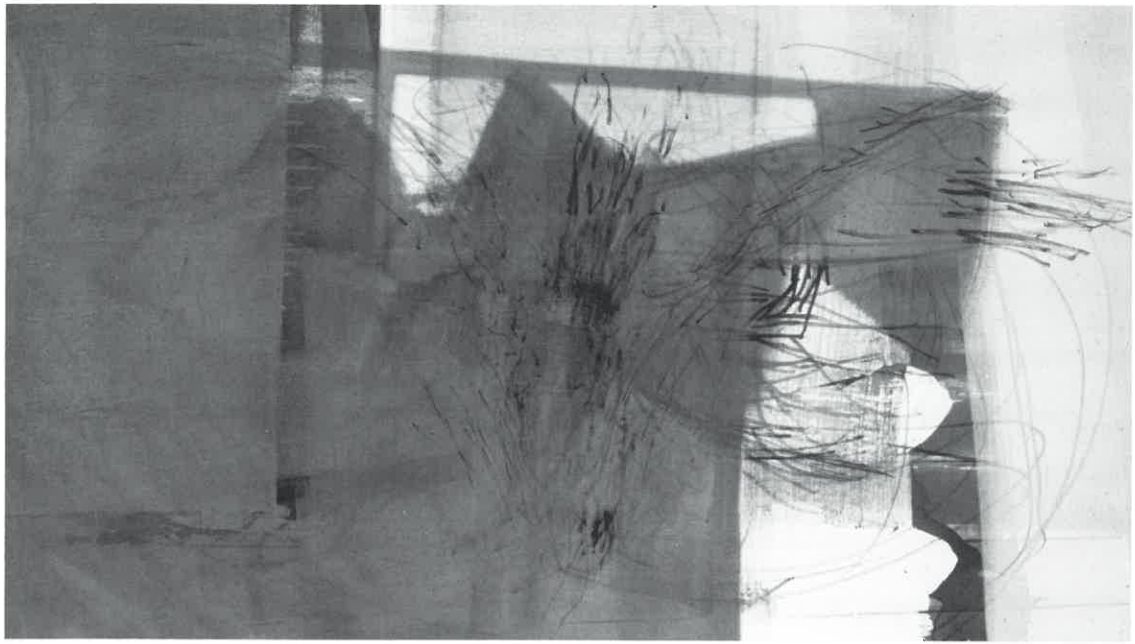


**Janet Echelman: New Vision**



*The dislocation of a tree from its scape, 1993 (checklist number 7)*

## Preface

In June 1985, I received a telephone message that a Janet Echelman had called from the St. Petersburg *Times*. Apparently, Ms. Echelman wished to interview me, but the only Echelman I had encountered during my first few months in Tampa was my new doctor. I figured there could not be too many Echelmans, so I returned the call and set up an appointment. It was at once an "interview op" for the new director and an opportunity to meet the daughter of new friends.

I encountered an impressive young woman, home for the summer from Radcliffe and working as a newspaper intern. The allotted fifteen minutes became ninety. I was charmed. Janet possessed poise, self-confidence, maturity, a knowledge of art and a worldly perspective far beyond what I expected. From that time on, her occasional visits

between trips to Hong Kong, Bali, Santa Fe and Cambridge included stimulating discussions about art, artists, and cultures.

Amidst her many experiences, Janet was blossoming as a painter, moving beyond her early accomplishments as a concert pianist. Eager and talented, Janet has been in the right place at the right time with the right people. And it has not been luck. Janet makes it happen. From one-person exhibits in commercial building lobbies in Tampa to the American Cultural Embassy in Indonesia, and now this Museum, Janet's prodigious production warrants attention. Janet may be young but what she lacks in years she more than makes up for in quality.

