

CALL FOR STUDENT PAPERS

Contemporary Nature: Tending the Garden Spring Symposium at MASS MoCA

March 13–15, 2026

Student presentations start

3:00 PM on Friday, March 13, 2026

Submission Deadline

November 1, 2025

MASS MoCA's Department of Public Programs is seeking applications for student presentations during **MASS MoCA's Spring 2026 Symposium, Contemporary Nature: Tending the Garden.**

We welcome applications for experimental or traditional student presentations or performances that reinterpret the concept of the garden — not as a site of colonial borders, indexing, or control, but as a space that offers an experience of the world's polyphony, precarity, indeterminacy, and interspecies collaboration or communication.

Topics might include using the garden as a site for sensation and affect; gardening or landscape as an artistic method; gardening as a process to fill in gaps in the historical record; gardening as a mechanism for sowing queer culture; or gardening as a process used to make land viable for all organisms through Indigenous stewardship.

Student presentations will take place on Friday evening, March 13, 2026, in MASS MoCA's Club B10 starting at 2:30 PM. After the presentations, speakers are invited to a reception at 5:00 PM in MASS MoCA's Research and Development Store.

All student presenters are welcome to join the conference weekend, including all presentations on Saturday and private presenter-only breakout sessions on Sunday.

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

Gardens are choreographed sites with the most cyclically immanent power to all life: to catch sunlight and transform energy into matter. Through gardening, we are able to cultivate physical and emotional energies, making us manipulators of the world. Nature is dialectic; we are one of many agents in a wide network. Humanity continues to create gardens to ecologize, although we have blighted them through histories of apartheid, colonialism, and control, and we continue on this path.

Gardening reframes choice and power by allowing us to understand what it means to be with others in difference, to embrace unknowing, and to surrender humanity's control to the ecological network of which we are a part.

MASS MoCA poses a question for our future: How do we tend the garden into co-becoming with the earth and all that it embodies? How can artists help us understand the immanence between nature and humanity?

Our intention is to dissolve boundaries of information sharing between species and ecological processes and realize how truly immanent we are in nature

MASS MoCA seeks out new ways of being and knowing as contemporary nature through polyphony, indeterminacy, and ecosystem cultivation. We seek to expose artist ecologies that drive new ideas into existence, and give life to, critique, and share culture.

This two-day symposium explores ways to undo traumatic ecological behavior by envisioning new ways of being within the earth through scholarly presentations on thought experiments, writing, and artist practices.

CRITERIA FOR SUBMISSION

Student submissions should be finished, and if your presentation is prospective or in process, it must be finished by December 1, 2025. The average length for each presentation should be 10 minutes; no presentation should exceed 15 minutes.

Contemporary Nature is an expanded format that welcomes experimental and traditional presentations that may include, but not be limited to, seeing gardening as a production of sensation and affect; gardening or landscape as an artistic method; or gardening as a process to fill in gaps in the historical record (metaphorically as a mechanism for sowing queer culture and figuratively as a process used to make land viable for all organisms through human stewardship). Practical applications of this work may include, but not be limited to, presentations in new landscape design, advancement in energy production, green alternatives, capital accumulation/monopolies, or green marketing/the green industrial complex.

MASS MoCA ultimately seeks transdisciplinary alliances that use the garden as nature to frame scholarly research or interspecies collaboration.

Please email Gabriel Sacco, Sr. Manager of Public Programs, at gsacco@massmoca.org with questions regarding your application.

JURY FOR STUDENT PAPERS

Lisa Dent

Director, Public Programs, MASS MoCA

Evan Garza

Curator, MASS MoCA

Gabriel Sacco

Sr. Manager, Public Programs, MASS MoCA

Lydia Jasper

Curatorial Assistant, MASS MoCA

Thomas Logan

Studios at MASS MoCA Residency Coordinator

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Contact Information
(Name, pronouns, phone number, email address)
- Availability/commitment to present your research on Friday, November 7, 2025
- Affiliated college or university, or continuing education program
- Year of graduation
- Artist/scholar bio
- Abstract of your paper with key topic(s)
- Proposal for your presentation including spoken length
- Names and contact information of one (1) professional reference who will be available for us to contact from October 2025 to December 2025

Please send one (1) PDF of your application materials.
Your final PDF submission should be no larger than 25MB.

Email your application to:

publicprograms@massmoca.org

With subject line:

Contemporary Nature Student Submission

Before:

November 1, 2025, at 11:59 PM

We will contact you in early December with the results of your application.

If your application is selected, you will be asked to submit your full paper to Public Programs by December 1, 2025. Public Programs has the right to decline final submissions that do not align with the original submission without prior notification from the student.