

DOMINIQUE FISHBACK
GRIMANESA AMORÓS
JENNIFER SEARS
LAUREN EZERSKY
NAOMI WATTS
X MAX PELLEGRINI
RAINSFORD
RICHARD BUTLER
SHIRIN NESHAT
AND MORE

2021 / ISSUE N° 18

as i t





LET THERE BE LIGHT

Artwork by
**GRIMANESA
AMORÓS**

Portrait and interview by
TATIJANA SHOAN

"There's a certain Slant of light" is the first line of a poem of the same name written by American poet and writer Emily Dickinson back in 1861. The poem likens winter sunlight to cathedral music and considers the spiritual effects of the light. Light has been a theme throughout history for poets, writers and artists, and Peruvian-American artist

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has taken this theme to an experiential level. More than using light to illuminate her work, light is her main medium, which she controls through a complicated and intricate proprietary computer system that allows her to choreograph rays of light in various color hues to hypnotic music. This interdisciplinary artist is known for her large-scale light sculpture installations that incorporate elements from sculpture, video, drawings, printing and technology to create site-specific installations that engage architecture and captivate viewers. Amorós's ephemeral and transcendent works reflect her Peruvian heritage and the communities where the artwork lives, and aims to bring communities together and build a bridge between the past, present and future.



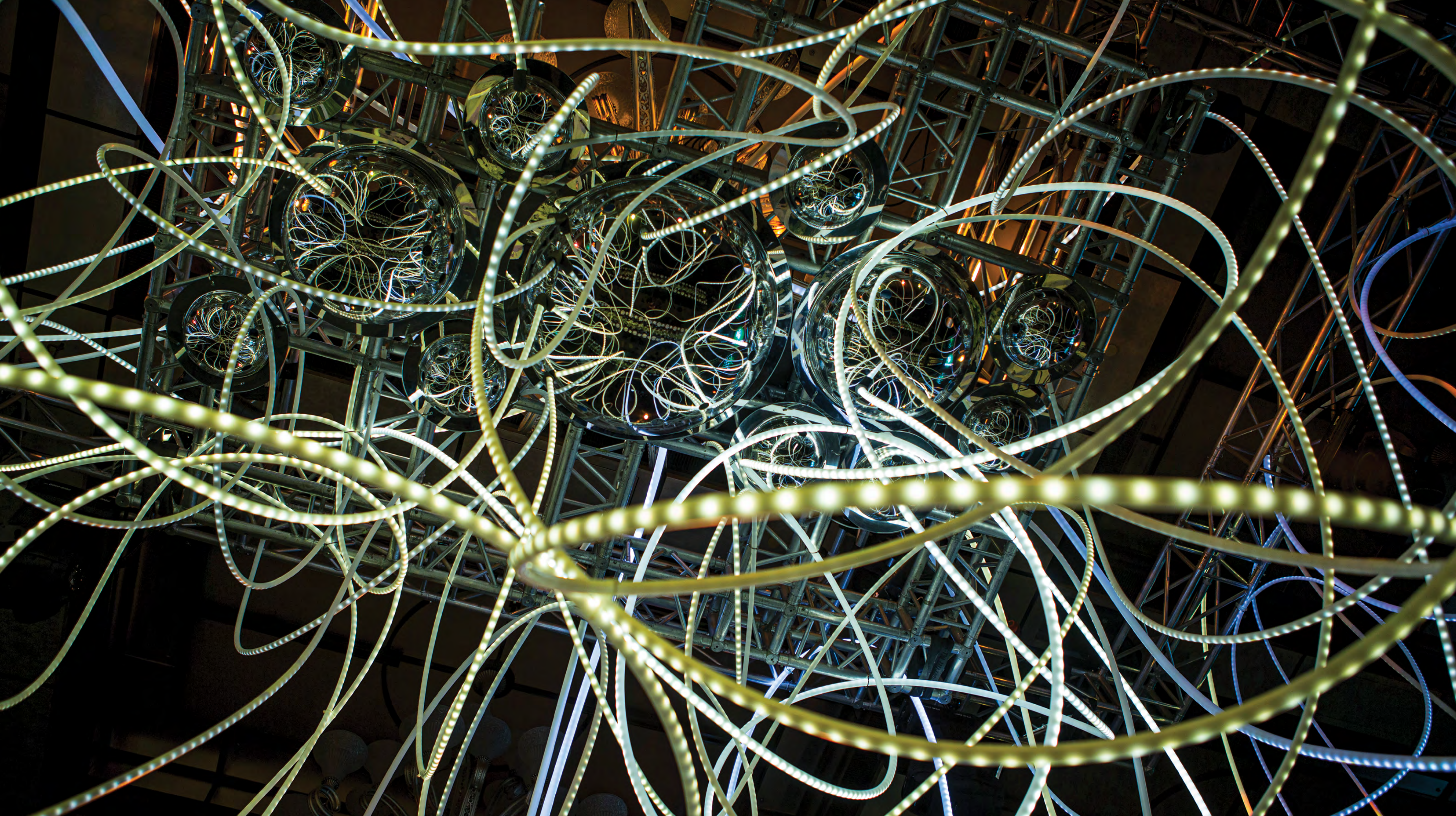
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GOLDEN CONNECTION
2013, Harper's Bazaar
Art, Art Basel Hong Kong,
China