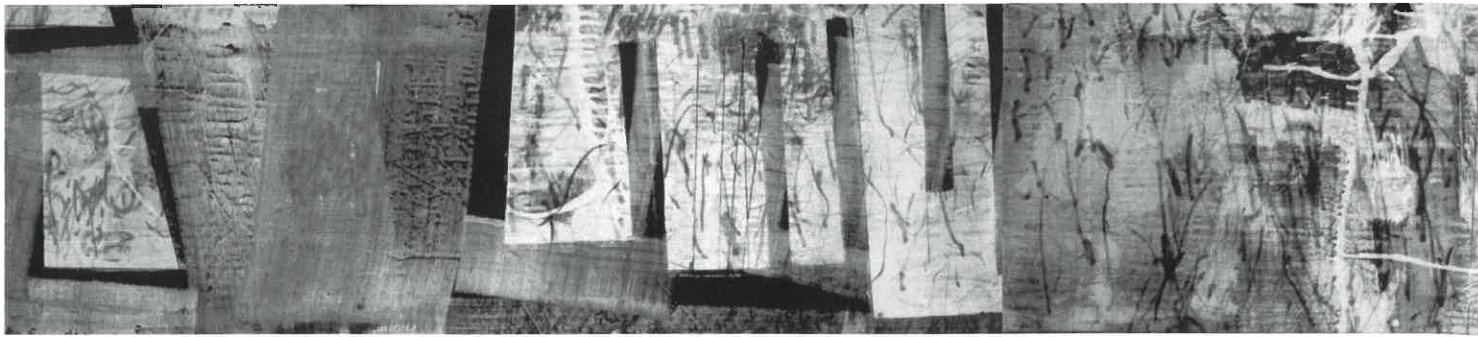
R. Andrew Maass  
Director

# Janet Echelman: New Vision

**W**riting about an artist whose work is evolving at Janet Echelman's accelerated pace is a tricky business. Only two years ago Echelman's all-over painting and collage process favored a much more heavy-bodied materiality and the descriptive spaces in her work were shallower in relation to the picture plane. Since then her touch has significantly lightened, her color has become more evocative of natural and projected light, and her use of illusionistic space has become more dynamic, often receding into deep space before being called back emphatically to the literalness of the picture surface. I believe these formal developments are symptomatic of an emotional sea-change in her relation to the painting process.

In the past, Echelman has directed her abstract expressionist manner to its traditional role as an autographic register of a psychic state. The psyche may wear a public or social face and this emphasis was borne out in Echelman's earlier work which focused on questions of identity and placement within the world. Since 1988 she has divided her time between Bali and the United States, where she teaches at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. A number of her free-hanging collages have incorporated Balinese ikats, and her own paint splattered overalls are embedded in another. The calligraphic alphabet of circles and crosses that she has developed over the last few years is partly inspired by the symbols and signs of Asian ornament and cosmological systems, and also by the staves and notes of the musical scores that she immersed herself in as a concert pianist during her teens in Florida. Even her use of hot color and her emerging engagement with the fluidity of paint can be attributed to her identification with the semi-tropical and tropical environments of Florida and Bali.

In looking at Echelman's recent work, which is the subject of the present exhibition, it is immediately apparent that she has consolidated her technique while expanding her formal range. But her development has been more than technical. Overt visual clues to exotic locales and vocations other than painting have largely disappeared from her imagery. Instead, Echelman has established firmer connections to a more contemporary painting culture, one that invokes the rich historicism of painters as diverse as Twombly, Kiefer, and Polke. Each artist in his own way is influenced by the grand manner of gestural abstract expressionism; but each rejects that movement's belief in the painting process as a means to uncover and confront an "authentic" prime self, an existential, core being. Certainly, their work reveals characteristics of individual sensibility and personality, but this occurs in a movement away from a preoccupation with self-definition as the goal of cultural production. Rather, their efforts are directed towards observing a mutable self *in relation* to culture. In this view, it is startling but not surprising to find that a similar shift in intention has opened up Echelman's work to an increasingly vivid "inner" life of the psyche.

