

JACKIE BROOKNER (New York, New York)



My commitment is to revitalize ecosystems while raising awareness that the vitality of any community and the continuity of its cultural heritage depends upon the health of the natural world that embraces and sustains it.

HUMBLE [c L. humilis low, small, slight, akin to humus, soil, earth
(see HUMUS)]

HUMUS [c L. earth, ground, soil < IE. *ghom-: see HOMAGE]

HOMAGE [c L. homo, a man IE. *ghom-, < base *gtheim-, earth, ground, whence L. humus, Gr. chthon, earth, OE. guma man]

Hidden in the roots of our words, we find what we seem to want to forget—that we are literally the same stuff as earth. My work explores this identity while undermining the assumptions and values that keep us from acknowledging it. I work in various ways depending on the possibilities and needs of the context. My work has grown from individual sculptures that are personal and intimate, to site-specific installations that explore how landscapes and cultures mutually influence each other in particular historical contexts; to collaborative, often community-based, water remediation projects that occupy most of my focus today.

I work to address the particular concerns of the community by collaborating with ecologists, landscape architects, bioengineers, and others to understand the particular ecological and structural needs of specific sites, and by working in close consultation/collaboration with the range of stakeholders the project serves. The final work weds sculpture's conceptual, metaphoric, and aesthetic capacities with ecological functionality and, at its best, serves as a focal point for community building, as well as building community awareness. The physical sculpture becomes a nexus—a natural system's means of remedying polluted water that is a visible manifestation—and, a reminder of a renewed relationship between the human and other-than-human worlds—an energy collector of a social process.

My desire to work with communities grew out of my project *Of Earth and Cotton*. From 1994-1998, I traveled throughout the rural South from the Carolinas to Texas, following the westward migration of the cotton belt, speaking with people who farmed and picked cotton by hand in the 1930s and '40s. For this project, I created a series of installations that included sculpture, documentary video, and historical photographs. But it was the less tangible part, my experiences with the cotton farmers, that changed my life and my art practice. The power of these conversations and relationships made me want to work with people, and at the grassroots level.

Most of my recent work addresses urban storm water issues—with current projects in Cincinnati, St. Louis, New York, and West Palm Beach. I also work in rural areas. This past year as artist in residence with the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Division, I worked in collaboration with Susan Steinman of Oakland, California in

two small rural towns in the Pacific Northwest. The focus was primarily about building community support for projects that link revitalization of local water resources with economic revitalization. Our goals were to create an interpretive trail along a long underappreciated tidal slough that is crossed by route 101 (Tillamook, OR), and to daylight a stream in downtown, Caldwell, Idaho. Grossenhain a town of 17,000 in Germany, 30 km. west of Dresden, commissioned my biosculpture™ The Gift of Water as part of the constructed wetland that provides the sole filtration for their very large municipal swimming complex.