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Maren Hassinger returns to Socrates Sculpture Park over 30 years later with Steel Bodies

Looking back to look forward


The new, site-responsive work examines the complications of human interrelation and affinity, identity, and collectiveness, through abstraction in the outdoors. The public is invited to walk among the steel vessels, up to eleven feet high, experiencing new perspectives through their linear frames. The pieces evoke literally and figuratively, containers and forms of different shapes and sizes, but all share the same internal air. The proximity of Hassinger’s sculptures to one another, choreographed throughout the Park’s five-acre landscape, encourages visitors to move through the exhibition taking note of their bodies in public and shared space.

“Vessels are what we all are - and it’s within our capacity to recognize each other as companions,” said Maren Hassinger about her work for Socrates. “Whoever we are, wherever we’re from, we are companions - capable of compassion for one another.”
Hassinger has built an expansive practice that articulates the relationship between nature and humanity. Carefully choosing materials for their innate characteristics, she has explored the subject of movement, family, love, nature, environment, consumerism, identity, and race. Wire rope has played a prominent role in Hassinger’s artistic practice since the early 1970’s when, as a sculptor placed in the Fiber Arts program at UCLA, Hassinger used the material to bridge the gap between the two disciplines. The artist often takes a biomimetic approach to her material, whether bundling it to resemble a monolithic sheaf of wheat or planting it in cement to create an industrial garden. The use of steel silhouettes for the Park’s exhibition is no different.

“The archival images of Hassinger’s Three Bushes presented in a very different looking Socrates in 1988-89, inspired me to invite her back to consider the continuity of her public art practice, while pursuing a powerful new series of works,” explained Jess Wilcox, Curator and Director of Exhibitions of Socrates Sculpture Park. “The Steel Bodies series further expands on her ideas of individuality, affinity, identity, and collectiveness through striking and elegant choreography of forms. While the landscape environment of Socrates is greener and more robust now than in the 80’s, the global environment today is more precarious. The porousness of these substantial vessels, evocative of bodies, blurs the figure/ground distinction and emphasizes our interrelation with each other and the environment.”

“It was a pleasure to work with Maren on realizing her vision for the Steel Bodies show,” said Chris Zirbes, Director of Studio and Fabrication of Socrates Sculpture Park. “We appreciate Maren’s openness to discussions about process and form, and even being asked to provide a statement speaks volumes about the spirit of collaboration that she brings to her work!” The Socrates Sculpture Park steel bodies fabrication team included Stephen Callender and Sam Fisch, and studio team with Mark Bartec, Rick Holmes, and Chase Winkler. The Maren Hassinger Studio team for Steel Bodies includes Julia Eshaghpour, Josh Leff, and Cole Palatini.

As a complement to the new Steel Bodies, in June, Socrates will present Hassinger’s most recent duo of steel bushes, one of her most iconic series. Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation in 2021, the new bushes reflect back on similarly made bush sculptures that she presented at Long Island University in 1991. At Dia Bridgehampton, they were accompanied by an indoor installation of scrims printed with an archival image of a singular bush, hanging in a grid layout. Relocated here at Socrates, they echo back to Hassinger’s 1988 presentation of Three Bushes, also featuring her signature un-braided steel rope. Archival images show the trio of wild, looming shrub-forms rendered out of industrial steel cable, again bringing attention to urban ecosystems, the fragility of site and how bodies move through space.

“It is quite the honor to have Maren return to us after more than three decades following her first exhibition at the Park,” echoed Tamsin Dillon, Executive Director of Socrates Sculpture Park. “I have been a fan of Maren’s work for many years and am excited to see the well-deserved attention she has garnered. Her consideration for material, form and concept has created a steadfast career with much to discover. She is an innovative artist whose work asks us to consider how we engage with and access our natural environment. I hope the public will enjoy Maren’s invitation to reconstitute themselves in relation to her sculptures. It will challenge their notions of interiority and exteriority. I am very excited about this season, my first as Executive Director, and the opportunities Socrates continues to offer our community to interact with these artists and their ideas expressed through public art.”

Maren Hassinger Steel Bodies is on view Thursday, June 9, 2022 – March 2023. A public opening reception for the exhibition will be held on Thursday, June 9, from 5-8 pm, with live music courtesy of the Jazz Foundation of America and bites by Gladys Bienvenida Restaurante. Socrates Sculpture Park is open 365 days a year, from 9am to sunset. Admission is free.

For full details visit www.socratessculpturepark.com/steel-bodies
ABOUT THE ARTIST
Maren Hassinger (b.1947) has built an expansive practice that articulates the relationship between nature and humanity. Carefully choosing materials for their innate characteristics, Hassinger has explored the subject of movement, family, love, nature, environment, consumerism, identity, and race. Wire rope has played a prominent role in Maren Hassinger’s artistic practice since the early 1970s when, as a sculptor placed in the Fiber Arts program at UCLA, Hassinger used the material to bridge the gap between the two disciplines. The artist often takes a biomimetic approach to her material, whether bundling it to resemble a monolithic sheaf of wheat or planting it in cement to create an industrial garden. Maren Hassinger is the recipient of numerous honors, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women’s Caucus for the Arts. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Baltimore Museum of Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, NYC; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, among others.

Artist biography and images available for download here.

SUPPORT
Major support for Steel Bodies comes from the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation with special thanks to Susan Inglett Gallery.


Socrates programs are also supported by public funds from the Queens Borough President Donovan Richards; the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the New York City Council and Julie Won; the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature; and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT SOCRATES
For over 35 years, Socrates Sculpture Park has been a model of public art production, community activism, and socially inspired place-making. Over 1,000 artists have created and exhibited new works on its five waterfront acres and outdoor studio facilities. Socrates is free and open to the public 365 days a year from 9am to sunset. It is located at 32-01 Vernon Boulevard (at Broadway) in Long Island City, New York. Socrates Sculpture Park is a not-for-profit organization licensed by NYC Parks to manage and program Socrates Sculpture Park, a New York City public park. Covid-19 Updates: Socrates remains open to the public at regular hours, 9am – sunset, with free admission. Park policies and updates regarding health and safety can be found at socratessculpturepark.org/Covid19.

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