

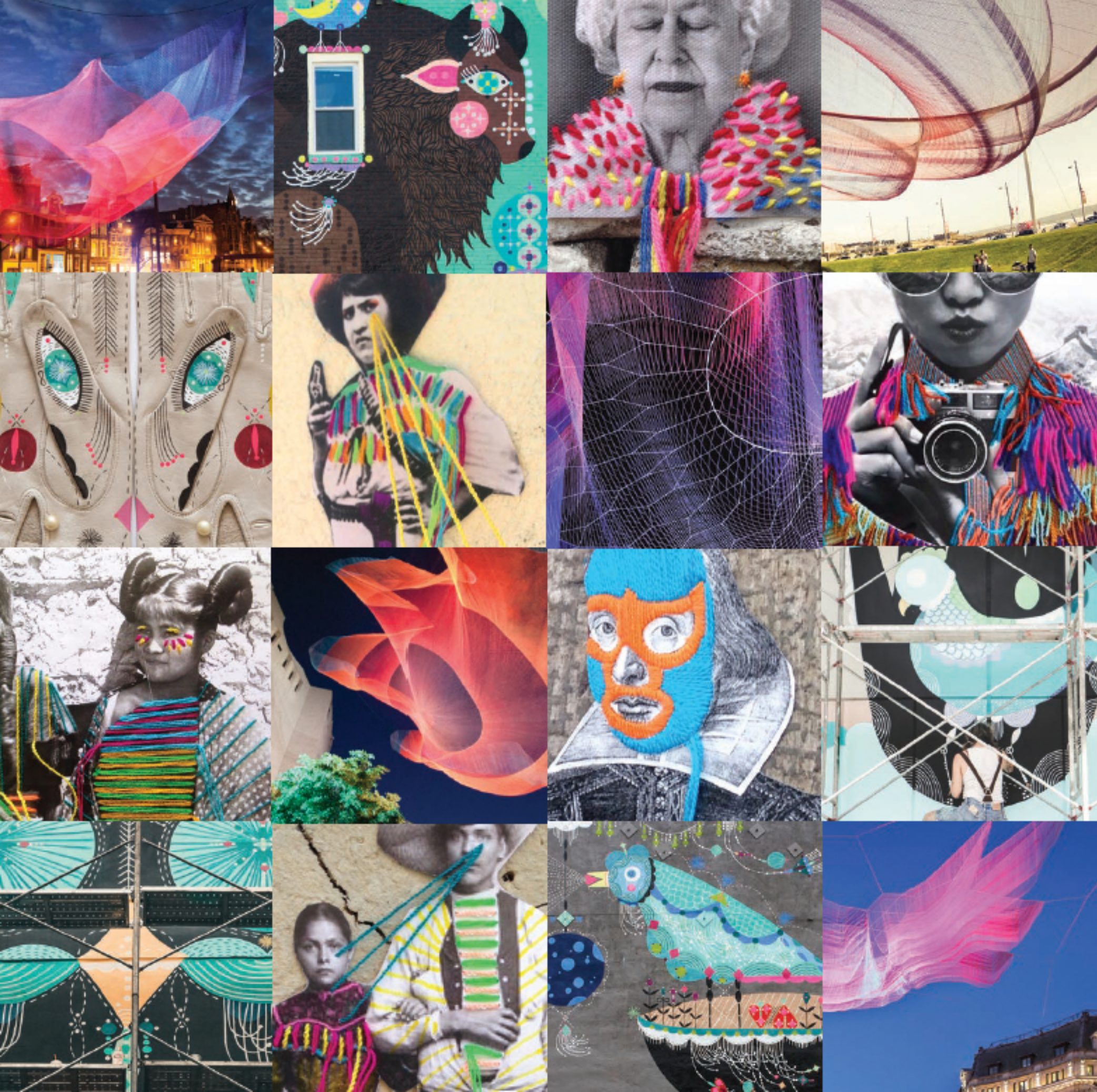


A BIG IMPOR- TANT ART BOOK

**NOW WITH
WOMEN!**

Profiles of Unstoppable **F**emale Artists—and Projects to Help You Become One

DANIELLE KRYSA, FOUNDER OF THE JEALOUS CURATOR



Chapter 11

**SHARE
WITH
THE
PUBLIC**

like Janet Echelman,
Bunnie Reiss,
and Victoria Villasana

PROJECT

Sharing your work with the world can be intimidating, but there is literally nowhere to hide when you're a public installation artist. They don't stash their art away on a dusty studio shelf; these artists take it outside for everyone to see. After all, that's what being an artist is about, right? We want to share our ideas, so that's exactly what we're going to do—but we'll start small. In my first book, *Creative Block*, I asked Toronto artist/designer Amanda Happé what she does when she needs to get unblocked, and her answer is perfect for this chapter. Here is what she suggested:

“Make something and leave it somewhere public—somewhere it might be found. Something not too grand or careful, but honest and perhaps lovely. When you're creating it, think about one person happening upon it. Make them a message. If you enjoy this feeling of caring about something without feeling precious about it, do it again.”

I took her advice and left three small collages in various places around my hometown. It was exciting, scary, vulnerable—but most important—fun!

