

Eisenstadter, Dave. "Hampshire Life Editor's Note: The Studio Museum exhibit," *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, 24 January 2020.

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A group at the Smith College Museum of Art walks by a piece called *River* by Maren Hassinger which is part of a show called, *Black Refractions, Highlights From the Studio Museum in Harlem*.

Dear readers,

As civil rights battles raged in the 1960s, among the many arenas where African Americans were shut out was in the art world. Just over 50 years ago, artists and community members looking to right this wrong created their own museum – The Studio Museum in Harlem. Now that museum's traveling exhibit has come to the Valley at the Smith College Museum of Art. The exhibit, titled "*Black Refractions: Highlights from the Studio Museum in Harlem*," contains work spanning decades.

Perspective, in art as in everything, is hugely important. These featured artists, by virtue of their skin color, sadly are forced to view the world differently than artists who possess white privilege. That makes displaying – and viewing – art produced by artists who have the perspective of being African American important for all, especially in the largely white communities immediately surrounding Smith College.

I have not been there myself, but I look forward to taking time to walk through the exhibit. As writer Steve Pfarrer points out in this week's cover story, the 30-foot sculpture made of entwined heavy rope and steel chains called "*River*," by Maren Hassinger, seems to be one of the most striking. As I looked at the image that's on the cover this week, seeing the piece snake through the exhibition gallery, strong emotions surged within me about bondage and freedom. It's a beautiful work in that it exposes something so ugly.

Smith College Museum of Art has been on a roll presenting exhibitions that evoke such conflict. I still recall seeing the exhibit they presented last year called "*Plastic Entanglements*," featuring a hanging chandelier of plastic bottles along with seaworn plastic items dating back decades, but still intact, nowhere near decomposition. Color, shape and beauty, all aimed at exposing the horrible truth of how plastic is choking our oceans and much of the rest of our environment.

Above all, good art provokes thought and emotion. And in that, it would be hard to find a more worthy exhibition to visit than the one Smith College Museum of Art has on display.

– Dave Eisenstadter