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J.J. ABRAMS
ON REBOOTING AN
ENTIRE UNIVERSE



Artist Janet Echelman creates otherworldly aerial sculptures. Composed of hand-spliced and knotted lightweight fibres, they're coloured by projected light. "They're about the complexity of interaction that we cannot predict," explains US-based Echelman, 49. "I am drawn to urban spaces, because I think that art should be part of life."

The pieces are designed using custom-made soft-body modelling software from Autodesk. It allows Echelman to model the interaction of every single element. She constructs the pieces from highly

engineered fibres, such as ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene, which is 15 times stronger than steel.

Looms are used to make panels and then shapes are cut, knotted and spliced by hand. "My work is pre-industrial in terms of these old techniques. It's industrial with the looms. And it's post-industrial in terms of the digital analysis. We're not cut off from our past, but neither are we cut off from our future."

Echelman's latest will debut at the Lumiere

London light festival in January. Its title, *1.8 London*, refers to the microseconds by which the day was shortened by the 2011 Japanese quake; the piece is inspired by a data set of the wave heights of the tsunami. Using smartphones, the public will be able to change the colour of the sculpture. "It's a contemplation on connectedness and the larger cycles of time," Echelman says. **Kevin Holmes** *Lumiere London is January 14-17* visitlondon.com/lumiere

MAKING LIGHT OF TRAGEDY

Janet Echelman's *As If It Were Already Here*, which appeared in Boston, Massachusetts, in 2015

160KM OF
SUSPENDED
FIBRE

PHOTOGRAPHY: MELISSA HENRY
ILLUSTRATION: LAURINDO FELICIANO

BRIGHT PLACE, BRIGHT TIME

What makes a city innovative? Location, location, location. In *The Geography of Genius* (Simon & Schuster), out January 5, Eric Weiner examines history's most creative locales. Here are three smart cities. **GV**



ANCIENT ATHENS

What made it great: Openness

"The willingness to borrow, steal and embellish distinguished Athens from its neighbours," writes Weiner. "Athenians were open to foreign ideas."



RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

What made it great: Rich investors

The city thrived under the wealthy Medicis, who invested in art and science – key factors in brewing revolutionary ideas. "Florence is about money and genius," says Weiner.



SILICON VALLEY

What made it great: First-starter advantage

Its success may just be about being the quickest at creating new tech, says Weiner. "First starters become magnets and, once magnetised, momentum takes hold."