

Frankfurt am Main,
March 4, 2025

Interview with the Artist Janet Echelman



How does it feel to be a part of World Design Capital Frankfurt RheinMain 2026? How does this project, *A Sky Full of Hope* at Konstablerwache, fit in with your global vision of design as a democratic and unifying medium?

Janet Echelman: It's an honor to be part of Frankfurt's World Design Capital programme. My approach to public space is to bring our eyes up to the sky and to let nature be the animating force of my work. It is always changing and it's more interesting than any pattern I could create. And this work I'm creating for "Konsti" (Konstablerwache) is about multiple strands of color interwoven with each other, moving in harmony with nature. This to me seems to be very compatible with the theme of *Design for Democracy. Atmospheres for a Better Life*.

Your works transform places such as Konstablerwache into a living sculpture that is constantly changing with light, wind, and use. How would you like Frankfurt's urban society to actually use and appropriate this new atmospheric and social reference point in everyday life?

Janet Echelman: My work is an invitation for each person to create meaning out of what they experience. I never give a set of instructions or meaning because each person is the completion of the art through their own process of interpreting it. And with "Konsti", I'm quite excited to see people take a public space and use it in their own way, whether it might become music or dance, parties or yoga gatherings, drumming, hanging out, whatever. Who knows what it will be? And the most exciting part for me is that I don't know. I like giving control out to nature and to the people of Frankfurt. They will determine—this is their sculpture, so they will decide how they want to use the space.

***A Sky Full of Hope* refers to the many nations that live in Frankfurt and stands for openness, diversity, and international solidarity. How do you translate these abstract values into the materiality, colorfulness, and design language of the net, and how will passersby recognize these messages?**

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Janet Echelman: The way that I transfer ideas into visual form are important in the development, but it may be that passersby don't know about these abstract concepts embedded within the work. That's fine. If they get interested, they may go online and start to read about it and discover it. And I like that if you put effort into something, that you get a gift for your efforts.

Konstablerwache is considered one of the busiest and most polarizing places in the city center, characterized by transit, friction, and differing interests. What role do you think art in public spaces can play here? Should the installation calm conflicts, make them visible, or open up a new framework in which urban society can discuss the future coexistence and design?

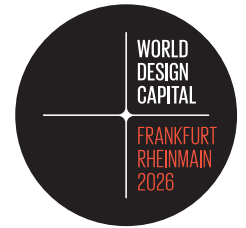
Janet Echelman: I think...I hope this new sculpture creates an atmosphere of harmony and enlivens everyone's daily life with color and light and movement. Maybe in this environment new possibilities will arise.

Your career began with a chance observation of fishermen in India knotting their nets. Today you use high-tech software and aerospace fiber. How much of that original artisanal intuition is still present today in such highly complex digital planning as for the Frankfurt project?

Janet Echelman: Certainly, when I was first making works all by hand, there was a different rhythm to being able to decide aesthetic questions in the moment. And now, to create something at the scale of a public space like "Konsti", with intense engineering challenges, I need to do intensive planning. And I need to follow construction documents that we create, which are reviewed by the city for safety, for example. So some things are given up, like the spontaneity of creation. But I believe that the spontaneity of the aesthetics is retained. And I think it's an equation that I like the outcome, because being able to share it at the scale of a city, at the height that can be over all of our heads together—whether the market is there or it's a regular day—I think that expansion of scale expands the potential for what the art can be. So, of course, I give up some craftsmanship spontaneity, but I think the overall outcome is worth it.

Many people in Frankfurt will see your work as they rush to work or go shopping. What is the nicest compliment a normal passerby—not an art expert—has ever given you about one of your sculptures, and what do you hope for the people at Konstablerwache?

Janet Echelman: The nicest compliment anyone can give me is for them to be thinking about it and creating their own ideas. That's the best compliment. And when my piece opened in Sydney, Australia, it was right above the exit of the subway trains. And people would come out of the subway and be shocked or surprised to



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see the world in a new way. And there was a man coming up the street with a grocery cart, and it was clear that he lived on the street and his belongings were in that cart. And he didn't know that I was the artist, and he started talking to me about it and he said: "What is that?" And he said: "I think it's a bird." That interaction—that number one, he felt entitled to be creating ideas and thinking about it—that was the biggest compliment.



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