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UROS HOUSE
 2011, Times Square,
 New York, NY

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RACIMO
 2010, Royal Caribbean
 International Allure of
 the Seas Turku, Finland

AS IF: Do you remember your first work that made you say, I am an artist?

Grimanesa Amorós: Yes, I remember it correctly. I was ten years old, and I used to stay up very late creating maps because my dream was to visit all the continents. My mother realized that I was staying up very late at night, creating, so she put me into classes to learn how to oil paint. The first piece I did was a landscape of mountains and clouds.

AS IF: Do you still have that painting?

GA: I do! I actually gave it as a present to my sister.

AS IF: You started working as an artist using paint, it evolved into sculpture and paper making that you still use in your work. The evolution continued into what we see today with light. Tell me how light became your main medium.

GA: In 2000 I traveled to Iceland and saw the natural phenomena of the Northern Lights; this experience forever changed me. I had my camera next to me and decided to experience the moment not through the lens of a camera, but by soaking it in and I was mesmerized by the beauty. There can be a detachment through the camera, and I wanted to live the moment immediately and be engulfed by it. That's how I began my exploration with light. My fascination with light stems from how it evolves by the second, and light has no master; it simply is.

Light is ephemeral, and I love the fact that every person can connect to it—people have a relationship and attachment to light. I am fascinated by the speed of light. There are many elements, qualities, and characteristics of light that make it so enchanting. I became obsessed with light, and that is the reason I started working with it.

AS IF: Your work pulsates, it has a rhythm, it changes color and speed, you harness and direct it. Tell me about that technology.

GA: I compare making a lighting sequence to composing music; instead of creating different sounds to develop harmony, I develop different patterns of light. The technology used in my pieces gives me the ability to manually select my color values from more than 16.8 million colors, control the hue, saturation, and intensity of every point of light, set the speed, duration, and transitions data to our custom lighting system. It could take me weeks and many hours to complete a lighting sequence, it all depends on the space, how large the pieces are and the site. The lighting control software and electronics, such as motherboards, lighting controllers, and electrical components, are all custom-made giving me the ability to have creative control. I use low voltage custom 24bit LEDs ranging from 12 to 24 volts that are high quality to ensure they last very long and use less power. The lighting system is carefully analyzed and tested to meet the power requirements for the piece.

AS IF: What does color mean to you?

GA: I grew up in Peru by the Pacific Ocean. As a person who lived close to the water, I try

to be like the waves, fluid and flowing. I was, and am, fascinated by how water comes and goes. It repeatedly leaves an imprint on the land and fades. The blue and deep turquoise colors of the Pacific Ocean is embedded in my psyche. Peru is known for its environmental diversity, and depending on where you are in the country, the colors change dramatically. In the Sierra, one can see hot pink, deep greens, blues, reds, and yellows, and then in the Amazon, one can see ochre's, blacks, and deep browns. Peru introduced me to color and gave me color sensibility by exposing me to an array of colors and hues on an everyday basis.

I came to New York in 1984, spending my formative years in Peru, everything at that age stays with you. I have a Latin way of being and a deep love and tremendous respect for nature and ecology, which continuously surprises me. The mountains in Peru, Lake Titicaca, and the Amazon are all astonishingly unique; they move me. It's my exposure to this ecological diversity that has sparked my endless curiosity and made me the exploratory person I am and will continue to be.