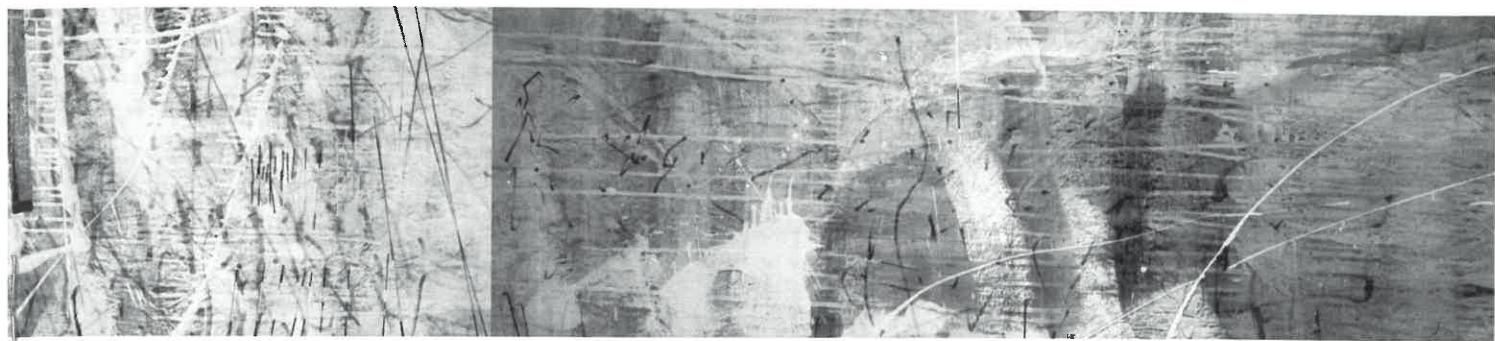


*Rewriting sonata form (3 movements)*, 1993 (checklist number 10)

One measure of the evolution of Echelman's art is the breadth of its expressive range. Though her new paintings are as a group the most beautiful and elegant she has made, it would now be impossible to summarize the spirit of her work with words like "celebrational" or "commemorative," the way it might have been two years ago. Her current work cultivates too many qualities of feeling to define so easily. I'm particularly struck by the Gothic intensity of the smaller paintings in general and of two landscapes in particular (both paintings come as close to an overt pictorial representation of traditional space as Echelman has allowed herself in some time). In each of these paintings, the viewer's gaze is drawn into the receding space of a landscape horizon line and then snapped back to the surface by concrete actions of paint that nevertheless invoke an invisible world of feeling, even the supernatural. *Invasion of the landscape by a high-pitched sound* is a small terror of a painting; the light is stormy and crepuscular and the ghostly figure of the red splatter of paint reads like a cancellation of the landscape. The mood of *The occupation of a landscape and its subsequent denial (is wider than never being occupied at all)*, on the other hand, is ecstatic. The twisting white brushstrokes levitate out of the ground like the dead on Judgement Day, weaving in and out confetti sprays of little red pen marks and diminishing into the daylight deep space of the high horizon line.

Echelman's larger paintings trade in the concentrated mysticism of the smaller works for a more open ended exploration of painterly effect and stylistic tropes. These are cultural scapes, rather than expressively intensified natural landscapes. The blue washes in *The dislocation of a tree from its scape* and *Erasure and residue*, for instance, are not generative of natural phenomena and light so much as they are of cultural and technological experience. The transparent blue and white light in both paintings is blatantly artificial, reminiscent of photochemical dyes and light projected through transparent gels. The sense of movement and animated scratchiness of Echelman's pen marks brings them closer to suggesting frames from experimental film, such as Stan Brakhage's hand treated films that evoke the natural world while giving us a concrete experience of their own materiality. For while nature remains a referent in these paintings, the balance of intention is tipped towards the experience of *painting*. And if the visual effects seem artificial in relation to nature, we are nevertheless growing accustomed to regarding them as wholly natural to painting.

A similar filmic space and light inhabits the panoramic triptych, *Rewriting sonata form (3 movements)*, but the jazzy black and white trapezoidal patterning on the left is more evocative of two dimensional design, recalling both Art Deco and the Beat rhythms of the 1950s. The central and right hand panels describe a breaking free of design into a luminous



energetic free floating space, a transcendental progression that is given a formal focus by her acute compositional use of cropping. It is apparent that Echelman's increasing technical command and broadening overview of painting culture have empowered her to make paintings of a heightened emotionality and formal discipline, in essence, to embark on the mature phase of her artistic production.

