

PUBLIC ART: A WORLD'S EYE VIEW

Integrating Art Into The Environment



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She Changes

Janet Echelman's distinctive sculptures made of netting have been circling the globe during the last eight years, turning up in many a far-flung place. Netting - natural and synthetic - has become Echelman's trademark, a signature material that she puts to spectacular use. She had gone to India in 1997 as a Fulbright Senior Lecturer in painting - she had started out as a painter - and while there, had a felicitous mishap. The paints that she had shipped to herself via the diplomatic pouch failed to arrive, and she was unable to replace them in time to complete work for her fast approaching exhibition. However, her solution was right in front of her, in the fishermen she watched every day as they folded their nets deftly into large, beautiful volumetric forms. It was a light-bulb moment when she realized that this could be a different way to treat volume, as outlined, fluid space rather than as a solid. Almost overnight, she had found a new medium and a new metier: she became a sculptor although she retains a painterly sensibility.

Among her earliest three-dimensional works was a conically shaped construction of patterned silk fabric wrapped in a diaphanous net train called *More than You Can Chew* and a suspended cascade of shaped netting called *In the Garden of Earthly Delights*, both from 1997. This was followed by cones such as *Outside/Inside*, dropped into the courtyard of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, and *Roadside Shrine*, installed on a highway outside of Houston and fabricated out of vinyl coated polyester. Echelman is constantly experimenting with different fibers in order to increase its flow, physical and visual lightness and durability. *Target Swooping Down...Bullseye!* signaled a departure, its

appearance depending wholly on its site and was a quantum jump in ambition, its potential scale limited only by the architecture. Made in 2001, this free-form sculpture has been installed in five venues - Madrid, Burgos, New York, Miami Beach, and Rotterdam - looking remarkably different in each place. It seems to be a direct descendant of Target and, much praised, it is her most successful venture to date.

She Changes is located in Portugal, a permanent outdoor public art project sited on a plaza at the juncture of Porto and Matosinhos, facing the Atlantic Ocean. Its layered red and white netting -made of Tenara, an almost indestructible fiber akin to Teflon in composition - is held in place by three striped poles, also red and white, a reference to the color of smokestacks and lighthouses in the vicinity, and an enormous tilted red steel ring 45 meters in diameter, its highest point 27 meters off the ground. It emblematically presents local history; the nets remind us that the site is a fishing community and the form at times resembles a giant but delicate, translucent jellyfish or other sea creatures - or even a space ship in motion. It is also based on feminist principles as the title suggests, more yielding than otherwise, soft rather than hard, bowl-like, oblique rather than vertical, monumental in an anti-monumental way. It is also pure poetry. *She Changes* - while seemingly simple, its engineering apparent - becomes breathtakingly beautiful as it dances in the shape-shifting winds from the ocean, merging into sky, sea and weather. Gilded by ambient light and colors by day, illuminated at night, it is a sculpture that dissolves into thin air, becoming part of the landscape and seascape, then reappears, an intervention that acts in perfect unison with nature, an

exemplary instance of what outdoor public sculpture can be.

Lilly Wei :

Lilly Wei is a New York-based art critic and independent curator who writes frequently for *Art in America* and other publications.

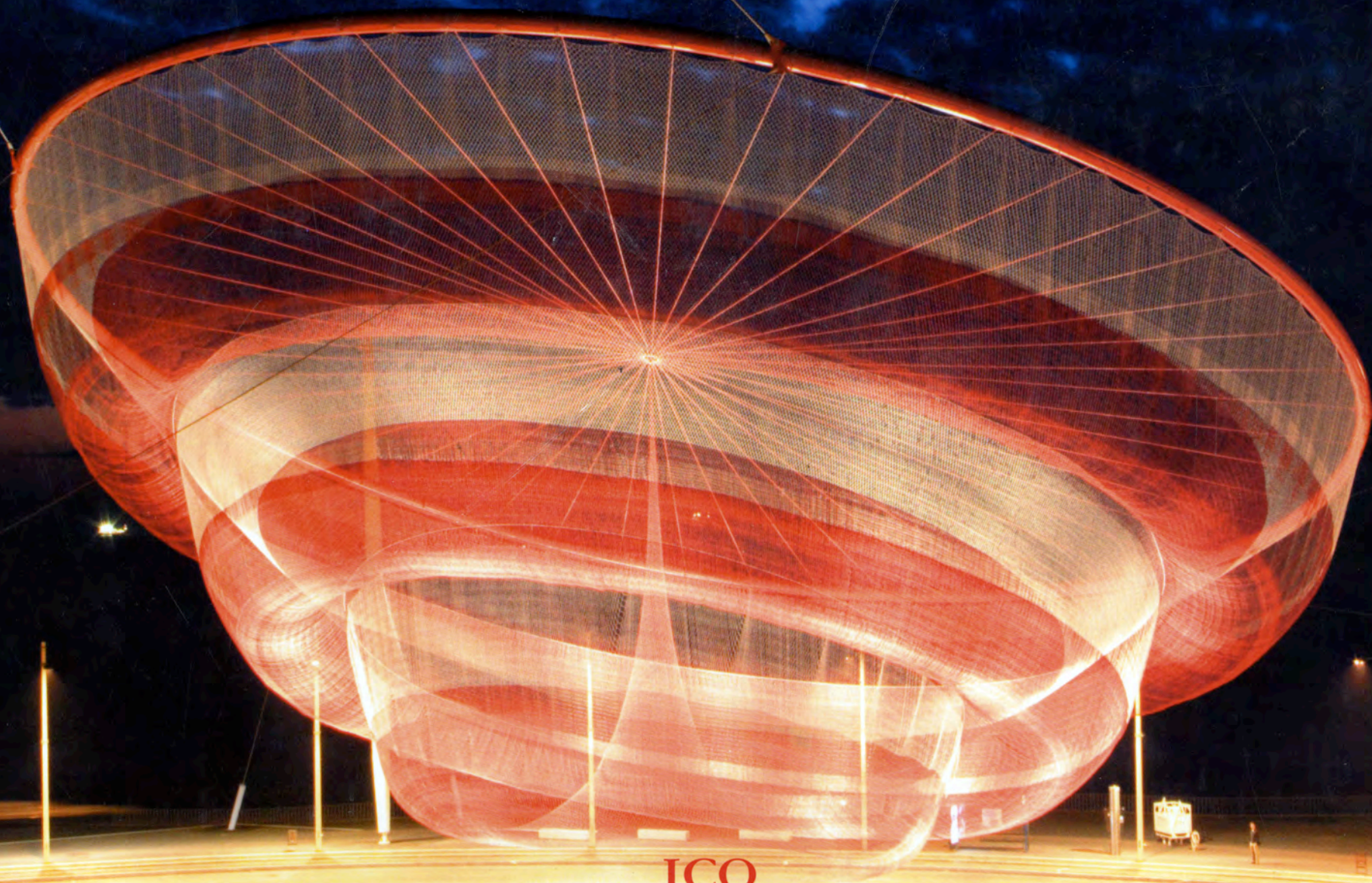
She is a contributing editor at *ARTnews* and *Art Asia Pacific*.



OUTSTANDING PUBLIC ART

OF THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY FIRST CENTURIES

A World's Eye View of Great Public Art



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