AS IF: Aside from the use of color, how does your Peruvian heritage show itself in your work?

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AS IF: Your work is ephemeral, yet the soul of it is connected to your Peruvian roots. In this country, the Black Lives Matter movement has finally picked-up momentum and can no longer be ignored. The roots of this issue steams from slavery and the systemic racism problem in this country and around the world where blacks and other minorities are not given the same privileges as whites. Can you share your thoughts on this subject with me?

GA: I believe in the importance of being an ally and helping the black community. People of different races must educate themselves on the issue of race, and the oppression black people face in this country. It is crucial to gather a better understanding of their pain and constant struggle. We must be their partners.

I encourage people to get involved and support. This can mean donating, having an open conversation with friends and family, buying books to understand what is being fought for, and even signing a petition supporting movements for change. It is not the time to be complacent; now is the time to have compassion and be by their side in support. We must understand that we can never understand their struggle, but we can help by being a support for their justice.

AS IF: I want to touch upon the idea of being curious and an explorer. In a middle of your career, just when you were being celebrated internationally for your work, you stopped to have a baby and you raised your daughter for the next six years. So, I want to talk about the idea of creation. An artist is in a constant state of creation, was that fulfilled when you had your baby? Did motherhood replace the need to be in constant creation as an artist?

GA: As an artist and mother, it is crucial to maintain balance for yourself. When I had my daughter, I thought I was finished with being an artist; I had no creative juices after having her. I couldn't even draw. I was nursing, and I think all my creativity went to producing milk. A month after I stopped nursing all my creative juices started flowing again and have not stopped!

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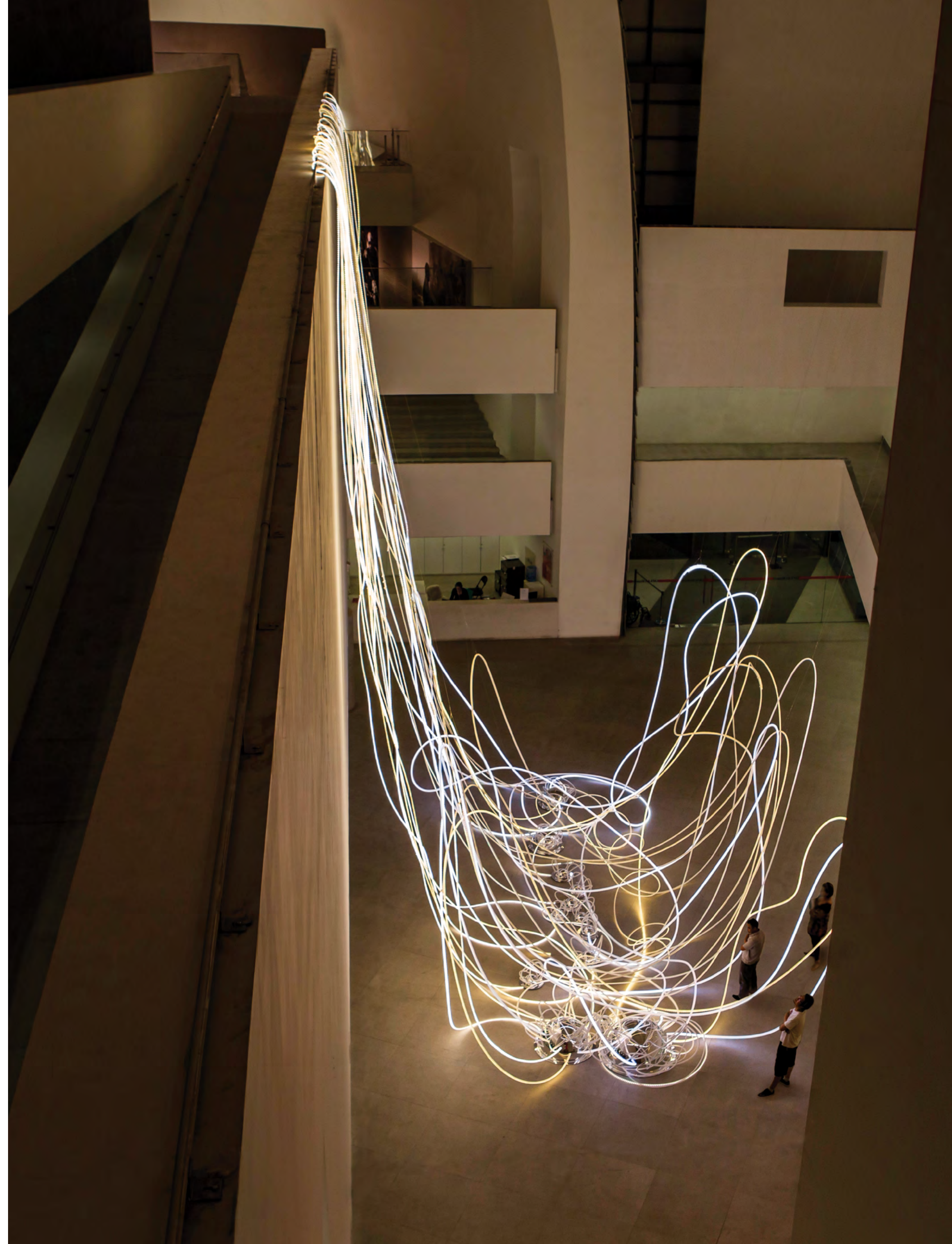
HUANCHACO

