

**MAREN HASSINGER**  
***PASSING THROUGH***

2 October – 15 November 2019

“I don’t know where I come from and I don’t know where I’m going. This is the life I share with everyone. We are equal in this predicament. We are all passing through. From this untenable place, I make things.”

Maren Hassinger

Tiwani Contemporary is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of work by Maren Hassinger outside of the United States.

For more than four decades, the pioneering New York-based artist has worked across sculpture, drawing, installation, film/video, performance, and public art. The exhibition will bring together a selection of six key sculptures including new work alongside unseen works on paper spanning Hassinger’s influential practice.

Known for her meditative and critical explorations of nature, movement and transformation, Hassinger’s work emerged in the 1970s and 1980s alongside the African-American avant-garde of Los Angeles and has built upon the legacies of abstraction especially post-minimalism. Her poetic oeuvre has frequently incorporated industrial objects and organic materials including plastic bags, tree branches, leaves, dirt and newspapers. She is known especially for the long-standing use of wire rope in her work which she has employed for its expressive possibilities. Hassinger’s expansive art-making follows a humanistic approach which has led the artist to reflect on the pressing issues of the day including industrialisation, consumerism, gender, culture, identity, equality, race, politics and social policy.

The exhibition will feature wire rope sculpture works, including *Consolation* (1996) and *Excerpts from ‘On Dangerous Ground’* (2019) alongside recent newspaper-based works, *Sit Upons* (2010/2015), *Fight The Power* (2017), *Hand in Hand*, (2019). Drawings titled *Savannah* (2007), *Whisper* (2007) and *Ocean* (2007) will also comprise the show.

Born in 1947 in Los Angeles, USA, Hassinger obtained admission to Bennington College in Vermont to study dance – a decision rooted in years of training as a child. Discouraged to follow through by the school, she turned her attention there to studio art focusing on sculpture - graduating in 1969. Returning to LA in 1970, she enrolled at UCLA intending to pick up an MFA in sculpture but was not accepted into the programme. Instead she was encouraged to enter the recently founded Fiber Structure programme – the first graduate to receive an MFA in the subject in 1973. She had graduated after an extra year studying the subject, to help her embark upon and develop a teaching career. Later, she would hold the position of Director of the Rinehart School of Graduate Sculpture for 21 years from 1997 to 2018. During her studies, she became interested in the transformative and kinetic potential of an important signature material, wire rope – which she chanced upon in a salvage yard. Influenced by the work of artists Agnes Martin, Eva Hesse, and John Cage, Hassinger’s research with the steel-based medium centred on its malleability and performativity particularly the material’s capacity to mimic natural forms like hair, vines and water-ripples and its saltatory possibilities for tension and motion.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Hassinger began demonstrating what would become a lifelong interest in the relationship between the industrial and natural worlds notably in sculpture, time-based media, as well as public and collaborative settings - all of which have become key markers of her wide-ranging practice. From ‘planting’ now demolished wire rope sculptures on the margins of freeways and palms of Southern California – a prescient comment on industrialisation and urban movement- to an installation that resembled feet and legs moving in an environment – an enquiry into movement in space, Hassinger’s work began to receive greater public attention. In 1980, MoMA included Hassinger

in its Afro-American Abstraction exhibition at PS1. In 1981, she became the first African-American artist to have a solo exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Here, she presented *On Dangerous Ground* (1981), a sculptural installation comprising bundles of spiky wire-sculptures created through twisting, fraying and knotting. The metal bushes, arranged as obstacles in the path of the viewer, alluded to the museum as being a dangerous site for experimental or advanced art. The exhibition at Tiwani Contemporary will feature a new sculpture, *Excerpts from 'On Dangerous Ground'* which highlights Hassinger's interest in institutional critique.

The substantive states and illusory natural forms of Hassinger's earlier works led her to further explore the paradoxical and often hierarchical tensions between nature and culture. Focusing on other forms of movement – both spatial and temporal as well as fixed and shifting environmental states, Hassinger's work has emphasised seriality, presence, hapticity, immersion, ephemerality and continuity. From collecting and redistributing detritus found or painted pink for a performance to installations which have seen walls lined in fragrant and preserved rose leaves and ceilings blanketed in webs of tree branches, Hassinger's labour-intensive and reflective explorations belong ultimately to an overarching concern of her practice: 'to focus on elements, or even problems - social and environmental - that we all share, in which we all have a stake'. At Tiwani Contemporary, Hassinger will present *Consolation*, a wall-based installation with repeating stems of palmetto-shaped steel wire in a grid – unravelling, vulnerable and examinable individually and as part of a whole – ever present through frequency and ultimately experiential. Similarly, unseen drawings *Savannah*, *Whisper*, and *Ocean* that will be on view feature repeating lines of hand-written single-word formations relating to the natural world. These works evoke the quiet urgency of a written mantra to locate the refuge and tranquillity found in nature.

In the 2000s, Hassinger began using newspapers especially *The New York Times* – in her words 'a paper of record' to produce works that contain and relate to everyone and that speak of a 'collective consciousness'. Set to be on view is *Fight The Power* – a hive-like work mounted near the ceiling referencing the highly charged 1989 protest song by Public Enemy. Wrought from newsprint onto which Hassinger has daubed the anthemic song's title, the work presents the black outlines of text, barely legible to the viewer but ultimately emerging in and out of a new, indeterminate form. Her *Sit-Upons* – a group of floor and wall-based woven newspaper works will invite interaction, transforming the space into a communal site of rest and contemplation. Hassinger's large mandala-like work *Hand in Hand* will also be on view. Made by bundling and twisting thousands of pages of the *New York Times*, the work processes copy relating highly public spectacles and depredations of contemporary experience into a focal point of reflection. Imbued with the capacity to effect renewal and nascency, these works reprocess known and reported crisis and received forms of knowledge into spiritual expositions of phenomenological prospect.

Born out of the marginalised positions Hassinger has experienced throughout her life, her innovative practice has challenged and continues to, orthodox notions of art-making through its adoption of non-traditional materials and myriad site-specific and performative methodologies. This distinctive, restorative, and humanistic approach is an attempt to ultimately effect unity, solidarity and significantly equality.

## **ABOUT MAREN HASSINGER**

Maren Hassinger has exhibited widely in both the United States and abroad. Recent institutional solo exhibitions include *The Spirit of Things* (2018) a presentation at Mark Bradford's *Art + Practice*, Los Angeles traveling to the Baltimore Museum of Art and *Maren Hassinger ...Dreaming* at Spelman College, Atlanta (2015). Recent group exhibitions include *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985* at the Brooklyn Museum, New York (2017), *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, (2012); *Now Dig This!*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; travelled to MoMA P.S.1, Long Island City (2011). Her work is represented in numerous public collections, including MoMA; the Hammer Museum, LA; SF MoMA and The Studio Museum in Harlem.

Hassinger is the recipient of many awards and honours including grants from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Gottlieb Foundation, *Anonymous was a Woman* and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for the Arts. She was until recently the Director of the Rinehart School of Graduate Sculpture at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore. Currently Hassinger serves as a visiting critic in the Graduate School of Columbia University's Visual Arts Program. She lives and works in New York City and is represented by Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.