

selvedge

ISSUE 12
UK £7.50 EUROPE €15
USA \$20 CANADA \$25
REST OF WORLD £15



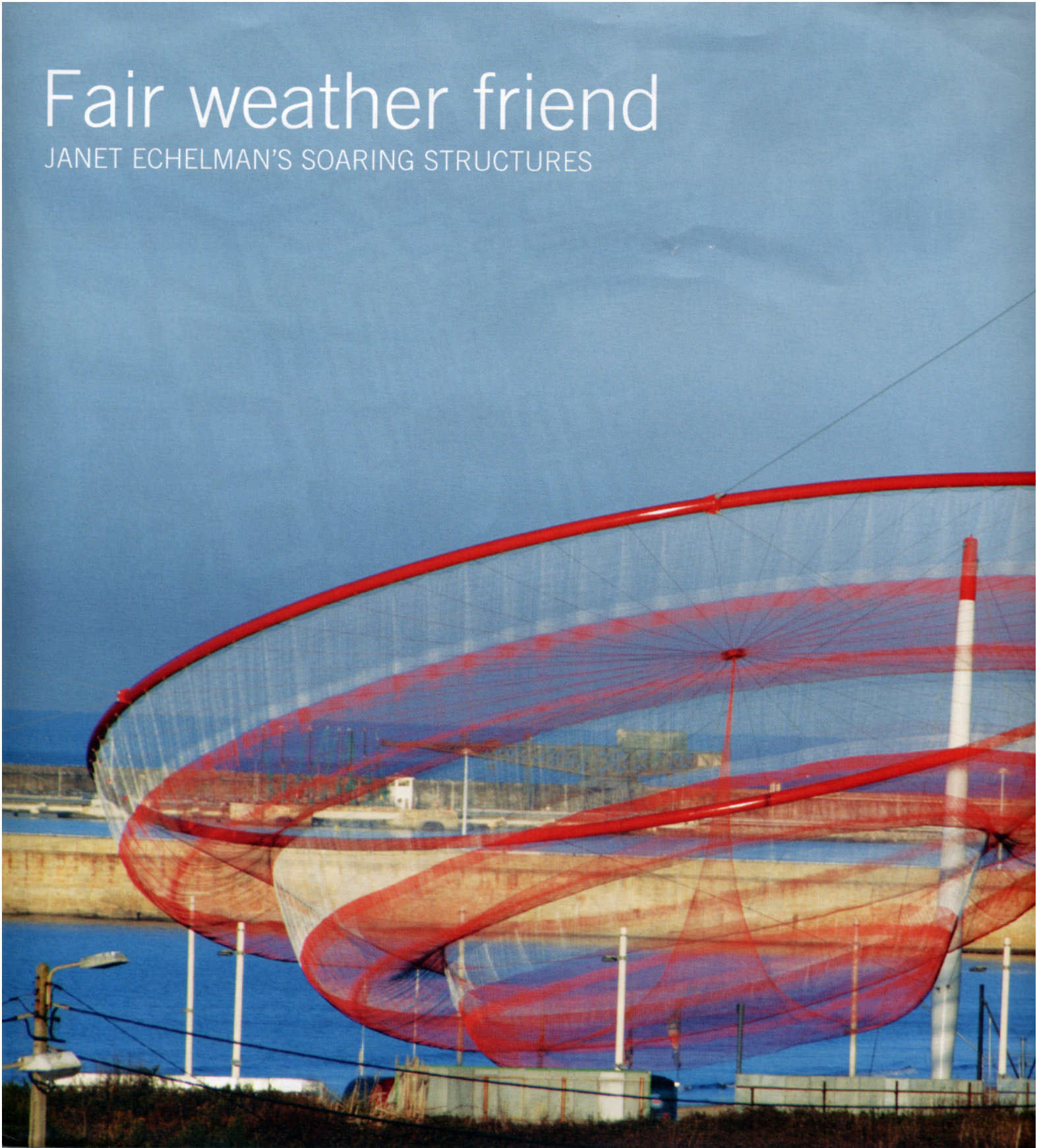
Voyage! Patterns of the world



THE FABRIC OF YOUR LIFE: TEXTILES IN FINE ART, FASHION, INTERIORS, TRAVEL AND SHOPPING

Fair weather friend

JANET ECHELMAN'S SOARING STRUCTURES

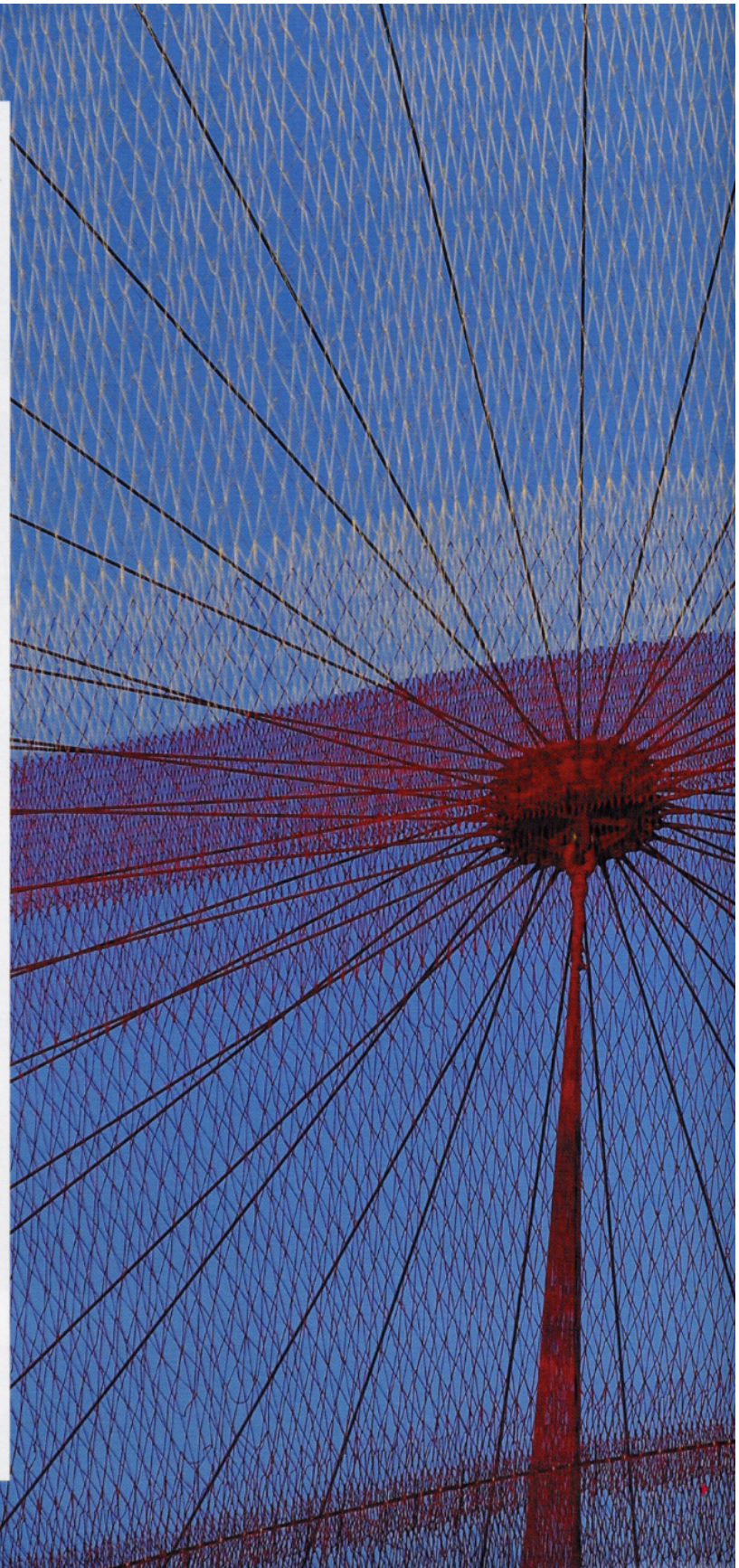




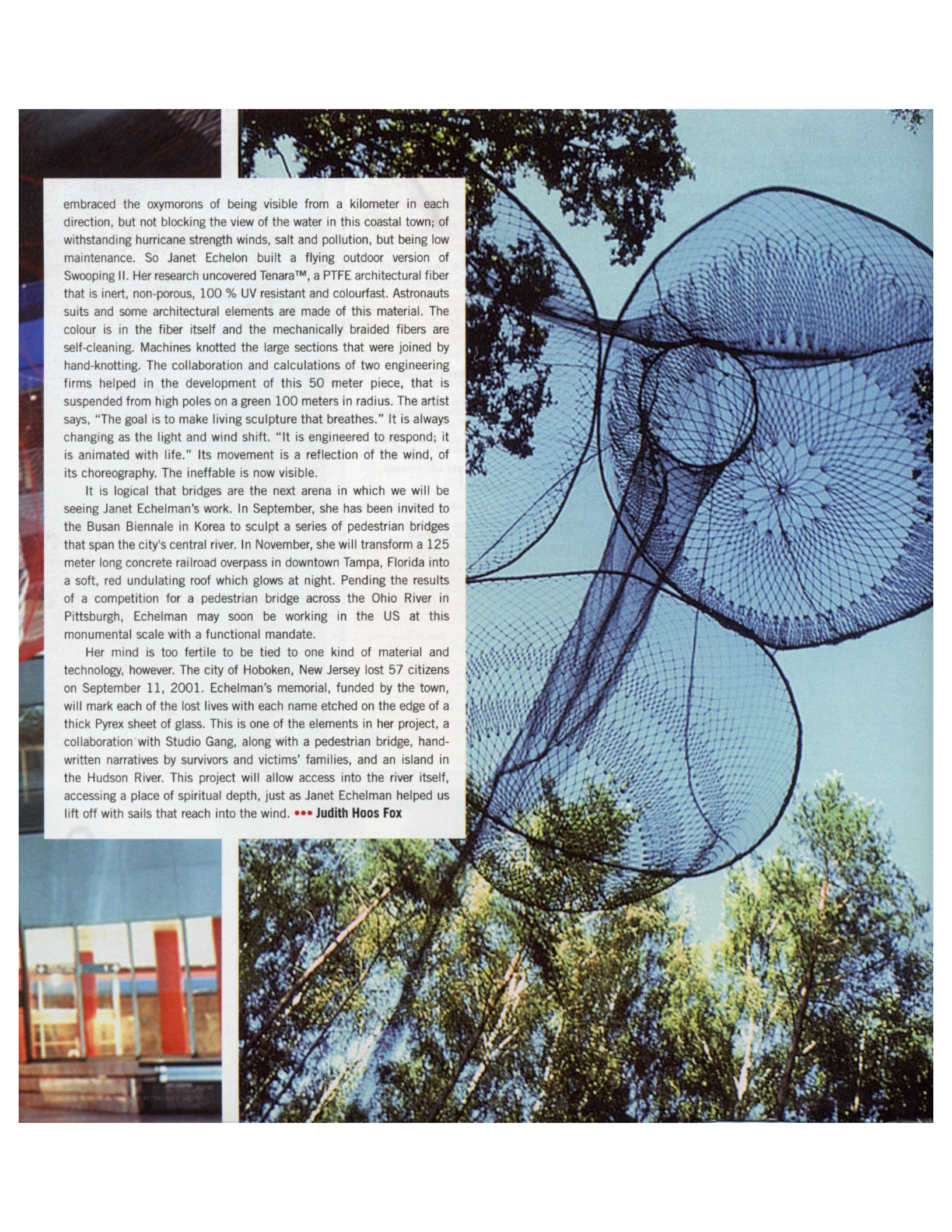
This glorious three-tiered interior court is where Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand welcomed home Christopher Columbus from his voyage to the New World. Here the old world met the new: history and future, conjoined dramatically. Now this space houses the headquarters of Caja de Burgos, a Spanish bank. Here royalty, formerly a power source, meets finance, a current measure of the same. New York and Boston based artist Janet Echleman created for this space, in 2001, a work that embodies its complexity, that knits together past with future, that reflects the polarities that define the dialogue of history. Suspended from the coffered ceiling *Swooping II*, is a network of nylon threads, knotted by hand into a lace form, suspended and soaring, doubles back on itself, self-enveloped and reaching, rising up and settling down, a maze of tracery against the finely carved stone walls. This cocoon-umbrella-jellyfish-blossom speaks as much of the lace makers of Spain and Portugal – fine fingers balancing and bouncing many bobbins – as of its weathered and brawny fishermen, their livelihood gleaned from the sea.