2012, Ruta de la Amistad La Torre De Los Vientos Mexico City, Mexico

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THE MIRROR CONNECTION

2013, Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum Beijing, China





GOLDEN WATERS
2015, Solori Bridge
Scottsdale, AZ



“EACH COMMISSION IS DIFFERENT, AND EACH COUNTRY IS VERY DIFFERENT, EVERY CITY IS VERY DIFFERENT. THERE'S ALWAYS REQUIREMENTS, THERE'S STILL DIFFERENT BUDGETS AND VARIABLES, BUT I THINK THAT'S WHAT KEEPS THE WORK ALIVE AND KEEPS ME RAW.”

Ideas and projects come to me quickly now, one after the other. I've never had any trouble with creativity after I stopped nursing. I think that my daughter Shammil is my masterpiece. I entirely devoted myself to her. I studied psychology but stopped three months before getting my degree, though I remember a lot. From my classes, I remembered how important the first five years are for a child, they are formative and said to be the most instrumental in their lives. Shammil is now a woman and she has never given me any troubles. She's a balanced and kind human being, she loves reading and her work.

AS IF: What has motherhood brought to your art?

GA: Oh my god, it's changed everything! An artist can be very self-centered, and motherhood made me realize the importance of all those around me and made me focus on the question, "how can I make a difference to inspire people to think and be creative?"

AS IF: Talk to me about the importance of community in your work.

GA: My goal is to activate the communities where my work lives. I start by learning about

the site history and how it was built, founded, etc. I love finding information that even the people of the area do not know. It is a collaboration of knowledge and creativity between me, them, and the art. When I was in a small town, just an hour away from Rome, Italy, called Civita di Bagnoregio, I learned that it was not the Romans who founded the area but the Etruscans. It gave me a completely new insight into the town and its architecture.

In Civita, I created a work of public art for all to see and I'm now working on a film. When working on an art project, it is essential to be focused because there is a lot for both me and the audience to learn. If my work can make them curious about their home or the area more, then I have done my part in causing them to think and explore beyond. At the same time, the work is universal, so when someone from Egypt or Iceland arrives in Civita di Bagnoregio and sees the piece, they will be able to have a relationship with the artwork. The point is that the work will have the same relevance in 50 years as it does now, like poetry.

AS IF: Your light sculptures have an organic fluidity like the tentacles of a jelly fish. How much of the shape is inspired during



HEDERA

2018, BRIC Prospect
Park Bandshell
Brooklyn, NY



DNA

2016, Philippe Starck
Malecón Building Lima,
Peru





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the actual installation of the artwork, or does every branch of the work have a specific map and set of instructions before the installation takes place?

GA: It varies; it all depends on the project requirements. It is crucial to have structure because there are budgets. I require to know the materials I am using to develop the piece and study the logistics. During installation, I am always on-site, the number of hours varies, I can be there for 14 to 16 hours a day, and have done double shifts on many occasions. On location, sometimes you are faced with challenges, and therefore some things happen organically. The architecture and structure of the building mandate the requirements of the piece. As an artist, I have personal communication with the architecture of the space—the ceiling, walls, floors, everything!

