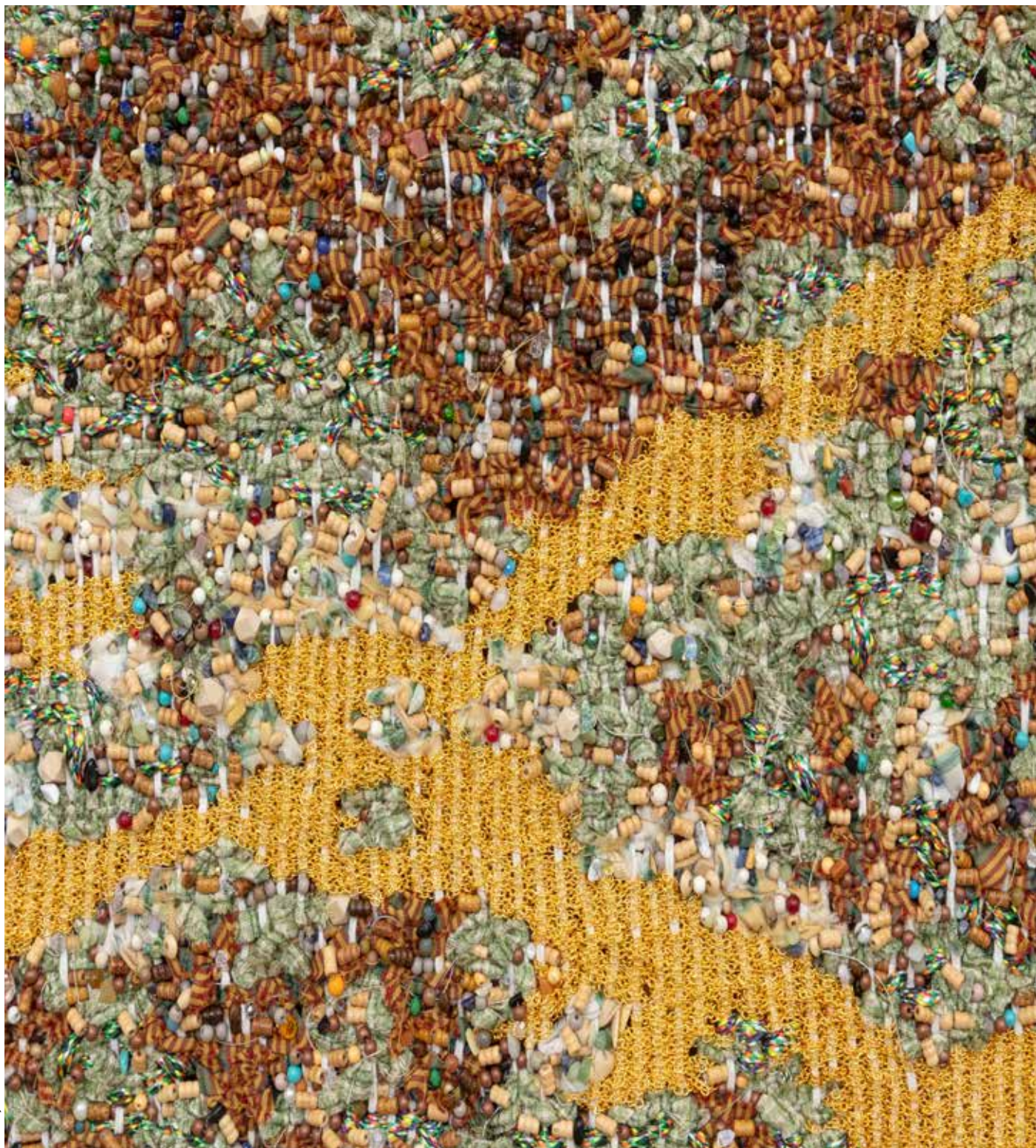


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JANET ECHELMAN'S FIBER-MONUMENTS



JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA, 2021. Fiber, Buildings and Sky combined with Colored Lighting. The fibers are woven with nylon and UHMWPE (ultra high molecular weight polyethylene), Net dimensions: 117' long x 102' wide x 20' deep, Photograph: Andrew Williamson, Umbereen Inayet, Guy Pavelo. Ph courtesy Studio Echelman

Monumental, sometimes permanent works, capable of changing the perception of urban spaces: Janet Echelman's art defies categorization, challenging and pushing the limits of fiber art. Thanks to her experimentation with innovative materials and techniques - from the use of atomized water particles to engineering fibers that are many times stronger than steel - her installations reach macro dimensions and resist exposure to atmospheric agents and natural elements, with which they interact, generating unexpected effects and suggestions.