Stephen Westfall

October, 1993

*Stephen Westfall, a New York-based painter and critic, teaches at the School of Visual Arts.*

## Works in the Exhibition

1. *Invasion of the landscape by a high-pitched sound*, 1993  
Acrylic and paper on canvas, 24 x 18 in.
2. *Slipping off a plane in a Japanese water garden*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 18 x 24 in.
3. *The occupation of a landscape and its subsequent denial (is wider than never being occupied at all)*, 1993  
Acrylic, ink, and paper on canvas, 18 x 18 in.
4. *Light from behind (Hudson Valley)*, 1993  
Acrylic, ink, and paper on canvas, 18 x 24 in.
5. *Tentatively held on the edge of a table (or I can paint with lumps of my charred house)*, 1993  
Acrylic and burnt wood on canvas, two panels, each 65 x 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.
6. *Lines for Kandinsky*, 1993  
Acrylic and burnt wood on canvas, 65 x 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.
7. *The dislocation of a tree from its scape*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 30 x 50 in.
8. *Erasure and residue*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 30 x 50 in.
9. *Receded space*, 1993  
Acrylic, tempera, and ink on canvas, 24 x 32 in.
10. *Rewriting sonata form (3 movements)*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 3 panels, each 19<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 60 in.
11. *Reverberating white*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 74<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 66 in.
12. *Transubstantiate*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 59<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 64 in.
13. *Running lines*, 1993  
Acrylic, burnt wood, and ink on canvas, 31 x 83<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.
14. *Mixed metaphor (the rhythm of skinny palm trees)*, 1993  
Acrylic, burnt wood, ink, and paper on canvas, 66 x 73 in.
15. *Downpour*, 1993  
Acrylic and burnt wood on canvas, 66 x 36 in.
16. *Pasted on the clouds*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 30 x 50 in.
17. *Melted tree*, 1993  
Acrylic, burnt wood, and ink on canvas, 24 x 18 in.
18. *Melting treeline*, 1993  
Acrylic, burnt wood, and ink on canvas, 18 x 24 in.
19. *Erasing the shore*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 18 x 18 in.
20. *Kiss the camera*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 18 x 18 in.
21. *Strata*, 1993  
Acrylic, burnt wood, and ink on canvas, 3 panels, each 30 x 36 in.
22. *Floating lines, reflected surfaces*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 19<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.
23. *Lines and thickets*, 1993  
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 20 x 20 in.

## Education

Harvard College, Cambridge, MA, 1983-87  
A.B., Magna Cum Laude.

University of Hong Kong, 1987-88  
Rotary Graduate Scholarship, Fellowship for International Understanding.

International School of America, International Honors Program, 1985-86

New York School of Visual Arts, 1991  
MFA Program at Bard College, 1992-94

Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts.

## Exhibitions: One-Person

- 1995 Center for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 1994 Avery Art Center, Bard College, New York
- 1994-93 Tampa Museum of Art, Florida
- 1993 Jakarta Cultural Torch, Indonesia, "Two Worlds, One Artist: Works from Indonesia and America"
- 1992 Harvard University, Adams House, Cambridge, MA
- 1991 NCNB Plaza, with assistance from Tampa Museum of Art "Recent Works from the Bali Studio."
- 1990 Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong "Acrylic-Batik-Crayon: Paintings from Bali by Janet Echelman."
- 1990 Kamarkini Gallery, Bali, Indonesia, "Recent Mixed-media Works by Janet Echelman."
- 1989-90 Barbara Mann Performing Arts Hall, Florida, "Batik Collage: New Works from Bali by Janet Echelman," Robert Rauschenberg, curator.
- 1989 Department of Fine Arts Gallery, University of Hong Kong, "Recent Work from the Bali Studio: Acrylic Paint on Dyed Canvas."
- 1989 University of South Florida Art Museum, One Tampa City Center, "Recent Work from the Bali Studio: Acrylic Paint on Dyed Canvas."
- 1988 Fringe Club Gallery, Hong Kong
- 1985 Harvard University, Mather House, Atrium Gallery

## Exhibitions: Selected Group

- 1993 Harvard University, Luis Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, "30th Anniversary Exhibition."
- 1991-92 Tampa Museum of Art, Florida State Museum of Art, University of Florida Art Museum, Vero Beach Art Center, Daytona Beach Museum of Fine Art, "Florida Craftsmen 40th Anniversary Juried Exhibition."
- 1991 Linda Garland Gallery, Bali, Indonesia, "Bali International Fine Arts Exhibition."



Janet Echelman in her Bali studio, 1992.

- 1988 Hong Kong, Kowloon, and New Territories Sites (traveling exhibition) "Phillippe Charriol Foundation: 1988 Modern Art Competition Winners."
- 1987 Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Main Gallery, Harvard University, "Thesis and Senior Tutorials."