My goal is always for my viewers to feel like they are a part of the work and the site. Although the structure is well planned, the artwork is a breathing organism because before its completion, before it can breathe, the technical programming has to be finished. I don't know what I'm going to do with the lighting until I finish building the piece. The time spent during installing helps me determine the lighting meant for space. Being on-site allows me to get familiar with the actual light around

me; how does the light behave when the sun comes up, or how does the light look when the sun goes down, how do the streetlights behave with the work? Once I answer those questions I can make the final adjustments.

AS IF: Your work has been described as living, breathing organisms. Tell me what these structures are for you?

GA: For me, when visitors see my work, I want to grab them, to stop them, and have them ponder what they are seeing and feeling. As I stated above, the works are living organisms, and no matter how many times I've seen them, I never get tired of looking at them, so that tells you something. There's generosity from the artist of the work to its viewer—I'm not doing a piece to please someone; I'm doing a piece to communicate with someone. I want to communicate with everyone who's passing by.

AS IF: You've been traveling a lot for work, tell me about your upcoming projects?

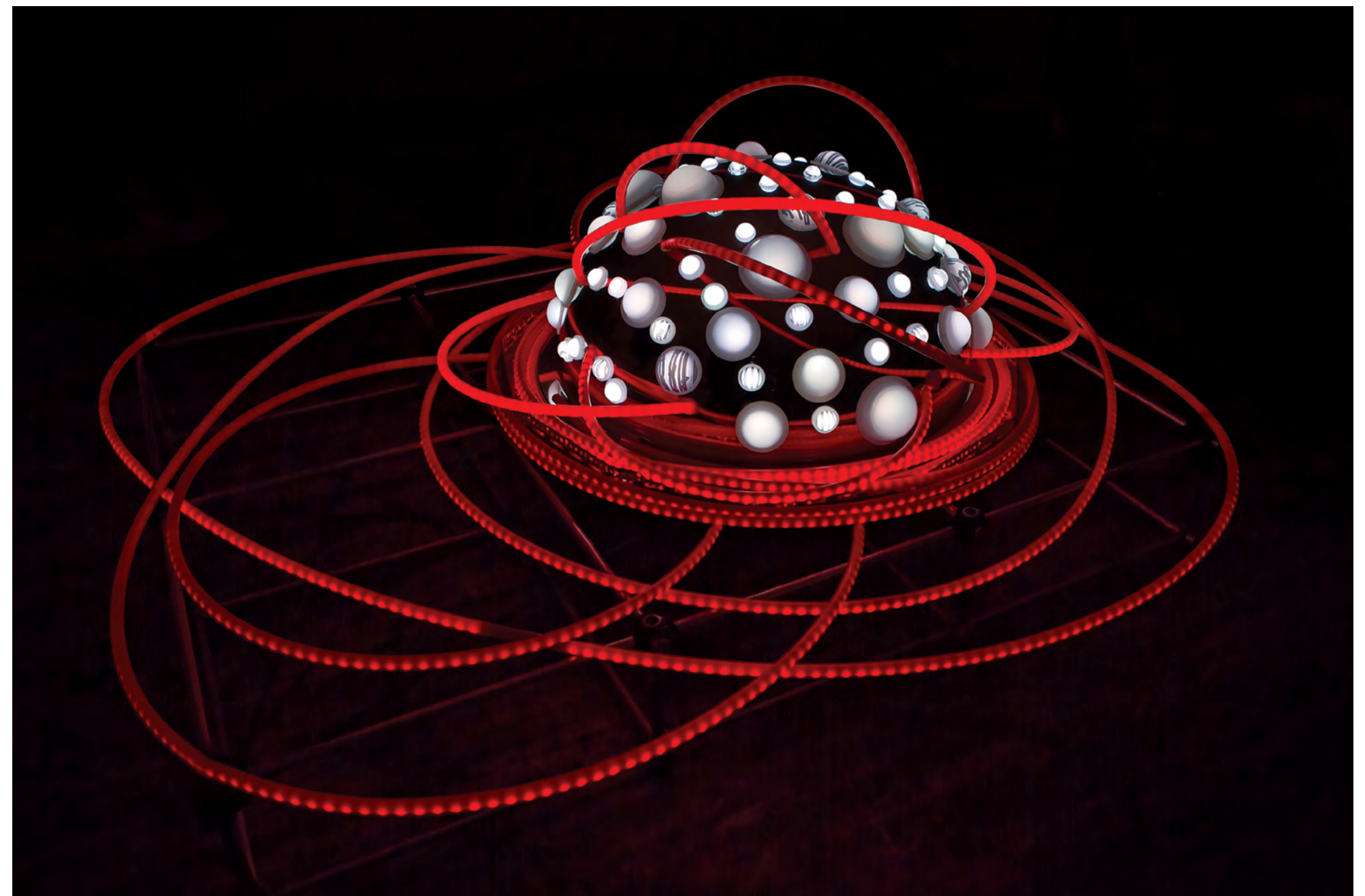
GA: Yes, I travel a lot! I will be doing pieces in Mumbai, another one in Havana, Cuba. I also have an upcoming project in New York commissioned by the City and State of New York. Because of COVID-19, projects are on pause; we will see what will happen next, but I am positive!



