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Hi res images available upon request

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***Kristine Mays: Rich Soil***

**On view June 26, 2021 to January 9, 2022**

**Life-size wire sculptures transform the grounds of Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens for the second ever installation of art in the gardens**

Washington, D.C.—Contemporary American artist Kristine Mays's life-size, three-dimensional, dancing wire sculptures will emerge throughout the gardens at [Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens](#) for the special exhibition *Rich Soil*, on view from June 26, 2021 through January 9, 2022.

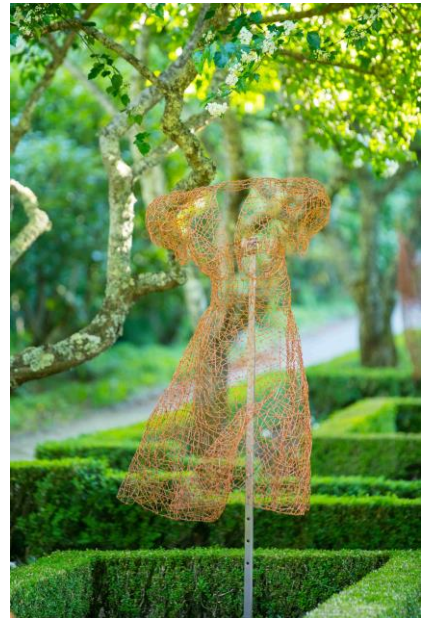
Mays breathes life into wire, transforming an industrial product into fascinating and moving works of art. Springing to life throughout the 13 acres of formal gardens, 29 sculptures will surprise visitors as they dance throughout the garden beds, bursting forth from the plant life. "My hope is that the figures will spring forth like spirits rising from the soil, to be recognized, revered, and embraced," Mays has explained. "May they push through while at the same time mingling and dancing among the flowers. Both plants and human beings come and go—reverberating within the cycles of life."

The exhibition is next in a series of collaborations with contemporary artists, such as Vladimir Kanevsky in 2021, Bouke de Vries in 2019, Philip Haas in 2016, and Isabel de Borchgrave in 2013.

"We are thrilled to have *Rich Soil* at Hillwood, as we continue to bring contemporary pieces and voices to the museum and gardens," said Kate Markert, Hillwood's executive director. "To be the site of Kristine Mays's first outdoor exhibition on the East Coast and to be able to share her remarkable work with our community is such a meaningful venture for Hillwood."

**About the Artist**

Kristine Mays is an American artist currently living and working in San Francisco, California. Independently trained, and a self-described maker for her entire life, she began crafting with wire in 1993, after years of drawing, sketching, sewing, and bead work. Of her current work, Mays said, "I am honored and humbled that I can spend my life creating artwork."



Mays seeks to create change with her art, raising thousands of dollars for AIDS research through the sale of her work and collaborating with organizations such as Visual Aid, the San Francisco Alliance Health Project, WE-Actx, and ArtSpan. She has participated in programming at the De Young Museum and the Museum of African Diaspora (MoAD), and exhibited at the California African American Museum (CAAM) and at Filoli Historic House and Garden. Mays is represented by Adler & Co. in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, the Richard Beavers Gallery in Brooklyn, New York, and Zenith Gallery in Washington, D.C. Collectors of her work include George Lucas and the collector Peggy Cooper Cafritz, with her work also displayed in many Bay Area homes and private collections throughout the United States.



### ***Rich Soil at Hillwood***

Marjorie Merriweather Post maintained a lifelong love of dance, particularly the paso doble and the tango, often hosting dances in the pavilion at Hillwood after dinner parties. She remained a dedicated patron of the Washington Ballet and American Ballet Theater, in addition to serving as vice president of the Washington Ballet Guild. Given this history, it is fitting that *Rich Soil* finds a home at Hillwood, continuing this connection to bodily movement and expression.

"Marjorie Post greatly enjoyed dance for both its artistic and health benefits," said Rebecca Tilles, associate curator of 18<sup>th</sup>-century French and Western European fine and decorative arts and curator of the exhibition. "To have *Rich Soil* within the gardens follows the tradition of her inviting dancers to Hillwood. And, with Post's appreciation for outdoor sculpture, as seen in the French parterre and the Japanese-style garden, she almost certainly would have been intrigued by Mays's work."

*Rich Soil*, Mays's first ever outdoor exhibition, originally displayed at Filoli Historic House and Garden in northern California, explores the dance between life and death, as the pieces interact with the land, and draw inspiration from the movement of Alvin Ailey's dance composition, "Revelation." The sculptures do not speak to any one form of dance but rather to an overall sense of movement, as Mays tries to "bring out a human form through the wire to capture a gesture." *Rich Soil* pays honor to the ancestors—those that walked, lived on, and tended to this land—to the lives that have been recognized and those that have been "forgotten." These forms deliver a message of strength while challenging how we view ourselves and others; though they look fragile and soft, they are solid and strong. Within the confines of hard metal wire is a sense of resilience and perseverance—a need to push forward and thrive. The work also speaks to identity—the question of who we are and what we can do with our lives, the impact our lives have on the world.



