

Questions and Answers about A Sky Full of Hope:

(As of August 10, 2026)

What kind of artwork is it?

Title: “A Sky Full of Hope” Earthtime 1.78, Frankfurt

Artist: Janet Echelman

Year of Creation: 2026

Location: Konstablerwache, Frankfurt am Main

Occasion: The project takes place as part of World Design Capital (WDC) 2026, but will remain installed far beyond that.

Period: July 2026 to expectedly October 2029



Floating as a giant, softly colored cloud object, Janet Echelman's net sculpture—measuring over 200 square meters—hovers at a height of more than 7 meters above the Konstablerwache plateau. The load-bearing, flexible net structure is made from hand-

spliced, ultra-high-strength polymer fibers similar to those used in aerospace technology. Colored net segments up to 4.5 meters long, knotted using traditional fishing net techniques, are attached to it. In interplay with wind, weather, and lighting conditions, the work continuously changes. As darkness falls, a light score developed by the artist turns it into an almost immaterial, iridescent luminous object.

The internationally renowned US artist created **A Sky Full of Hope Earthtime 1.78 Frankfurt** for the city as part of "WDC 2026, World Design Capital 2026 Frankfurt and Rhein-Main". The work is installed at Konstablerwache for an initial duration of three years. Echelman describes her artistic work as interventions in the perception of places rather than primarily as the creation of autonomous works. Art should not decorate, but rather make spaces re-experienceable. Crucial for her is the actual physical experience of the art on site. This can arise casually in the middle of everyday urban bustle, without prior knowledge or expectation: "All you have to do is look up," says the artist.

Echelman does not search for prestigious, already "functional" places. Her special interest lies in urban spaces that are perceived as anonymous, problematic, or unsafe. Konstablerwache is such a place: a central, highly frequented city square that is simultaneously marked by social tensions and, outside of the two weekly market days, has offered little quality of stay. In precisely such places, Echelman believes art has the potential to transform how urban spaces are used and remembered. She understands her work as an invitation: "The people of Frankfurt decide how they want to use the space. It is their sculpture." (Interview with Janet Echelman, FAZ, March 23, 2026). Thus, **A Sky Full of Hope** touches on current questions regarding the social impact of public art and the relationship between urban space, art, and well-being.

The Frankfurt piece is part of Echelman's **Earthtime series**. The number in the title stands for the microseconds by which the Earth's day was shortened due to the acceleration of the Earth's rotation caused by a single geological event. **Earthtime 1.78** refers to the severe Tohoku earthquake in March 2011 off the east coast of Japan, which triggered the devastating tsunami and the nuclear disaster at Fukushima—a local event of global significance. To find the form for the net sculpture, Echelman was inspired by the measurement data capturing the change in ocean wave heights in the Pacific Ocean during the earthquake.

Through this conceptual reference, as well as through the idea of the net itself, Echelman's work points to the fact that we are part of complex systems of mutual interdependence: ecologically, spatially, and socially. In this respect, the net reflects the

WDC core theme "Design for Democracy. Atmospheres for a better life" and can be understood as a symbol for living together in a democratic society: every knot counts, every connection contributes to the stability of the whole. Only the diversity and complexity of relationships—and the ability to find new balances in the constant interplay of forces—make the net resilient.

Who is the artist?

Echelman, Janet, b. 1966 in Tampa, Florida, currently works near Boston, Massachusetts.

Janet Echelman is among the most internationally renowned figures in public art. Her net sculptures suspended in mid-air often reach the scale of buildings or entire architectural ensembles. In the interplay of traditional knotting techniques, innovative high-performance fibers, and computer-based engineering, the artist creates lightweight, flexible forms that react to wind, weather, and light. Echelman thereby makes forces of nature visible while pointing to the mutual interconnectedness of people, places, and planetary forces. Human creation and natural forces are thus literally networked together.

After graduating with a degree in Visual & Environmental Studies from Harvard University, Echelman studied Chinese calligraphy and brush painting at Hong Kong University before moving to Bali for several years. There, she collaborated with local artisans, combining traditional textile techniques with contemporary painting. She subsequently completed postgraduate studies in painting and psychology.