HEDERA
2018, BRIC Prospect
Park Bandshell
Brooklyn, NY



LOTUS
2016, New York, NY





FORTUNA
2013, Ministry of Culture
of Spain Tabacalera
Promoción del Arte
Madrid, Spain



PINK LOTUS
2015, The Peninsula
Hotel New York, NY



MARIPOSA DORADA
2019, 13th Havana
Biennial / Detras del
Muro Sarra Building
Havana, Cuba

AS IF: Tell me about your creative process and how you approach the work?

GA: Well, it's exciting. The commissioner prefers I visit the site first, especially when they are quite large spaces to absorb. I enjoy seeing the area because it enables me to see the vastness and, in turn, I get inspired. The wheels in my mind begin rolling the more I am there to feel the energy. I require knowing how things can be mounted, the maintenance of the building, what the exterior is like, and how the interior is structured. There's a lot of practicality in the engineering part that I have to consider when developing my piece with the electronics, so site visits are essential.

My first stage is to study the history of the place while also taking into consideration what I felt while I was there. I look at the photos I took of the location and begin sketching possible forms. I do a lot of drawings, and then develop a 3D rendering to give myself a good idea of how many structures and LED lights are required. The most crucial aspect of any artwork is the budget, and being sure to stay within the guidelines. You cannot tell a commissioner you need an additional 20k while in production, so I have to be very responsible with my planning.

Each commission is different, and each country is very different, every city is very different. There's always requirements, there's still different budgets and variables, but I think that's what keeps the work alive and keeps me raw.

AS IF: The shapes that we see repeated in the work are spheres, globes and circles amongst the light tentacles, what do each of those shapes represent to you?

GA: As a child, I was fascinated with desert dunes. I grew up going to the beach in Peru, especially in March when the Pacific Ocean gets exceptionally rough. When the ocean becomes like this, the waves crash into the shore and develop a sort of foam. The foam creates sculptural forms. Sometimes these forms are quite big, and they move with the wind reflecting light like a rainbow. I always wanted to see these forms from the inside. I'd poke the bubbles and loved how the little bubbles gathered together would pop; I even did a video about it.

AS IF: What do the drawings on the shapes represent?

GA: They are simplified representations of my drawings from the studies I have made while





