

Whitney, Kay. "Los Angeles: Maren Hassinger-Art + Practice," *Sculpture Magazine*, September 2018.



reviews

LOS ANGELES

Maren Hassinger Art + Practice

The idea of consciousness-altering plays a central role in Maren Hassinger's thinking. Her practice transcends the formal demands of sculpture, the ABCs of it, amplifying the idea of making an object in such a way as to recast it as performance. At their most basic, her objects deal with the tangibility of materials and their existence in the manifested world, evoking what it is to move through this world as an embodied presence. This elegant and forthright work, which stands at the intersection of multiple axes of history and culture, precipitates an intense contemplation of everything from nature and industry to gender and race. The extraordinary balance that Hassinger strikes between poetry and topicality is, by its nature, complex and multidisciplinary, demanding an intense level of focus and control.

Hassinger has referred to her work as a "hybrid"—the consequence of a collaboration between movement and object, between the body's response to the space around it and the object's relationship and sensitivity to that same space. She has been involved with collaborative fabrication, dance, and performance throughout her 40-year career. The works on view in "The Spirit of Things," a sort of mini-retrospective, attested to those intersecting



Above: Maren Hassinger, *Love*, 2008/2018. Plastic shopping bags, each filled with a love note and inflated with human breath, dimensions variable. Left: Maren Hassinger, *The Veil Between Us*, 2007/2018. Twisted and knotted New York Times newspapers, dimensions variable.

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Above: Maren Hassinger, *Whirling*, 1978. Wire and wire rope, 9 elements, approx. 1.42 x 7.66 x 9.42 ft. **Left:** Maren Hassinger, *Sit Upens*, 2010/2018. New York Times newspapers, dimensions variable.

arenas. Given her awareness of the institutional rejection of women artists and artists of color, her work is very much a performance of outsidership and otherness.

Video, photography, an installation, and numerous objects formed a compendium of movements and forces—weaving, stacking, twisting, bending, tying—as told through a range of materials—wire rope, newspapers, pink plastic bags, steel. Looked at from another angle, such elements could be considered junk and refuse, but Hassinger assembles

them into something unrecognizable. Her use of abstraction is double-edged. Though it offers dimensions beyond social, racial, and aesthetic issues, it also, and at the same time, deals with the realities of life. Hassinger's identity as an African American woman in a racist and misogynistic society has a consistent presence in her work, yet her aim is not so much to assert racial or sexual identity as it is to undermine those very concepts.

Crucial present-day issues echoed throughout the show, even in older

works: natural versus artificial/ industrial, static gesture as opposed to the human body in motion, the imprint of race and gender all reverberate, particularly in the wire rope pieces from the '70s. *Whirling*, a dimensionally variable piece from 1978, and related works are clearly based in an Eva Hesse-type Post-Minimalism but take on a performative excess of meaning from the ferocious process of unwinding strands of heavy wire, binding them together, and standing them upright on their frayed ends.

In the window installation *Love* (2008/2018), Hassinger stuffed hundreds of inflated, shocking-pink plastic bags into a narrow corridor. The pillow-like forms press on the viewer from all sides, creating a womb-like, claustrophobic atmosphere—a triumph, like much of her work, of feminist, collaborative aesthetics.

—Kay Whitney

LAGRANGE, GEORGIA

Bruce Chechfsky

Cochran Gallery

A cursory glance around the gallery—a tastefully restored, turn-of-the-century dry cleaning establishment—

offers no aesthetic frisson. Open packing crates used to ship art are strewn about seemingly at random. Tools for mounting exhibitions litter the floor: a drill, hammer, and nails. Next to a ladder, two slender tree trunks stand against a wall, crookedly supporting a brightly hued print. The cover of one crate is lifted to reveal an almost indistinguishable, shadowy gray image. Visually unexciting, this display nonetheless carried out a multi-pronged spoof, tackling societal biases, narcissism—artistic and otherwise—and an art world inverted into a business.

Learning that the angled print set high against the wall was by Mildred Thompson began to unravel the allusions. An African American who escaped racial prejudice and sexism by living in Germany for several decades, Thompson never enjoyed the recognition she deserved during her lifetime. Only now, after a posthumous one-person show at New York's Galerie Lelong & Co., is her work becoming appreciated. Her "pain," as she termed it, derived not only from her rejection by the art community, but also from America's denigration of blacks—symbolized here by the tree trunks and ladder, which served as instruments of lynching, especially in the South. The tar on the moisture-proof paper lining the crates adds another reference, hinting at the Uncle Remus stories that celebrated "Tar Baby" and reinforced stereotypes.

The half-opened crate revealed a second telling symbolic nexus, disclosing a slate-hued rectangle of Andy Warhol's portrait of Joseph Beuys, the self-styled shaman of contemporary art. In a well-known performance, Beuys, his face smeared with gold dust reflective of his exalted status as an artist-magus, strutted around a gallery holding a dead hare while explaining the exhibited works, whose esoteric meaning—in his opinion—was beyond the grasp of a dense

TOP: JOSHUA WHITE, COURTESY MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY; THE JAMES E. LEWIS MUSEUM OF ART, BALTIMORE / BOTTOM: JOSHUA WHITE, COURTESY THE ARTIST