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<https://artscopemagazine.com/2021/05/a-gold-medal-installation-olympic-artist-jennifer-wen-mas-new-britain-showcase/>

PIVOT AT SSAC

NESVET ON NFTS

NEWBURY STREET  
REOPENS

KEENE'S NEW LEAF  
GALLERY

FUTURE VIEWS AT  
NEWPORT & HERA

JENNIFER WEN MA'S  
INWARD SEA AT  
NEW BRITAIN

YOUNGSHEEN A. JHE  
LORI MEHTA  
JO ANN ROTHSCHILD  
MICHAEL C. THORPE  
ALISON WELLS

## TIMELESS ILLUMINATIONS

SCOTT PRIOR'S NEW ENGLAND  
AT THE CAHOON



TOP: *An Inward Sea (detail)*, drawing for installation at New Britain Museum of American Art.

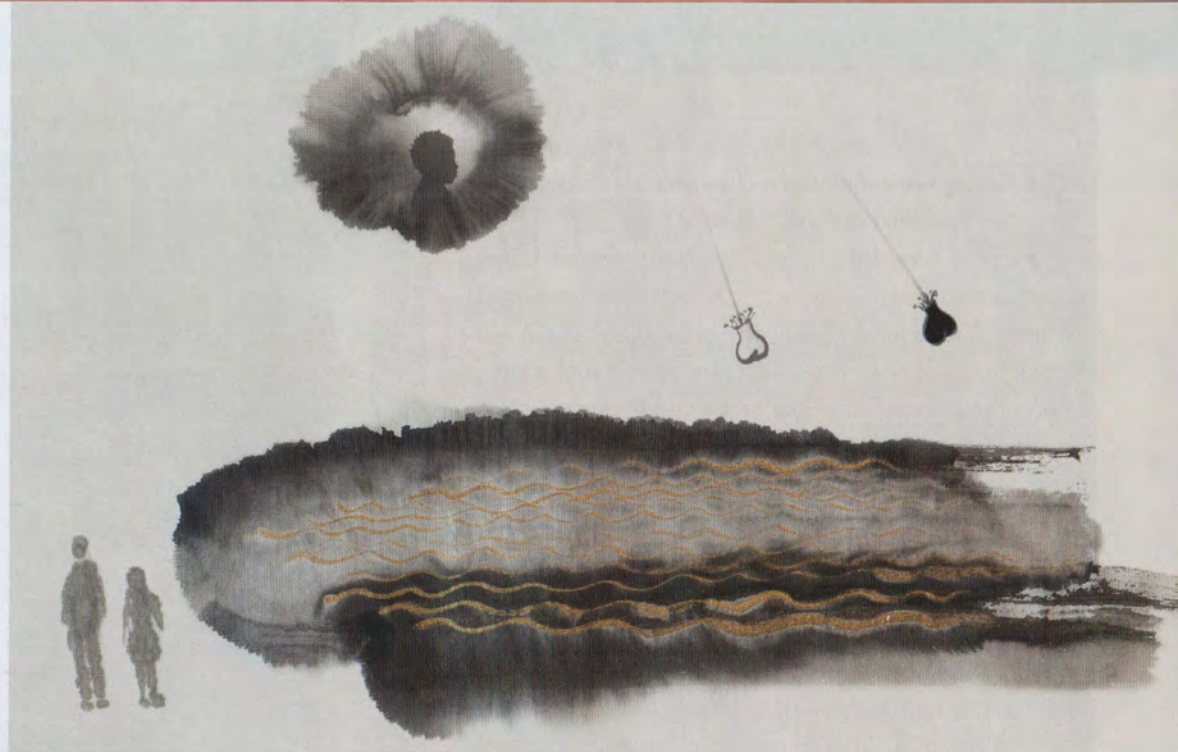
BOTTOM: Jennifer Wen Ma; photography by Joe Goldman.

She combined three distinct elements to the installation puzzle to give “An Inward Sea” its sensibility as a completed project. One of those components is aural and meant to reach into New Britain and its surrounding communities to create a shaped sound dimension connecting with socio/political dynamics of varied texture to reflect the past year.

Describing the evolution of “An Inward Sea,” Ma noted, “The original idea I proposed changed quite a bit. I had a piece that was more dynamic – even volatile – because there was a lot of political strife during the Trump years, [it was] more a reflection of the time, then. The pandemic happened and I knew we would push the show back. I knew also, quite immediately, that I wanted to make a dramatically different work because our world drastically changed. It took time to figure out what elements to leave...what elements to add. The piece is now in three parts and with the black waves, we have a landscape, and the pendulum forms show the swing of uncertain time.”

