a well with clean and good-tasting water. That taste is still my definition of what water ought to taste like. Our well water has since become contaminated with nitrates and saline from agricultural runoff and possibly nearby fracking. I mourn it.

I put visualizations of data about these things into my work as a way to think and talk about them. These data visualizations are images of huge amounts of scientific data on climatic and environmental phenomena that are certainly affecting our bodies and our habitat, but it is difficult to really take that information in, since the changes are incremental and often invisible, and they are taking place over a very long time and a huge spatial area. They are so much larger than the scale of humanity that we have a hard time conceptualizing them. Data visualization is a process of abstraction that lets us take in all that information. But there is still a big difference between looking at a map and walking across a landscape. My other reason to work with data visualizations is a less rational one, a sense that copying these pieces of information in the long slow process of embroidery lets me connect my body to the information somehow. I’m trying to reintroduce some element of the walk into the map. To connect myself physically to abstracted data. Make non-human/geologic time and space become tactile; to make knowledge material.

ANNA SCIME

The Great Lakes are in my blood—quite literally a part of me. I was born in Buffalo and while I’ve lived in many incredible places, this place has always felt the most like home. My mother, grandmothers and grandfathers were born and buried here. I love the Great Lakes, and some of these fresh-water-seas’ most magnificent waterscapes and fertile fisheries are in my backyard— Lake Erie, Niagara River and Falls, Lake Ontario. I’m a fish and water lover and spend a lot of time at the shore, on the surface, and exploring the underwater worlds here. If I were a migratory fish—the Niagara would be my natal river.

I’ve been drawn to water for as long as I can remember, and I’ve been drawn to water as a subject, material, and metaphor in my practice since I began making work. Water is elusive and hypnotic. It gives only fleeting impressions. Both familiar and foreign, everything moves differently in water than it does on land and through the air, including light and sound waves. I can gaze into it for hours. As Bachelard wrote (and I would agree), “mirror impressions are hard flat images. They are unreachable images, but an image in water possesses infinite potential.”

In addition to being the liquid mirror at the root of many metaphors—time, memory, a place where all is one, the primordial womb—water is a collective character, in a living landscape. It hides and reveals through movements, expansions and intersections. It is generative and acquiescent, an infinitely malleable yet qualitatively finite substance that is in possession of its past, present and future potentials at once.

There is no same river. No same lake shore. Water is alive and full of life. It’s always moving and always changing. Each waterbody is a complex everybody of nested, interdependent ecosystems that are constantly kinetic and capable of autonomous action, yet always connected to and intermingling with something else. Water is not just what it is but what it is becoming.

BENTLY SPANG

As an enrolled member of the Tsitsistas/Suhtai nation (aka Northern Cheyenne), my People’s current ancestral homeland, the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, is situated on 500,000 acres in southeastern Montana. Our historical homeland was much larger, however, encompassing lands in both the Great Lakes area and the Great Plains. We considered large parts of this vast area our home before settler colonialism led to violent forced relocation by the US government. Those lands were stolen from us and other tribes, using the Christian Doctrines of Discovery and new laws and broken treaties based on those doctrines, and we eventually were forced onto the small reservation we now occupy today. Through incredible sacrifice and forethought, my relatives were able to secure a homeland for us that we had a strong history with, and for that I am eternally grateful. Prior to this forced removal, we developed a strong relationship with all these lands over many thousands of years and, as such, we have been grappling with climate issues for a long time. The key has been maintaining a balanced and respectful relationship with the natural world, taking only what we need and acknowledging the gifts the land continues to give us. Out of these teachings from my elders, I have developed a strong relationship to the land, the animals and the water specific to my homeland.