A decisive turn in her work came during a Fulbright Fellowship in India. In a Tamil fishing village, Echelman waited in vain for her painting materials to arrive and passed the time watching fishermen work on their nets. In them, she recognized the potential to create three-dimensional forms that would capture every movement of the wind and translate it into ever-new shapes. Her first net sculptures were created in collaboration with these fishermen.

Wishing to develop larger and formally more complex works, Echelman soon ran up against the limits of existing digital tools. Starting in 2001, she began working with computer scientists and engineers to develop custom software. This made it possible to visualize complex net geometries and simulate their behavior while accounting for tensile and gravitational forces, weather, materials, and production techniques. Interdisciplinary collaboration and research have been central components of her artistic practice ever since.

Echelman is thus one of the pioneers of those artistic positions that have crossed traditional genre boundaries since the 2000s, working at the intersection of art, science, and technology. At the same time, art-historical connections can be drawn to Environmental Art (which examines the relationship between humans and the environment) as well as the Light and Space Movement (which deals with light, space, and perception). Particularly insightful, however, is the connection to Textile Art. Echelman's work can be situated within the re-evaluation of textile practices since the 1960s. Long considered typically female, domestic handiwork, they were hierarchically devalued compared to the traditional fine arts. Artists like Lenore Tawney and Sheila Hicks contributed significantly to bringing textile techniques out of the craft domain into the canon of contemporary art. Echelman continues this development while transforming it: she combines textile practices with digital technologies and engineering processes, scaling them up to the monumental scale of public space.

Echelman's net sculptures have been exhibited at major sites worldwide, including Oxford Circus in London, the city halls in Sydney and Amsterdam, and Marina Bay in Singapore. She has realized installations in cities like Porto, Vancouver, San Francisco, and Phoenix, where they have become identity-defining urban landmarks. The work created for Frankfurt, *A Sky Full Of Hope – Earthtime 1.78 Frankfurt* (2026), is the artist's first long-term installed work in Germany and only her second in Europe.

Echelman's awards include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, Harvard University, and the Aspen Institute, a Fulbright Senior Lectureship, and the Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award, which honors outstanding innovators in the US. She received an honorary doctorate from Tufts University and has taught at MIT, Harvard, and Princeton. In 2025/26, she held a visiting professorship at the University of Stuttgart.

Janet Echelman Website: www.echelman.com

Technical Facts

Construction: Self-supporting construction consisting of four approx. 12-meter-high pylons anchored securely in the ground.

Dimensions: The colored net measures approximately $26\text{ m} \times 13\text{ m}$ with a height of about 4.5 m.

Installation: The sculpture hovers at a height of approx. 7.5 m to 12 m above the plateau.

Lighting: LED spotlights utilize the reflective quality of the high-tech fibers so that the work appears as a luminous body at night. The sculpture itself contains no light fixtures; it is illuminated by fixtures attached to the four pylons. There are four moving lights and eight static floodlights per pylon, making 48 lights in total.

Material: Suspended over seven meters high, the artwork consists of a load-bearing, flexible net structure made of high-strength polymer fibers—stronger than steel, extremely lightweight, and weather-resistant—similar to those used in aerospace engineering. Colored net segments up to 4.5 meters long, knotted using traditional fishing net techniques, are attached to it. In total, around 103 kilometers of yarn were used for the work.

Ecological Aspects and Wildlife Protection

Tree Population: The trees at Konstablerwache will not be affected. In consultation with the Parks Department (Grünflächenamt), a solution was developed that does not touch the trees.

Note on Bird Safety: Bird safety was carefully considered during the planning of the artwork. Professional bioengineering expertise was brought in. **Assessment:** The physical properties of the artwork do not meet the criteria that would suggest a hazard to birds.

The net structure consists of strong ropes with generous mesh openings. It is therefore easily perceived by birds and, in its spatial effect, resembles naturally occurring structures like vines or dense vegetation. Birds are naturally well-adapted to recognizing and avoiding such structures. According to Janet Echelman's studio, no bird or other animal has ever been harmed by any of her sculptures.