It was a mishap recast from tragedy to trajectory, that brought Echelman to this way of working. When her painting supplies failed to reach her in India, where she had arrived for a sojourn of teaching on a Fulbright, she looked to her surroundings to shape her next steps. It was her evening walks on the beach, passing fishermen mending their nets, and seeing these mounds of fibers that pointed the way. Here was a method for creating mass that could easily be moved; nomadic mass, she calls it. She learned the living crafts of the region from her neighbours – a family of Muslim tailors, the Hindi fishermen. Using the language of the place has become a hallmark of Echelman's artistic practice.

In 2001 she was invited to Porto Portugal to create her first monumental permanent piece, *She Change*. Here, the requirements







embraced the oxymorons of being visible from a kilometer in each direction, but not blocking the view of the water in this coastal town; of withstanding hurricane strength winds, salt and pollution, but being low maintenance. So Janet Echelon built a flying outdoor version of Swooping II. Her research uncovered Tenara™, a PTFE architectural fiber that is inert, non-porous, 100 % UV resistant and colourfast. Astronauts suits and some architectural elements are made of this material. The colour is in the fiber itself and the mechanically braided fibers are self-cleaning. Machines knotted the large sections that were joined by hand-knotting. The collaboration and calculations of two engineering firms helped in the development of this 50 meter piece, that is suspended from high poles on a green 100 meters in radius. The artist says, "The goal is to make living sculpture that breathes." It is always changing as the light and wind shift. "It is engineered to respond; it is animated with life." Its movement is a reflection of the wind, of its choreography. The ineffable is now visible.

It is logical that bridges are the next arena in which we will be seeing Janet Echelman's work. In September, she has been invited to the Busan Biennale in Korea to sculpt a series of pedestrian bridges that span the city's central river. In November, she will transform a 125 meter long concrete railroad overpass in downtown Tampa, Florida into a soft, red undulating roof which glows at night. Pending the results of a competition for a pedestrian bridge across the Ohio River in Pittsburgh, Echelman may soon be working in the US at this monumental scale with a functional mandate.

Her mind is too fertile to be tied to one kind of material and technology, however. The city of Hoboken, New Jersey lost 57 citizens on September 11, 2001. Echelman's memorial, funded by the town, will mark each of the lost lives with each name etched on the edge of a thick Pyrex sheet of glass. This is one of the elements in her project, a collaboration with Studio Gang, along with a pedestrian bridge, handwritten narratives by survivors and victims' families, and an island in the Hudson River. This project will allow access into the river itself, accessing a place of spiritual depth, just as Janet Echelman helped us lift off with sails that reach into the wind. ●●● Judith Hoos Fox