

JACKIE BROOKNER

"UTTERANCE"

1999

60 x 56 x 50"

Volcanic rock, winterstone, moss, rubber, water, fish, plants

I collaborate with ecologists, design professionals, local communities, policy makers and government agencies on water remediation/public art projects for wetlands, rivers, streams and stormwater runoff. My living sculptures, which I call Biosculptures™ integrate sculpture's conceptual, metaphoric and aesthetic capacities with ecological revitalization and serve as focal points for building community awareness.

Biosculptures™, such as "Utterance," purify water and air while demonstrating how there is no waste in healthy natural systems. As the water flows over the sculptures, the mosses and carefully chosen plants and their associated bacteria transform waste and toxins into food. Pollutants become resources for metabolism. Aquatic organisms such as fish, snails, and plants enrich these sculpted wetland ecosystems.

Why are we treating stormwater as waste, when in fact, we could be using it to create lush environments? Instead of getting the water out of sight into drains as fast as possible, we could reveal the hydrology of a place to create expressive and multifunctional public spaces. To affect change of this sort, in addition to doing things differently on the practical level, I believe it is also necessary to examine the unconscious collective cultural assumptions and fears that underlie policy and choices that shape our values and constrain our actions. One of my roles as an artist is to help in this process--to expose and examine assumptions about value, about how we see ourselves as a species, about our responsibilities to each other and to the other species on the planet. To unearth fears that underlay our extremely ambivalent relationship to matter, our bodies, waste and ultimately death.

Bio

Ecological artist Jackie Brookner works collaboratively on water remediation/public art projects for wetlands, rivers, and stormwater runoff. Recent and current projects are near Dresden, Germany, in West Palm Beach, FL, Cincinnati and Toledo, OH, San Jose, CA, New York City, and 3 towns in the Pacific Northwest working with the National Park Service. Her projects demonstrate how the undervalued resources of stormwater and other polluted water can be reclaimed and used to create lush environments, expressive and multifunctional public spaces. They range from Biosculptures™ that are vegetated water filtration systems, to municipal planning where local water resources become the focal point of community revitalization. Brookner was Guest Editor of the 1992 Art Journal issue, "Art and Ecology." Her essays can be found in M/E/A/N/I/N/G, in *Natural Reality/Artistic Positions Between Nature and Culture*, and in *Cultures and Settlements*. She received her B.A. from Wellesley College and holds M.A. and A.B.D. degrees from Harvard University. She is the recipient of numerous awards including The National Endowment for the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts in both Sculpture and Drawing, The Nancy Gray Foundation for Art in the Environment, The Trust for Mutual Understanding, and New School University. She lives and works in New York and teaches in the Graduate Program at Parsons School of Design.

Illustration: Prima Lingua (First Language/First Tongue), 1996-2002, 64" x 101" x 80," Volcanic rock, concrete, mosses, ferns, wetland plants, water, fish, snails, steel, rubber..Prima Lingua is a monstrously large tongue that licks the polluted water in which it stands. The mosses, liverworts and other plants that live on the surface help clean air as well as filter the water. Mosses are extremely efficient biochemical filters that are capable of absorbing even heavy metals, while the porous concrete substructure physically removes particulates. The piece demonstrates decay as part of creation.

