



## ECO ART >> BASIA IRLAND

**(O)**ur bodies house streams: lymph, bile, sweat, blood, mucus, urine. Water enters, circulates, leaves—individualized hydrologic cycles. Each of us is a walking ocean, sloshing down the hallway with damp saline innards held together by a paper-thin epidermis.

I peered into the microscope and watched a minute creature that looked like a plump sperm dancing in circles. It was *Giardia (lamblia) duodenalis*, an aquatic parasite similar to the one I contracted swimming in polluted rivers in Indonesia. Learning that deaths from water-borne diseases equal 20 jumbo jets crashing every day, I began to collaborate with scientists on a series of international projects that focused on these beautiful, deadly pathogens.

Recently, while working along the Nile in Egypt and Ethiopia, I created a documentary. In the film a woman with a baby on her back hauls contaminated drinking water from Lake Tana (the source of the Blue Nile), a half-submerged man paddles his papyrus boat across the lake and a *falucca* [ancient Egyptian sailboat] captain cooks with tainted Nile water. Last year, in India, I photographically transferred images of Guinea worm (*Dracunculus medinensis*) and *Cholera* (*Vibrio cholerae*) onto *sari* silk, which can be used to filter out life-threatening parasites. These were hung as scrolls, and floated in rivers.

Other water projects include community-based actions along the length of rivers: beside the Don, the most urbanized river in Canada,

which flows through Toronto (straight-jacketed by a railroad on one side and four-lane highway on the other); floating the River Dart in Devon, England; and down the 1,875-mile length of the Rio Grande from its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, a five-year event.

For four months, this summer, I worked in Colorado with biogeochemist Dr. Jason Neff and the City of Boulder Watershed Initiative filming a documentary, *A Gathering of Waters: Boulder Creek, Continental Divide to Confluence*. Connecting people along Boulder Creek's 47 miles, it documents the necessity of communal effort to deal with the complex issues of climate change. Collected in a canteen by participants to show that we are all downstream, gathered creekwater is frozen, carved into the form of a 250-pound open book [above, left] and embedded with a riparian [land where river meets the shore] "text" of columbine, blue spruce and mountain maple seeds that are released as the ice melts in the current. When the new plants grow beside the bank, they will help sequester carbon.

I lived the first 17 years of my life in Boulder, often playing in and around the creek in my backyard. This experience seeped into my bloodstream. Responsibility and contentment accompanies rivers. I often choose to install my work *in situ*—listening to a cacophony of humid tones, watching tiny creatures in the flow, smelling wet sage, feeling the rain.

*The work of BASIA IRLAND and 50 other artists from around the country will be on display as part of "Weather Report: Art and Climate Change," a national exhibition curated by art critic, historian and writer Lucy R. Lippard at THE BOULDER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART through December 21: [bmoca.org](http://bmoca.org), [ecoartsonline.org](http://ecoartsonline.org)*

At left: "Desert Fountain" collects rain on the roof of the Albuquerque Museum in a stock tank. This rain then cascades down through a set of three cast bronze arms. This fountain only works when there has been moisture, thereby making visible the high desert ecosystem where we live. When all the fountains in New Mexico were shut down two years ago because of drought, "Desert Fountain" sang loud and clear about our need to conserve water.

Above right: "Hydrograph," a carved wooden book covered with melting snow, shows the stream flow in Boulder Creek over a two year period. Earlier snow pack melt has consequences in times of climate change.