Echelman combines archaic craft techniques with cutting-edge computer design software to create works of art that have become focal points for many cities on five continents, from Singapore, Sydney, Shanghai and Santiago, to Beijing, Boston, New York and London - to name but a few - not to mention permanent works in Porto (Portugal), Gwanggyo (South Korea), Vancouver, San Francisco, West Hollywood, Phoenix, Eugene, Greensboro, Philadelphia, Seattle and St. Petersburg (FL) that change according to the varying degree of light throughout the day. A Harvard graduate, recipient of international prizes and awards, published in journals, books and specialist texts, Janet Echelman is driven by an unquenchable curiosity and the belief that imagination must always be taken seriously.

<https://www.echelman.com/>



BORÅS, SWEDEN, 2021. Fiber, buildings and sky combined with colored lighting. The fibers are woven with nylon and UHMWPE (ultra high molecular weight polyethylene). Net size: 100 feet long x 45 feet wide x 20 feet deep. Director of photography: Hendrik Zeitler. Ph courtesy Studio Echelman

Janet, when and how did you begin to imagine monumental works made with textile techniques? And what was the process that led from the idea to the first work actually installed?

I was a young painter when I traveled on a Fulbright Scholarship to India. Promising to give painting exhibitions around the country on behalf of the US Embassy, I shipped my special paints and equipment to create the new paintings. The deadline for the shows arrived - but my paints did not. I was in a terrible bind, with no materials to make my art. I was staying in a South Indian fishing village, and each afternoon I walked the long beach, watching the fishermen bundling their nets into mounds on the sand. I'd seen it every day, but this time I saw it differently - a new approach to sculpture, a way to make volumetric form without heavy solid materials.

My first satisfying sculptures were hand-crafted in collaboration with those fishermen, including a self-portrait which I titled "Wide Hips." We hoisted them onto poles to photograph. I discovered their soft surfaces revealed every ripple of wind in constantly changing patterns and was mesmerized.

Your works interact with urban spaces and with human beings, with natural elements - wind and light: everything is interconnected, in art as well as in the universe. Is this one of

the messages your installations convey?

Yes - my work reminds us of our interconnectedness on every scale. When I look at my sculptures, I see a physical proof of humanity's ability to work together with nature in shaping our physical world. An action in one part of the world can cause ripple effects all over the planet. When any one element in the sculpture's network moves, every other element is affected.

It is the sculpture's ability to change and move with the forces of wind that make it able to withstand typhoons. Resiliency is the source of its strength.

How do such complex works take shape, a synthesis of ancient techniques and cutting-edge materials, architecture, design, structural engineering and computer science? How many skills and how many talents participate in the creation of an installation? Are different techniques and materials used according to the specific installation?

I look all around me for inspiration - at the forms of our planet in macro and micro scale, to the patterns of life within it, to the measurement of time, weather patterns, or the paths created by fluid dynamics. I am always in search of inspiration from life. I guess this is my way of making sense of the world, and finding



MUNICH, GERMANY. Fiber, Buildings and Sky combined with Colored Lighting. The fibers are woven with nylon and UHMWPE (ultra high molecular weight polyethylene). Net dimensions: 79' long x 68' wide x 18' deep. Installation dimensions: 113' long x 68' wide x 52' high. Photos: Alexandra Gollin, Antonia Eisert, Jan Saurer, Alkan Yilmaz, Roser Brothers. Ph courtesy Studio Echelman



HELSINKI, FINLAND, Fiber, Buildings and Sky combined with Colored Lighting. The fibers are woven with nylon and UHMWPE (ultra high molecular weight polyethylene). Net size: 100 feet long x 45 feet wide x 20 feet deep. Director of photography: Ahti Kannisto, Ella Tommila, Maija Toivanen, Tim Bird. Ph courtesy Studio Echelman

my tiny little moment within the larger unfolding story of humanity on our planet.

I always turn to the unique site as a guiding force for each artwork. When I make the first site visit, I get a feel for its space and explore its history and texture to understand what it means to its people. I work with my colleagues to brainstorm, sketch, and explore all ideas, without censoring our ideas in the early stages. As the sculpture designs begin to unfold, our studio architects, designers and model-makers collaborate with an external team of aeronautical and structural engineers, computer scientists, lighting designers, landscape architects, and city planners to bring my initial sketches into reality.

