



Images Available Upon Request

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## Wave Hill Retrospective Focuses on Ecological Artist Jackie Brookner

September 13–December 4, 2016

Exhibition Reception: Saturday, September 17, 2–4:30PM

Bronx, NY, July 26, 2016—Wave Hill is pleased to present *Jackie Brookner: Of Nature*, the first retrospective tracing the expansive work of Jackie Brookner (1945–2015), an artist who was deeply engaged with the environment. Her work has been included in two previous exhibitions at Wave Hill, a public garden and cultural center. Brookner’s groundbreaking, remediative sculptural environments were designed as ecological filters to cleanse gray water, urban storm water or agricultural runoff. This exhibition will connect the underpinnings of Brookner’s early sculptures and drawings to her ongoing exploration of materiality, which was informed by bodily touch and, particularly, the human hand. Spanning her entire career, the exhibition will include a selection of bronze sculptures from the 1980s and her seminal *Of Earth and Cotton* project, which traveled through the South in the 1990s. Her biosculpture *I’m You*, 2000, created for Wave Hill’s exhibition *Abundant Invention*, will be reinstalled, and shown together with documentation of her commissioned water remediation projects in San Jose, CA; West Palm Beach, FL; Cincinnati, OH; Fargo, ND; and Salo, Finland. Drawing was a consistent part of Brookner’s practice, although exhibited only briefly along with early sculpture. The exhibition will include a selection of drawings that were seldom seen and never shown.

### Exploring Materiality through Bronze and Earth

Brookner worked with bronze, rubber, dirt and water. A selection of bronze sculptures from the 1980s displays her inventive and tactile approach, following in the footsteps of David Smith and Alberto Giacometti. Writing in *The New York Times* in 1988, Michael Brenson observes that “Ms. Brookner is one of several artists fighting the continuing identification of bronze with the preciousness and impersonality of reproduction and commerce.” Brookner herself wrote in the catalogue for Wave Hill’s show *Remediate/Re-vision* in 2010 that her first 20 years as a sculptor were “a period of introversion” that led eventually to the realization that her “work could be ‘of’ nature, rather than ‘about’ it.” Over the next 20, she adds, “I have learned that beyond the science and the practical function, successful ecological restoration/remediation demands addressing the societal/cultural values that have allowed humans to dissociate from and be at war with the natural systems of which we are part.” In addition to these fundamental themes, the influence of feminism is evident in her mixed-media rubber and fabric sculptures, work that materializes the inner body. From there, Brookner went on to work with dirt and water in works that relate directly to the human body.

### *Of Earth and Cotton* to Be Presented in New York for First Time

Brookner’s seminal work *Of Earth and Cotton* evolved from 1994 to 1998 as it traveled to museums across the southern United States. Brookner followed the westward migration of the cotton belt,

speaking with people who farmed and picked cotton by hand in the 1930s and '40s. Meeting with individuals in their homes, Brookner sat on the ground to sculpt portraits of their feet, using the soil from fields nearby. The collection of "portraits" grew as the project traveled. In each location, they rested on 2500 pounds of ginned cotton and 60 tons of soil. It was presented at McKissick Museum, Columbia, SC (1994), Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC (1995); The Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, TN (1995); The Columbus Museum, Columbus, GA (1995); University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton, TX (1996); The National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, TN (1996); and Gallery 210, University of Missouri, St. Louis, MO (1998).

Pairs of sculptures will be assembled and presented with video by Terry Iacuzzo that captures conversations between the artist and the former cotton workers who were her subjects. This will be the first presentation of *Of Earth and Cotton* in New York. The entire piece has been donated to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.

### **Exhibition Chronicles a Life of Engaged Activism**

Brookner came of age at a time when introspection was prized, and an artist generally focused on working in the studio. Ultimately, she finds her place in the vanguard of artists who are catalysts for environmental and social change. Her activism was triggered when she edited an issue of *Art Journal on Art and Ecology* (1990–1992), while her desire for personal, direct engagement was honed through creating *Of Earth and Cotton*. In her first public art projects, she sought out places where she could be part of a team to remediate tough ecological questions, collaborating with scientists, planners and other artists, notably Susan Liebovitz Steinman and Angelo Ciotti. For many of these projects, she worked to catalyze communities in sharing their own environments. Typical of these efforts was the time she spent in Fargo, ND, working on a holistic ecological restoration project to rebuild critical stormwater basins as active green spaces for community connections. That project was funded by an Our Town Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and continues to evolve today.

