

METABOLIC STUDIO

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Lauren Bon and Metabolic Studio will participate in multiple exhibitions for Getty's *PST ART: Art & Science Collide* initiative this fall

***Portable Wetland for Southern California* opens today at *Brackish Water Los Angeles* at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH)**

As the holder of the LA River's first private water right with the responsibility for the stewardship of water, Bon's work demonstrates new ways to look at water conservation through an accessible and minimally invasive process to protect our health and well-being



Lauren Bon and Metabolic Studio *Portable Wetland for Southern California* system installed at CSUDH uses three "cells" filled with scoria and native wetland plants native that will filter and treat water from the university's water supply.

Los Angeles, CA — As a part of several Getty *PST ART: Art & Science Collide* exhibitions, Lauren Bon and Metabolic Studio are presenting *Portable Wetland for Southern California*, a conceptual artwork and experimental proposal for ecological remediation that opens today at *Brackish Water Los Angeles*. Located on the California State University, Dominguez Hills campus in South Los Angeles, where local rivers have been transformed into concrete channels, and where industrial contamination and ecological racism have plagued surrounding communities for generations, the exhibition considers issues of access, inclusion, ecological racism, and cultural/class system interchanges along Los Angeles' waterways.

Portable Wetland for Southern California was initially developed by Bon and her studio as part of *Bending the River*, their ongoing infrastructural artwork that utilizes adaptive reuse and reconnects the City of Los Angeles with its original source of water, the Los Angeles River. “By capturing the recycled water and urban runoff that travels in the river’s low-flow channel and returning it to the watershed by using it to irrigate the adjacent LA State Historic Park, we are rescuing a precious resource that would otherwise flow out to sea,” said Bon. “This captured water, however, needs to be treated to meet state and local water quality requirements, and we want to incorporate an organic approach rather than relying solely on conventional treatment methods.”



Wetlands are one of the most sophisticated water treatment systems that nature has ever created. They feature some of the highest levels of biodiversity found on earth, and are capable of removing many contaminants of concern, including metals, nutrients, and

bacteria. While wetlands are now protected by federal law, they have historically been undervalued and many natural wetlands were overtaken and destroyed by urban development — *Bending the River* aims to bring them back.

While traditional water treatments are still being used, this project presents a rare opportunity. Integrating a wetland component to the process mimics the wetlands that flourished on the historical floodplain of the LA Basin, while also taking advantage of native plants that have bio-adapted to thrive in oxygen-poor wetland soil. As the holder of the LA River’s first private water right, Bon has a responsibility for the stewardship of that water. “When the river water passes through water treatment at Metabolic Studio, we can conduct real-world experiments, and demonstrate new ways to look at water conservation,” Bon adds.



Metabolic Studio’s wetland design team created a modular horizontal-subsurface flow wetland system, built from off-the-shelf components so it is easily replicable and deployable, with a modular design with the flexibility to accommodate sites with varying conditions. They performed tests using three different media and determined scoria, crushed volcanic rock provided superior filtration. The scoria used is also symbolic. It was gathered from the Owens Valley, called Payahuunadu by the indigenous Paiute people of the area. Owens Lake is the original water source of Los Angeles’ famed aqueduct system and the lake’s water was stolen to serve Los Angeles, leaving behind a dry lakebed and an ongoing ecological disaster.

While *Portable Wetland for Southern California* is a conceptual artwork, it is also a scientific study. “We know that there is growing interest in dry-weather runoff capture and use, from the LA River and across California, and we hope that our exploration of biomimicry and habitat replication will show a way forward in a landscape irrevocably changed by climate change and industrialization,” said Bon.

Starting with nine “cells”, extensive testing determined that for standard water flow, three linked cells provides optimal water filtration. As water moves horizontally through the length of each cell, the scoria substrate and native plant roots filter contaminants from the water. Arranging the tubs in offset tiers utilizes gravity (along with solar pumps) to maintain steady water flow for optimal cleansing. The *Portable Wetland for Southern California* system installed at CSUDH (image top) uses three cells filled with scoria and native wetland plants native that will filter and treat water from the university’s water supply.

Ongoing investigations at Metabolic Studio use various configurations of the *Portable Wetland* infrastructure. A new large-volume experiment uses four portable wetland cells to clean twelve tanks containing 5000 gallons of groundwater collected on the Metabolic Studio. While testing for a full array of contaminants, E. coli and other coliforms are a matter of primary health concern and their removal is an important marker of successful water filtration. The studio’s findings to date demonstrate that it takes approximately one month for the *Portable Wetland* system to stabilize, at which time the coliforms and E.coli levels are significantly reduced. After a second month of water circulation, E. coli and coliforms were no longer detected in the water supply. E. coli and coliforms are considered indicator organisms demonstrating microbial contamination risk. Using natural methods to effectively eliminate E. coli and other contaminants from the water supply demonstrates an accessible and minimally invasive process to protect the health and well-being of human and non-human creatures that make up the web of life.

For more information about *Portable Wetland for Southern California*, including Bon and her studio’s selection of plants, download the *Brackish Water Los Angeles Water* exhibition zine [HERE](#).

Bon and her work will be featured in the following Getty PST ART exhibitions:

Bon’s solo exhibition [Concrete is Fluid](#) will open at Honor Fraser on September 14 – December 14, 2024. Concrete never dries which gives the materiality flexibility during fluctuations in temperature. The motility of concrete is applied as a metaphor for the change that is needed for us to support the web of life. The exhibition examines the transmutability of Bon’s concrete warehouse, which is located next to the concrete channel known as the LA River. Once a symbol of inflexibility and industrial order, the

reclaimed warehouse is taken up as both a political site and a malleable material—pierced and transformed into a permeable membrane through which light, soil, and water can interact and flow uninhibited.

Energy Fields: Vibrations of the Pacific co-presented by Fulcrum Arts and Chapman University at Chapman University opening September 15, 2024 - January 19, 2025

Nature on Notice: Contemporary Art and Ecology at Charles White Elementary School Gallery presented by LACMA opening December 21 2024 - August 1 2025

Image captions and credits for all images: Installation view of Lauren Bon / Metabolic Studio *Portable Wetland for Southern California* (2024), a part of the Getty PST ART exhibition *Brackish Water Los Angeles* at The University Art Gallery at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), courtesy Metabolic Studio

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