I asked how big the pendulums were. “The glass sculptures themselves about 25 inches or 30 inches, bigger than a human chest, let’s say,” Ma said.

“At what height will these swing?” I asked. She responded that the pendulums would swing at a height of about 5 feet to 6 feet, timed to avoid each other as they swung just above



the height of the waves. She said, “they’ll swing at the chest level of the person looking at the installation, just over the sea.”

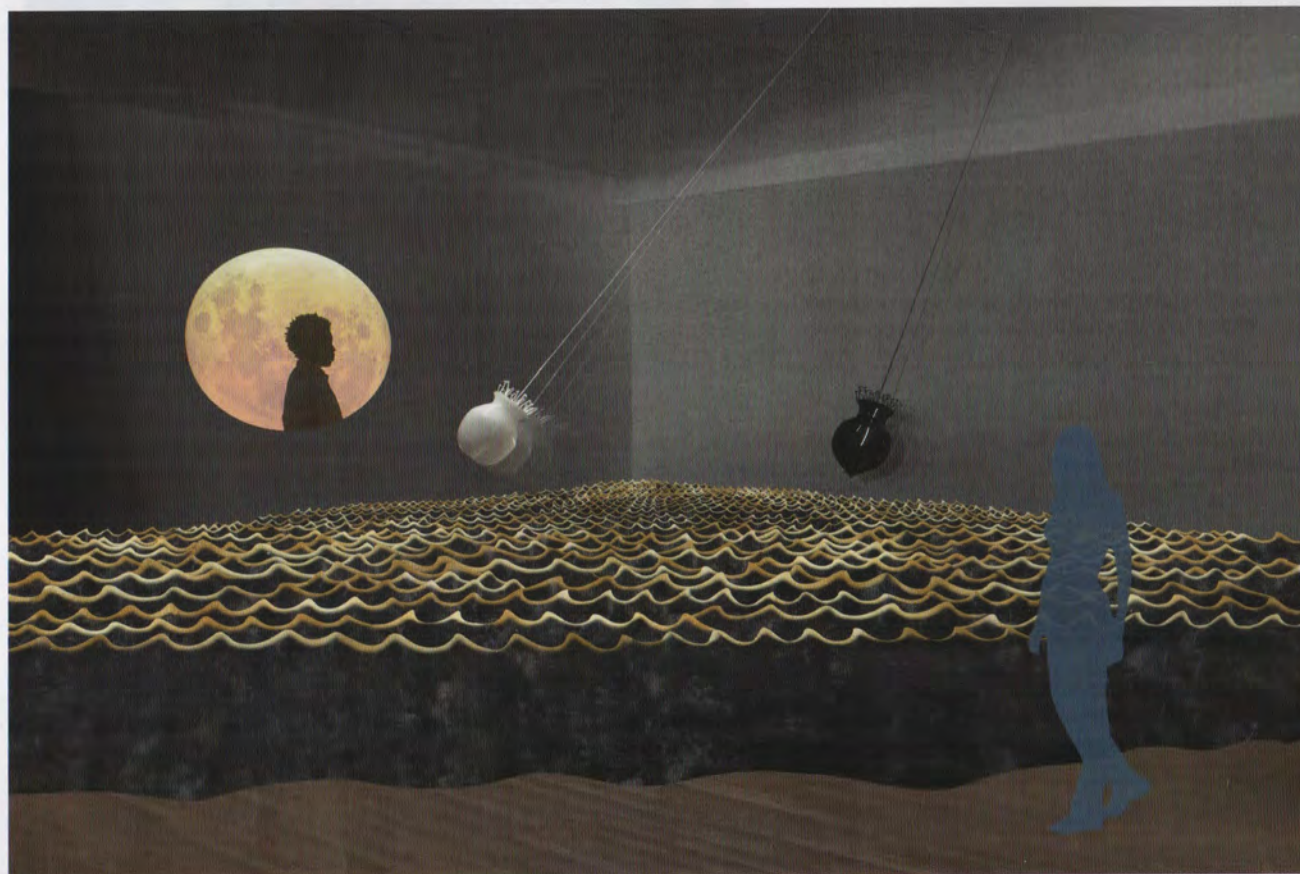
The next layer of the installation will feature a moon projected onto a wall featuring silhouettes of people from New Britain and surrounding communities speaking about their experiences, talking about their lives during the pandemic, past experiences or other things. The artist said, “I knew I wanted to create





# A GOLD MEDAL INSTALLATION

## OLYMPIC ARTIST JENNIFER WEN MA'S NEW BRITAIN SHOWCASE



### FEATURED ARTIST

JENNIFER WEN MA: AN  
INWARD SEA

NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF  
AMERICAN ART

56 LEXINGTON STREET

NEW BRITAIN,  
CONNECTICUT

MAY 13 THROUGH  
OCTOBER 24

*An Inward Sea*, drawing for  
installation at New Britain  
Museum of American Art.