Once you feel comfortable with these small public pieces, you may very well move on to a much grander scale. Perhaps you'll be inspired by Janet Echelman and her giant, colorful nets floating over various cityscapes, the cosmic murals of Bunnie Reiss, or the embroidery-covered street art of Mexico's Victoria Villasana.

Janet Echelman

B. 1966 | USA

American artist Janet Echelman was raised in Tampa, Florida. As a child she was a serious classical pianist, which was great help when applying to Harvard. There she studied history and documentary filmmaking and later earned a master's degree in counseling psychology. So no, Janet hadn't spent her childhood drawing, painting, and dreaming of creating huge public installations all over the world. In fact, she'd never even really made art until university, when she decided to take an elective drawing course—mainly as a way to minimize her reading load.

“After that drawing class, I had a chance to take one more art course before graduation, then realized being an artist was the only thing I wanted to do.”

I thought I should give it a try, because there would always be time for compromise if I failed.

Upon graduating, now ready and excited to be an artist, Janet applied to seven art schools—and was rejected by all of them. No problem: Janet would create her own curriculum. She moved to Hong Kong in 1987 on a Rotary Club-sponsored scholarship to be an ambassador of goodwill and took the opportunity to study Chinese calligraphy and brush-painting. When her scholarship ran out, she made her way to Bali with only \$300 in her pocket and began learning from local artisans to combine traditional Indonesian batik with contemporary painting. Sadly, her bamboo house was destroyed by a fire, so Janet

Impatient Optimist, Seattle, WA, 2015. Spliced and braided PTFE, UHMWPE, and polyester fibers with colored LED, 91 x 53.3 x 16.8 m. Seattle, Washington

decided to return to the States. For seven years she taught and was an artist-in-residence at Harvard—until she was offered an opportunity to travel again, which of course, she took. Janet returned to Asia, this time taking on a Fulbright lecture-ship in India.



LEFT TO RIGHT

She Changes, Porto, Portugal, 2005. Painted galvanized steel and TENARA® achitectural fiber, 41.4 x 73 x 48.8 m. Porto, Portugal.

As if It Were Already Here, Boston, MA, 2015. Hand-spliced UHMWPE and braided high-tenacity polyester fibers with colored LED lighting, 182.9 x 109.7 x 91.4 m. Boston, Massachusetts.

1.26 Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2012-2013. Spectra® fiber, high-tenacity polyester fiber, and colored lighting, 70 x 42.7 x 9 m. Amsterdam, Netherlands.

questions that would help shape her work:

“*How can I shift these sculptures from being objects you look at to something you could get lost in? How can we enhance public spaces in cities so that they engage individuals and community? What can encourage us to slow down and take a moment of pause in our busy lives?*”

The answer is, of course, everything she has made since then. Janet makes beautiful billowing sculptures as big as the buildings they float beside, creating breathtaking centerpieces for cities around the world from London, Amsterdam, and Boston to San Francisco, Singapore, and Sydney. And Janet’s nets were only the beginning: she has also started working with atomized water particles. She continues

to push her ideas with artwork that—thanks to wind and light—constantly transforms itself right in front of your eyes.

Janet collaborates with a huge range of people to produce these pieces, often referring to public art as a “team sport.” Her team began with the fisherman in India and now includes aeronautical and mechanical engineers, architects, lighting designers, landscape architects, and fabricators.

The result is a truly communal experience, not only for the team involved, but for the thousands of viewers who walk by, drive past, and lie under Janet’s soft, flowing, ultralightweight feats of artistry and engineering.

Public Accolades for a Public Installation Artist

Janet Echelman is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship,

and her TED Talk “Taking Imagination Seriously” has been translated into thirty-five languages with 1.8 million views. She was named an *Architectural Digest* Innovator for “changing the very essence of urban spaces,” received the Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award in Visual Arts, and ranked #1 on Oprah’s list of “50 Things That Make You Say Wow!”



ACROSS 1.26 Denver, Colorado, 2010. Spectra® fiber, high-tenacity polyester fiber, and colored lighting, 40 x 42.3 x 41 m. Denver, Colorado.

RIGHT 1.8 London, UK, 2016. Fibers braided with nylon and UHMWPE, colored lighting, Wi-Fi, and interactive computer programming, 54.9 x 54.9 x 21.3 m. London, UK.

Since she was a painter at this point, the plan was of course to paint and exhibit her paintings during her time in India. Janet had her supplies shipped to Mahabalipuram, a small fishing village where she'd be staying. She arrived, but her paints did not. Perhaps it was a sign from the universe, or just an opportunity for an artist with moxie, but Janet did not let this stop her from creating. Mahabalipuram was known for sculpture, and so Janet began working with the bronze casters in the village. Unfortunately, her Fulbright budget didn't allow for expensive heavy materials, so once again she would have to readjust her plan.

One evening she was watching local fishermen bundling their



nets on the beach. Could nets be the way to create volume without weight? Yes, yes, they could.

Janet spent her year in India collaborating with not bronze casters or artists but fisherman. She used their traditional knot-tying techniques to create beautiful netted sculptures, but the final piece of the puzzle

fell into place when the nets were hoisted up onto poles so Janet could photograph them. She was mesmerized when she saw their "delicate surfaces revealing every ripple of wind in constantly changing patterns." Janet now had her sights set on a truly artistic horizon and began to ask the very important