

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT**

Lizz Biswell, Halsey Institute

[BiswellL@cofc.edu](mailto:BiswellL@cofc.edu)

843.953.5659 [w]

843.412.0576 [c]

High-res images available [here](#).

**THE HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS**  
**AN EXHIBITION BY JENNIFER WEN MA,**  
***CRY JOY PARK—GARDENS OF DARK AND LIGHT***

On view: May 17 – July 6, 2019

**CHARLESTON, SC** – The [Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art](#) at the College of Charleston presents the exhibition [Cry Joy Park—Gardens of Dark and Light](#) by Jennifer Wen Ma. The exhibition is on view from May 17 to July 6, 2019 at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art. *Cry Joy Park—Gardens of Dark and Light* is an official visual arts offering of the City of Charleston’s Piccolo Spoleto Festival 2019. The Halsey Institute’s gallery hours are Monday – Saturday, 11:00AM to 4:00PM, and 11:00AM to 7:00PM on Thursdays, closed on Sundays after Piccolo Spoleto. The Halsey Institute galleries will be open on Sundays during Piccolo Spoleto, May 19, May 26, June 2, and June 9. The Halsey Institute is open to the public and admission is free.

**ABOUT THE EXHIBITION**

*Cry Joy Park—Gardens of Dark and Light* investigates the history and social landscape of Charleston, a cultural capital of the American South, and an exemplar of its complex opulence and beauty. The exhibition creates an immersive, multi-sensory experience that explores the juxtaposition of utopia and dystopia. *Cry Joy Park* is part of a larger body of work that deals with the difficulty of reconciling opposing forces in our society. It follows the explorations that began with *Paradise Interrupted*, an installation opera conceived, designed, and directed by Ma, which made its world premiere at Spoleto Festival 2015, performed at Lincoln Center Festival, New York and continues to travel worldwide.

Walking into the Halsey gallery, one steps into the enveloping tangles of an oversized black garden, employing Ma’s signature visual language of honeycomb paper structures and cultivated chaos. Crawling vines and branches heavy with giant leaves and fruits are complimented by motion-sensored portions of the garden that introvertedly retreat when approached by the visitor. At the far end of the garden, one must push through a flower portal reminiscent of a botanical birth canal, emerging from darkness into the garden of light. Dark impenetrability gives way to shocking brightness, and comforting ambiguity is replaced with glaring clarity. Mirroring the responsive intelligence of the dark garden, portions of this cut-paper foliage move to greet visitors in extraverted display.

Two landscape paintings of ink-on-glass stand as walls to separate the gardens. The pictorial planes further the illusory landscape created by the gardens, while the paintings’ mirrored finish reflect the built environment, and places the viewer’s reflection within this constructed paradise.

Crafted by the same means yet yielding contrasting tones and qualities, the gardens of dark and light illuminate the opposing forces that exist within a whole, and the inseparable union between utopian ideals and dystopic reality. Human societies often systematically exclude some of their members from sharing in the full benefits of the paradises they build. This is evident in the racial history and dynamics of Charleston, whose accomplishments were achieved largely by an enslaved workforce that was barred from full citizenship rights.

A vital component of this exhibition is a series of community dinners celebrating some of those who have contributed to the making of the paradise that is Charleston but might not have been invited to the harvest table in times past. Taking place in the galleries, these culinary feasts are created by local chefs and will feature performances and guided conversations on specific environmental justice\* themes related to the exhibition such as spirituality, food security, land politics, re-entry into society following incarceration, and education. Key members of the Charleston community are invited to recognize their contributions in elevating the disfranchised and engaging in dialogues that can be translated into action.

The contrasting gardens of light and dark will also be a visual platform for interdisciplinary performances taking place during the exhibition period and providing ephemeral encounters to the audience in unexpected ways. These performances take the form of dancing, singing, drumming, storytelling, poetry and other kinds of theatrical exchange. The Halsey Institute is collaborating with the faculty and students of College of Charleston, as well as with a variety of community groups and artists.

*Cry Joy Park—Gardens of Dark and Light* is co-curated by Mark Sloan, Director and Chief Curator, and Bryan Granger, Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs at the Halsey Institute. This interdisciplinary exhibition is produced by Jennifer Wen Ma with the help of her studio staff and students from the College of Charleston. This exhibition is generously supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Henry and Sylvia Yaschik Foundation, and The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.

\*Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

#### **ABOUT THE ARTIST, JENNIFER WEN MA**

Jennifer Wen Ma (b. 1973, Beijing) moved to the United States in 1986 and graduated with an MFA in 1999 from Pratt Institute. Her practice draws together elements and cultural references in sensitive and unexpected ways, bridging such diverse media as installation, drawing, video, public art, design, performance, and theater. Ma was one of seven members of the core creative team for the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and received an Emmy for the US broadcast. Since then, she has increasingly delved into the material and philosophical qualities of the Chinese ink tradition.

Ma's work has been shown around the world, including the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; National Art Museum of China, Beijing; the Guggenheim Museum, New York and Bilbao; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Her installation opera *Paradise Interrupted* was performed at Spoleto Festival USA in 2015, New York's Lincoln Center Festival and Singapore International Festival of Art in 2016, National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts and Taipei National Theatre and Concert Hall in 2018, as it continues with an Asian tour. Jennifer Wen Ma's website is [www.littlemeat.net](http://www.littlemeat.net).

## EVENTS DURING CRY JOY PARK

All events take place at the Halsey Institute's galleries and are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. More information about these events can be found on the Halsey Institute's [Events page](#).

### Opening Reception – Halsey Institute

Thursday, May 16, 6:30PM – 8:00PM

### Artist Talk

Saturday, May 18, 2:00PM

### Halsey Talks: Utopias

Tuesday, June 11, 6:30PM

### Family Day! for *Cry Joy Park*

Saturday, June 15, 11:00AM – 4:00PM

Free admission for Halsey Institute members

### Curator-led tour for members

Thursday, June 27, 6:00PM

Free admission for Halsey Institute members

There are free guided tours of the exhibition at the Halsey Institute galleries every Saturday during exhibitions at 2:00PM unless superseded by a public program.

## ABOUT THE HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

Location: The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts, College of Charleston

161 Calhoun Street, 1st Floor (corner of St. Philip & Calhoun Streets), Charleston, SC 29401

Parking: Available at metered spaces on surrounding streets and in the St. Philip and George Street Garages

Gallery hours: Monday – Saturday, 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM, open until 7:00 PM on Thursdays during exhibitions, or by appointment. Closed on Sundays. FREE ADMISSION and OPEN to the public.

Tours: Free guided group tours are offered through the Halsey Institute's Looking to See program.

Email [HalseyTours@cofc.edu](mailto:HalseyTours@cofc.edu) for inquiries. Free, staff-led guided tours are available at 2:00PM every Saturday during exhibitions unless superseded by a program.

For more information, call 843.953.4422, visit [halsey.cofc.edu](http://halsey.cofc.edu), or e-mail [halsey@cofc.edu](mailto:halsey@cofc.edu)

Social media accounts: [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

###