

September 2014

Alumna Jennifer Wen Ma Creates Public "Portrait Garden" in Washington, D.C.

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Renowned interdisciplinary artist Jennifer Wen Ma (M.F.A. '99) has created a public art installation titled *Alpha Lillstrom Portrait Garden* for the 5x5 Project *Nonuments*, an exhibition in Washington, D.C., which opened to the public on September 6.

Ma created the garden to commend an unsung hero of everyday life, approaching the project as personal portraiture on a magnified scale. The portrait honors local Washington, D.C. community member Alpha Lillstrom as a longtime advocate for civil rights. Lillstrom was selected by lottery from nominations that were submitted by Washington, D.C. residents.

To create the portrait garden, Ma used charcoal-based Chinese ink, which can paint grass black but still allow it to grow, enabling the resilience of the plants to serve as a metaphor for people persevering through the struggles of contemporary life.

Ma, a 2014 recipient of Pratt Institute's Alumni Achievement Award, is one of five artists participating in *Nonuments*. Curated by Lance Fung, *Nonuments* is a temporary park that seeks to challenge understandings of the word "monument." The exhibition is part of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities' citywide public arts initiative, the 5x5 Project. It will be on display through October 6, and the *Alpha Lillstrom Portrait Garden* will remain on site for another year after the end of the exhibition.

To watch a video profile of Ma's work with Chinese ink, [click here](#).

Image: Jennifer Wen Ma, *Alpha Lillstrom Portrait Garden* (photo: courtesy of the artist)

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