We fabricate our artworks through a combination of hand splicing and knotting together with industrial looms, and then install on location. It is a gradual, collaborative, and iterative process from every angle, and takes more than a year to go from idea to the final artwork.

You said you want your works not to be looked at but to be experienced. Can you tell me about the public's relationship with your installations?

It is a scientifically proven fact that our visual physical context can affect how we feel. It influences how we experience our lives. The way our cities look and function results from the way

people choose to build them, and I believe that collectively we have the power to build them differently.

My artwork brings an experience of softness to the scale of the city. It is a counterpoint to the hard edges of buildings.

It offers proof that we can interrogate the status quo - that the assumption that cities must be formed from hard materials and straight edges can be changed.

Everyone experiences public artwork differently.

My hope is that each person becomes aware of their own sensory experience through engaging with my work. That contemplative moment - that moment of pause - can lead each person to create their own meaning or narrative, so I leave it open-ended.

I have been moved by the public's responses to my installations, and the way these sculpture have become part of life.

When I installed a temporary exhibition in Boston in 2015, a waiter at a restaurant beside the sculpture told me that every night after he finished work he lies down in the grass and watches the colored light of the sculpture change.

A woman who worked further downtown but couldn't see the sculpture from work made it a point to walk during her lunch hour every day to visit it.

A woman who lived near the sculpture told me that the area now feels safer for her. These stories are incredibly meaningful and attest to the importance of public artwork in our lives.



HELSINKI, FINLAND, Fiber, Buildings and Sky combined with Colored Lighting. The fibers are woven with nylon and UHMWPE (ultra high molecular weight polyethylene). Net size: 100 feet long x 45 feet wide x 20 feet deep. Director of photography: Ahti Kannisto, Ella Tommila, Maija Toivanen, Tim Bird. Ph courtesy Studio Echelman

Among the many works, which was the one that posed the greatest challenge?

Technical constraints have pushed my creativity - in many of my works and particularly with Dream Catcher in West Hollywood, California. In designing permanent work in sites with unique challenges (climates with extreme weather conditions like typhoon winds, snow, and ice storms, or complicated site layouts with multiple buildings like in West Hollywood), I try to approach challenges as a feature rather than a bug. For West Hollywood, the challenge of creating four horizontal structural layers suspended in both tensioned and draped forms was a new and exciting exploration. This combination proved challenging for our software to accurately simulate, but through much collaboration among our talented team, we were able to create forms new to the practice. To achieve this, both technology and collaboration were necessary. My studio has built a custom software tool that allows us to perform 3D modeling of our monumental designs while understanding the

constraints of our craft, and shows digital responses to the forces of gravity and wind. Collaboration has always been central to my work. I work with a tight-knit group of architects and artists inside my studio, plus an external team of computer scientists, aeronautical and structural engineers, with independent architecture, landscape, and lighting designers, as well as fabricators and artisans. I describe public art as a “team sport.” Being able to work with so many talented individuals expands the language with which I can speak as an artist. I am always learning from my colleagues, and what we create together is definitely greater than what I could create myself.

Large installations like yours necessarily vibrate in unison with the site that hosts them. Each naturally collects the energies of the place and returns them filtered and intertwined with those of the artist and the team that created it. Is there one in particular with which you feel deeply in tune? Or is each one like the children all differently and equally loved? What relationship do you have with your works?

They are all unique to their site and so different from each other that I cannot pick a favorite.

When I begin a commission, I always turn to the unique site as a guiding force for each artwork.

When I make the first site visit, I get a feel for its space, talk to the people who use it, and spend time uncovering its history and texture to understand what it means to its people.

The design for each work is a collaborative and iterative process that can take more than a year - it's hard to compare them to each other!

