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MAGAZINE

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1 Nothing but Net

Janet Echelman's colossal, shape-shifting public sculptures awe and inspire.

In 1997 painter Janet Echelman moved to India on a Fulbright Lectureship—but her paints, which she'd shipped separately, never arrived. One day while walking on the beach, she noticed the massive nets being used by local fishermen; unlike her abstract paintings, “they were able to change and move, and were soft but also incredibly strong,” she recalls. She decided to experiment—and, working with the fishermen, produced her first woven sculpture, a jellyfish-like self-portrait she called *Wide Hips*. Now her enormous, billowing creations hang in cities around the globe, from an airport terminal in San Francisco to a plaza in Porto, Portugal. She chooses her materials—netting, mesh—for fluidity, which contrasts sharply with the urban environments where her pieces live. “In big cities we're surrounded by concrete chasms, by glass and steel,” she says. Her sculptures serve “a greater need for softness,” providing a shared experience of awe in a hard-edged world. —ZOE DONALDSON

Echelman's sculpture 1.26 Amsterdam captivated passersby from December 2012 to January 2013.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE GRANITZ. STYLING BY JANE BROWN. HAIR BY JANE BROWN. MAKEUP BY JANE BROWN. PROJECT: SAM KAPLAN. PROP STYLIST: SARAH GIBBO FOR HAILEY RESOURCES.