Bently Spang
War Shirt #6 - Waterways, 2017
Televisions, digital stills, steel, video players, cabling, ethernet bridge, wood. Fabrication with Craig Whitely
Courtesy of Bently Spang and Mountain Time Arts

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Info + free tickets at bemiscenter.org/events

Member Preview

Friday, June 13 | 6–7 PM

Opening Reception

Friday, June 13 | 7–9 PM

Artists Talk Water

Saturday, June 14 | 3 PM

Lunch + Learn: Aquatic Invasive Species in Nebraska

Friday, June 20 | 12 PM

OMA ARTalks with UNMC Water, Climate and Health Program

Saturday, June 28 | 3 PM

Lunch + Learn: Monroe Burianek of Lauritzen Gardens

Thursday, July 31 | 12 PM

In Conversation: Author Anna Farro Henderson and Exhibiting Artist/Poet Trey Moody

Thursday, August 7 | 6 PM

Film Premiere: *Drowned Land* with Colleen Thurston and Taylor Keen

Thursday, August 21 | 6 PM

Experimental Music Performance: Nadia Botello’s *Other Channels* with Omaha Symphony

Saturday, August 23 | 3 PM

Exhibition Tours

Curator–Led

Thursday, June 26 | 7 PM

Thursday, August 14 | 7 PM

Exhibition Highlights

Thursday, July 10 | 12 PM

Saturday, July 26 | 3 PM

Saturday, August 9 | 12 PM + 3 PM

Saturday, September 13 | 12 PM



RESOURCES

EPA Carbon Footprint Calculator

epa.gov/ghgemissions/carbon-footprint-calculator

Keep Omaha Beautiful

keepomahabeautiful.org

Citizens’ Climate Lobby Nebraska Chapter

citizensclimatelobby.org/chapters/Nebraska_-_At_Large/

Omaha Climate Action and Resilience Plan

omacap.org #OmahaClimateAction

Clean Solutions for Omaha

omahacso.com

Green Omaha Coalition

greenomaha.org

Community Gardens in Omaha

Dundee Community Garden (4902 Underwood Ave)

The Big Garden (multiple locations)

City Sprouts (4002 Seward St)

Gifford Park Community Garden (3416 Cass St)

Big Muddy Urban Farm (various sites)

Glacier Creek Preserve

unomaha.edu/college-of-arts-and-sciences/nature-preserves

Conservation Nebraska

neconserve.org

SOUNDTRACK

Celebrate the exhibition with sounds and songs compiled around an eclectic foundation of water.

Listen on Spotify >



THREAD OF WATER

By Trey Moody

a sentence like a little trickle of water a sentence like a little trickle of collected water that fell from the sky as rain a trickle whose speed increases with gravity toward growth or is it loss a sentence like a trickle of water that joins another trickle of water and another and another a sentence like a watershed a sentence that builds with the weight of duration subject to the laws of a watershed’s gravity a sentence that includes a memory of a dry backyard creekbed that in minutes became a flash flood a memory of the heft of piling sandbags along the patio’s perimeter a sentence whose past is each last word that can’t help but continue that can’t help but become metabolized which is another way of saying felt a sentence that would not be possible without the water mixed with synthetics to create the pen’s ink without the water within the cellulose to create this very page without the water from rivers and aquifer mixed with fluoride and chloramines that the writer and reader drink to keep living in this particular place whose rivers and aquifer allow for the sustenance of human life not to mention the sustenance of non-human-animal life not to mention the sustenance of plant and soil life not to mention the sustenance of the kinds of life that may not be apparent to human subjectivity though all these forms of actual and possible life have now been mentioned a sentence that acknowledges the watershed of etymology that links the very word sentence in a grammatical context to the very word sentence

human language has a liquid quality, a flow in its overall effect, water in its consonants

—Gaston Bachelard

in a legal context a sentence that does such a thing by way of the Latin sentire meaning to feel to perceive to sense a sentence that acknowledges it is feeling perceiving sensing something when learning that Metropolitan Utilities District which is the overarching body managing the drinking water for this particular place began testing for PFAS compounds also known as forever chemicals in November 2024 a sentence that acknowledges so far which means seven months as of this writing the forever chemicals in this place’s potable water are below the EPA’s recently established and enforceable Maximum Contaminant Levels mentioned on the MUD website a sentence that makes its writer and perhaps its reader feel something perceive something sense something regarding the word maximum regarding the word enforceable a sentence that a little while ago in the past used the word body metaphorically for a publicly owned company and political subdivision a sentence that recognizes such a metaphorical body is much different than a literal body that needs water to survive a sentence whose future should be building toward something important if the sentence is abiding by the common advice for literary and rhetorical writing in the English language that recommends a sentence should end with emphasis a sentence like a trickle of water whose predictable end after traveling through city streets through storm-drain grates through streams through creeks finally into the