## Gallery Representation

NEW YORK Yasuda Fine Arts  
TOKYO Yasuda Fine Arts  
HONG KONG Alisan Fine Arts, Ltd.  
FLORIDA Clayton Galleries, Tampa  
BALI Agung Rai Fine Arts Gallery, Peliatan  
Sumertha Gallery, Ubud  
JAKARTA C-Line Gallery

## Selected Collections

Agung Rai Museum of Fine Art, Bali, Indonesia  
Fung Ping Shan Museum of Art, Hong Kong  
French Embassy, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Hong Kong University, The University Collection, Hong Kong  
Josuf Wanandi, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta,  
John L. Marion, Jr., New York/Fort Worth, Texas  
National Minister of Culture and Education Fuad Hasan, Indonesia  
Robert Black College, Hong Kong  
Robert Rauschenberg, New York/ Captiva Island, Florida  
Tampa Museum of Art, Florida  
United States Ambassador's Residence, Jakarta, Indonesia

## Selected Bibliography

### CATALOGUES

- 1994-93 "Janet Echelman: New Vision," Tampa Museum of Art, Florida. Essay by Stephen Westfall
- 1993-92 "Two Worlds, One Artist: Works from Indonesia and America by Janet Echelman," Bentara Budaya Jakarta (Jakarta Cultural Torch). Essay by Jim Supangkat; introductions by U. S. Ambassador Barry, Indonesian Minister of Culture and Education Fuad Hasan.
- 1990 "Acrylic-Batik-Crayon: Works by Janet Echelman," Fung Ping Shan Museum of Art, Hong Kong. Essay by Joan Lebold Cohen; introduction by Dr. Michael Lau, Director, Fung Ping Shan Museum (in Chinese).
- 1988 "An Artist's Journal from Bali: Notes by Janet Echelman," Department of Fine Arts, Hong Kong University, Pokfulam, Hong Kong.

### REVIEWS

- Jim Supangkat, "American Painter explores art, life through metatextual works," *The Jakarta Post*, January 21, 1993, p. 7.
- Melanie Morrison, "Two Worlds of artist Janet Echelman," *The Jakarta Post*, January 21, 1993, pg.7.
- Gary Sussman, "Artists Abroad: Searching the World for Inspiration," *The Boston Phoenix*, May 29- June 4, 1992.
- Janet Echelman, "Metamorphosis of a Painter, the artist in Bali," *The Radcliffe Quarterly*, March 1992, pp. 30-31.
- Janet Echelman, "The Balinese Effect," *Harvard Magazine*, March-April, 1993, with color photograph on p. 22.
- Patti Breckinridge, "Lessons learned from engaging in a simpler life," *The Tampa Tribune*, Editorial, March 13, 1991.
- Amy Scherzer, "From Harvard yard to Bali rice fields," *Tampa Bay Upscale*, March 1991.
- Angela Savko, "All things bright and beautiful: Color is key in new exhibits," *Ft. Myers News Press*, Arts Section, December 1990.
- Jeffrey Hantover, "Paradoxes in Paradise," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 1990.
- Jeffrey Hantover, "An American in Bali," *Discovery Magazine*, August 1990, photographed by Mary Beth Camp, p. 123.
- Sue Heady, "Art from a colourful life," *South China Morning Post*, *The Weekly Guide*, June 10-16, 1990.
- Vernon Ram, "Batik Images," *Arttention Magazine*, June 1990, pp. 48-51.
- Vernon Ram, "A Brush with Balinese Batiks," *The Hong Kong Standard*, *Your World on Sunday*, December 17, 1989.
- Mary Ann Marger, "A Bold and Abstract Bali," *St. Petersburg Times*, January, 1989.
- Regina Law, "Dyes Flowing . . .," *South China Morning Post*, September, 1988.
- Roni Kalyk, "Janet Echelman: A Woman of Many Talents," *B International Magazine*, June 1988.



Lines for Kandinsky, 1993 (checklist number 6)



*The occupation of a landscape and its subsequent denial (is wider than never being occupied at all), 1993  
(checklist number 3)*

## **Janet Echelman: New Vision**

November 14, 1993–January 9, 1994

Sponsored by

**WOLF BROTHERS**

Tampa Museum of Art

601 Doyle Carlton Drive

Tampa, FL 33602

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