

Art in America

JERSEY CITY, N.J.

Maren Hassinger at TransHudson

It was the afternoon of the great January blizzard, and the snow had been falling for some time. Along the walkway to the gallery a row of rippled silver wires approximately a foot high emerged out of the fast-accumulating drifts. Upright even in the wind, each slim shaft, balletically poised, appeared at once delicate and resilient. This was Maren Hassinger's *Garden Path*, which introduced her exhibition's Edenic themes lightly, with a disarming simplicity and open-endedness.

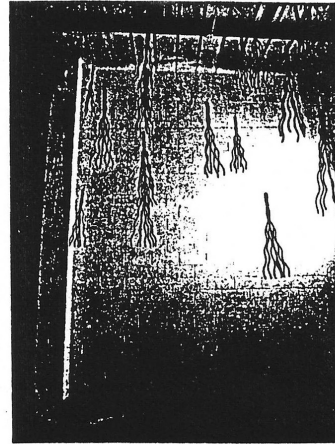
In this instance, the garden path led us to the gallery, where Hassinger's two-part installation *Treachery and Consolation* awaited. Much of the large room was dimmed; suspended overhead, from nearly invisible filaments, were repetitive shapes made out of ropelike strands of bundled wire that had been twisted together, raveled and frayed at the ends. These shapes suggested long-skirted women, poignant in their anonymity and effacement, or domestic implements like whisk brooms. Illuminated from below, this massing of shapes evocatively cast shadows high up onto the steel beams and adjacent walls. Despite the theatrical spotlighting, the mood was subdued. The silence seemed to contain a memory of lost voices, and the forms dangling overhead like dead husks or hanged bodies seemed like residues of hopes and desires.

The other half of the installation consisted of one large, brilliantly lighted wall that was filled by shining "glyphs"—silvery wire material, regularly arranged, in shapes that suggested twigs, branches, plants or trees. This

work recalled Hassinger's earlier series of elegant prints on the garden theme, now become tangible and much enlarged.

The outdoor path, then, led to a garden, a constellated image of paradise, as well as to a world of knowledge and experience, of betrayal and consolation. Among Hassinger's great strengths are her sense of theater and of the ensemble. Her reiteration of motifs throughout contributed to the incantatory, ceremonial quality of the installation. This was a haunting and bitter work, one of rare beauty and power, which more viewers should have had the opportunity to see.

—Lilly Wei



Maren Hassinger: Installation view of *Treachery and Consolation*, 1996; at TransHudson.