



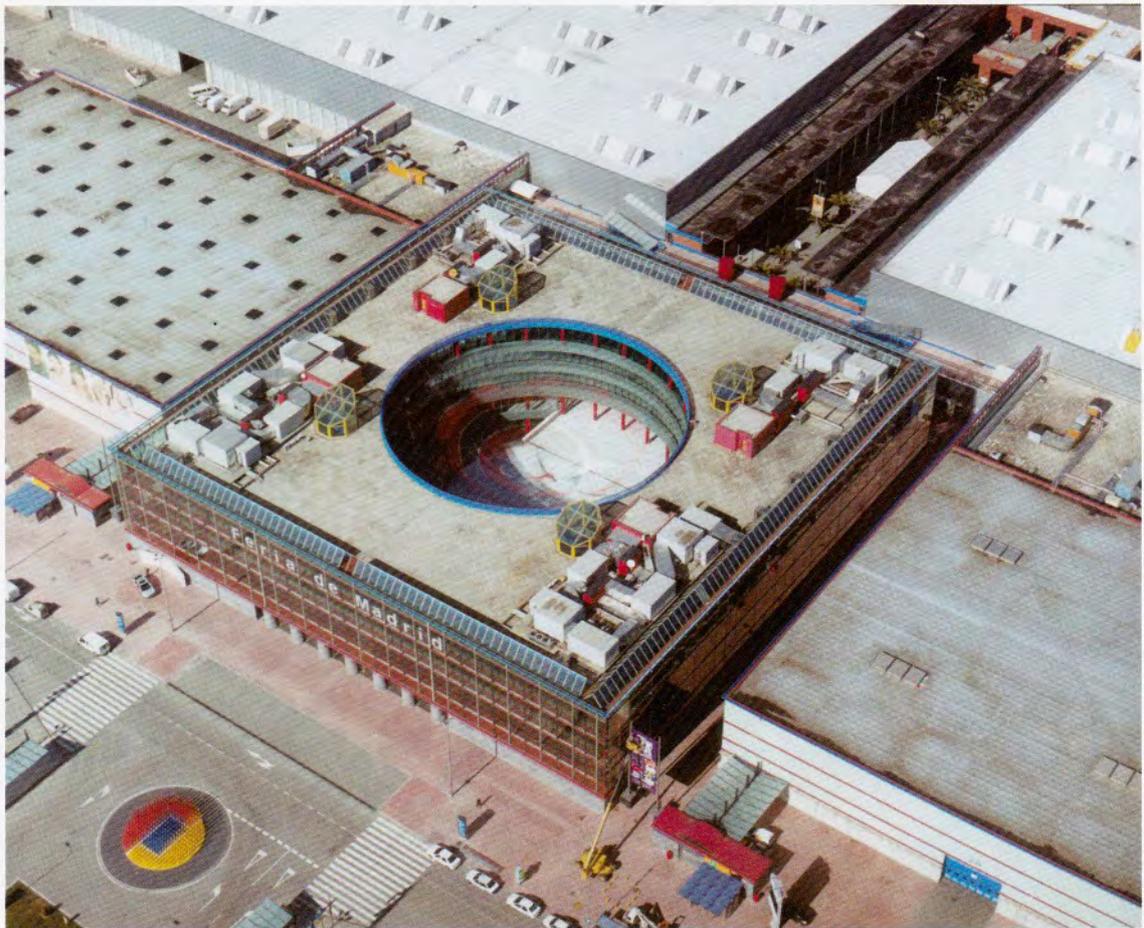
Janet
Echelmann

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Sculpture

Texts by Denise Caralho and Joan Lebold Cohen

Target swooping down...Bulleyes!, 2001, Aerial view, Atrium of Feria Internacional de Madrid, Spain



Janet Echelmans Sculptural Interventions - Art that integrates form and space

by Denise Carvalho

Janet Echelman is a New York artist whose monumental sculptures are as light and open as they are large. Alternatively embracing the outdoors and filling architectural spaces, how can they achieve, simultaneously, openness while filling spaces? The works balance opposites as they interplay positive and negative spaces in their own structure. They are primarily sculptures because they evoke their hand-made processes and deal with positive and negative, while at the same time, they are not grounded and appear to float. But these sculptures are also spatial interventions, since they function as mediators between natural and architectural spaces.

