

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

LONGFORMS

Maren Hassinger: *Twisted*

By Becket Gourlay



Installation view at Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC. Photo: Adam Reich

The waters of the world unite us - Maren Hassinger

Maren Hassinger displays her signature materiality in the form of wire rope and twisted paper, continuing her work in the transposition of the natural world. From early on in Hassinger's sculpture, references to nature are frequent, as seen in works like *River* (1972), *Rain* (1974), *Twelve Trees* (1978,) and *Beach* (1980). Such titling suggests a deep resonance with nature, yet the materials employed in all of these works are distinct in their evidence of the human hand: steel chains, rope, ink on paper, plaster, and, of course, Hassinger's signature twisted wire cable. The story is told best by Hassinger herself:

*Growing I, 2025*

I was in a graduate program [at UCLA] called Fiber Structure, and one day I was out and about in Los Angeles searching for different kinds of fibers, and I went to a junkyard on Alameda Street in downtown LA, where there were all of these salvage yards. I was just looking around, and I picked up this piece of wire rope. It was rusty, but I realized that it had the capacity to have everything that you ever do to metal done to it, but you could also treat it like fiber. If you un-plied it, or unwound it, and you kept going deeper and deeper into each ply, its lines of metal. I realized I could do very sculptural things with this. (Maren Hassinger, 2019)

The wire rope makes up the majority of the exhibition, wielded in a myriad of clever ways. The new work is distinctly fluid, as opposed to previous works that lean more terrestrial, echoing forms, patterns, and movements found in natural phenomena such as waterfalls, wind, and the growth that follows a rainstorm. *Growing I* and *Growing II* are twin sculptures, their poured cement bases flush with the pedestals they rest on. Expanded steel in a lattice pattern curves out of and back into the cement, as tendrils of greased wire rope climb through, terminating midair above the industrial trellis. One is reminded of a chain link fence, overtaken by insistent vines.

Hassinger consistently situates the human body at the dynamic intersection of the organic and the industrial, the natural and the cultural. Encouraging movement and, at times, direct participation, she uses her art to forge a sense of connectedness among seemingly disparate things.¹

Hassinger also considers verticality, as multiple suspended works charge the space between the ceiling and floor with dynamic motion. Another long-standing pillar of Hassinger's work is the use of twisted newspaper as a sculptural material. Hassinger considers newspapers, specifically the New York Times, as a common thread, this "newspaper of record" disseminating news and information that unites all who read it.



Cascade, 2025

The meditative practice of twisting the newspaper is also one of community, seen in her performance *Women's Work* (2013). Part of the exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* at NYU's Grey Art Museum, six women, including Hassinger, sat in a row of chairs and began tearing and twisting copies of The New York Times. These strips were then knotted to one another, until each woman held a single, knotty strand. To conclude the performance, the women passed her individual strand to the next and connected them, until only a continuous length of paper remained and could be rolled into a ball, much like yarn. Now, the twisted newspaper became a signature used in sculptures mounted on the wall, such as *Hand In Hand* and *Fight the Power* (2019). Now, the paper descends from the ceiling in the aptly titled *Cascade* (2025), coiling on the floor below like a torrent of water.

The tightly coiled clippings refuse readability: while one might catch a date, a reference to immigration policy, or a photographic sliver of an Olympic medalist, one is struck above all by the artist's transformational action, her forceful manual response to an ongoing onslaught of information that is, as the title suggests, at times hard to bear.²



Falls II, 2025

Hassinger also employs an integral part of her practice in the form of weaving, using rigid materials and structural techniques that belie the aqueous, malleable nature of wind and water. Wire-rope sculptures *Falls I* and *Falls II* hang from the wall, bundled at the top much like brooms of yore, sans stick, and unravelling as they descend, emulating the shape of their namesake. These sculptures are modular, units of these wire rope bundles able to be added ad infinitum, per the space available where they are installed. An impressive grouping of eleven dominates one wall, while a more approachable grouping of seven hangs on another, a nod to the infinite potential of the work's final form.

The paradoxes inherent in Hassinger's work are readily apparent. Her imitations of nature are both sincere and ironic. She manipulates industrial wire rope to look like natural forms, yet these objects also retain their metallic, unnatural quality. The process of creation is quite evident, and in this sense, Hassinger's work is akin to process art. Viewers can easily reconstruct the nimble movement of fingers and tools fraying, unraveling, shaping, and arranging. Although there is sometimes the suggestion of the decay, neglect, or displacement of natural forms - the result of human activity - these works also strongly insist on the constructiveness of human touch. Some critics, and even the artist herself, have described her works as expressing a sense of memory, nostalgia, or even mourning for the loss of a closer experience of nature.³

In echoing organic forms via inorganic materials, Hassinger considers the reciprocal impact and exchange of humanity and nature. This is an ongoing conversation Hassinger participates in, seen anywhere from performances like *Pink Trash* (1982) in which Hassinger explored ethical citizenship and the treatment of natural public spaces by deliberately littering (and of course, cleaning up afterwards) parks around New York City with the eponymous, rosy refuse, or the *Monuments* series (2018-present), in which Hassinger scrounged deadwood branches and built pyramids, cubes, and mandala-like wreaths in public spaces. The works were undeniably "natural" in their substance, yet the hand of "Man," or rather "Woman," is obvious in their construction.

