About the Project
Bahar Behbahani’s installation review generated@wavehill, a program that invites artists to create temporal artwork engaging with Wave Hill’s site and programs. Initiated in 1999, recently generated@wavehill projects have included both visual and performing arts commissions throughout the grounds. Behbahani was invited to engage with the Wave Hill and Wave Hill’s youth programs. Her response to this charge began with her interest in the underground water systems within the garden’s ecosystem and parallels the importance of water engineering in Persian gardens. This multi-faceted initiative was informed by intensive walks taken with Wave Hill staff and workshops that she led with interns and students to discuss local and global water concerns.

Behbahani collaborated with Forest Project and Woodland Ecology Research Mentorship (WERM) interns who were active during the summer in the Woodland. She worked with Family Art Project Art, Community and Environmental Stewards (ACES), CUNY Corps and Bloomberg interns, who will continue to activate and maintain the installation throughout the fall. They have also produced a zine full of stories informed by the research they contributed.

During a time when the political borders have become less permeable, All water has a perfect memory connects Wave Hill to eight of the world’s celebrated—Biennale, the Euphrates, Ganges, Hudson, Karun, Mississippi, Nile, Rio Grande, and Waal. It reminds us that the flow of water, the flow of people, and the migration of seeds and plants take their own course. A reference to the Mississippi River, All water has a perfect memory comes from a phrase in Toni Morrison’s essay The First Memory: “All water has a perfect memory and it is forever trying to get back to where was.”

Behbahani exploring drainage system with Art, Community and Environmental Stewards

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The focal point of the installation is an octagonal post mounted on plastic barrels, suggesting a floating raft to be used in the event of an emergency move to the river. Located on Wave Hill’s campus, the new Octagon Learning Center, it leads to the northern entry point to the Woodland and sits above an underground drainage system that carries storm water from 232nd Street into the Woodland. The post’s interior is surfaced with tiles sourced from construction projects. The raft’s eight side panels are carved with waves of water, plants, birds and underwater species that are reminiscent of Behbahani’s paintings (as seen in Eren, 2019 in the exhibition The Final; or, a View in Glyndor Gallery). While the post’s structure projects symmetry and balance in a multicultural and spiritual habitat, the barrels on which the raft is mounted introduce an element of uncertainty.

Fellow the Woodland project to encounter the second component of the installations within the rustic gardens. Experience the sounds of each river by using your camera to activate the QR code. This mediation sound piece vivaciously active rivers sounds with rhythms and lullabies, and was developed in collaboration with composer Maciek Schejbal. A portable, eight-panel partition will be introduced at the Family Art Project on September 21 and 22. It will be used for storytelling, either in the intimate space of an octagon or opened wide as a backdrop.

Beginning with the performance during the opening, the project will continue to be activated throughout the fall through organized programs and the participation of Family Art Project participants and Wave Hill visitors.

About the Artist
Through her research-based practice Bahar Behbahani approaches landscape as a metaphor for politics and poetics. She works in a range of media—such as painting, video, installation and performative talks—to layer Western approaches landscape as a metaphor for politics and poetics. She is interested in the underground water systems and their relationship to the underground art systems. The idea of floating a raft to the river is an attempt to bring the underground art systems to the surface.

BAHAR BEHBAHANI

All water has a perfect memory.

Creative Capital award for Ispahan Flowers Only Once and participated in The Brown Foundation Fellows Program at the Dora Maar House in Ménerbes, France; MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH, Time Equities’ Art in Buildings Residency in New York, NY, among others. She earned her BFA in Painting from Alzahra University and her MFA in Painting from Azad University of Art, both in Tehran, Iran. www.baharbehbahani.com

generated@wavehill
Consort Slope and Herbert and Hymie Brons Woodland

SEPTEMBER 15–DECEMBER 1, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All water has a perfect memory, came to harbor with the unlimited amount of it vast from the Wave Hill community and the generous vision of curators Jennifer McGregor and Eileen Jeng Lynch. My heartfelt gratitude to the staff of many other departments at Wave Hill: Barry Hagen, Senior Manager of Youth Programs, and students of the Forest Project and Woodland Ecology Research Mentorship, nurtured the project with their knowledge of water management and the native plants in the woodlands.

Senior Horticultural Interpreter Charles Day and Assistant Director of Horticulture Steven Connaway armed me with the botanical language and the insights into the issues around native and non-native plants in our present time.

For Jennifer Perrone, Director of Facilities and Capital Projects, and his team offered logistical guidance and support.

I am grateful for the generosity, wisdom, and passion that Molly May, Arts Education Coordinator, and the team at Wave Hill, which includes the Art, Community and Environmental Stewards (ACES), CUNY Corps and Bloomberg interns. For the last three months, they were deeply engaged in research and conversations around the subjects of art, memory, immigration, among many other fostering discussions.

My special thanks for the level of skill and artisanship that Greg Henderson, Sunny Ranuro, and Andrey Walicki put into this project. I feel humbled to my fellow artists Roberto Visani, Todd Chandler, and Ferry Blinkring who engaged me during my residency in New York. I feel really humbled to my fellow artists Roberto Visani, Todd Chandler, and Ferry Blinkring who engaged me during my residency in New York. All water has a perfect memory, with their continuous encouragement and expertise.

— Bahar Behbahani

Through the process of building a raft, I realized how difficult it would be to construct one that was safe; with one exactly the right buoyancy to transport bodies, food, culture, memories, and belongings. I asked myself, how can I calculate the weight of dignity so that my raft will arrive safely on the shore?

— Bahar Behbahani
Like a River Flows
Bahar Behbahani was born in Iran and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, in a very concise label. But what is Bahar Behbahani’s emphasis on community and inclusion.

The quote is a partial sentence from an essay titled “The Site of Memory,” which was published in the Winter 2019 issue of the journal “Theatre Survey.” The quote reads: “All water has a perfect memory.”

BRUNO SEGERSTROM

All water has a perfect memory. (Octopus), 2019
Hard-edged, pinned paper panels, Lavagna paper gesso, oil, plastic barrel, lashing strip, sandbag, 2019, 12 x 12 x 3 feet

Photos: Stefan Hagen

All water has a perfect memory. (Octopus) is a project by Bahar Behbahani. The project was commissioned by Wave Hill in collaboration with Cesar Ramirez, the artist and programmer behind the software tool wavehill. The project is part of Wave Hill’s “Waterways” exhibition, which explores the role of water in human history and culture. The exhibition features installations, performances, and workshops that shed light on the complex relationship between humans and water.

During the exhibition, Bahar Behbahani led workshops with Wave Hill’s education department to engage the community in discussions about water and its role in shaping our world. The workshops focused on the importance of water as a resource and the impact of human activities on water bodies.

Bahar Behbahani was born in Iran and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She is a painter and multimedia artist who has exhibited her work in galleries and museums around the world. Her work often explores themes of community, identity, and the environment.