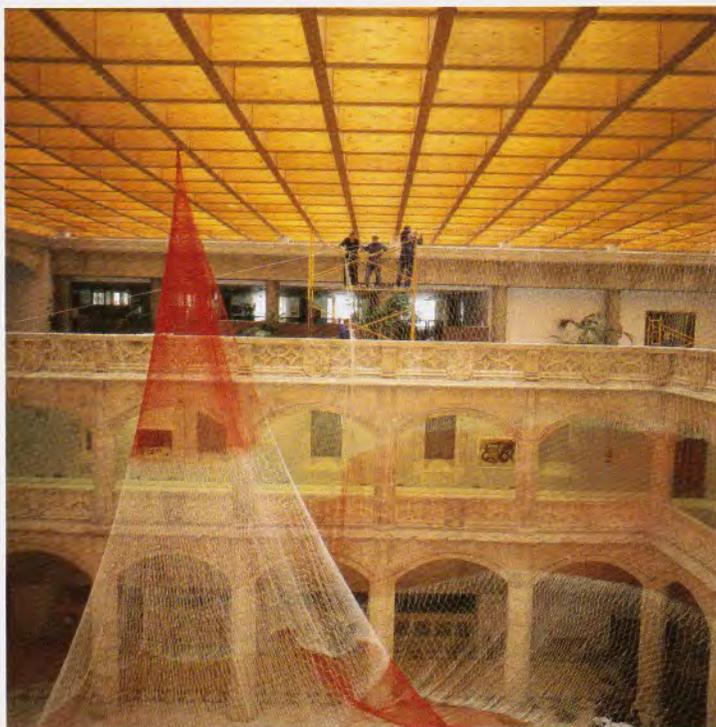
These objects are more than just beautiful, functioning as a visual language which infers that every difference, every tension, visual or conceptual, can appear lessened when incorporated into a greater process. Even hard edges of the surrounding architecture may appear organic if seen from a distance and incorporated into the organic shapes of her sculpture. In this organic vastness of Echelmans sculptural interventions, the idea is that the language of art is always universal, even if it is also local and immediate. This is why most of her major pieces assimilate different cultural influences, exemplified in *Trying to hide with your tail in the air*, produced with Lithuanian lace-makers for the Museum of the Centre of Europe in 1998, *South India Project: in the garden of earthly delites*, produced with Hindu temple masons and fishermen begun in 1998, or even *Roadside Shrine: Cone Ridge*, produced with American trucking-tarp factory workers for installation in 2000 on Interstate Highway I-10 in Houston, Texas.

This hybrid tendency is not accidental, as it is part of the development of a language which is reflecting the postmodern condition, a condition of unification of aesthetic differences, something interconnected with all the other world processes in development, social and economic. Echelmans art maintains its connection to a formal aesthetic language in which universal beauty is implied. The sense of universality in her works language is not taking a critical stand for or against globalization. Instead, it demonstrates what has been already accepted, that art stands as an individual and independent language, though it clearly reflects world phenomena.

The critical sense of her art consists of the intervention of the almost invisible womb-like structure as a parallel visible space from which we can note our own relationship of strangeness to architecture today. With this parallel place of vision we can distance ourselves from the architectural surroundings enough to notice how far and unrelated to them we have become. The architectural space is a clear ambivalence in a globalized world of utopian democratized societies. In relation to nature, her work functions as a reminder of a manmade world in its interwoven relation between our innate tendency to mimic nature and our desire to surpass it, between our intimate relation to the crafting or making of the work and the distance that art enables us to contemplate it.

