

Stephanie Rothenberg,
Aquadisia

September 27–November 9, 2024



Installation image courtesy of Buffalo Arts Studio

No Problem

Curatorial Essay by Shirley Verrico

Stephanie Rothenberg's installation *Aquadisia* immerses visitors in a techno-utopian narrative where a new breed of bioengineered oysters converts toxic water into a drinkable "cure-all" promising to solve global environmental problems. The project focuses on the neoliberal concept of "natural capital," which treats nature as a form of capital that can be bought, sold, and managed like any other economic asset. Rothenberg's speculative narrative builds on the myth of the oyster as an aphrodisiac, replacing sexual desire with the desire to remedy the climate crisis. Inside this multimedia installation, *Aquadisia Water™* becomes the lubricant for a new kind of public eco-machine.

The multichannel installation fully transforms the gallery into a disorienting yet attractive space filled with a soft soundscape and the lovely glow of purple LED lights. After passing display shelves filled with *Aquadisia Water™*, a talking head appears on a video monitor asking,

Do you want to cure climate change but can't find the right solution? That's because you've been looking out there when the solution is right here. It's called Aquadisia. A new, awakened state of multispecies entanglement.

This introductory video embraces the familiar styles of infomercials and mindfulness videos, presenting the scientific explanation of the product supported by a series of pleasant and accessible graphics. Consuming the water produces a new, awakened state of multi-species entanglement. In a gentle voice, the narrator encourages viewers to imagine a future where Aquadisia Water™ is pumped directly into municipal drinking water reservoirs. In the center of the installation is The Orb where visitors can view the bioengineered oysters hard at work producing Aquadisia Water™.

Throughout the six-week exhibition, artist Rothenberg has performed in the installation, inviting visitors to sample a special vintage of Aquadisia Water™ and to learn for themselves what's behind the science of sentience 2.0. During these performances, Rothenberg anticipates and answers questions from potential consumers.

Don't oysters need saltwater?

Aquadisia oysters are bioengineered to flourish in any waters. No saltwater? No problem!

What if I am allergic to seafood?

No problem! The oysters are bioengineered.

What if I am a vegetarian or vegan?

No problem! Aquadisia Water™ is bioengineered and does not contain animal products.

What if I don't like the taste of seafood?

No problem! Aquadisia Water™ is brewed with a neutral flavor everyone can palate.

So Aquadisia Water™ is made for and sold to everyone. But can this new and improved bioengineered oyster push humans past the mere libidinal and sexualized state of capital conquests and into a new state of sentience—a Sentience 2.0? No problem!

Moving between reality and fantasy, Aquadisia aims to make visible contradictions confronting the impact of eco-capitalism on our environment. These include the ethics of genetic engineering and the commodification of nature into capital. In questioning human action and

the ethical and economic dimensions of market-based solutions, Aquadisia provides a space for envisioning an alternative future where humans become more perceptive to the environment, and perhaps even more empathetic to other-than-human considerations.



Image courtesy of Nilson Rivera Photography

Artist Biography

Stephanie Rothenberg has exhibited internationally in venues and festivals including ISEA International (formerly Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts), Eyebeam Art and Technology Center (US), Sundance Film Festival (US), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art / MASS MoCA (US), House of Electronic Arts / HeK (CH), LABoral (ES), Transmediale (DE), and ZKM Center for Art & Media (DE). She is a recipient of numerous awards including a Creative Capital, Harpo Foundation and NYSCA. She has been an artist-in-residence at ZK/U in Berlin, TOKAS / Tokyo Art and Space (JP), the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace/LMCC (US), Eyebeam Art and Technology Center (US), Santa Fe Art Institute (US) among others. Her work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art and has been widely reviewed including Artforum, Artnet, The Brooklyn Rail, and Hyperallergic. She is Professor and Chair in the Department of Art at University at Buffalo, SUNY where she teaches classes in design and emerging technologies and co-directs an interdisciplinary design studio collaborating with local social justice organizations.

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