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## ARTnews

### Building Faith in the Future Part 2: Five Women of the Black Arts Movement in Los Angeles

BY [COLONY LITTLE](#)

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Maren Hassinger, *Tree Duet II*, 56 17 San Vicente Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1977  
.COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY, NEW YORK. IMAGE: ADAM AVILA.

While it originated in New York in the 1960s with Black literary activist Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement quickly gained traction in Southern California in the wake of the 1965 Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles. Drawing on new mediums flourishing on the West Coast, the Black Arts Movement as it manifested there put the focus on community uplift and radical change.

Yet, despite the fervent calls for unity during this period, the face of the Black Arts Movement in Los Angeles was overwhelmingly male, the contributions of Black women largely overlooked, sidelined, or silenced. As art historian Kellie Jones notes in *South of Pico*, her groundbreaking scholarship on the Southern California Black Arts Movement, "Black women were integral to both the struggles for Black freedom and women's liberation. But as a number of writers have concluded, black women were expected to disregard the racism and class privilege of white feminism and turn a blind eye to the misogyny of Black Power."

Despite these challenges with mainstream visibility, Black women artists and arts advocates in Los Angeles did manage to forge new pathways that circumvented sexism and racial bias, creating revolutionary work and spaces to show it. Here are five of them.

#### Maren Hassinger



Maren Hassinger, installation view of "Process," a solo exhibition at Susan Inglett Gallery New York, April 20–June 3, 2023. Photo Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett.

Maren Hassinger took a much more conceptual approach to Black art. As a trained dancer growing up in Los Angeles, Hassinger studied sculpture and obtained her MFA in Fiber Arts at UCLA. Still active as an artist, she seamlessly combines these three art forms in sculptures and performances that simulate the harmonies between the body and the natural world. Rituals are integral in her practice as she draws on the energies of communal art-making processes like weaving and crafts to transform everyday objects like newspaper strips and trash bags into symbolic gestures of love, healing, and hope.