

# CANAL PROJECTS

EMILIJA  
ŠKARNULYTĖ

ÆQUALIA

01/19-03/30/24

*To presume a given distinction between humans and nonhumans is to cement and recirculate the nature culture dualism into the foundations of feminist theory, foreclosing a genealogy of how nature and culture, human and nonhuman, are formed. Hence any performative account worth its salt would be ill advised to incorporate such anthropocentric values in its foundations.*

— Karen Barad

**ÆQUALIA** is a new immersive installation from Lithuanian-born artist **Emilija Škarnulytė**, co-commissioned by Canal Projects and the 14th Gwangju Biennale. In this piece, Škarnulytė swims through the Encontro das Águas in Manaus, Brazil as a mermaid called “*Æqualia*.” The Encontro das Águas is the confluence where the Rio Solimões and Rio Negro give birth to the Amazon River.

Rio Solimões’ milky white waters, originating in glacial melt, turbid with suspended and nutrient-rich silts and clays from the High Andes, meets the heavy, black flow of the Rio Negro, dark with the decay of lowland rainforests, warm and hypoxic. The stark difference in temperature and composition causes the two rivers to remain distinct in color, temperature, and chemical profile for a six-kilometer stretch, before finally merging.

The rivers’ fluid instability is the result of differences in velocity and viscosity. They come together in fractal swirls along their meeting points—a similar phenomenon can be seen in other diverse and dynamic environments, ranging from the Red Spot of Jupiter to fluctus cloud formations, to the curls of a thin layer of oil on top of a simmering pot of water. In *Æqualia* these fractal swirls build and accelerate until the two streams become one.

The river basin is home to the pink Amazon River dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis geoffrensis*), locally known as *botos*. The dolphins use their honed sense of echolocation to navigate both the cooler waters of Rio Solimões and the warm, opaque waters of Rio Negro, moving between the two with ease. Swimming alongside the *botos*, Škarnulytė embodies the mermaid *Æqualia*—a chimera figure—existing at the intersection of multiple realms.

She seamlessly blurs the boundaries between the human, the nonhuman, and the transcendental, melding scientific and mythological elements into a singular hybrid and vibrant force.

By October 2023, within a year of completing the filming of *Æqualia*, the Encontro das Águas ran dry due to excessive droughts leading to the mass dying-off of the *botos*. Embodied as a mermaid—half fish, half person—Škarnulytė unveils the repercussions of human hubris. Through her incarnation, she presents visions extending beyond the perceptual limits of our species, urging reflection on the consequences of our actions.

**Emilija Škarnulytė** (b. 1987) is a Lithuanian-born artist and filmmaker. Working between documentary and speculative realms, Škarnulytė makes immersive installations exploring deep time and invisible structures. Her video works take viewers through decommissioned nuclear power plants, deep-sea data storage units, forgotten underwater cities, and uncanny natural phenomena. Through a future archaeologist's perspective, the artist suggests that the environments and worlds we believe to be confined to science fiction and fantasy can already be found on our own planet.

She most recently presented works at MORI Art Museum, Kiasma, Gwangju Biennale, Helsinki Biennale, Vilnius Performance Biennale, Henie Onstad Triennale, Penumbra. Her work was presented in solo exhibitions at Ferme-Asile, Sion (2023); Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel (2021); Den Frie, Copenhagen (2021); National Gallery of Vilnius (2021); Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2017); Contemporary Art Centre CAC of Vilnius (2015). Prizes awarded to her include the 2023 Ars Fennica Award and the 2019 Future Generation Art Prize. She represented Lithuania at the XXII Triennale di Milano and participated in the Baltic Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. She has films in the collections of IFA, HAM, Kadist Foundation and Centre Pompidou, and her works have been screened at the Tate Modern, Serpentine Gallery in London, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Museum of Modern Art in New York, and numerous film festivals.

*Æqualia* was co-commissioned by Canal Projects and the 14th Gwangju Biennale thanks to the support of Canal Projects Board of Managers and Advisory Board, The YS Kim Foundation, and the Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

This is Škarnulytė's first presentation in New York. The artist would like to thank Sook-Kyung Lee, Harry C. H. Choi, Nahyun Kim, Frances Reynolds, Lucas Albuquerque, Linas Lapinskas, Erik Vojevodin, Adam Kleinman, Andrew Fowler, Andrew Berardini, Karen Barad, Instituto Inclusartiz, the Lithuanian Culture Institute, the Lithuanian Council for Culture, OCA: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, and The Norwegian Consulate General, New York.

Written and directed by: Emilija Škarnulytė; Editing: Vytautas Tinteris; Exhibition Architecture: Linas Lapinskas; Composers: Jokūbas Čižikas, Vivian Caccuri, Thiago Lanis, Savio de Queiroz; Sound mixing and mastering: Savio De Queiroz; Drone Pilot: Bruno Hayden Barreto; Underwater camera: Michael Dantas; Swimmer: Emilija Škarnulytė; Production: Mirror Matter Productions.

Featuring location: The Encontro das Águas, Rio Solimões and Rio Negro, in Manaus, Brazil (3°8'12"S 59°54'17"W).