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Cities often commission large-scale public art to create events that draw visitors and give locals a fresh perspective on their environs. Few are better at delivering such experiences than Janet Echelman. Urban space is her canvas, and rope—kilometers of it—is her brush. With these simple tools, the Boston-based artist fashions multihued installations that hover over once-ordinary plazas like airborne fishing nets. Her latest, inspired by a cat’s cradle, floats above Boston’s Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, a zone reclaimed from car traffic after the Big Dig. Echelman says she conceived the project, on view through mid-October, as a way to “link the city back together along the gash that had been a six-lane highway.”

Echelman, who developed her technique after watching fishermen construct nets in the Indian village of Mahabalipuram, has in recent years created undulating works in cities from San Francisco to Singapore. Their construction is not simple: the one-tonne installation in Boston required more than 160 kilometers of specially braided twine and half a million knots, not to mention custom software to model the sculpture’s joints and predict the effects of weather.

Most visitors lie on the grass to view it, watching as it ripples against the sky.

COMING SOON

In November, Echelman will exhibit a sculpture inspired by the Japanese tsunami at the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Renwick Gallery, followed by projects in West Hollywood and Greensboro, North Carolina.