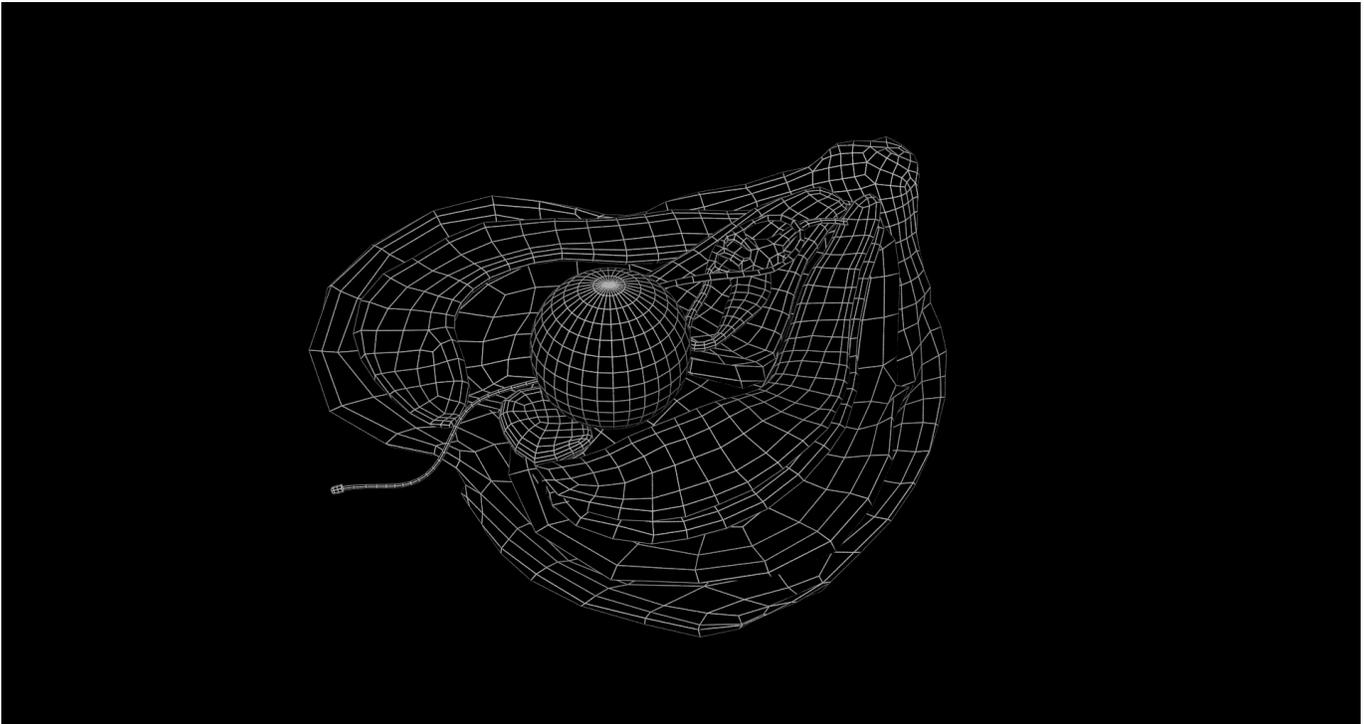


MEDIA RELEASE

Stephanie Rothenberg: Aphrodisiac in the Machine **Opens February 18th at New Media Artspace,** **Baruch College, CUNY**



Stephanie Rothenberg, *Aphrodisiac in the Machine*, video, 2020.
Images courtesy of the artist.

NEW YORK, NY - January 27, 2020 – [The New Media Artspace](#) presents *Stephanie Rothenberg: Aphrodisiac in the Machine*, a solo exhibition featuring a new four-channel video installation by the Buffalo-based new media artist Stephanie Rothenberg. The exhibition is curated by Katherine Behar, Associate Professor of New Media Arts and is sponsored by the Sandra Kahn Wasserman Jewish Studies Center.

The show will open on February 18, 2020 and run through May 1st, 2020 at the New Media Artspace gallery in Baruch's Library and Information Building, 151 E. 25th Street. A public artist lecture will be held on Tuesday, March 31, from 6:00–8:00 PM, at the Baruch Performing Arts Center's Engelman Recital Hall. The New Media Artspace will host casual discussions with the artist for Baruch students on Wednesday, April 1, 2020 from 3:00 to 4:30 P.M. and on Friday, April 3, 2020 from 1:15 to 3:15 P.M. in the New Media Artspace and room 415 in the Library and Information Building. Members of the public who wish to attend may RSVP to katherine.behar@baruch.cuny.edu.

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Aphrodisiac in the Machine presents a sci-fi narrative that spans the four floors of the New Media Artspace, exploring the ethics and economics of bioengineering nonhuman life for human survival. Merging fact and fiction, the project plays on the libidinous myth of the oyster, a hermaphroditic organism being bioengineered in a futuristic aquaculture farm.

