

HYPERALLERGIC



Installation view of Maren Hassinger, *Passing Through* (2019), Tiwani Contemporary, London (courtesy of Tiwani Contemporary)

LONDON — The title of Tiwani Contemporary’s exhibition *Maren Hassinger: Passing Through* is taken from a quote by the artist, which heads the show’s press release: “I don’t know where I come from and I don’t know where I’m going. This is the life I share with everyone. We are equal in this predicament. We are all passing through. From this untenable place, I make things.” In this exhibition, Hassinger presents a small selection of recent and older works, drawing on the notion that as we “pass through” life many more things make us equal than unequal.

Hassinger came of age as an artist amid the African American avant-garde scene in 1970s Los Angeles. Her cross-disciplinary practice brought together her studies in sculpture, dance, and fiber art. The power of her work comes from its suggestion that specificity and universality of identity and experience are not mutually exclusive concepts, but often exist side by side.



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She achieves this through works that incorporate multiplicity in both form and meaning. “Consolation” (1996) — reconfigured as a site-specific work for this show — is a wall-based sculpture in 100 parts. Each part is shaped from Hassinger’s signature material: wire rope, twisted into lines and splayed open at the top. The forms might be read as plants, seeds, hands, fraying electrical wires, or perhaps unraveling braids of hair — Hassinger doesn’t exclude any of these readings.

The 100 pieces that make up “Consolation” are all unique. Their hand-crafted quality evokes the physical act of twisting the wire. A similar twisting process is also employed in “Hand in

Souter, Anna. "Maren Hassinger Reminds Us That Equality Is For Everyone," *Hyperallergic*, 8 November 2019.

Hand" (2019), for which Hassinger enlisted the help of the Tiwani gallery team to transform onsite hundreds of copies of the *New York Times* into another mesmeric wall-based sculptural work. The title perhaps alludes to this shared process of making, as well as the shared experience of reading the paper.



Maren Hassinger, "Hand in Hand" (2019), shredded, twisted and wrapped *New York Times* International Edition newspapers, 160 cm x 63 in. (courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC and Tiwani Contemporary, London)

As one approaches "Hand in Hand," small excerpts of text become legible. Lives, deaths, advertisements, and other various narratives emerge in part, then retreat into the mass of paper; text becomes texture. Copies of the *New York Times* are also semi-legible in "Sit-Upons" (2010), where papers that might otherwise be thrown away are recycled into woven cushions. Placed in piles of 30 on the floor, the artist has then sat upon them, leaving a bodily imprint in the printed matter.



Maren Hassinger, "Sit-Upons" (2010), *New York Times* newspapers, 15 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 1/2 in. each (photo by Joshua White, Los Angeles, CA, courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC and Tiwani Contemporary, London)

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When I asked if I could sit upon one myself, I was told that I wouldn't usually be allowed, but since no one else had asked, I could. Lowering myself into the nearest one felt slightly awkward, but where I had expected the papers to feel solid, they gave under my weight and I sank into the pile. Surprisingly comfortable, it offered a different vantage point to view the other wall-based works, subtly suggesting a shift in perspective — something that is also essential for engaging with Hassinger's practice more broadly. Her meditative, craft-oriented work, with its emphasis on collaboration and multiplicity, suggests a radical change in viewpoint that was essential for navigating the post-minimalist art scene in the 1970s, and for exploring the expanded art canon that looks beyond white male creativity.

In particular, my position on the papers drew my attention to "Fight the Power" (2017), a large paper sculpture that occupies an unexpected space in the gallery, installed at the top of the wall and curving around a corner. As I sat close to the floor, I could feel my distance from the sculpture hanging high above me. In this work, Hassinger has daubed the phrase "fight the power" onto a huge ream of newsprint paper before gathering it into bunches and suspending it above the viewer's head. The work draws attention to the architecture of the space, emphasizing the significant role of the institutional or geographical context in constructing artistic meaning. It also again employs tropes of legibility, challenging how we read both sculpture and text.



Maren Hassinger, "On Dangerous Ground" (1981), wire rope, 15 x 60 x 12 in. (courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC and Tiwani Contemporary, London)

Maren Hassinger: Passing Through is the artist's first solo show outside the United States. It proves to be a wonderfully thoughtful and challengingly critical presentation by an artist whose lack of representation in the UK certainly does not reflect a lack of importance, but rather her marginalization as a Black American woman artist. Having experienced exclusion, Maren Hassinger reminds us that equality is for everyone.

Maren Hassinger: Passing Through continues at *Tiwani Contemporary* (16 Little Portland Street, London, UK) through November 15. The exhibition is curated by Eva Langret.