Target swooping down...Bullseye!, a 20,000 square feet lacy net funnel form, made with 1.56 million hand-made nylon knots links the monumental architectural circular openness of the entrance courtyard at the 2001 ARCO art fair in Madrid, Spain. Appearing as an open form, this floating structure expands the visual experience to a sensation of being embraced. The works organic form invokes the closeness between two sensorial experiences: the visual and the tactile. The feeling of being involved by this lightweight open form, allows the viewer to experience the connectedness of aesthetic form and architectural space. At ARCO, this red and white sculptural intervention was viewed by more than 180,000 people.

During the months of June and July, the work traveled to the Casa de Cordon, the 15th century stone courtyard where Christopher Columbus was welcomed home by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand after his second voyage to the New World. Located in Burgos, Spain, *Target swooping down...bullseye! (Variation #2)* brings a new relationship with the architectural space. Different in its relationship with the proscenium-like form of the entrance hall at Arco in which the form seems to mimic its architectural surroundings, at the Casa de Cordon, in Burgos, the sculptural form appears more detached and less absorbed by spatial surrounding, more dramatically centered, more as a sculpture.



Target swooping down...Bulleyes! (Variation#2), 2001.
Installation, Casa del Cordón, Burgos, Spain

It is interesting to note that Echelmans sculptures fluctuate in their relationship with space, sometimes adjusting to the architectural surroundings, while being absorbed by it, sometimes requiring a special placement where they are viewed in detachment. This quality of both being influenced by its surroundings as well as influencing it derives from Echelmans ability to incorporate distinct cultural languages already inherent in the environment. This organic language reflects her handcrafting process of making the piece. The intimate process of interconnecting the nylon knots into a pattern is extended to the horizontal environment as well as to its vertical limits, emphasizing an aesthetic compartment in which feminine and masculine energies are balanced out. The flexibility and softness of the nylons

give a greater feminine strength to the work, that way requiring an even greater opposing force provided by the architectural surroundings of the Casa de Cordon. This is also shown in her projects for Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Sculpture Park, at the Bass Art Museum and for Florence Lynch Gallery in New York in 2001-2002.

The success of Echelmans work depends as much on her skill to choose and prepare the materials as to envision and articulate its language in space. As cultural hybridity becomes more and more part of the environment, it also increases the challenge to create art that goes beyond the aesthetically correct, something that is fresh and beautiful while still reflecting a critical stance of our times.

Space sculptor of Urban Air Garments

by Joan Lebold Cohen

When a bud opens and the petals extend into space it is this miraculous structure that completes a flower. This natural phenomenon may have been Janet Echelmans inspiration because it is precisely this idea of extension into space that *Gravitys Angel* achieves. *Angel* was installed at the Florence Lynch Gallery in the heart of New York's crowded mid-town where buildings elbow each other. I walked up several flights of stairs into a virtually empty gallery a clean white space and was puzzled. Then my attention was drawn out of the open windows that looked over a hidden courtyard. Floating from the window frames like an airy canopy was a series of rectangular, transparent, flag-like pieces of white mesh with circles punched through to reveal translucent steely shapes hanging down. Describing this piece, Window Treatment with Twenty-four Tails, Ms. Echelman said: "I extended over a hidden courtyard allowing viewers to escape the white box of the gallery down the fire escape and look up at the metropolis through the veil of knitted stainless-steel. A related piece, *Red Spike over 29th Street*, spilled out the gallery's front windows into the air of the busy commercial street, visible to casual passers-by below. I wanted to expand the controlled gallery space out into active airspace of Manhattan and to address the holes of the gallery building (its windows)."



South India Project: in the garden of earthly delites, begun in 1998. 50 feet high, 15 feet diameter

These creations were made of knitted steel covered with vinyl-coated polyester. The artist explained that after measuring the gallery she went to a Truck Tarp factory in Connecticut that can sew knitted steel. Using the vast factory as her studio she cut and sewed the pieces in collaboration with the factory workers. These adventurous pieces were not born out of the head of Zeus fully formed. Ms. Echelman began as an abstract painter but when she went to Mahaballipuram, India on a Fulbright in 1997 she must have been deeply impressed by the great South Indian bronzes made during the Chola Dynasty (10th -13th centuries) and she began working in bronze. However, she grew frustrated with the weight and rigidity of the bronze organic forms that she created: "I drilled holes in the perimeter of my bronzes and extended their gestures in curving forms of hand-knotted fishing net." Mahaballipuram, on the shore of the Bay

