



In 1981 Maren Hassinger was invited by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to make work for a solo exhibition in Gallery Six, a small windowless space tucked away on the third floor. Hassinger approached the opportunity with some skepticism at this early stage in her career, finding the Museum context problematic as an artist whose practice championed the ephemeral in order to challenge societal values.

Her response to the invitation was a modular installation titled *On Dangerous Ground*. Modular, understood as a single motif repeated to fill space but also temporary. Bristling sheaves of wire ropes were tightly clustered in the gallery space and scattered along the wall, creating a palpable tension. In the original museum text, Katherine Hart recounts that “while appearing ‘natural,’ on a closer inspection- (the elements) exist in a separate plane, still shadows of a living form.” Nested in a long narrow hallway with hauntingly high ceilings, the installation evoked an eerie sense of the decline of order and balance in nature.

*I wanted the character of whatever I placed in the room to intimidate, to infringe, to threaten. I began to think of a nature gone mad. It seemed that spiky, briar-like vegetation might be the answer. The setting had to appear dense, dark, eerie, shadowy. There had to be a sense of things seen, unseen, half-seen. I decided on frenetic bushes as a device to develop this theme.*

- Maren Hassinger

Growing up in Los Angeles during a period of rapid development, Hassinger felt as though the “contemporary urban reality” lacked a centeredness, stating “There’s a lot of diversity but no divinity. An absence of freedom—only a kind of madness and anger.” Throughout Hassinger’s career she has referenced nature as a means to unite the collective and inspire equality. The artist’s use of wire rope began when she unearthed the material in a junkyard on Alameda Street during her student days in the Seventies. Turned away from the MFA program for Sculpture, she was encouraged to join the nascent Fiber Arts program, inspiring the artist to manipulate wire rope to bridge the gap between her practice in sculpture and fiber art. Reminiscent of dry grass, or ripples on the surface of a pond, Hassinger used the material to mimic nature, a place where she found peace. Ultimately it served to distinguish her from other environmental artists by using industrial materials to create natural forms.

The LACMA installation, *On Dangerous Ground*, marked the first solo presentation of a Black artist at the museum. As much of Hassinger’s work to date had been temporary, freeing her from the constraints of the art market so that she might effectively challenge social values, placing the work in an institutional context was fraught. The title of the work conveys at once

the threatening physicality of the work as well as the artist's own relationship to the museum setting as a conceptual artist, woman, and artist of color.

For Frieze Masters, the Gallery revisits and recreates elements of the installation, reexamining what it means to be *On Dangerous Ground*.

MAREN HASSINGER (b. 1947) has built an interdisciplinary practice that articulates the relationship between nature and humanity. Carefully choosing materials for their innate characteristics, Hassinger has explored the subjects of movement, family, love, nature, environment, consumerism, identity, and race. The artist uses her materials to mimic nature, whether bundling them to resemble a monolithic sheaf of wheat or planting in cement to create an industrial garden. Within the past five years, the artist has executed commissions for Dia Bridgehampton, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Hirshhorn Museum, and the Aspen Art Museum. Hassinger will be honored with an upcoming two-person survey alongside Senga Nengudi at IVAM, Valencia as well as an exhibition focused on their work in performance at the Cooley Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon. She is the recipient of the Women's Caucus for the Arts Lifetime Achievement Award. Her work can be found at the Art Institute of Chicago; the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, NYC; the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum, NYC; among others.