

Delson, Susan. "A Radical Sculptor's Need to Connect," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 2020.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Maren Hassinger's installation 'Nature, Sweet Nature' at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado.  
Photo : Simon Klein, Courtesy : Aspen Art Museum, Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

In the course of a nearly 50-year career, Maren Hassinger has made a practice of shaping everyday materials into eloquent abstract works. Her sculptures, installations, performances and videos respond urgently to the events of our time, bearing witness to the natural world and its accelerating loss as well as to the human desire for connection.

At the age of 73, Ms. Hassinger is busy. This summer, her work commands the roof-deck sculpture garden at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado. Two recent monumental pieces are on view at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum near Boston, and a commissioned work—a rippling river of newspaper, some 50 feet long—spans the upper reaches of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Sculptures that Ms. Hassinger made in the 1970s and 1980s have entered the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and other institutions.

Born in Los Angeles in 1947, Ms. Hassinger trained as a dancer before studying art at Bennington College and the University of California, Los Angeles. She soon became part of a groundbreaking Black avant-garde art scene in which women played a crucial part. "To understand the history of really radical American sculpture in the late 1960s and 1970s, you have to contend with the work done by Black women in Los Angeles," said Lauren Hinkson, associate curator at the Guggenheim Museum, who recently acquired a sculpture by Ms. Hassinger for the museum's collection. "Her work has an important place in the story of process art and conceptual art."

Minimalism was highly influential in the 1970s, and Ms. Hassinger took from it the idea of replication—conceiving works as accumulations of individual units. "Then I started to think about nature, and how nature functions," she explained. "A lawn, for example, is many blades of grass. That fed me as much as the aesthetic issues of the time." At the Aspen Art Museum, the sculpture "Paradise Regained" (2020) is a grid of shaped wire-rope pieces anchored in squares of concrete. "Leaning" (1980), the work now in MoMA's collection, consists of bundles of wire rope arranged on the floor. "These are hard, heavy, industrial materials," Ms. Hinkson said. "But when you see them from afar, they're delicate and light. They're moving, and they're anthropomorphic. There's an energy to them."

Delson, Susan. "A Radical Sculptor's Need to Connect," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 2020.



Ms. Hassinger's 'Our Lives' (2008/2018), made of shredded, twisted and wrapped newspapers.  
Photo : Adam Reich, NYC. Courtesy : Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

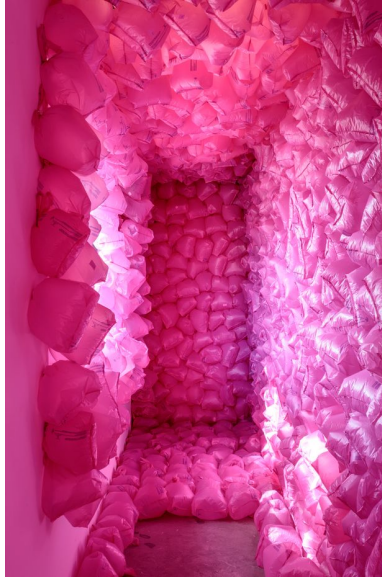
The energy comes through, too, in works made of more ephemeral materials. In works like "Hand in Hand" (2019) and "Our Lives" (2008/2018), newspaper twists are bound into circular forms that can be 5 feet or more in diameter. Up close, their dense, varied textures yield a shared history pieced together from fragments of random headlines, images and lines of text. "That power of the twist of the wire rope—I'm carrying it over," Ms. Hassinger said. "When I twist newspaper, it's like I'm twisting all of us in it—like I'm saying, 'Oh, we're all a part of this.'"

In a virtual visit to her studio, Ms. Hassinger pointed out a work high over a doorway, part of the installation "Fight the Power" (2017). "My assistant at the time and I wrote 'fight the power' on newsprint, then twisted the newsprint and bound it together with zip ties," she explained. "I made many units this size that wrapped around the room at this height." The positioning was crucial. When you think about fighting the powers that be, she explained, "it's important to me that you look up."

For Ms. Hassinger, collaboration is often intrinsic to a work and its concept. In 2018, the Studio Museum in Harlem commissioned her to create a yearlong public art project in nearby Marcus Garvey Park. Ms. Hassinger, who lives in Harlem, worked with volunteers from the neighborhood to create monumental sculptures from branches and other materials gathered in the park. "It was important to Maren that the works were made from the park, of the park, but with the people," said Thelma Golden, director and chief curator of the Studio Museum.

Community involvement was also a driving force behind "Tree of Knowledge" (2019), a gallery-sized installation of ceiling-hung newspaper twists presented at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. Made by local residents and museum visitors, the flowing twists were inspired by the roots of the banyan tree at the heart of Pearl City, a historic Black neighborhood near the museum.

Delson, Susan. "A Radical Sculptor's Need to Connect," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 2020.



Ms. Hassinger's installation 'Love' (2018).

Photo : Joshua White, Los Angeles. Courtesy : Art & Practice, LA, Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

In many instances, Ms. Hassinger's art conveys a subtly feminist sensibility and sense of humor. A series of site-specific installations, all titled "Love," are composed of dozens of fluorescent-pink plastic shopping bags inflated with human breath and tied off. Each bag contains a note with the word "love" written on it. The effect is womblike and affirming. "It sounds syrupy," Ms. Hassinger said with a small laugh, "but what do humans really have to offer each other but love and compassion?"

A related belief animates Ms. Hassinger's thinking as she prepares for a gallery show next year. "We're all human beings, we're all equal in that," she said. "That is what I see as the main issue now." The show, titled "We Are All Vessels," will include work produced under Ms. Hassinger's direction by younger artists, including former students from the Maryland Institute College of Art, where she headed the school of sculpture for 20 years. "It's about collaboration," Ms. Hassinger reiterated. At this point in her creative life, she said, "I feel egalitarian about everything."