of Bengal, is famous for brilliantly carved rock cut temples. The gods, saints and demons represented are all part of epic narratives revealed through their gestures called mudras. As the figure stands, sits or reclines, fingers extend and curve into a mudra heralding action. These extensions of the postures convey meaning. Working with this idea of extending beyond the body became a theme. As Echelman explained: "Earlier I began twisting wires and wrapping scraps of lacy brassieres and hosiery to create miniature models. These models were for spaces into which people could enter and experience the awe and wonder of being a small child lost in voluminous skirts, or the magic and mystery of a huge circus tent." In India she learned how to knot fishing nets from fishermen and with this new technique created *Suckle Bell Buckle*. Shore Temples in the background, *Suckle Bell Buckle* flies over the beach. An over size circular net bowl acts as the yin receptacle for a bronze sperm-like yang form, all contained within an open ended cylindrical net. This yin/yang image, which is similar to the lingam and yoni statues worshipped as a manifestation of the God Shiva, rather obviously connotes the phallus and female genital that is ever present by Indian road sides, in temples and home shrines. Surely this must have inspired the artist.

In 1998 Ms. Echelman was invited back to South India to make a large installation at the G.V. Memorial Trust in Coimbatore. She collaborated with a local crew of welders, electricians and Hindu Temple-masons to create South India Project: in the garden of earthly delites. They carved three brick pyramidal cones with indentations and undulations that point skywards. Above these forms that recall the great towering gateways of South Indian temples and that are conceived as sacred mountains, she suspended a nylon net from an arm that hangs like a semi-transparent sheet from a single point. It is 45 feet above the ground. "My sculpture," Echelman says, "is responsive in the sense of environmental interdependence where multiple conditions and occupants of space mutually affect one another. Variations in wind or sunlight affect the piece, and are affected by it, which can slow wind, lower temperature, and cast intricate shadow patterns on the ground."

That same year, 1998, Ms. Echelman was invited to create a piece for the Museum of the Center of Europe in Vilnius, Lithuania. Her permanent installation of three giant airborne baskets made of lace-like knotted nylon and steel with a long sock-like tail is suspended above the ground. Provocatively titled *Trying to Hide with your Tail in the Air*, this witty construction was a collaboration with Lithuanian lace-makers. According to the artist, "together we created a 35 foot tall sculpture which delicately hangs down amidst oak trees, and when the wind blows, might gently swat an inattentive visitor walking by."

1998 saw yet another of her collaborations, *Inside Out/Steel Lining*, a 4-story tornado form that was made with students at Harvard University and installed in the courtyard of the Fogg Art Museum. Echelman sees it "intruding upon the calm isolation of the Ivory Tower." The tail that hangs in the middle of the mesh cone suggests an energized sperm similar in form to the South India Project. Echelman posted a sign on the museums floor which read: "Viewers are invited to stick their heads inside sculpture."

In 2000 Ms. Echelman was invited to make a sculpture in Houston, Texas in conjunction with the International Sculpture Center Conference being held there. "I selected the underside of the highway as my site and created a 60 foot long undergarment composed of six 17 foot high inverted cones. *Roadside Shrine/ Cone Ridge* was viewed by some as a giant 6-cupped brassiere, and by others as a subversion of the interstate language understood universally by American drivers: the orange safety cone." The artist had lived in Asia for many years and in many Asian cultures including India roadside shrines are ubiquitous. One would assume that this must be part of this puzzle. This piece is as witty as it is mysterious, like a Zen Buddhist koan, a kind of riddle that cant be answered intellectually but only through intuition/enlightenment.

