

## Smithsonian American Art Museum



### ***WONDER***

November 13, 2015–July 10, 2016

### **Smithsonian American Art Museum**

Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20006

[renwick.americanart.si.edu](http://renwick.americanart.si.edu)

Gabriel Dawe, *Plexus A1*, 2015. Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Courtesy Conduit Gallery. Photo: Ron Blunt.

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*WONDER*, the debut exhibition at the newly renovated Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, celebrates the opening of the historic building with immersive installations by nine leading contemporary artists—Jennifer Angus, Chakaia Booker, Gabriel Dawe, Tara Donovan, Patrick Dougherty, Janet Echelman, John Grade, Maya Lin and Leo Villareal. *WONDER* will open November 13 and will be on view for six months. The exhibition is organized by Nicholas R. Bell, The Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge of the Renwick Gallery.

The artists featured in *WONDER* were selected for their ability to transform spaces through installation and for their focus on process and materials. Each was invited to select a gallery in the Renwick while the building was closed for a major two-year renovation and then create an installation inspired by that space.

"The Renwick was the first purpose-built art museum in the United States, intended to exhibit

American art and to celebrate American genius," said Betsy Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. "For the next chapter in its 156-year history, we will showcase exemplary artists like these nine who are dissolving the boundaries that once existed between craft, art and design. *WONDER* rededicates this landmark museum to the future of art."

While the nine artists work in strikingly different media, they are connected by a shared interest in materiality and the labor-intensive creation of objects by hand in a digital age. Their works are created by exploring the potential of unlikely materials and utilizing both traditional techniques and cutting-edge technology. The resulting installations are expressions of process, labor and materials that are grounded in our everyday world, but which combine to produce awe-inspiring results.

"The concept of 'wonder'—that moment of astonishment in the face of something new and unknown that transports us out of the everyday—is deeply intertwined with how we experience art," said Bell. "These nine artists are masters of constructing works that startle us, overwhelm us and invite us to marvel—to wonder—at their creation. These elements matter in the context of this museum, devoted for more than four decades to the skilled working of materials in extraordinary ways."

On the first floor, visitors will encounter works by Dawe, Donovan and Dougherty. Dawe's textile-based installation is made from thousands of strands of embroidery thread, all hung by hand, which appear as waves of color and light sweeping from floor to ceiling. Donovan's towers are constructed from hundreds of thousands of index cards that have been individually glued together to form irregular, looming spires. Dougherty's enormous pods of woven willow osiers seem to dance and sway through the rear gallery.

Works by Angus, Booker, Echelman, Grade, Lin and Villareal will be installed on the second floor. Angus covers gallery walls in spiraling, geometric designs reminiscent of wallpaper or textiles but made using specimens of brightly colored insects. Booker works with discarded rubber tires, splicing and weaving them into an enormous labyrinth. Echelman explores volumetric form without solid mass, overtaking the museum's famed Grand Salon with a suspended, handwoven net surging across its 100-foot length. Grade uses 500,000 of pieces of reclaimed cedar to reconstruct a hemlock tree approximately the same age as the Renwick's building, based on a complete plaster cast he made of the tree in situ in the Cascade Mountains. Lin's deluge of green marbles flows across the floor and up walls, recalling the flow of the Chesapeake Bay as part of her investigation into the fluidity of natural forms in her artworks. Villareal's installation—320 steel rods embedded with 23,000 LEDs programmed to display a code written and manipulated by the artist into endless variations—will be mounted above the Renwick's Grand Staircase.