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Maren Hassinger: What Holds Us Together.

INTERVIEW

Curator Anthony Graham on Maren Hassinger's landmark retrospective, where sculpture breathes, participation becomes practice, and care emerges as a radical artistic language.

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For more than fifty years, Maren Hassinger has transformed industrial materials into meditations on movement, ecology, and human connection. In 'Living Moving Growing', her largest retrospective to date at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, sculpture, performance, installation, and video come together to reveal a practice that is as fluid as it is enduring. ART AFRICA speaks with curator Anthony Graham about reimagining the retrospective as a living, evolving form, the politics of collaboration, and why Hassinger's vision of interdependence feels more urgent than ever.



Installation view from 'Maren Hassinger: Living Moving Growing', Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPPFA), 2026. Photo: Chris Grunder

Brendon Bell-Roberts: 'Living Moving Growing' traces more than five decades of Maren Hassinger's practice across sculpture, performance, installation, and video. What curatorial narrative emerged in bringing this diverse, often ephemeral body of work into a retrospective?

Anthony Graham: One of our main ambitions for this exhibition was to present different aspects of Hassinger's practice alongside one another, to understand how the sculptures informed the performances, how the performances informed the video, how the video informed the installations, and how she has continued to experiment across media throughout her career. What has emerged is not only an understanding of how her practice has developed over time,

but how certain ideas and themes have remained consistent and evolved. In some instances, her more recent works prompt new understandings of her older works.

Much of Hassinger's work resists permanence, requiring reconstruction, participation, or live performance. How did this challenge conventional ideas of the retrospective, and what does it reveal about the museum's role in preserving living artistic practices?

This exhibition asserts that there is an aliveness to Hassinger's work, a specificity and responsiveness to the moment. We titled the exhibition 'Living Moving Growing', drawn from a quote of Hassinger's, reflecting on the ways that her sculptures seemed to transform static, industrial material into works that have an energy all their own. That so many of the works in the exhibition have to be made specifically for each exhibition is an encapsulation of Hassinger's approach to artmaking: that there is always a sense of renewal and recreation every time a work is shown.

Hassinger has long worked across conversations around ecology, Black artistic practice, feminism, and embodiment, often refusing to privilege one over the other. How did you present these intersecting histories without reducing her work to a single framework?

At the core of Hassinger's work is an attention to the world around us. The open-ended quality of her work, the sense of movement suggested across her sculptures, performances, videos, and installations, are all invitations to consider how we move with and around one another, how we inhabit the world around us. Her interest in the environment is shaped by a fundamental understanding that if we can take care of the thing we all share – the Earth – we can take care of one another, as well. Hassinger's combinations of industrial and organic materials to explore ideas of interconnection and dependency are a way of recognising the things we hold in common alongside the things that make us different.

Participation is central to this exhibition, from the ongoing *Wrenching News* workshops to the restaging of *Pink Trash*. How do these collective acts shape the relationship between audience, artwork, and institution?

Collaboration has been a central aspect of Hassinger's work throughout her career. In the 1970s, she began staging performances alongside her friends and fellow artists, including artists like Senga Nengudi, Ulysses Jenkins, and Franklin Parker. This sometimes resulted in co-authored events and art actions, while at other times it provided a space for experimentation that would inform their individual practices. Over time, this sense of collaboration and collective making has become increasingly central to Hassinger's work. By inviting audiences into the actual making of her work, she dismisses hierarchies and boundaries in order to bring art into contact with our everyday lives.

The exhibition includes newly recreated installations alongside archival photographs and videos documenting works that no longer exist. How did you negotiate the tension between historical documentation and encountering the work as alive in the present?

This exhibition includes several sections of archival material, showcasing photographs of Hassinger's performances, public projects, and work in her studio. This aspect of the show provides insight into Hassinger's long career and her ongoing interest in working in ways that remain adaptable and ephemeral. We were particularly excited to show a collection of black and white photographs by the artist Adam Avila. Avila and Hassinger were close friends and collaborators in Los Angeles during the 1970s, and many of his images capture a young Hassinger in her studio and document her early studio experiments—including works that have been recreated for this exhibition.

Hassinger's practice consistently transforms industrial and everyday materials into forms that evoke tenderness, movement, and the natural world. What does this material language communicate in today's political and environmental climate, and how does the exhibition invite audiences to reconsider these ordinary substances?

In much of Hassinger's work, there is a sense of transformation – often taking a familiar or industrial material and altering the way we see. Hassinger often works with simple, repetitive acts, like twisting or untwisting a cord. Whether it be steel or strips of newspaper, these sculptures gesture towards all the ways we are connected to the world around us. Informed by her time studying textiles, Hassinger's sculptures point to the ways that simple materials become stronger through these acts of joining. In this way, so much of Hassinger's work prompts us to consider the things we hold in common rather than what sets us apart, and to recognise the strength that is possible through working together.

Although Maren Hassinger has profoundly influenced generations of artists, this marks her largest retrospective to date. Why has such comprehensive institutional recognition arrived at this moment, and what conversations does it open within contemporary art history?

Hassinger has received significant attention throughout her career, but in the past decade or so, her work has entered many large museum collections and been included in several major group exhibitions. With this exhibition, our goal was to dive deeply into her practice, which is incredibly multifaceted. By bringing together works from throughout her career and in so many different media, 'Living Moving Growing' is not only a record of Hassinger's expansive practice but also a reconsideration of the ways that she has explored ideas of interconnection, material, and movement over the past fifty years.

Throughout 'Living Moving Growing', there is an insistence that art is not simply an object to be viewed but a shared experience shaped by movement, care, and human connection. What do you hope visitors carry with them after encountering the exhibition, inside the museum and beyond its walls?

I hope that Hassinger's work is an invitation for audiences to think deeply about the forms of interconnection that make up our lives, between materials, between environments, between people. By drawing our attention to how we relate to one another and our surroundings, Hassinger's works help us to form a better understanding of one another and the radical ways that we can come together.