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# Maya Lin Captures the Hudson's Beauty and Power

By Abby Ellin

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When Miwako Tezuka was invited to guest curate an exhibition at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, N.Y., two thoughts sprang into her mind.

One: She wanted to do something “impactful” about nature, climate change and the environment, “with a really strong educational aspect to it.”

And two: It had to involve the artist and architect Maya Lin.



Maya Lin inspecting parts of her piece “The Hudson Bight” before it’s installed at the Hudson River Museum. Dana Scruggs for The New York Times

“Maya is a continuation of great American artists who appreciate the beauty and power of nature,” said Ms. Tezuka, 48, who specializes in modern and contemporary Asian art. “What better place to do that show than the Hudson River Museum?”

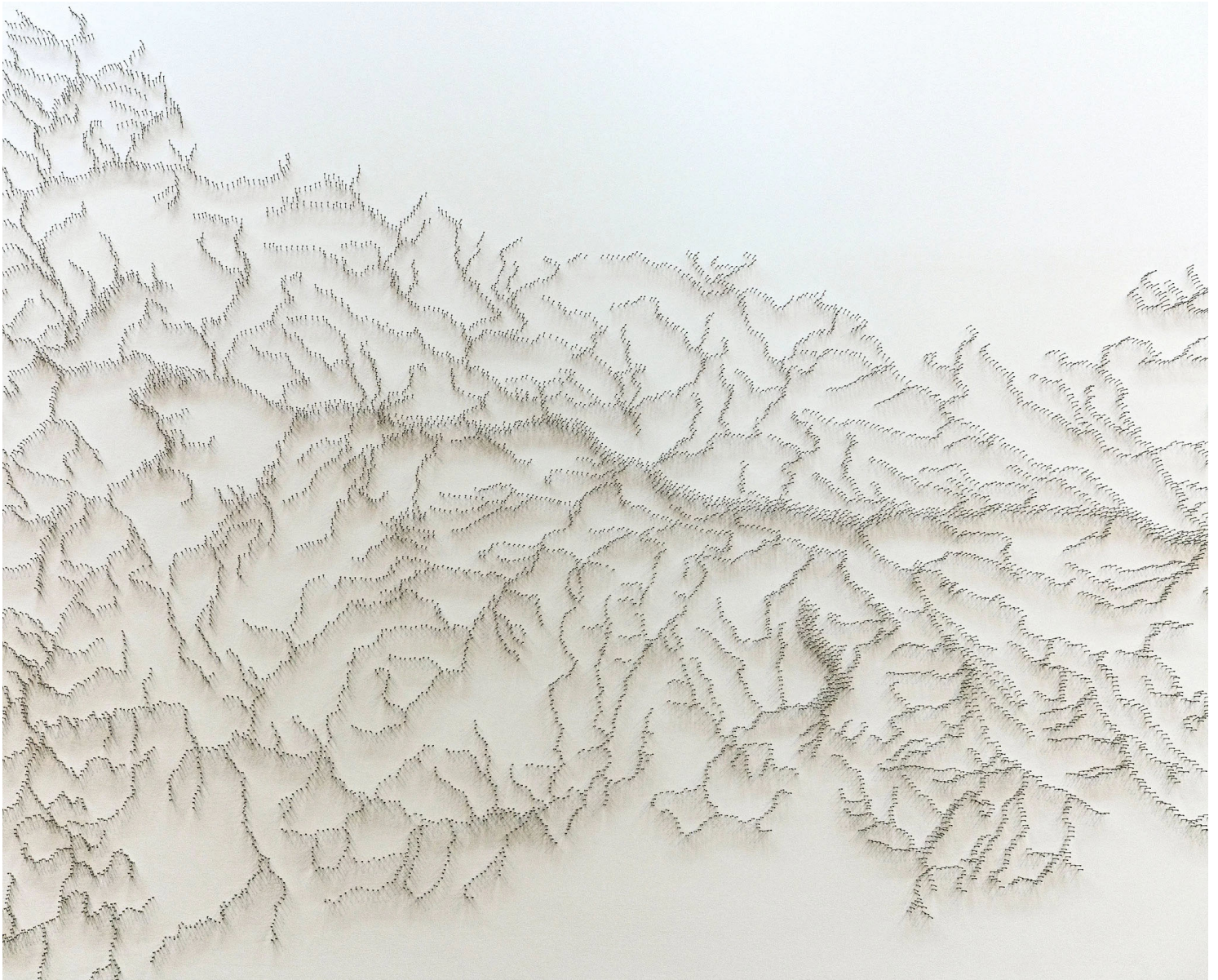
There was just one problem: Ms. Tezuka didn't know Ms. Lin personally. But she wrote up a proposal anyway, and through mutual art world associates approached Ms. Lin last summer. “I said, maybe if she can do one site-specific installation related to the river and we can select existing works to accompany that,” Ms. Tezuka recalled.