With rebar tie wire, Mays sculpts by hand, without the use of forms—using thousands of individual pieces of wire looped and hooked together to create small shapes and continually build upon them. Each

piece takes about one month of labor, not including conceptualizing time. Since steel wire does patina and rust over time, Mays covers the sculptures in copper-colored paint, so as they weather and age, experiencing the changing seasons for the first time, the orange tint remains.

Through the installation, Mays seeks to present people with a place to reflect and to breathe, an offering from Mays she is allowing visitors to receive. “As an artist I am very aware of the impermanence of life. With metal wire I have timelessly captured a fleeting moment that I hope will last for decades,” she has said. “My artwork points to the soul and spirit, transporting the viewer into another place. It’s about reconnecting to a deeper purpose—the soul and spirit of our lives...I create the outer shell, the exterior of a human being, but provoke you to see what’s within.”

### **Exhibition Organization**

*Rich Soil* will feature 29 of Mays’s lively wire pieces, organized into 7 groupings throughout the 13 acres of formal gardens.

1. *Soon and Very Soon* (5 figures, motor court entrance): Land watered by tears and rain, buried seeds that spring forth hope, despair covered in manure transformed into unspeakable beauty—when souls blossom.
2. *Not Just Happenstance* (4 figures, greenhouse): Sky above, ground below, the very fibers of our being. Breathe. Give thanks to both living and dead, creation unfolding, creator at work.
3. *All Night Worship Service* (5 figures, Butler House bed): The deepest grief and the holiest joy rise up from the soil in a furious dance beckoning you forward.
4. *Conjuring* (2 figures, ellipse lawn): Shadow, silhouette, the rustling of trees, breeze on your face, sunshine warming your skin—evidence that you are not alone.
5. *Little Worlds Within Us* (4 figures, eastern Lunar Lawn bed): An invisible thread binds us together, bone and marrow, soul and spirit, them and us.
6. *Celestial Prayer Meeting* (3 figures, outside the French parterre): The aunties. Storytellers. Sage spirits. They wipe away tears and place bandages on wounds. Your secrets are safe here.
7. *Ancestral Spin* (6 figures, vista lawn): Dancing between the veil of flesh and spirit, only the quiet will truly hear.

### **Curator**

Dr. Rebecca Tilles is the associate curator of 18<sup>th</sup>-century French and Western European fine and decorative arts at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens. She previously worked as a curatorial research fellow in decorative arts and sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. There, Tilles assisted with the exhibitions *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800-1815* (2007) and *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection* (2009). She completed her PhD in art history from the University of Sussex (2019) for which her dissertation was titled *George and Florence Blumenthal: A Collecting Partnership in the Gilded Age, 1858-1941*. She holds a BA in French and French cultural studies from Wellesley College (2003), an MA in European Decorative Arts from The Bard Graduate Center in New York (2007), and studied at the École de Louvre Paris. At Hillwood, Tilles curated the exhibition *Perfume & Seduction* (2019). She is also organizing a spotlight exhibition on Hillwood’s founder, titled *Marjorie Merriweather Post and the Diplomacy of Philanthropy* (2022), in partnership with the State Department, at the National Museum of American Diplomacy in Washington, D.C., as well as an exhibition on the evolution of hard-paste porcelain in Western Europe (2022).

## Events and Programs

*Kristine Mays: Rich Soil* inspires an array of programs and events throughout the presentation of the exhibition.

## Exhibition Sponsors

*Kristine Mays: Rich Soil* is supported by The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Ms. Nedenia Rumbough and Mr. Jan Roosenburg, Dr. Catherine M. Chura, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Goodwin Bennett, Kathryn Vigé Hicks and Peter J. Hicks, Nancy and CG Appleby, Linda and Bill Goldman, Kate and Bunky Markert, Alison Cady Martin, Amy and Marc Meadows, Dr. and Mrs. Michael J. Petite, and Gail Berry West. All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program. This project is supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

## About Hillwood

When art collector, businesswoman, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of [Russian imperial art](#) outside of Russia, an [exquisite 18<sup>th</sup>-century French decorative art collection](#), and 25 acres of serene landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include a [japanese-style garden](#), [rose garden](#), [French parterre](#), and an orchid-filled [greenhouse](#).

## General Information

Location:	4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC Metro: Van Ness/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)
Information/Tickets:	202-686-5807 for information or <a href="http://www.HillwoodMuseum.org">www.HillwoodMuseum.org</a> <a href="https://Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum">Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum</a>
Hours:	Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in January.
Café:	Merriweather To Go, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Saturday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Suggested Donation:	Advanced reservations are required to minimize physical contact and practice social distancing. No reservations will be taken on site. Reservations are by timed entry and are limited in order to manage safe capacity. \$18, \$15 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18.

No donation is suggested for children under 6.

Adults and seniors receive \$3 off the suggested donation for weekday visits and \$1 off for weekend visits when reservations are made online.

Members receive free admission to visit the estate during regular operating hours.

To join visit <http://www.hillwoodmuseum.org/join>

For more information visit <http://www.hillwoodmuseum.org/hours-and-tickets>

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