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## Deconstruction and Reconstruction: Chassidy A. Winestock and Maren Hassinger on 'A Female Landscape and the Abstract Gesture'



Installation view, "A Female Landscape and the Abstract Gesture," 2024. By [Courtesy of Julia Featheringill / Harvard Radcliffe Institute](#)

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Harvard Radcliffe Institute's exhibition "A Female Landscape and the Abstract Gesture," curated by Chassidy A. Winestock — a History of Art and Architecture PhD candidate at Harvard — as part of her dissertation, centers works from female artists in the 1970s and features Mildred Thompson, Howardena Pindell, Liliana Porter, and Maren Hassinger. It explores the abstraction in their works and how they manipulate materiality to foreground labor in art-making.

In an event held in person and virtually on March 7, artist Maren Hassinger joined Winestock for a special conversation about the exhibition. The conversation was introduced and moderated by curator and art historian Mary Schneider Enriquez.

Winestock's exhibition is titled after Thompson's 1977 work "A Female Landscape," a six-foot-long accordion-fold book gifted to writer and activist Audre Lorde. Along with Pindell, Porter, and Hassinger, the four artists create new vocabularies through "abstract gestures" in their art. Hassinger, in particular, explores the concepts of construction through deconstruction through her gestural work — often reminding viewers of the relationship between their bodies in movement and the construction of space and place. Born in Los Angeles in 1947, Hassinger has worked the better part of the past five decades in sculpture, printmaking, installation, drawing, performance, and video with various materials — most notably with wire rope, a material she fell in love with when she began pursuing an MFA in fiber arts at UCLA, sparking deliberations between the natural and industrial.

"The wire rope was weird, because although it seemed familiar because it was just like any other string or clothesline or anything you could imagine that's a piece of rope," Hassinger said in reference to her work "Interlock" (1972). "It could be manipulated in ways so that it could actually form images or sequences of images because it would — as a piece of wire — hold that position."

In their conversation, Hassinger often recalled points of redirection throughout her life. Despite her long-standing foundations in dance, Hassinger's medium eventually shifted from performance to sculpture at Bennington College, where she studied from 1965 to 1969. Still, another change in direction came for her while applying to master's programs: She became a student in the UCLA fiber arts program only after being rejected from their sculptural program. Here, she started her practice as a visual artist, despite initially intending to become a teacher. Winestock further highlighted the theme of redirection by addressing the importance of issues of space in her exhibition and the ways in which shifting places have influenced the works of her featured artists.

"A thread that runs through all of the stories of the people who are in the show, is that the moving around [and] getting to understand your place in a new place is all a part of this," Winestock said.

Despite the abstraction in her oeuvre, Hassinger continuously alludes to the human figure. Winestock acknowledged the significance of dance and movement in Hassinger's visual art in consideration of works like "Interlock," which she described as "more like a human body" than a work of art.

The discussion eventually transitioned to Winestock's study as an art historian. She explained that she often ruminates on an object long before she begins to even consider the artist.

In contrast, "A Female Landscape and the Abstract Gesture" is all about the artists and the inextricable traces of themselves in their works — "almost like a map to follow," Winestock said. She referred to Hassinger's wire rope to establish her process of drawing connections between minimalism, post-minimalism, and the "repeated gesture" in her exhibition's creation.

This material and thematic motif in Hassinger's work can be found again in "A Place for Nature" (1972). She took apart and reconstructed the wire ropes to loop them in different formations and, paradoxically, artificially created organic compositions, mimicking water, trees, and branches. The installation assumes a circular form, which Hassinger achieved by using heat to make V-shaped folds and weaving ends of the rope together as one may weave their fingers together.

In addition to rope, Hassinger also often works with newspaper. At a time when rope was inaccessible to her, she stripped newspapers down into sections and twisted them to imitate rope. This practice has been reflected in some of her more recent works such as "Wrenching News" (2010), which consists of two mandalas made of shredded and twisted newspaper.

"There is something about the wire rope that is inherently threatening — it always looks like it's going to fall and grab you — but [the newspaper] kind of settled into itself; it has a quietness," Hassinger said.

"A Female Landscape and the Abstract Gesture" is currently on display in the Johnson-Kulukundis Family Gallery at the Radcliffe Institute through June 22.