

Staff. "Boca Raton Museum of Art kicks off bold new season," *Art Daily*, 6 November 2019.



Clifford Ross, Maren Hassinger, Jody Harrison Grass (Chair of the Museum's Board), & Irvin Lippman (Executive Director, Boca Raton Museum of Art). Photo by Jose Lima of News Travels Fast.

**BOCA RATON, FLA.-** The power of nature was unleashed with the world premiere of two timely exhibitions at the Boca Raton Museum of Art for the new season. Both of these original shows — Maren Hassinger: *Tree of Knowledge* and Clifford Ross: *Waves* — launched the museum's 70th anniversary season and will remain on view through March 1st. The museum is presenting both exhibitions together because they sound a clarion call for environmental awareness. These two shows also remind viewers that the beauty and power of nature can still inspire us, despite the oversaturation of society by hand-held devices and screens.

The two exhibitions are presented side-by-side in adjoining galleries. Clifford Ross: *Waves* features a new approach to his monumental depictions of ocean waves that the artist captures during extreme weather. The result is the most comprehensive survey of his process ever shown in a museum. Ross dramatically presents the monstrous power of the seas in his new exhibition at a crucial moment in time for our planet: the United Nations recently issued a major new report warning that the dangerous effects of climate change on our oceans is much worse than previously thought. The new findings warn about warming oceans and damaged ecosystems.

Sea levels are rising faster than previously predicted, glaciers and ice sheets melting more rapidly than expected, shrinking the fisheries that feed millions. "When I first began photographing these hurricane waves 30 years ago, most of us were unaware that global warming was seriously damaging our oceans," said Clifford Ross. "Now, as I look back on my work, it takes on a whole new meaning."

For her show, Maren Hassinger: *Tree of Knowledge*, the renowned sculptor and performance artist was commissioned by the museum for a residency that explored the staying power of nearby Pearl City, Boca Raton's historic African American neighborhood. This is the largest installation that Hassinger has ever created in her long and celebrated career. It is based on Pearl City's landmark, the "Tree of Knowledge." This majestic, 100-year-old banyan tree still stands today and is protected by the Historic Preservation laws.

Hassinger vigorously engaged the public to recreate the tree's aerial roots by gathering many groups over several months, twisting by hand thousands of recycled newspapers. "I want visitors to the museum to think about the endurance of the tree and the endurance of the people who live beside it," said Maren Hassinger. "I hope they realize it's possible to build a world in which, like this installation, people work together side by side. Both the tree and the residents have inspired me with their mutual endurance."

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In new reports, the United Nations warns that fires such as those causing de-forestation in the Amazon elevate concerns for the planet's natural life support systems. This global call to action urges countries, companies and consumers to build a new relationship with nature. The destruction of the world's largest rainforest calls attention to the need to prevent ecosystems from declining to a point of no return, with dire consequences for humanity.

Hassinger's new installation is about nature as knowledge and about education. The twisted ropes of newspaper are made of words and stories. "I hope the community and all of the visitors to the museum take a moment to think about the materials used in the project, which are not traditional art materials, and realize that this giant project was made not by artists, but by the public, working together," adds Maren Hassinger.

"Following the theme of nature for our new season at the Museum, how appropriate that Maren Hassinger would choose this legendary tree, known as the Tree of Knowledge, as the subject for her site-specific installation," said Irvin Lippman, the executive director of the Boca Raton Museum of Art. "From its inception to its installation, this has involved audiences of all ages from every corner of our community to participate in the making of the aerial roots from streams of recycled newspapers. Much in the manner of the Banyan tree, we are all connected to one another." Hassinger's new exhibition will also feature the installation called Embrace Love - an experiential portal for visitors to walk through. As the entranceway into the museum's main galleries, it will surround visitors with hundreds of recycled pink plastic bags that will cover the walls around them. The shopping bags are filled with the air of human breath, and contain human love notes inside.

On the subject of Clifford Ross: Waves, Lippman adds: "It would seem obvious that a museum with a coastal address such as ours would naturally be ever fascinated by the subject of waves. The subject of Clifford's photographs in this new exhibition, however, goes deeper into the unpredictable shapes of waves, as much about abstraction as realism."

The effect of being engulfed in a room full of his work is profound, causing some viewers to claim they can actually hear the sound of the ocean waves although there is no sound component. Ross is celebrated worldwide for his Hurricane Waves series, monumental images that were photographed by the artist during storms and while hurricanes were off-shore, while he was attached by a tether to his assistant who remained on land as Ross braved the ocean surf. The size of these images is humbling. The angle of vision, from as low as possible, is calculated to inspire awe. The waves dominate us, framed or cropped; we feel their full force. These waves invoke the power of wind as well as the power of water, the great cyclical forces of nature that generate energy.

While it explores the limits of photography and abstraction, this exhibition is also a dramatic declaration about climate change. "This exhibition is a thorough survey of my working methods," said Ross. "an effort to show all the ways I have approached the subject of ocean waves. But there's also a deeper theme of addressing climate change – unavoidable in this day and age. Somehow the apocalyptic quality of the show does not erase the basic lyricism and beauty that I see in nature. When I started out, wanting to celebrate nature by creating bodies of work that were an homage to the sublime, I didn't understand that the images were also capturing evidence – evidence of our negative impact on nature. The ferocity, the forms of these waves were partially due to global warming. This project has come full circle, as much a meditation on the medium of photography as it is a photographic reflection of our world."