

## Jennifer Wen Ma

Internationally renowned interdisciplinary artist Jennifer Wen Ma's work bridges multimedia installation, painting, video, public art, performance, and social practice, bringing together unlikely elements in a single work. She conceived, visually designed, and directed the installation opera *Paradise Interrupted* for Spoleto Festival USA in 2015. Also in Charleston, she presented an acclaimed solo exhibition in 2019, *Cry Joy Park – Gardens of Darkness and Light*, at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art. She was a core creative team member for the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and received an Emmy for its US broadcast. Ma teaches in the MFA program at the School of Visual Arts, New York, and has guest lectured at many institutions worldwide.

Ma's residency with FSA highlights questions of artistic sustainability: What replenishes the spirit? How does the artist nourish the source of creativity and protect it from running dry? Over 15 years, Ma has honed a grounding practice of calligraphic writing concurrent with creating her large-scale installations and public artworks. Drawing from the *I-Ching* or *Book of Changes*, a 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE Chinese text, Ma has ruminated on this divination manual as one of her philosophical sources of ancient wisdom. Relying upon the *I-Ching* as an instructive rather than prescriptive text for meditative inspiration, Ma finds a spiritual resource that balances the internal dualities of yin and yang.

Receiving the "Well" 井 hexagram, "a source of inexhaustible replenishment," as her residency meditation, Ma has spent the last five weeks researching and repetitively writing a series of Chinese calligraphic characters as her primary centering process. The Well etiology originates from the Zhou dynasty, when water acted as the central life source for hydration, cooking, cleaning, and bathing. Villages dedicated time to overseeing and repairing their wells to ensure sustainability and self-replenishing. Likewise, this repetitive and somatic discipline serves as Ma's spiritual well, which she practices to replenish her creative energies. Rather than perfecting a particular calligraphic style, her writing process focuses on the direct transference of energy into form, translated from the center of her body, through her arm and to the tip of her brush on the scroll, emptying the mind.

As a part of her daily residency practice, Ma has invited members from the larger community of Charleston into her studio, while preparing a pot of tea to share (including one that is grown and harvested from her grandmother's home village in Jiangxi, China), sharing a reflection on her meditative process, and invited participants to draw together on the 100-meter-long (328 foot) scroll. Ma explains: "A well doesn't move locations, run dry, nor overflow. It gives to all who seek. It requires constant maintenance and steadfastness to the end in order to benefit from its nourishment. Here at the residency, I am returning to my practice of calligraphy, as I reflect on and draw from the wisdom of these words: 甃 (repair and maintain the wall of the well), and 養物不窮 莫過乎井 (nourish without exhaustion, nothing surpasses the well)."