Scientific Research Accompaniment: Art Meets Urban Planning

The installation unfolds its power on many levels and becomes a central social reference point. Accordingly, the artwork forms the starting point for a two-year research-based teaching format titled "A Sky Full of Hope" at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, led

by Prof. Dr.-Ing. Katarina Bajc. In cooperation with the Cultural Development Department of the Cultural Affairs Office and the Coordination Office for Central Urban Space in the Urban Planning Office, urban planning students are investigating how art can activate and develop urban squares as inclusive stages for a public realm. This dynamic interplay between urban development, culture, and artistic practice in public space—exemplified by Konstablerwache—offers diverse starting points for background reporting.

How did the idea arise to install an artwork by Echelman in Frankfurt?

The idea to install a visible public artwork in Frankfurt with an exciting external impact was jointly developed in early summer 2025 by the two responsible departments—Culture & Science and Economy, Law & City Marketing—on the occasion of Frankfurt and the Frankfurt Rhine-Main region being named **World Design Capital 2026**.

WDC was meant to become more tangible and understandable for the public. As part of World Design Capital Frankfurt RheinMain 2026, this installation by renowned US artist Janet Echelman makes design and spatial planning visibly and tangibly realized in public space.

"A Sky Full of Hope" attracts international attention, enhances Frankfurt's appeal to tourists, generates publicity, and provides fresh momentum for the city center.

Why is this art installation being placed at Konstablerwache?

The choice of Konstablerwache—a place full of tension where social friction exists alongside the bustling weekly market—was not accidental. It highlights Frankfurt's ambition to courageously try new paths to spark change.

US artist Janet Echelman herself describes her installation at Konstablerwache as an experiment. Precisely because the square is challenging, it presents not only obstacles, but above all opportunities, potentially serving as a meaningful test case.

The installation enriches the square, creating a new anchor point with a strong emotional impact at a central location.

However, one thing must be clear: art cannot combat crime or solve urban planning challenges—that was never the claim. But it can influence the atmosphere and thereby transform the location. In the best-case scenario, positively.

An artwork in an already beautiful location merely confirms what is already there. An artwork in a place of contradictions and transit shows whether a different atmosphere can actually make a difference and give the site a new direction. However, no one can predict this; it is an experiment we are entering into. What effect it will unleash remains to be seen.

The sculpture is initially intended to hang at Konstablerwache for three years, giving it a long-term perspective.

How are the costs explained?

It is important to know that the money invested in the art installation "A Sky Full of Hope" by US artist Janet Echelman at Konstablerwache does not come from the ongoing cultural budget. Therefore, cuts were not made elsewhere in the city's art, culture, or science budgets.

In fact, investment was made in more than just the art itself. Parts of the paving at Konstablerwache were renewed, and the location is also receiving new safety lighting.

The funds used stem from carryforwards of the "City Center Initiative" (Initiative Innenstadt, M55/2022) investment program from 2024. €1.2 million was investment funding intended for "City Center Illumination". Because these funds had not been spent, they would no longer have been available for their original purpose in 2025. By passing the 2025 supplementary budget, the city council specifically secured these resources to enable a sustainable upgrading of the city center within the framework of World Design Capital Frankfurt RheinMain 2026.

Thus, the reallocation of funds was made possible. They were supplemented by remaining investment funds from the "City Center Initiative" that were no longer needed for other projects, so that the Department of Cultural Affairs now has €2.3 million in investment funds to implement the "A Sky Full of Hope" project. The Department of Cultural Affairs is responsible for the allocation of these funds.

Tourism Significance from a City Marketing Perspective

With "A Sky Full of Hope – Earthtime 1.78 Frankfurt," Konstablerwache receives a new radiance. The location could gain a higher quality of stay, international appeal, and a strong identity for Frankfurt. A heavily frequented inner-city space can become a new

landmark inviting residents and visitors from all over the world to linger, meet, and experience.

