Making Waves: Janet Echelmanâ??s Awe Inducing Textiles

Description

American contemporary artist Janet Echelman makes vast, diaphanous sculptures that mimic the flowing patterns of nature, resembling air, water, wind and light. Made from colossal nets and strands of rope, her awe-inspiring aerial constructions merge aspects of fibre art with architecture, landscaping, and engineering, a fusion that has allowed her to entirely transform a vast range of public places around the world. She says, â??I hope my art creates an invitation to listen to our inner selves, and to connect us to one another in a public space. In that way, I hope my art can be a transformative element. In our busy urban lives, I feel a need to find moments of contemplation, and I hope my art can offer that to each person in their own way.â?•

Butterfly Rest Stop, Frisco, TX, 2024

Echelman was born in Tampa, Florida, in 1966, and graduated from Harvard University in 1987. Following graduation, she spent time in Hong Kong learning Chinese calligraphy and brush painting. She then spent the next 5 years living in a Balinese village, where she learned how to combine traditional textile production with element of painting. When her Balinese house burned down in a fire, Echelman returned to the United States, where she took on further study in painting and psychology, followed by teaching work at Harvard.

Noli Timere, Sculpture #1 (Milan), Italy, 2023

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From here, Echelman earned a Fulbright artistâ??s lectureship in India. While spending time in the fishing village of Mahabalipuram, Echelman became fascinated with the voluminous fishing nets used by local fishermen, and the ways they moved through space. She began making hand-crafted net sculptures in collaboration with the local fishermen, producing intricate nets which she would hoist high on poles, which led them to ripple and wave organically in the wind. This radical ability to create voluminous form from lightweight, fragile means subsequently became a lifelong fascination for the artist. She said, â??When I began making my netted sculptures, they were fabricated completely by hand, made possible by my work with a group of fishermen in India whom I met during my Fulbright grant.â?•

Earthtime 1.8 London, UK, 2016

In 1999, Echelman established her design studio, Echelman Studios, and began working with a team of engineers who helped her develop a series of vast, aeronautic sculptures that could soar in the sky, while withstanding all kinds of weather conditions. In the early 2000â??s, she began working with the industrial material used for spacesuits, adapting it into a lightweight, yet weatherproof twine, and it sparked a lifelong interest in merging industry with handmade art objects. She explains, â??All of my recent works are a combination of machine and hand-work. My studio uses hand-work to create unusual, irregular shapes and joints, and to make lace patterns within the sculpture. We utilize machines for making rectangular and trapezoidal panels with stronger, machine-tightened knots that can withstand intense winds, and the heavy weight of snow and ice storms.â?•

Earthtime 1.78 Dubai, U.A.E., 2018

Earthtime 1.78 Helsinki, Finland, 2021

Her first monumental permanent outdoor sculpture went on display in Porto, Portugal, suspended above a highway roundabout. Building on this success, she began incorporating metal armatures, along with programmable lighting aimed at shifting in accordance with the changing seasons. Installations in the following years include *Earthtime Series: 1.26,* at Denverâ??s Civic Center Park, along with *Every Beating Second* at Terminal 2 of SFO international airport, and *Skies Painted with Unnumbered Sparks* in Vancouver for the TED Conferenceâ??s 30th anniversary. What all these colossal artworks have in common is their ability to turn seemingly ordinary places into sites of awe, wonder, and contemplation. Reflecting on the atmospheric qualities of her art, Echelman explains, â??Iâ??m drawn to places that somehow do not yet click, because itâ??s a challenge â?? enigmatic and interesting.â?•

CATEGORY

1. WEAVING
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Author
rosie-lesso