



Art of Harlem: Maren Hassinger

I had the pleasure of interviewing Maren Hassinger, a 3D artist and sculptor living right here in Harlem.



She uses wire rope, newspaper, and other found materials like plastic bags to create sculptures depicting motion, in a literal sense and also in the fundamental movement necessary for life: the breath of life. Maren Hassinger is a Los Angeles native who has participated in 120 group shows and has been included in 34 catalogs along with public collections of AT&T and the Pittsburgh Airport. She has been the Director of the Rinehart School of Sculpture at Maryland Institute College of Art since 1997, an institute integral to the evolution of 3D art.

The nature of your work involves a cohesive theme throughout. What, in your eyes, is the most fundamental element of your work?

The theme is movement. I went to college as a dance major, the art of motion. Movement is often in my art. I discovered that in the Bible, there is a reference to wind and the garden. Wind in nature is biblically considered the breath of life, it indicates God's presence. In that sense [in regard to the pieces entitled *Love* 2008 and *Love Monument* 2010] I felt that I was connecting with some spiritual presence of the earth. With the bags, it's not so much that I am paying attention to natural forms, but I am inflating the bags with my breath. The wind is not a godlike wind but it is our wind.

What is it about natural form that inspires you the most?

Recently I read that we are all drawn to the African savannah - our first "safe" home. So, then it became clear why I made all those fields (*The Garden* 2004 and *Necklace of Trees* 1985-2008). My heritage is African and Native American - peoples who lived in nature and had reverential concepts about our common mother, etc. My use of nature was to draw attention to our change: changing concepts -changing lives. Our nature comes from industry. We imagine the past. And, genetically, we may remember it too.



So much of art has conceptual underpinnings that are hard to grasp. So, I make things that seem true to as many people as possible, and that's because I want to connect to as many people as possible; I feel connected to everybody. I really want my work to be in a context where all people can understand it. [Art] is the place where an individual can meditate on their particular relation to the world. We can look at art through the ages and see what was important at that time. Masterpieces are examples of captured moments which tell us how it was then. The past is perfectly communicated, perfectly shared.

Your work featured in "Material Girls" showcases your ability, along with the ability of the other artists, to make the ordinary into art. When you saw those pink plastic bags, or masses of New York Times newspapers, did you immediately see their potential, or was it something that you had to pull an artistic media "from the rubble" so to speak?

Idea and material finding and manipulating happen together then spin off in a kind of series over time. They're not separate. When I get my hands on the material, I already know what to do with it. I can already see what the material is going to be.