

# METROPOLIS

## The Metropolis Observed

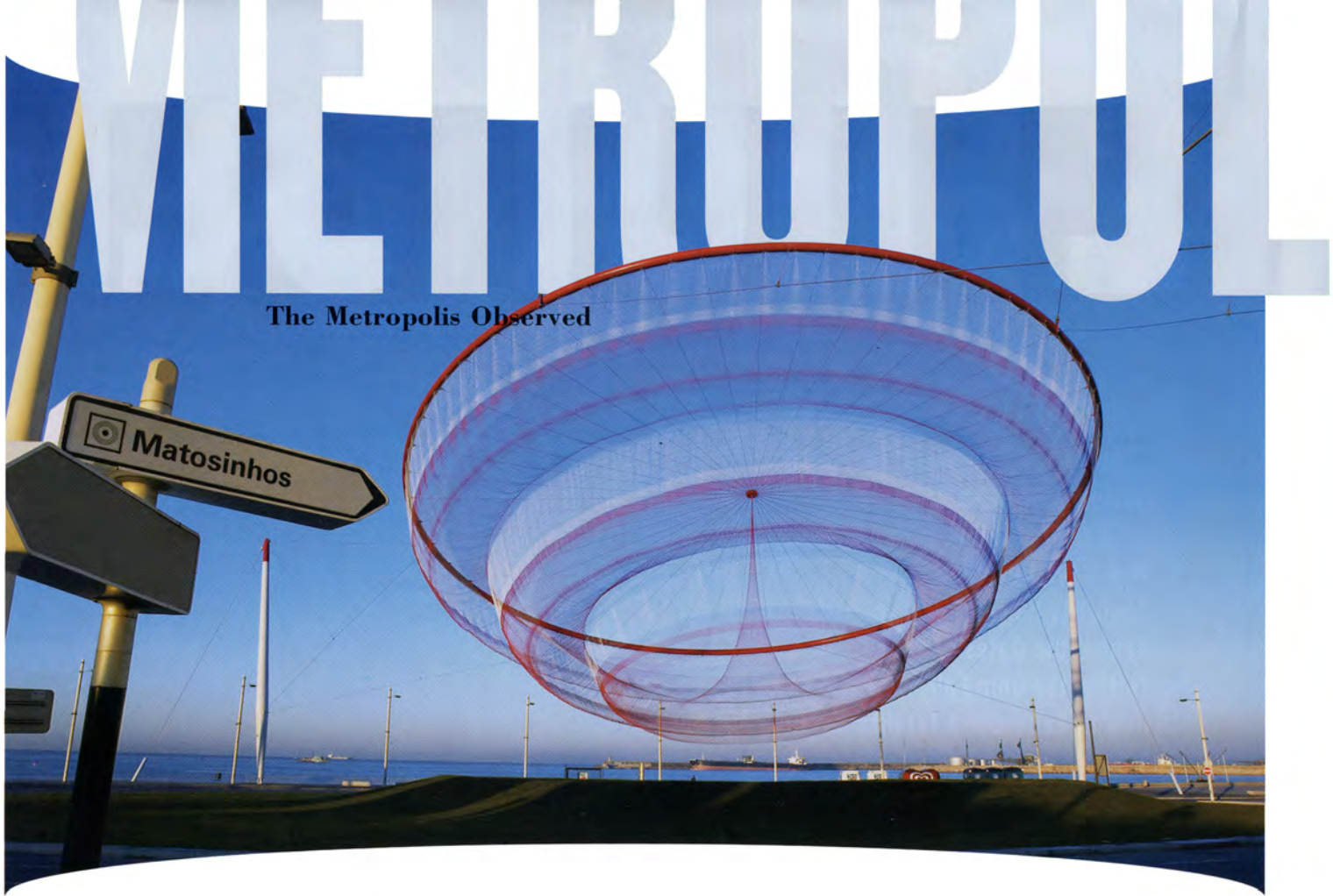
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The Portuguese city of Porto's distinctive new landmark, Janet Echelman's red-and-white *She Changes* sculpture, recalls local scenery such as fishing nets and smokestacks.

Courtesy Joao Ferrand/Florence Lynch Gallery



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## Motion and Change public art

By giving Porto, Portugal, an active landmark, Janet Echelman altered the town's notion of what sculpture can be.

"I like limitations and parameters," artist Janet Echelman says. "I find them inspiring." A veteran of public sculpture projects, she is accustomed to such challenges as less-than-ideal sites, inflexible budgets, and unrealistic expectations. Her most recent work—*She Changes*, which will be dedicated this month on a recently redeveloped waterfront shared by two cities, Porto and Matosinhos, in Portugal—had all that and more.

"They asked me to create a symbol of the cities' redevelopment that would be visible from one kilometer [.62 miles] in all directions but didn't block the view of the ocean and wouldn't require much maintenance," she says. "And we had to do all of this with \$1.66 million." The unpromising site: a small traffic island.

Also limiting was the fact that bronzes of statesmen are still the standard form of public art in Portugal's public plazas. "'Plop art,' I call it," Echelman quips, "meaning you take a form and plop it down. I worked with them to start thinking of this project as a sculptural intervention." This meant integrating the site with its context: "It took more

than a year to convince them to allow me to suspend over the three-lane highway. That was an ambitious goal, but we did it."

Echelman knew the piece would be exposed to salty sea air, storms, and sunlight, so she hunted for materials that could withstand dire conditions. "I went in search of an archival material that would also allow fluid movement. It was an arduous task—I went to the conference on industrial fabric in Las Vegas and basically went from booth to booth." Her search led her to a new textile called *Tenara*, produced by W. L. Gore & Associates. "They have a patent to turn PTFE, which is made of the same stuff as Teflon, into a fibrous strand."

The result is fabric and thread that is UV-resistant, self-cleaning, fade-proof, and practically indestructible. "The only thing that degrades this material is molten alkaline metal," Echelman says. Not only that, but it comes in custom colors and has

the fluid quality the artist wanted for her finished work—a gently breathing concave mesh that evokes fishing nets, sea creatures, and the ancient Portuguese craft of lace-making, as well as (with its steel cables and red-and-white poles) the local smokestacks, masts, and red-and-white lighthouses along the coast. "I wanted the piece to have multiple layers of reference to the local visual language—the vernacular architecture and design," she says.

Best of all, Echelman says, is the piece's movement: "I think the wind, which is more beautiful than anything I could create, animates this sculpture with a sort of choreography that's greater than I am—and I'm just trying to harness that and work with it."

—Lara Kristin Lentini



Janet Echelman's sheer textile sculpture, which blows in the breeze like a fishing net, marks the redevelopment of Porto's waterfront.