But Ms. Lin, a staunch environmentalist who is obsessed with the effects of climate change and the geology and topography of rivers, wanted to contribute more than one work. In fact, she wanted to do an entire show that focused on “the Hudson River and the waterways around us.”

“I took one look at the atrium, and knew I wanted to treat the museum as my site,” she said, referring to the 28-foot ceiling in the middle of the museum. “I'm very interested in making a much more environmental installation around you.”

The result is “Maya Lin: A River Is a Drawing,” which opened at the museum on Oct. 12 and runs through Jan. 20.

On a recent afternoon amid a torrential downpour, Ms. Lin, 59, slight in a pair of slacks and clogs, warmly showed a visitor around the museum. Sheets of paper and scraps of metal were strewn about.



Ms. Lin's "Pin River — Hudson Watershed," at the Hudson River Museum. Dana Scruggs for The New York Times

The exhibition presents 12 works in a range of media, some of which were still being assembled. "Pin River — Hudson Watershed" 2018, is composed of more than 20,000 pins. "Reed River" 2018, in the museum's courtyard, includes over 200 bamboo reeds and Kentucky bluegrass. In "Concrete River" 2018, Ms. Lin filled in existing cracks, holes and bumps on asphalt outside the museum with painted silver lines. And in "Folding the Hudson" 2018, she spread nearly 22,000 recycled industrial glass marbles in the shape of the Hudson River basin throughout the museum's floor, walls and ceiling.

"This isn't a perfect marble, they weren't made that way," said Ms. Lin, plucking a pale blue ball off the floor. "These are directly made to be melted and turned into glass bottles, glass artworks."



Ms. Lin's "The Hudson Bight," 2018. Kris Graves

"The Hudson Bight" 2018, is an augmented seafloor map of the Hudson Canyon, a submarine canyon that was created by the glacial change at the end of the last ice age. The piece tumbles through the museum's atrium on a diagonal, a 30-foot installation with contours drawn with webbing wires.

Part of her inspiration for that piece, Ms. Lin said, came from an article she read about the canyon, which reaches over 10,000 feet at its deepest. “Scientists discovered that because it’s colder in the deepest part and because of the tidal flow, water is flowing in that river,” Ms. Lin said. “So in a lot of ways it’s an underground river. I’m trying to get you to see things that are quite literally under your feet but you had no idea were there.”

Ms. Lin is not new to the Hudson River Valley. In 2004, she designed the Greyston Bakery along the Yonkers waterfront on the Hudson River. In 2009, she created a permanent site-specific work, “Storm King Wavefield,” at Storm King Art Center in the lower Hudson Valley. And in 2014, Ms. Lin and her husband, the art collector Daniel Wolf, purchased a Yonkers City Jail and converted it into a private art space.



Ms. Lin’s “Wavefield” at Storm King Art Center in New Windsor, N.Y. Librado Romero/The New York Times

Like all of her work, the river exhibition — which also includes two-dimensional drawings in paper, and encaustic relief sculptures based on the Laurentide Ice Sheet, an enormous sheet of ice that covered most of Canada and a large portion of the northern United States — is deeply political.

“Always,” she said with a laugh.

The planet is in pretty dire straits. “The point of no return is 2020. It’s here,” she said. “Whether it’s Hurricane Sandy or the last hurricane or the fact that the number of droughts has grown. We’re in it.”

About a decade ago, Ms. Lin set up a not for profit foundation called What Is Missing, a “global memorial to the planet” which raises awareness on climate change. The project makes an appearance at the museum in “Map of Memory: Hudson River Timeline,” a moving timeline of images and text narrating habitat changes and population fluctuations of various species in and around the Hudson River, throughout the history up to today.



Ms. Lin in front of her installation “Pin River — Hudson Watershed” at the Hudson River Museum. Dana Scruggs for The New York Times

With that display, computer kiosks connected to the What Is Missing? website allow visitors to share stories of what they’ve seen disappear or be restored in the natural environment. “We like to ask people to give us a memory of a story, something they personally witnessed disappear or come back,” she said.

To complement the overall exhibition, the museum is offering a host of programs, including an artist lecture with Ms. Lin, a gallery tour with Ms. Tezuka, a partnership with Riverkeeper, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of the Hudson River and its tributaries, and a film series that presents different perspectives on the challenges posed by climate change presented in partnership with Alamo Drafthouse Cinema-Yonkers.

Ms. Lin knows she is walking a fine line between activism and art, and she doesn't like to beat her audiences over the head with bleak statistics and information.

“All my works are incredibly subtle, they try to stay a little quiet and a little unemotional, because if I add that layer of ‘it's the end of the world’ I feel like I've almost lost you,” she said. “It's about this intersection where I'm really embedding myself in scientific knowledge and I want people to know about it, but I'm also hyper aware that I do need to transcend and not just do something that lives in a science museum.”

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