Jennifer Wen Ma's massive "An Inward Sea" installation, which opens on May 13, is part of the New Britain Museum of American Art's 2020/20+WOMEN initiative celebrating female-identifying artists throughout American history and its NEW/NOW series spotlighting emerging and established contemporary artists.

I recently discussed "An Inward Sea" with Ma prior to its completion. We spoke about content, the artist's career in overview, and how the pandemic impacted her life and creative practice. Our conversation also touched on the unexpected delay of custom-made elements from China, "bound for the New Britain show," that were delayed due to blockage of the Suez Canal by a huge container ship, *Ever Given*, cutting things close for the show's timely installation.

Ma's career emerged when she became the youngest among seven artists chosen to create the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, a spectacle that wowed the world. Since 2015, performances of "Paradise Interrupted," an installation opera she wrote and created with composer Huang Ruo, have consistently garnered critical acclaim. A version of Ma's emotionally complex installation "Cry Joy Park" was just installed in Lille, France – a country

still in lockdown, at the time of writing – at Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse to hopefully comfort and inspire people emerging from pandemic isolation.

The past year's delayed projects and curtailed travel plans gave her the opportunity to pause and finally spend an extended period of time in New York, which she found recharging in a positive way. Her installations in Lille and New Britain are the first exhibitions in her schedule since the pandemic began.

Her exhibition at the New Britain Museum of American Art occupies 2000 square feet; it's a big space, but intimate compared to projects she has made previously. Audiences visiting the museum will encounter a combination of signature visual elements in the artist's repertoire – most noticeably laser-cut paper waves adapting a technology and material she favors, flash spun nonwoven HDPE, that is laid flat for transport then expanded honeycomb-style to easily fill exhibition spaces. In this case, the waves have uniquely been tipped with gold to create the appearance of reflection on water under the museum lights.



a concentrated space for the pieces to come together, including the element of oral history and past history was the last element that came in," Ma said.

Discussing New Britain's gallery size compared to the epic proportion of space normally utilized for performances of her "Paradise Interrupted" opera, Ma said, "Yes, it is a more intimate space for me and I wanted to create a more externalized interior space so that a visitor coming into it would seem reflective. In the voices people will hear in the audio, clear sentences can be heard, but there will also be a blurring so words become indistinct and the sound waves mirror the gold tipped waves of the installation – that's the feel that we are still editing now."

That sound element of "An Inward Sea" was in the process of being completed when we talked in mid-April. Ma was collaborating with oral historian, interdisciplinary artist and writer Nyssa Chow. "She has her own creative practice," Ma said. "I love what she said about the path of allowing people to be the author of their own stories, so my installation is a vehicle to hold the story for them. This aspect is really about conveying experience and memory, isolation, frustration."

"What Nyssa helped me do is go into people's deep memories in this time period. What I have found poignant is the way people's thoughts have compounded during this time of pandemic into a richness of individual experience rather than a one-dimensional story that has been retold a lot. I try, through my work, to tap into the universal core we share with each other to find resonance with audiences," Ma explained, noting she wanted to work with an oral historian because it was such a rich tradition.

When Ma's black-flash-spun nonwoven HDPE laser-cut gold tipped waves are installed at the museum, they will have been expanded in width across the floor ranging from roughly hip height closest to viewers to a height of 6 feet at the far wall. "The glass pendulums are stand-in for the human figure," she said. "One is black. One is white. They look like fruit or sexual organs from the human body."



Interestingly, Ma's installation perfectly complements NBMAA's emergent global identity that has evolved in the past year through concerted virtual-based outreach rich programming intended to be relevant locally that has since been picked-up globally. Their ongoing strategy builds connectivity, identity and relevance to transform the negativity of this pandemic year into positive momentum for the museum.

Extending the exhibitions of 2020/20+WOMEN into 2021 allows the New Britain Museum of American Art to stay true to their goal of showcasing the stellar cultural contributions of artists such as Kara Walker, Anni Albers, Shantell Martin, Yoko Ono, Nancy Spero, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Carrie Mae Weems, the Guerrilla Girls and Helen Frankenthaler, whose "Late Works, 1990-2003" exhibition continues through May 23. This article is an opportunity to express appreciation to Museum Director Min Jung Kim and curator Lisa Williams for having the vision and courage to present such a compelling series.

**Suzanne Volmer**

Jennifer Wen Ma  
conducting interview for  
oral history portion of her  
"An Inward Sea" exhibition  
at the New Britain  
Museum of American Art.