What project are you working on? And is there any that you

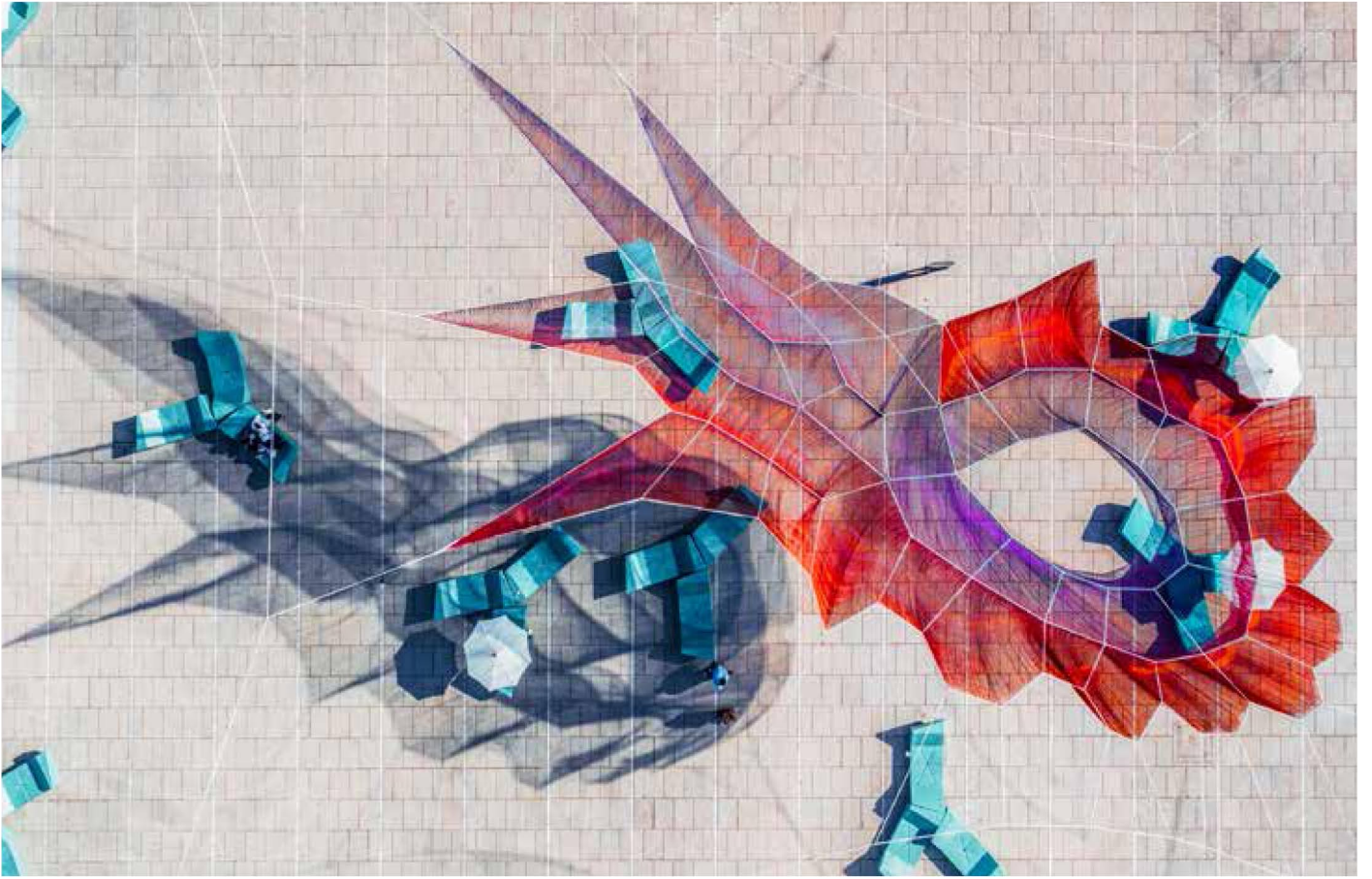
would like to be able to carry out in future?

This coming year I'll open temporary exhibitions in Jeddah and Amsterdam. For permanent commissions in the US, I'm working on new permanent commissions in Florida, Texas, Ohio, Oklahoma, and California. I'm also engaged in an experimental collaboration with a dance choreographer where my sculptures will interact with dancers. Overall, my focus right now is to share my art with cities around the world, to bring people together through a communal art experience.

This moment in our world has so many challenges and I believe art can help bridge the gap.



VIENNA, AUSTRIA. Fiber, Buildings and Sky combined with Colored Lighting. Fibers are braided with nylon and UHMWPE (Ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene). Dimensions of net: 100 ft. length x 45 ft. width x 20 ft. Depth. Photography: MuseumsQuartier Wien, Lorenz Seidler, Solomon Ellia, Thomas Weber, Ivan Roncevic



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