

AVIVA RAHMANI

NEW YORK



Portrait of Aviva Rahmani. 2016. Photography by Joe Gaffney

New York-based ecological artist **Aviva Rahmani** has helped pave the way for the art world's current crescendo of interest in environmental issues. In cunning work that sits squarely between activism and science, she attempts to thwart a pipeline expansion and the dizzying industrial complex of international travel for art, which is becoming its own intoxicating carbon footprint.

Ruba Al-Sweel: Ecological issues have been a running theme in your work since the 1990s. How does it feel to have the art world finally catch up?

Aviva Rahmani: The art world is an opinion-maker, and intellectual trickle-down takes time. My feelings are mixed, because it's already too late for many species, but I remain hopeful of art's visceral effect.

RS: You use the internet "to perform residencies without the travel that spews jet fuel over the Earth's waters." How can artists best participate in this topical discourse during wide-ranging press trips and biennials?

AR: The internet allows us to have unprecedented conversations across geographies. Sometimes, physical presence is essential, as when Greta Thunberg came to the US, but often we can stay where we are, while we tend to our own gardens.

RS: Your interdisciplinary practice is activist and draws from science. How do you make

esoteric fields more accessible?

AR: My interests are broad and I see connections between ideas in different fields. My art is based on ideas, just as science is based on data.

RS: You use the Trigger Point Theory – small points of carefully selected interventions affecting large systemic transformations. How do you manifest this in your daily life?

AR: I used physics to identify rules for interaction between independent agents to determine how and where to take trigger point actions; for example, "play will teach." While abstract, they reveal the imperative to control outcomes and require an open mind. At times, the simplest expression is in my willingness to rest, read science fiction and experiment in my studio. The tragedy is that many people don't have time to rest, let alone allow their minds to play with new ideas.

RS: In *Blued Trees*, you go beyond the aesthetic properties of art to attempt at halting the

expansion of the Spectra Energy Algonquin Incremental Market pipeline. How did this unfold?

AR: When I was confronted with maps of the proposed pipelines, I envisioned a continental-scale installation where the planned corridors would be. The corridors looked like musical lines in which designated trees could become "tree-notes". Quickly, I realized that copyrighting the artwork would also challenge the land's exploitation and establish a legal precedent for a new category of art.

RS: You've been advocating for ecological restoration for decades. What keeps you inspired?

AR: Simply, my passion for the beauty of nature and my feelings about justice across the globe. I do get frustrated, but I never stop caring.

RS: You've often said the world needs a little more than just inspiration. What does it need right now?

AR: We need innovative models for cultural support that will allow humans to survive the Anthropocene, and thrive. When we allow only a few to acquire wealth at the expense of many, and of the Earth, then we commit eco-suicide.

RS: If the whole world were listening, what would you say?

AR: Pay close attention to what is happening around you. Have the courage to not only have an open mind, but to change your mind.



1. *Lanes Island Blue Sea Lavender*. 2008. Rocks and cut branches, Variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist

2. *Oil & Water #8*. 2011. Digital drawing printed on Japanese Digital Niyodo Kozo paper, 11" x 11". Courtesy of Pierre Menard Gallery, Cambridge MA and HP Garcia Gallery, New York, NY

3. *Oil & Water #6*. 2011. Digital drawing printed on Japanese Digital Niyodo Kozo paper, 11" x 11". Courtesy of Pierre Menard Gallery, Cambridge MA and HP Garcia Gallery, New York, NY

4. *Blued Trees with Cow*. 2016. Photographic documentation. Photography by Robin Boucher