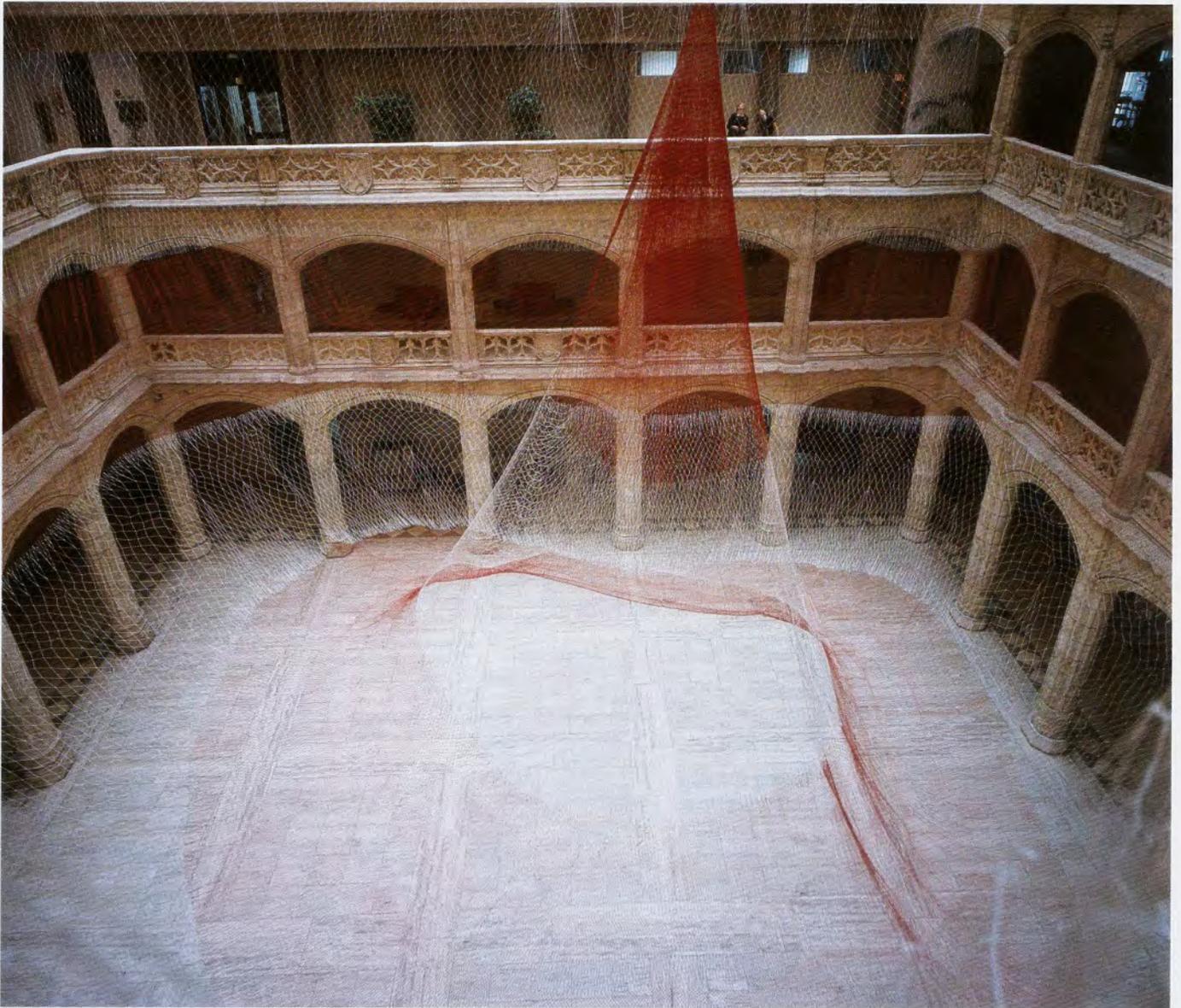
In 2001 Ms. Echelman brought one of her urban air garments to Madrid, Spain where she created *Target swooping down...Bullseye!* as the centerpiece of the ARCO art fair. More than 180,000 people walked under her vast lacy net form that covered more than 20,000 square feet and was composed of approximately 1.56 million hand-made knots. She said: "Whenever possible, I like my work to be within reach of the human hand, both touchable and movable. Works are often confrontationally suspended directly to eye-level."