river whose namesake identifies this specific watershed to English-speaking humans a sentence that recognizes the water joining the watershed is not the water’s end because the water the river collects continues on before joining an even larger river a sentence like the water that formed that first trickle now part of something much larger on the way to the river’s mouth a sentence like an opening a sentence that questions this mouth metaphor because it is the river that is giving water because it is the ocean that is accepting water a sentence that acknowledges the anthropocentric implications of calling a river’s end a mouth a sentence that anthropocentrically equates water to language as both leave a mouth a sentence like that original trickle whose dispersed parts now join new water in that ecotone called an estuary a sentence that includes a memory at the beach of sitting on a sand-covered jellyfish a memory of the surprising sting a sentence that notes Spanish and Portuguese terms for jellyfish translate to living water a sentence whose gravity has led to the ocean the ocean whose surface eventually evaporates into air creating clouds a sentence that is now in the clouds the clouds that cross over increasingly hydrophobic soil a sentence that delights in the kinds of life rain provides a sentence that fears the extremity of deluge how to write a sentence like living water

—after César Paternosto

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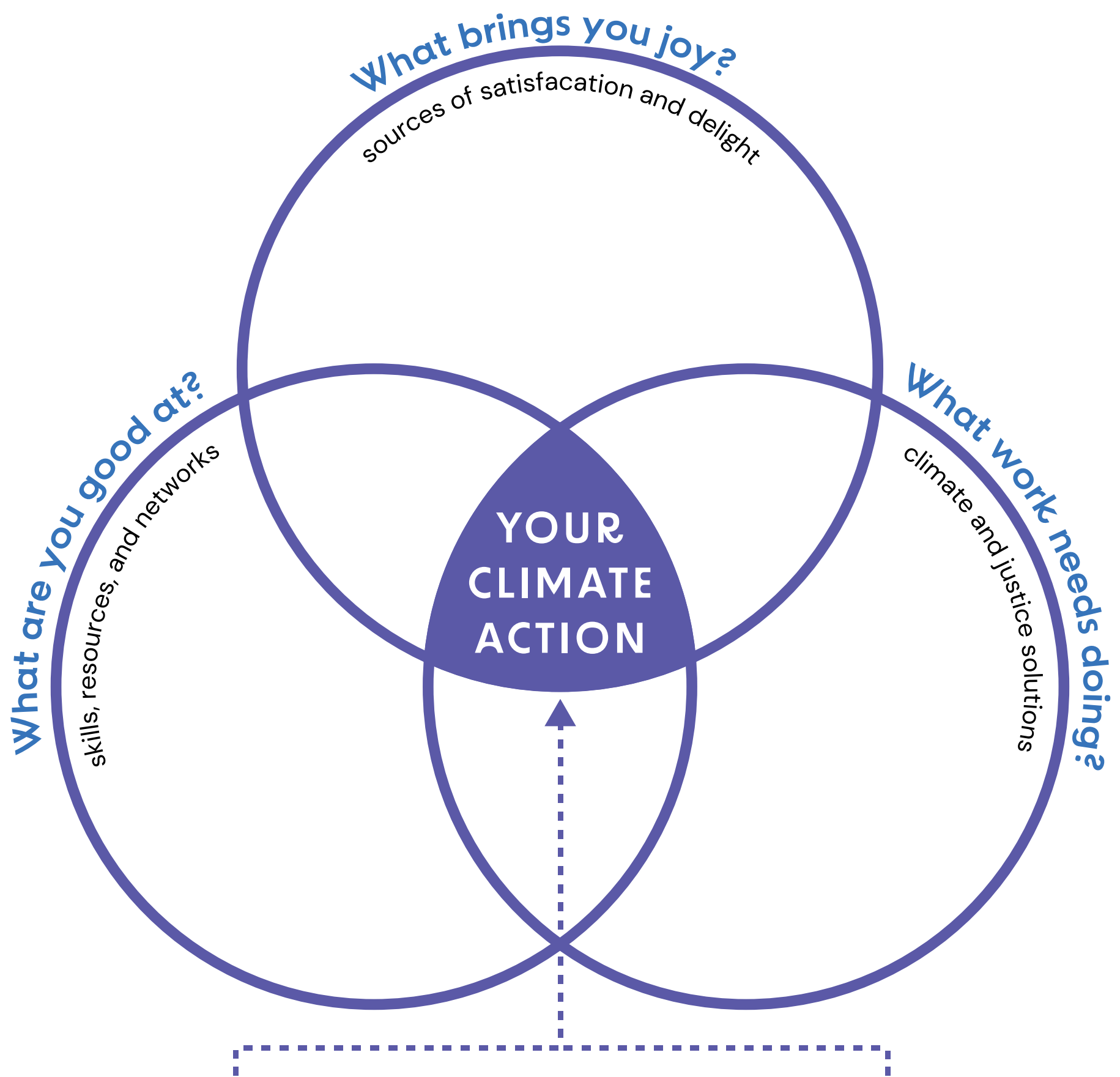
From the Great Lakes to the Great Plains: The Visible Currents of Climate Change is generously supported, in part, by:



Funding for the August 7 and August 21 programs is provided by:



Omaha, named for the Tribe indigenous to this land, translates to “those going against the current or upstream.” Poised on the western banks of the Missouri River and in a state that is groundwater rich, this city is a significant originating point for *From the Great Lakes to the Great Plains: The Visible Currents of Climate Change*. If we can “go against” what has become the status quo regarding water usage and instead work together to combat climate change and safeguard our water, we can positively impact our region and beyond.



CLIMATE ACTION:

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Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

Bemis Center facilitates the creation, presentation, and understanding of contemporary art through an international residency program, exhibitions, and educational programs.

Exhibition Program

Bemis Center’s exhibition program features solo and group exhibitions of artwork in all media by local, national, and international artists. Exhibitions are always free, open to the public, and frequently introduce the community of Omaha to the most experimental and provocative art forms today.

Public Programs

Artist-driven, community-responsive programs provide opportunities for the public to learn about and be inspired by the visual arts. Through artist-led workshops, ARTalks, open studios, panel discussions, film screenings, and performances, the community has direct access to artists and to their diverse approaches to art-making and interpreting the world around us.

LOW END

LOW END is Bemis Center’s music venue and an integral part of the Sound Art + Experimental Music Program. The unique artist-designed space features free live shows by local, national, and international sound artists, composers, and experimental musicians. These performances aim to not only build new audiences and a greater appreciation for nontraditional forms of sound but also to liberate artists to take risks and present truly avant-garde work.

Residency Program

Since 1981, Bemis has provided artists from around the world with dedicated time, space, and resources to conduct research and create new work. Bemis offers artists private live/work studios, financial support, technical/administrative assistance, and opportunities for intellectual discourse. The Sound Art + Experimental Music Program is a special track for artists working in sound, composition, voice, and music of all genres and features dedicated facilities for rehearsing, recording, and performing. The Curator-in-Residence Program provides national curators the opportunity to organize exhibitions and public programs at Bemis.

Alumni Program

Designed for artists who have participated in Bemis Center’s Residency Program or have exhibited at Bemis, the Alumni Program ensures the organization’s ongoing relevance, connection, and impact to Bemis alumni by providing financial resources, unique opportunities, and expanding their professional networks.

Gallery Hours

Wednesday	11 AM – 5 PM
Thursday	11 AM – 9 PM
Friday	11 AM – 5 PM
Saturday	11 AM – 5 PM
Sunday	11 AM – 5 PM

Admission

Thanks to the generous support of individual donors, local and national foundations, and corporate partners, Bemis Center offers free admission to all of its exhibitions and public programs.

Plan your visit at bemiscenter.org/visit.

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