

CRITICS' PICKS

Beijing

- Jennifer Wen Ma
- Yang Fudong
- Hiroshi Sugimoto

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Jennifer Wen Ma

ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART | 尤伦斯当代艺术中心
798 Art Zone, No. 4 Jiuxianqiao Road, Chaoyang Di | 朝阳区酒仙桥路4号798艺术区内
April 15–May 27

Jennifer Wen Ma's *Hanging Garden in Ink*, 2012, a site-specific commission, offers her latest experiment with the organic properties of *mo*, or ink. Inspired by the mythical hanging gardens of Babylon—King Nebuchadnezzar II's offering to his wife who was homesick for trees and mountains—the work is a towering structure of ink-dipped foliage. The plants will continue to grow over the course of their installation in the long, narrow hall, with fresh green shoots sprouting beneath thick layers of black.

Ma began working with *mo* several years ago and has now inked all manner of flora: At a solo exhibition in Taipei's Eslite Gallery last year, Ma covered orchid and chrysanthemum plants, bamboo, and plum and cypress trees with gallons of the stuff. *Who Would Have Expected to Encounter Ni Zan's Gentlemen in S-Chanf?*, 2011, at the 2011 ShContemporary art fair re-created a traditional Chinese ink landscape as an installation, blackened snow pines and soil placed in front of a white sheet of canvas. *Germinating Thoughts*, 2011, presents the words AMOR FATI on a lawn with ink and grass seedlings.

Employed in classic Chinese painting as a tool for crafting two-dimensional likenesses of natural subjects, ink is here conceptually repurposed. Ma asks how the densities of *mo* can manipulate its physical subjects: Does ink obscure or does it illuminate? Is black the color of vitality or of death? Ma's obfuscations demonstrate that compositions have the capacity for growth, and that darkness can give form to life.



Jennifer Wen Ma, *Hanging Garden in Ink*, 2012, ink, plants, dimensions variable.

— Angie Baecker