

One display, 365 spigots

Art exhibit 'Boil Notice' taps into South Florida's water woes



Dana Kleinman and Ruth Avra at the Pompano Beach Cultural Center with their art exhibit highlighting the water-quality issues in Broward and Palm Beach counties on Wednesday. Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel
BY JACK LEMNUS SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

It was early April, and colossal floodwaters were ravaging parts of Broward County, engulfing streets and displacing residents. Just as the floods surged through Fort Lauderdale, sisters Dana Kleinman and Ruth Avra were debuting their art exhibit highlighting a different water crisis.

“It was sort of art coming to life,” Avra said. They took it as a sign.

Titled “Boil Notice,” their interactive art installation at the Pompano Beach Cultural Center illuminates chronic water quality issues, specifically the prevalent issuance of boil-water notices.

The exhibit features 365 unique spigot sculptures, each representing a day in 2022. Some dispense a clear, plant-based resin, meant to represent a day when all of Broward County had clean drinking water. Out of these 365 spigots studding the walls, 270 are clogged with a murky ooze made from recycled concrete and debris, resembling dirty water.

These symbolize the days when boil-water notices were issued in the county, the precautionary move over concerns of contaminants in the drinking water supply. “Broward County, as much as it’s an affluent, well-to-do area, we still have water access issues, and it’s not something that everybody is aware of,” Kleinman said.

Partnering with sound designer Dave Rosenthal, the exhibit includes an audio component where a large pipe emits the sounds of groundwater being converted into drinking water, sourced from the Margate Water Treatment Plant.

For the project, the sisters compiled data from city websites and social media, often finding multiple regions under advisory at once.

More often than not last year, at least one neighborhood was issued a boil-water notice, yet most attendees of the exhibit’s opening day were surprised by the number, according to the artists. “Most knew it was a problem, but not that it was this bad,” Avra said.

The first time Kleinman experienced a boil-water notice was when she moved from New Mexico just before Hurricane Irma struck Florida. Since then, understanding water issues in various communities in the county became a passion project for her.

The sisters wanted to raise awareness, but they knew the community wouldn’t gauge the severity of the situation from the data alone.

“Artwork visualizes data in a very different way,” Kleinman said. “It’s meant to be beautiful; it’s meant to engage you; even if it talks about something that’s a little ugly.”

The community overwhelmingly supported Boil Notice, the artists said. For example, one of the salvage yard owners who’d supplied their materials

showed up a half hour early to the exhibit's opening and stayed throughout the whole event.

"He didn't know what the heck we were doing with all this stuff," Kleinman said. "He was like, 'This is unbelievable. I didn't know this was such an issue.'"

Also in attendance was a local plumber who donated materials for the exhibit, who was equally astonished.

But the most touching moments were when people approached the artists with their stories. Some shared their experiences with flooding, and others spoke of living without potable water.

It seemed the community found an outlet for their concerns through Kleinman and Avra's art, they said.

"As artists, we're not here to point fingers. We're not saying it's anyone's fault," Kleinman said. "But I do want people to come here and ask questions. We want people to ask themselves, 'What can I do to make things better.'"

At the Pompano Beach Cultural Center, at 50 W. Atlantic Blvd., Pompano Beach, the exhibit is free to the public and runs Tuesday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. To celebrate the installation's last day on July 3, a free brunch will be held at the gallery from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.