According to frequency measurements, between 70,000 and 150,000 people cross the Zeil and Konstablerwache daily, depending on the day of the week. The installation not only makes this central place more visible, but also creates an additional reason to visit Frankfurt and specifically go to Konstablerwache. This creates a new tourism draw and an unmistakable key visual for the city.

The local farmers' market (Erzeugermarkt) also benefits from this development. Konstablerwache remains its home, while significantly gaining in spatial quality and attractiveness.

The project thus strengthens urban and tourism marketing, sustainably enhances the eastern Zeil, and revitalizes retail and gastronomy. At the same time, it connects the tradition of the Frankfurt farmers' market with a forward-looking design of public space. Exactly therein lies its uniqueness: "A Sky Full of Hope" is an artwork, an experiential space, and a new attraction for Frankfurt all at once.

Additional day-trippers and overnight guests also boost the economic impact of tourism for the city. In 2024, Frankfurt generated gross revenue of around €4.9 billion through tourism demand. The direct tourism contribution to municipal tax revenue was over €100 million. Tourism thus strengthens not only hotels and gastronomy, but radiates into many areas of the city—from retail to transport, culture, and leisure.

Are expenditures like this worth it?

Regarding the question of how cultural spending pays off, there is a summary of **a recent study** from Berlin:

IKTf 2026: Kultur als Standortfaktor in Berlin,
<https://www.iktf.berlin/publications/studie-standortfaktor-kultur-berlin/>

Although the study refers to Berlin and the cultural sector as a whole, it can certainly be used as an indicator/argumentative aid for positive impact:

Return on Investment: For every euro invested in cultural funding in Berlin, €3.50 is returned—an ROI of 350%.

Well-being: Culture in the city increases individual well-being and health roughly as much as an increase in annual income of up to €2,700.

Business Location Factor: For Berlin companies, culture is a crucial location factor: around 90% of surveyed companies consider the cultural offering important for recruiting and retaining new employees.

Reason to Travel: Culture drives travel. Sights (63%) and art/cultural offerings (61%) rank among the top motivations for a trip to Berlin. And culturally motivated tourists stay longer and spend more money.

Why was there no public tender for this?

The project is a commissioned work by the internationally renowned artist Janet Echelman, who is known for her site-specific, net-like sculptures. The contract was awarded via a negotiated procedure without a prior call for competition because it involves the procurement of a unique artwork with specific requirements.

Public space art projects are usually preceded by art competitions. Artists living in Frankfurt and the Rhine-Main region are explicitly included. They also frequently win these international competitions (recently Anselm Baumann, Silke Wagner, the artist duo Winter & Hörbelt, or Filippa Pettersson). However, special opportunities require special measures that must be responded to flexibly when, for example, time is a critical factor, as was the case here.

The procurement process took place against the backdrop that, by the will of the city council, Frankfurt am Main became the World Design Capital 2026 under the motto "Design for Democracy – Atmospheres for a better life". One of the main thematic focuses of the WDC is the design of public spaces. Under this directive, a curator was commissioned via the cultural administration to present a selection of artistic works that met the thematic requirements and could still be made available or produced within the WDC year 2026.

As an artist, Janet Echelman has explicitly dealt with the enhancement of public spaces for 20 years. She has successfully executed and tested this concept in various places worldwide with the "Earthtime" series, including verifying the harmlessness of her artworks for bird and animal life. Therefore, this idea did not need to be developed from

scratch for Frankfurt, but was adapted here through a new production in such a way that the atmosphere of Konstablerwache is enhanced in line with the WDC motto, turning it into a place of encounter and connectedness. For that is what her idea stands for and what her artwork expresses: an atmosphere of connectedness in which every individual stands for themselves yet acts within a community—the foundation of any democracy.

Why Atelier Markgraph?

The artist Janet Echelman insisted on the planning and construction implementation of the project by Atelier Markgraph. The background is that Atelier Markgraph had already been commissioned in other projects with the development and implementation of art installations by Janet Echelman, such as in Munich. The agency worked very closely with the artist on those projects and successfully realized her artistic vision. Without Atelier Markgraph, the project would not have been realizable due to a lack of consent from the artist.