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## LOOK AGAIN: AMAZING DESIGN TRANSFORMATIONS

An aerial sculpture lights up the sky at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation campus

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Artist Janet Echelman installed a temporary version of *Impatient Optimist* at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation campus in Seattle last October, in order to study the movement of the wind within the courtyard and the optimal lighting placement. The final piece, made with more durable materials, will be unveiled this fall.

*i*

he idea began with the mercurial Pacific Northwest sky. When developing concepts for an aerial sculpture commissioned for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation campus in Seattle, artist Janet Echelman saw opportunity in the ever-changing expanse above and installed a camera on the foundation's roof to capture the sky every five minutes over a 24-hour period.

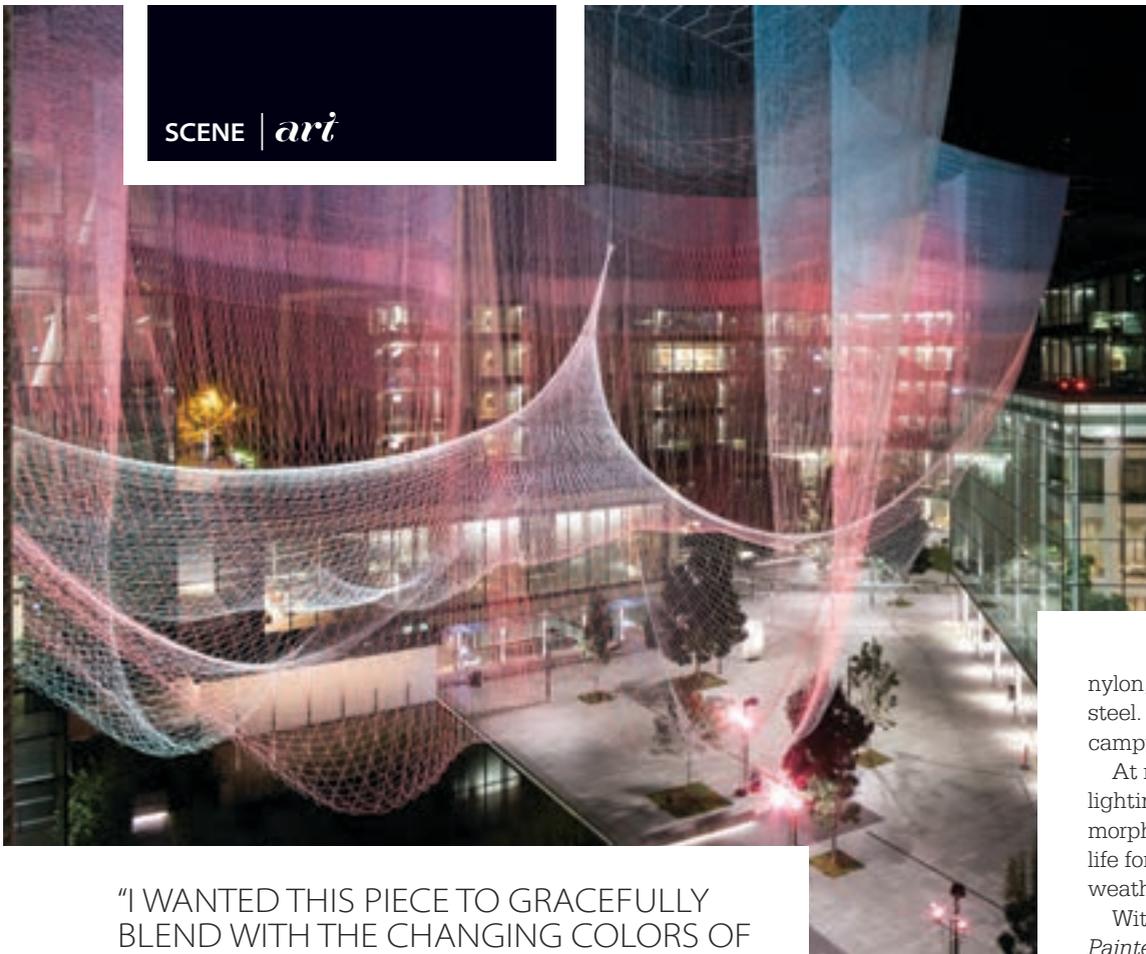
"I thought a great deal about the sky metaphorically with the foundation's mission of uniting people all over the world in common goals of good health and respecting the environment," Echelman explains. "I wanted to re-create the combination of hues at sunrise from their regional offices from New Delhi to London, Beijing to Seattle, and the gradual transmuting of colors."