I feel that there's an absence of nature, yet a proliferation of human-made products which reflect nature, or imitate nature. Wire rope is one such product. When I use materials made by people that resemble things found in nature, like reeds, flowers, trees, etc., I'm also saying that the proliferation of the copies are causing the erasure of the 'real' nature. Materials made by people have a tumultuous effect on the survival of nature as we know it.

(Maren Hassinger, 2021)



Showers, 2025

Activation of public space is another throughline, as a work commissioned by the Art Institute of Chicago for their roof deck finds a new form at the gallery. *Showers* (2023) consisted of a scattering of sparse bundles of wire rope (minuscule versions of the aforementioned bundles in *Falls*) hung from the structure of a marquee above the heads of visitors. The 2025 version turns the dial from gentle showers to torrential downpours, as a significant increase in both bundle scale and amount fills the air in the main gallery. Without pre-existing infrastructure, Hassinger has hung the steel sprigs from a woven grid, helices of wire cable gently bowing from their collective load.

Much of the work is sturdy and staunch, like the unyielding symmetry of *Ripples* (2025) greased wire rope, but there is also room for delicacy, like the *Wall Composition* series installed in Gallery II. These wall-mounted pieces don't indicate any obvious mimicry of nature; instead, these works function as abstracted explorations of the material's inherent qualities of simultaneous rigidity and pliability.

I wanted my work to be an overarching statement about nature in our lives now. Our relationship to nature is going to be different than other generations' relationship to nature because we have damaged so much. I see the loss of nature as intimately connected to people who have created social situations and monetary gains, based on killing nature. Only recently, I got really interested in how the rape of nature and discrimination against certain individuals, certain human beings, are related.

(Maren Hassinger, 2018)



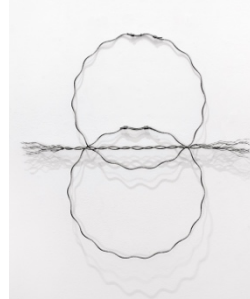
Ripples, 2025



Rose Leaf Composition, 2025

In a final address of nature's cyclical movements, the work that both greets and bids farewell to visitors of the gallery is comprised of preserved rose leaves. *Rose Leaf Composition* (2025) is a radial installation, visually recalling how fallen foliage appears on the surface of a body of water. Hassinger lengthens the life of these leaves with a formula concocted during a residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, a poetic ode to nature's ephemerality. The leaves bud, blossom, and yearn to wilt, and only an artist's intervention freezes them in stasis, bidding them to hold on a bit longer. This mirrors Hassinger's concern for our effect on the world around us, positing that since we cannot reverse the damage we have done, we can, and must, at the very least,

stop it altogether. By acknowledging this symbiosis, Hassinger's work highlights the primordial tethers we all share as stewards of the earth, a reminder of the life-giving forces from which we came.



Wall Compositions III, II, V, and VI, 2025

Citations:

¹ Richmond, Susan. "The Material Distillation of Dreams: Maren Hassinger at Spelman Museum," *BURNAWAY: The Voice of Art in the South*, 27 February 2015.

² Grotte-Jacobs, Miriam. "Maren Hassinger: The Spirit of Things," *ASAP Journal*, 15 November 2018.

³ Megerian, Maureen. "Entwined with Nature-The Sculpture of Maren Hassinger," *Woman's Art Journal*, (Fall 1996/Winter 1997), pp. 21-25.



MAREN HASSINGER (b. 1947) has built an interdisciplinary practice that articulates the relationship between nature and humanity. Carefully choosing materials for their innate characteristics, Hassinger has explored the subject of movement, family, love, nature, environment, consumerism, identity, and race. The artist uses her materials to mimic nature, whether bundling it to resemble a monolithic sheaf of wheat or planting it in cement to create an industrial garden. Within the past five years, Hassinger has been commissioned to make work for Sculpture Milwaukee (curated by Ugo Rondinone), Dia Bridgehampton, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Aspen Art Museum. Hassinger was recently honored with an exhibition focused on her collaborative performance work with Senga Nengudi at the Cooley Gallery, Reed College, Portland, OR traveling to the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH, and will be honored with an upcoming two-person survey alongside Nengudi at IVAM, Valencia. Hassinger is the recipient of the Women's Caucus for the Arts Lifetime Achievement Award. Her work can be found in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Guggenheim Museum, NYC; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, NYC; the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum, NYC, among others.

Photo: Grace Roselli, Pandora's BoxX Project