Beginning on Floor 2, viewers enter what appears to be the headquarters of an unnamed biotechnology laboratory where they encounter an animated infographic presenting a glossary of key terms: “natural capital,” “ecosystem services,” “bioremediation,” and “aquaculture” are new models of sustainable production being adopted in the face of climate change.

Journeying on to Floor 3, viewers encounter an industrial display presenting a historical overview of the oyster, scientific name *Ostreidae*. Known for producing aphrodisiac—a state of enhanced sentience—when consumed by humans, *Ostreidae* have influenced human cultural production in the arts and literature for centuries.

Floor 4 brings viewers behind the scenes in the laboratory where they learn about the physiology of *Ostreidae* as a hermaphroditic organism, and how that impacts its bioengineering potential. A scientific study reveals that *Ostreidae* produce a rare amino acid that increases estrogen and testosterone production in human and nonhuman species, such as rats. They are also filter feeders, able to filter up to 50 gallons of water per day.

Floor 5 takes viewers to an undisclosed location where testing is being conducted on the *Ostreidae 2.0 Aquaculture System™*. Viewers gain insight into the *Ostreidae* amino acid harvesting process, and discover that toxic water is being converted into this amino acid and is being transferred into municipal water systems. Is this a risk to human populations? Or might this lead to more sentient ways of being?

Shedding light on some of the extreme practices humans are turning to in an era of resource scarcity, *Aphrodisiac in the Machine* is framed by the reality of climate change on the one hand, and extractivist imaginaries on the other. As throughout her practice, Rothenberg draws out the underlying absurdity she finds in current events. In this project, she raises important questions about the ethics of bioremediation and the technological design of living organisms, asking what these practices might look like and what they may mean.

Bioremediation reconfigures the relationships between humans and the environments they perceive as “natural”—which too often simply means available to extraction. So in turn, the desensitization wrought by technological immersion is what makes these practices seem “natural” or normative. For Rothenberg, the oyster could be the answer, but not in the form of “oyster-tecture,” like the (not science fictional) oyster reef proposal for Brooklyn’s New York Harbor. Instead, Rothenberg imagines an alternative: that the oyster’s aphrodisia could provide an awakened state of enhanced sentience, going beyond mere sexual connotations. Perhaps, this work suggests, the humble oyster could awaken humans from their technological stupor and teach them to proactively disrupt the desensitizing effects of media machines.

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Stephanie Rothenberg’s interdisciplinary art draws from digital culture, science and economics to explore relationships between human designed systems and biological ecosystems. Moving between real and virtual spaces her work investigates the power dynamics of techno utopias, global economics and outsourced labor. She has exhibited throughout the US and internationally in venues including Eyebeam (US), Sundance Film Festival (US), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art / MASS MoCA (US), House of Electronic Arts / HeK (CH), LABoral (ES), Transmediale (DE), and ZKM Center for Art & Media (DE). She is a recipient of numerous awards, most recently from the Harpo Foundation and Creative Capital. Residencies include ZK/U Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik in Berlin, TOKAS / Tokyo Art and Space, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace, Eyebeam Art and Technology and the Santa Fe Art Institute. Her work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art and has been widely reviewed including *Artforum*, *Artnet*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Hyperallergic*. She is an ongoing participant and organizer in the MoneyLab research project at the Institute of Network Cultures and co-organizer of the 2018 MoneyLab 5 symposium that took place in Buffalo, NY. She is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Art at SUNY Buffalo where she co-directs the Platform Social Design Lab, an interdisciplinary design studio collaborating with local social justice organizations.

Stephanie Rothenberg: Aphrodisiac in the Machine is curated by Katherine Behar, Associate Professor in the Fine and Performing Arts Department in the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences at Baruch College, CUNY. The exhibition is generously sponsored by the Sandra Kahn Wasserman Jewish Studies Center under the directorship of Professor Jessica Lang. The exhibition is made possible by support from the Baruch Computing and Technology Center (BCTC), the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences, and the Newman Library. All images appear courtesy of the artist.

Gallery Location: New Media Artspace at Baruch College, Library and Information Building, 151 E. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010

Gallery Hours: The New Media Artspace is open to the CUNY community during regular library hours. Members of the public may request access to the New Media Artspace at the security desk at the second floor entrance to the library. For this week's public hours, please check the gallery website: www.newmediartspace.info or dial a docent at 646-312-1664.

The New Media Artspace is a teaching exhibition space in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Baruch College, CUNY. Housed in the Newman Library, the New Media Artspace showcases curated experimental media and interdisciplinary artworks by international artists, students, alumni, and faculty.

About Baruch College:

[Baruch College](http://www.baruch.cuny.edu) is a senior college in the [City University of New York \(CUNY\)](http://www.cuny.edu) with a total enrollment of more than 17,000 students, who represent 160 countries and speak more than 100 languages. Ranked among the top 15% of U.S. colleges and the No. 4 public regional university, Baruch College is regularly recognized as among the most ethnically diverse colleges in the country. As a public institution with a tradition of academic excellence, Baruch College offers accessibility and opportunity for students from every corner of New York City and from around the world. For more about Baruch College, go to <http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/>.

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