Bellbottoms Series: Suckle Bell Buckle, 1997. Bronze, silk, cotton, and steel. Dimensions variable. Shown here at. Installation, Mahaballipuram Shore Temple. Sponsored by American Consulate Mumbai/Bombay, Fulbright Scholarship Board, U.S. Education Foundation in India, and the National Institute of Design of India.

This dynamic young sculptor, who graduated from Harvard University with highest honors in 1987, has since received more than 20 awards, grants and residencies and held more than 30 solo exhibitions. A current look at her studio includes models and designs for upcoming projects for Art Basel Miami Beach with the Bass Museum of Art Sculpture Garden, the Storm King Art Center in New York State, and the Florence Lynch Gallery in New York City, in addition to a permanent sculpture for the 22-story building which headquarters BRAC, the worlds largest charity, located in Bangladesh.

Reprinted from World Sculpture News



Target swooping down...Bulleyes! (Variation#2), 2001. 140 x140 x 90 feet. Hand-knotted nylon lace net. Caja de Burgos, Patio Casa del Cordón, 15th-century stone courtyard where Christopher Columbus was welcomed home from the New World by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand.

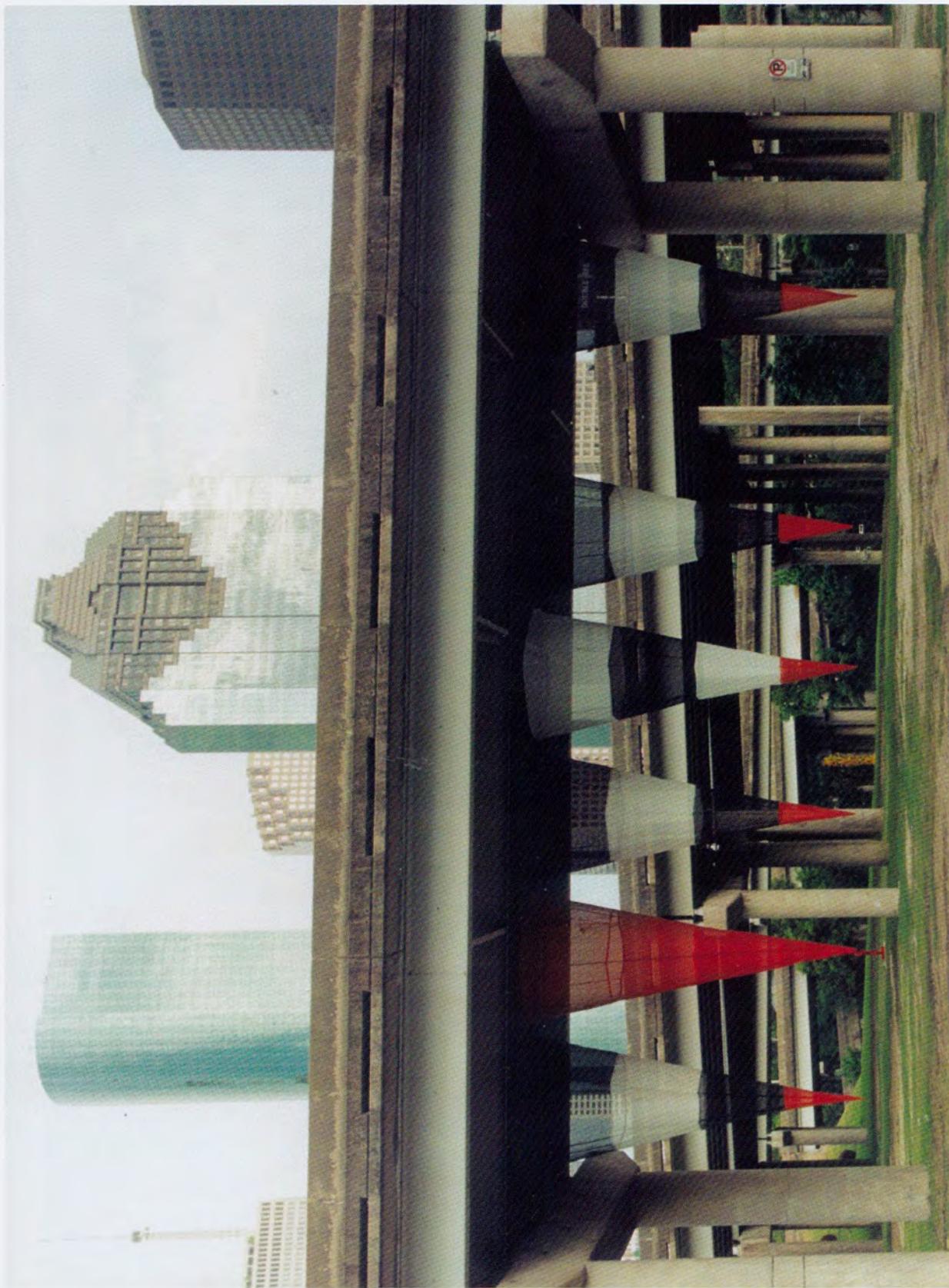


Target swooping down... Bulleyesi, 2001. 140 x 140 x 90 feet. Hand-knotted nylon lace net. ARCO, Atrium of Feria Internacional de Madrid, Spain. Photo: Bruce Petchek





Gravity's Angel Series: Window Treatment with 21 Tails, 2000. Dimensions Variable. Knitted stainless steel and vinyl-coated polyethylene mesh. New York City, Florence Lynch Gallery, Chelsea. Photo: Bruce Petchek



Roadside Shrine I: Cone Ridge, 2000. 57 feet long, 9 feet wide, 17 feet high. Vinyl-coated polyester affixed to the interstate highway, I-45, Houston, Texas, commissioned by the Buffalo Bayou Art Park.



Red Peak, 2000. 22 x 14 x 14 feet. Nylon and fiberglass, steel cables. Art OMI, Omi, New York



Eye of the Storm, 1999. 36 feet high, 13 feet diameter. Knitted stainless steel, nylon, attached to brick buildings by stainless steel cables. Harvard University, Randolph Courtyard. Photo: Bruce Petchek



Trying to hide with your tail in the air, 1998, 18 ft high x 9 ft diameter, suspended from 35-ft-high stainless-steel cable;
