

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY'S COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS  
AND THE SCHOOL OF ART'S MURALS AT MASON AND MASON EXHIBITIONS PRESENT

## SAM NESTER'S *ARCADIA*



Yassmin Salem, Coordinator of Murals at Mason, within the *Arcadia* installation  
Photo by Evan Cantwell/Mason Creative Services

### The newest ELEMENTS installation cultivates green consciousness through December 2021

(FAIRFAX, VA) George Mason University's College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA) announced the public sound and light installation [Arcadia](#), created by artist Sam Nester and offered in partnership with the School of Art's [Murals at Mason](#) and [Mason Exhibitions](#) initiatives. The groundbreaking exhibit, which features plants as musical composers and visual performers, opened in November 2020 and will be accessible through December 2021 via its dedicated Twitch livestream at [twitch.tv/masonarcadia](https://www.twitch.tv/masonarcadia), as well as in person from [outside the Presidents Park Hydroponic Greenhouse on Mason's Fairfax campus](#).

*Arcadia* uses modified biodata-sonification sensors to convert the natural, real-time biorhythms of Virginia native plants into Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) data. Data collected from the plants is sent to a computer that processes it with Ableton and Max MSP and then outputs real-time sound through a variety of MIDI instruments. Plant signals controlling the MIDI instruments also control an LED light display corresponding to the pitches of the MIDI instruments. The audiovisual experience

creates a synesthetic art exhibition where the activation of one sense triggers other senses, evoking a state of wonder.

“*Arcadia* represents an inspiring fusion of worlds—the natural and the digital, the visual and the musical. This kind of boundary blurring speaks directly to a vision of a better future, and we are thrilled to share it with the Mason community,” stated Rick Davis, Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

Regarding the name, exhibit creator and artist Sam Nester explained “the term ‘Arcadia’ references Greek mythology and the utopian ideal of natural harmony. Arcadia was the home and domain of Pan, the god of music and the wild, and the title references this marriage of nature and music. Bringing the environment from the background around us into the foreground from our increasingly urbanized existence, this installation aims to be an Edenic return to nature and humans in balance.”

Yassmin Salem, Coordinator of Murals at Mason and Mason alumna, added “*Arcadia* makes sustainability a topic of inspiration and reflection for a wider audience. Environmental consciousness is a shared value at Mason and public art is a great tool for casual viewers to reflect on their relationship with nature. This exhibition will catalyze wonder through a variety of programs that use intersectional social justice as a frame to explore sustainability, environmental justice, healing, and consciousness.”

*Arcadia* applies contemporary artistic practice to engage cross-disciplinary research and inquiry. Over the course of the year, the exhibit will have a number of collaborators and research partners who will utilize the data, monitor the plants’ health, and manipulate the MIDI stream for a variety of activities and events. Two of these partners are the Center for Well Being and Counseling and Psychological Services, who are currently featuring *Arcadia* as an integral part of the “Mindful Mason Moments” guided meditation series. Similarly, Doni Nolan, the Greenhouse and Gardens Program Manager and current Biosciences PhD student, is making use of the exhibit to conduct research on the propagation of American ginseng (wild ginseng is a threatened plant in Virginia) and soil microbiome health—both of which support her ongoing research about root rot in hydroponics and her development of an organic integrated pest management (IPM) program that adds beneficial microbes to prevent and treat root rot.

University Curator Don Russell supports *Arcadia*’s integration of researching, saying “I would like to see contemporary artists collaborating in all types of research, not only by influencing the research process, but by creating an accessible and communicable result: a work of art—especially studies of the

environment, social justice, health, technology, psychology, history, community development, and political science, to name a few.”

Following the conclusion of the *Arcadia* exhibition, all of the native Virginia plants will be relocated to various sites on Mason’s Fairfax campus. The medicinal plants will be transplanted to the Green Studio, in collaboration with Associate Professor Mark Cooley, and the edible plants will be moved to the Innovation Food Forest under the care of Greenhouse and Gardens Program Manager, Doni Nolan.