At her studio, based in Brookline, Massachusetts, Echelman utilizes a custom-designed software tool by Autodesk that mimics the most intricate effects of gravity and wind force to visualize her sculptures. Her final designs are then sent to factories throughout the Pacific Northwest, where the requisite braiding, industrial looming, hand-knotting, and hand-splicing is accomplished. Echelman relies on artisans in the region for their "deep historic skill set from the long-standing fishing industry, combined with their ability to deal with complex new technical designs."

Two years in the making, *Impatient Optimist*—also the title of Bill Gates's 2012 autobiography—is a voluminous tethered web of lightweight braided fiber with a core of Honeywell Spectra »

# SKY'S THE LIMIT

Written by LAURA GOLDSTEIN • Photographed by SEAN AIRHART



**FROM BOTTOM:** Echelman began her design process by researching the hours of sunrise in the cities where the Gates Foundation has offices, from London to Beijing, and sketching. She and her team developed a lighting program for *Impatient Optimist* that cycles through a spectrum of sunrise hues, projected in real time as the day dawns in each city.

"I WANTED THIS PIECE TO GRACEFULLY BLEND WITH THE CHANGING COLORS OF SKY DURING THE DAY IN A QUIET WAY, THEN BECOME BOLD WITH COLORED ILLUMINATION AT NIGHT." —JANET ECHELMAN

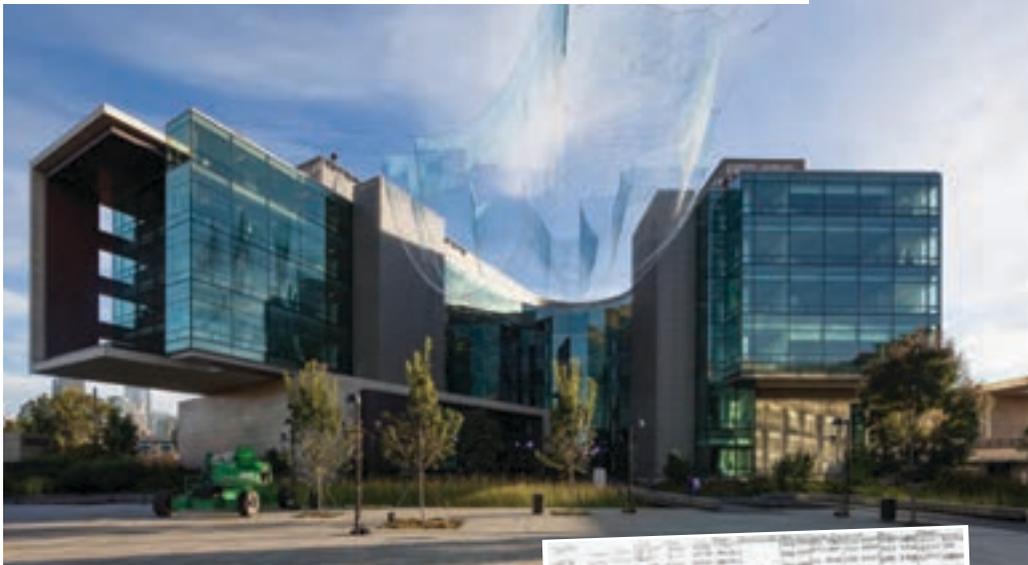
nylon, which is 15 times stronger than steel. It will be installed at the Seattle campus in late 2014.

At night, with computerized lighting effects, the aerial sculpture morphs into an otherworldly, organic life form, symbiotic with every weather condition.

With her earlier installation of *Skies Painted With Unnumbered Sparks* in Vancouver for the TED Conference's 30th anniversary, Echelman raised the bar on the transformative potential of public art. More than double the size of Echelman's previous works, and weighing 3,500 pounds, the sculpture was suspended 745 feet over the waterfront between the 24-story Fairmont Waterfront Hotel and the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Constantly challenging herself, Echelman is also at work on an indoor commission for the Matthew Knight Arena in Eugene, Oregon. The piece, which will open on October 21, consists of five interconnected net-like forms and will highlight the connection between itself and viewers. When people stand beneath it, they'll trigger a sensor that changes the colorful lighting to white spotlights, which in turn project shadow silhouettes and line-drawings onto the wall.

As Echelman says, "Bringing people together to interact with public art and nature is ultimately my goal with every project." ✱



SEE THE GATES FOUNDATION SCULPTURE IN MOTION AT [GRAYMAG.NET/ECHELMAN](http://GRAYMAG.NET/ECHELMAN)