Hand-knotted and machine nylon nets, stainless steel, enamel paint, Oak tress;
Permanent Collection, Museum of the Center of Europe, Vilnius, Lithuania. Photo: Gintaras Karosas

Inside Out / Steel Lining, 1998. 36 feet high, 13 feet diameter. Knitted stainless steel, nylon, steel, and sign with text: Viewers are invited to stick their heads inside sculpture. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Photo: Bruce Petchek





Janet Echelman's artwork has been the subject of more than twenty exhibitions and installations in the last decade, including the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University, the Tampa Museum of Art in Florida, The Fields Sculpture Museum in Omi, New York, the Atrium Gallery of the University of Connecticut, the Fung Ping Shan Museum of Hong Kong University, the National Harvard University Graduate School of Design Currents Gallery, and a solo-exhibition curated by Robert Rauschenberg.

She has received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation award, a Japan Foundation artist fellowship, a Massachusetts Cultural Council Individual Artist Grant, a Fulbright Senior Lectureship in Visual Art, a Rotary International Fundacion Fellowship, the Kohler Arts/Industry fellowship in metals, the American Institute of Indian Studies Senior Creative Artist Fellowship in metals, the American Institute of Valparaiso in Spain, the Bogliasco Foundation in Italy, the America Center in Lithuania, the United States Educational Foundation in India, and the United States Information Agency.

She received her undergraduate training at Harvard University and her graduate training at the University of Hong Kong, the New York School for Visual Arts, and the Bard College M.F.A. Program. She currently directs the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and the Graduate School of Lesley College. Echelman lives and works in New York City.

Gallery Exhibition

December - January, 2002

Art Sculpture Park

Art Basel Miami Beach, December 5-8, 2002

Florence Lynch Gallery, New York

Cover photo: **Target swooping down...bullseye! (Variation#2)**, 2001. Caja de Burgos, Patio Casa del Cordón.

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