

# Anicka Yi: *Message from the Mud*

## Learning Resource



This resource is designed to help you prepare to explore Anicka Yi's exhibition at Storm King, *Message from the Mud* (2026), with your students. We hope to engage learners in focused close looking, activities, and conversation—providing a solid foundation as students construct connections throughout their experience.

**Image:** Anicka Yi, *Message from the Mud*, 2026. Photo by Jeffrey Jenkins.

**Location:** South Ponds | [#810 on our Map](#)

**Credit:** Anicka Yi (American, b. South Korea, 1971), *Message from the Mud*, 2026. Acrylic, water from South Ponds, sediment, diatomaceous earth, nutrients, and light. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

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## Main Themes

**Living Materials.** The tall cylinders at the center of the installation are filled with colorful bands of living microorganisms. The columns were filled with mud and water and left under lights for many months at room temperature, allowing bacteria to grow. These columns are also called Winogradsky columns. Sergei Winogradsky developed this technology in the 1880s to study microbial activity in soil without the use of microscopes. The columns make visible what exists all around us: thriving communities of bacteria.

**Time Scales and Biofiction.** Anicka Yi often uses unexpected organic and perishable materials in her art. She explores biology, evolution, and time. Describing *Message from the Mud*, Yi notes, "...it really brings together multiple timescales of microbial time, geological time, algal time, but also the backdrop of this archeological dig site is, what I would like to call a 'prehistoric biofiction'. And what that means is that it is imagining these old ruins from ancient civilizations and ancient communities..., but also the living bodies within these soil ecosystems."

**Portrait of the Landscape & Site-specificity.** The mud and water in the columns is from Storm King Art Center's South ponds, located a short distance from the artwork. The matter from the ponds creates growth in the columns that is site-specific to Storm King. Anicka Yi has described the landscape as her collaborator and *Message from the Mud* as a portrait of the landscape.

## Artwork Engagement

**View the work from multiple angles.** Move around and view the artwork from multiple perspectives. Look from afar and up close while maintaining a safe distance around the pond. Divide a sheet of paper into four sections and create a quick sketch in each section from a different perspective. What do you notice about the artwork?

**Observe the bacteria.** Focusing on the columns, what do you notice about the shapes, colors, and textures? These colors and textures are a result of bacterial growth. Write down a few different colors you see, both inside and outside the columns, and then come up with 3-4 different adjectives to describe each color. Write down a few adjectives to describe the textures you see. The artist has described the columns as having the specific *flavor* of Storm King because the soil comes from this landscape.

**Explore the landscape.** Head over to Storm King's ponds, just east of the artwork. These ponds are human made, a result of digging up gravel and reaching groundwater in the 1950s, when the New York State Thruway was constructed. Do you notice any creatures near or within the ponds?

**Discuss and ask questions.** Return to the artwork and discuss: How might this artwork relate to the theme of *time*? In what ways might scientists and artists be similar? What questions do you have for Yi?

**Consider the title.** The artist titled this artwork *Message from the Mud*. Chat with a friend about why she might have chosen this title. What do you think the mud's message might be?

## Continued Engagement & Resources

**Bio-fiction writing.** Think about the possibilities of microbial life. What would two bacteria say to one another? What might microorganisms spend their time doing? Write your own fictional narrative about bacteria.

**Portrait of the landscape.** Consider the type of landscape that surrounds your home or school. Is it an urban, suburban, or rural area? How will you create a portrait of this landscape? What types of materials might you use to represent this space?

**Resources.** For more information about the exhibition, and to hear the artist speak about her work, visit our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects via the QR code here.