Russell further adds, “*Arcadia* invites us to wonder how we use technology to have an authentic relationship with the natural phenomena that surround us at all times. I urge all of us to consider how we can re-center ourselves at this crucial moment in our shared history.”

Details about *Arcadia* are available [on the official Mason Exhibitions page](#), including an introductory video. Additionally, the recording of a live *Mason Arts at Home* performance—featuring Sam Nester, members of the Brass Project Ensemble, and fellow experimental musicians—can be viewed [here](#).

*Arcadia* is made possible with generous funding from Mason’s [Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact](#); [Institute for a Sustainable Earth](#); [Institute for Digital Innovation](#); the [Office of Sustainability’s Patriot Green Fund](#); the [Center for Well-Being](#); [Counseling and Psychological Services](#); and [Provisions Research Center for Art & Social Change](#). Collaborators include Amanda Jarvis, MIX Maker Manager, [Mason Innovation Exchange](#); Doni Nolan, Program Manager of the [Greenhouse & Gardens Program](#); Mark Cooley, Director of the [Green Studio](#); Dr. Andrea Weeks, Director of the [Ted R. Bradley Herbarium](#); and [Paige Seber](#), a New York City-based Lighting Designer, who helped Nester with initial lighting concepts.

### **About the School of Art**

George Mason University’s School of Art is founded on the premise that art both reflects and inspires a creative society, improving the human condition while describing the world, both as it is and could be. Embedded in a major Research I university rich in learning resources, it plays a vital role in the creative climate of the institution and the region through the cross-disciplinary research it facilitates and the artwork it produces and exhibits. The School’s state-of-the-art facilities engage an exceptional faculty of practicing artists, an active visiting artist program, and a diverse and intellectually curious graduate and undergraduate student body. Artistic skills and principles of creative practice in all visual media are grounded in a forward-thinking, adaptive curriculum. Faculty and students forge cross-disciplinary experimentation, challenging conventional thinking and blurring lines between traditional artistic disciplines, indeed, between the arts and the other humanities and sciences. <https://art.gmu.edu>

**Mason Exhibitions** offers a multi-venue forum for presentation of contemporary visual artists who advance research, dialogue, and learning around global social issues. Through its research partnership with Provisions Research Center for Arts and Social Change, Mason Exhibitions develops cross-disciplinary curatorial platforms to

engage questions around philosophy, social justice, communications, conflict resolution, identity, technology, and sustainability. MFA thesis exhibits and undergraduate senior exhibitions are also presented.

<https://www.masonexhibitions.org>

### **About the College of Visual and Performing Arts**

George Mason University's College of Visual and Performing Arts provides an academic environment in which the arts are explored as individual disciplines and interdisciplinary forms that strengthen one another. The college prepares students for careers as creators, performers, teachers, scholars, arts leaders, and arts entrepreneurs. Understanding that an education in the arts is deepened by regular contact with the work of distinguished visiting artists, the Center for the Arts, the professional presentation and production arm of the college, welcomes a variety of professional and world-renowned artists, musicians and actors to its stage. Students have the opportunity to perform, create, and exhibit their work in a wide variety of public venues, including a 2,000-seat Concert Hall. The college is home to the Riva and Sid Dewberry Family School of Music, the Schools of Dance, Art and Theater, as well as the Computer Game Design, Arts Management, and Film and Video Studies programs.

<https://cvpa.gmu.edu>

### **About George Mason University**

George Mason University is Virginia's largest public research university. Located near Washington, D.C., Mason enrolls nearly 39,000 students from 130 countries and all 50 states. Mason has grown rapidly over the past half-century and is recognized for its innovation and entrepreneurship, remarkable diversity, and commitment to accessibility. <https://www2.gmu.edu>

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**For more information, please visit:**

[Mason's College of Visual and Performing Arts](#)



[Mason's School of Art](#)



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### **PRESS CONTACT:**

Kirstin Franko

George Mason University College of Visual and Performing Arts

Assistant Director of Marketing & Communications

703-993-8794 | [kfranko@gmu.edu](mailto:kfranko@gmu.edu)