Jackie Brookner (b. 1945 Providence, RI; d. 2015 New York, NY) was based in New York City during her entire artistic career. She received a BA in art history from Wellesley College in 1967 and completed the work for a PH.D. in art history from Harvard University, before shifting her focus to sculpture in 1971. She came to New York City and lived in Soho, then an emergent artist neighborhood. She studied at The New York Studio School and experimented with sculpture in steel and cast bronze, as well as drawing in graphite. A passionate teacher, she inspired students at Parsons The New School for Design from 1980 until the time of her death. From 2000, she created public projects for wetlands, rivers, streams and storm-water runoff that unite water remediation and public art. Throughout her career, she exhibited widely and was included in many publications on the topic of public art and environmental remediation.

An illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition. Plans are underway for the show to travel, and potential venues are currently being sought.

*Jackie Brookner: Of Nature* is curated by independent curator Amy Lipton and Wave Hill Senior Curator Jennifer McGregor.

## Exhibition-related Public Programming:

**September 17, 2016, 2–4:30PM, Fall Exhibition Reception**, with curators' tour at 3pm.

**September 17, 18, 10AM–1PM, Family Art Project: Ecological Landscapes.** Be inspired by Jackie Brookner's ecologically based sculptures and installations on view in Glyndor Gallery. We'll invent our own mini ecological landscape systems, sculpting with clay, rocks, sticks, moss and other upcycled materials, and even add water to create tiny pools.

**October 14, 2016, 2–5PM, Public and Environmental Art Portfolio Review.** Experts, including Lester Burg (MTA Arts for Transit), Tania Duvergne (Public Art for Public Schools), Kendal Henry (NYC Percent for Art), Jennifer Lantzas (NYC Department of Parks and Recreation), Amy Lipton (ecoartspace) and Jennifer McGregor (Wave Hill), will provide feedback to individual artists.

**November 11, 2016, 10:30AM–5PM, Of Nature Symposium.** Celebrating the legacy of Jackie Brookner, this day of presentations and conversation will reflect on the artist's contributions, and will spotlight environmental, socially engaging projects that artists are pursuing around the country. Featured conversations include Stacy Levy with Jennifer McGregor, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles with Amy Lipton.

Support for the Visual Arts Program is provided by Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Inc., Milton & Sally Avery Arts Foundation, The New York Community Trust, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and by the Cathy and Stephen Weinroth Commissioning Fund for the Arts. The Family Art Project is supported by Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation. Support for Public Programs is provided by The William Froelich Foundation. Wave Hill, Inc. is an independent, non-profit cultural institution governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The buildings and grounds of Wave Hill are owned by the City of New York. With the assistance of the Bronx Borough President and Bronx representatives in the City Council and State Legislature, Wave Hill's operations are supported with public funds through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Grant Program administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



A 28-acre public garden and cultural center overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades, Wave Hill's mission is to celebrate the artistry and legacy of its gardens and landscapes, to preserve its magnificent views, and to explore human connections to the natural world through programs in horticulture, education and the arts.

**HOURS** Open all year, Tuesday–Sunday and many major holidays: 9AM–5:30PM.  
Closes 4:30PM, Nov 1–Mar 14.

**GALLERY HOURS** 10AM–4:30PM, Tuesday–Sunday.

**ADMISSION TO THE GROUNDS** \$8 adults, \$4 students and senior 65+, \$2 children 6–18.  
Free Tuesdays and Saturdays until noon.  
Free to members, children under 6.

**DIRECTIONS** Getting here is easy! Located only 30 minutes from midtown Manhattan, Wave Hill's free shuttle van transports you to and from our front gate and Metro-North's Riverdale station, the W. 242 St. stop on the #1 subway line, and to and from our free offsite parking lot. Limited onsite parking is available for \$8 per vehicle. Complete directions and shuttle van schedule at [wavehill.org](http://wavehill.org).