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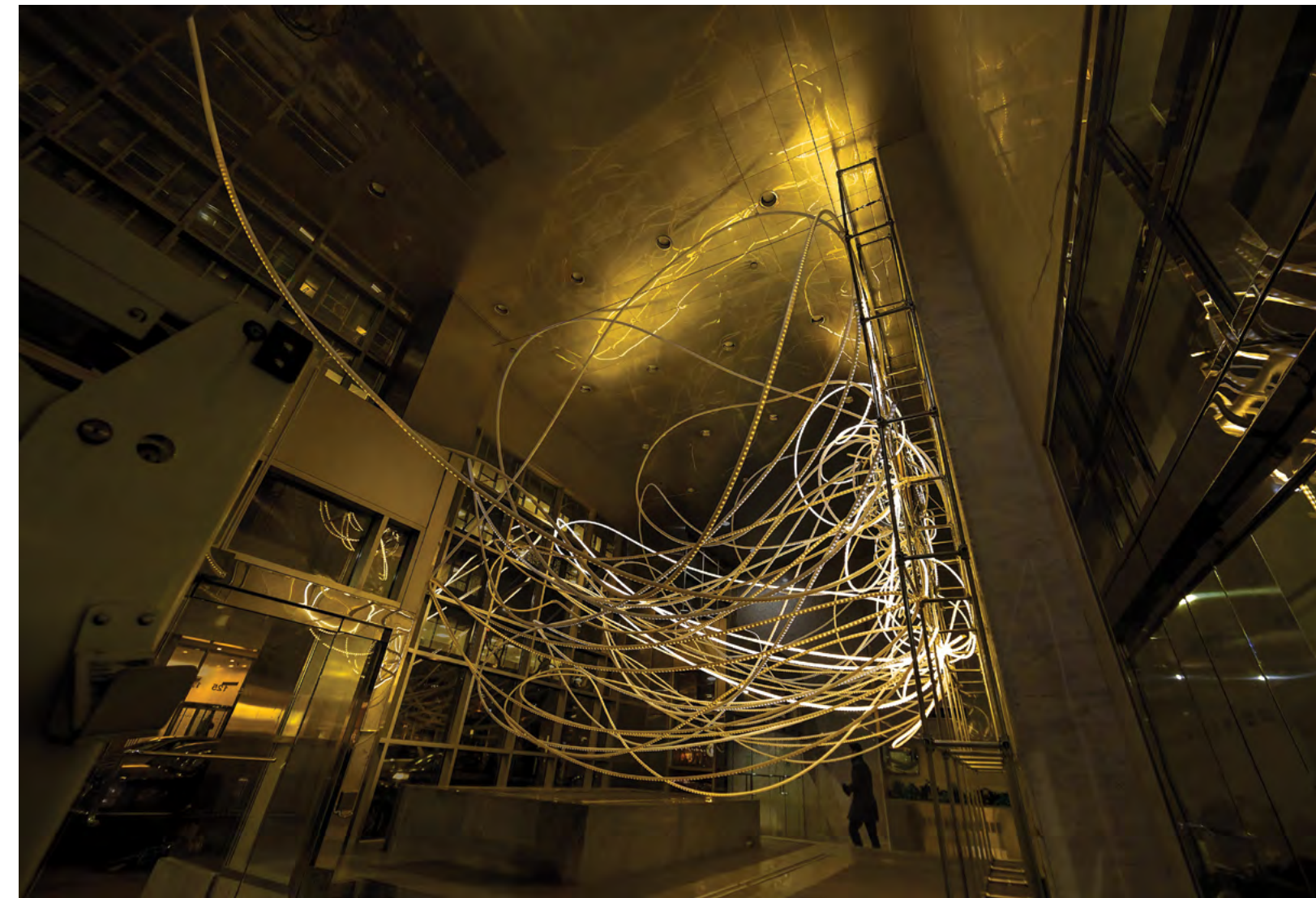
CETHA

2019, Civita di
Bagnoregio Palazzo
Colesanti Viterbo, Italy

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**BREATHLESS MAIDEN
LANE**

2014, Financial District
Time Equities Building
New York, NY



being in nature. The screen prints are usually specific to the site to connect the piece to the public and its surroundings or history. My aim with my drawings and observations is always to link my work with the public. Here is an example; I have a deep connection to Lake Titicaca for diverse reasons, and it took me years to make my first visit. There used to be over 400 humanmade floating islets, and now I think it's down to 42. They were created by the ancient indigenous Uros people who have lived in this area for over 3000 years. They used totora reeds, which are large plant stocks, to make their homes and the islets. These islets eventually become rotten, so they have to be constantly replaced so the islands don't sink. It is the weaving of these reeds, and the reeds themselves, that inspire many of the silkscreens on the pieces.

These islands in Lake Titicaca inspired a project I did in collaboration with my gallery Nina Menocal Gallery, The Armory Show and The Times Square Alliance in 2011. I had the opportunity to present a proposal. I chose to create something very close to my heart, being that I arrived from Peru and Puno two days prior, I proposed to do a Uros house in Times Square. The selection committee thought

it was an exciting way to share my cultural heritage with Times Square among many tourists from around the world. What you see on the spheres' surface are my drawings of the totora reeds. They are simplified versions that have been vectorized and then printed on the dimensional domes.

It's important to share your ideas as an artist and essential to have confidence in yourself. When I was very young, I came to New York with two bags and many dreams, I didn't know anyone, and I went through so many rejections as an artist. Even when I got rejected, I knew that being an artist was my only passion, my calling. So, I kept all my rejections and put them in a folder. Keeping them reminds me and has taught me how to learn to let go—the only thing that matters is how it *feels working towards making your dreams a reality*. There are many reasons why committees might reject a piece of work; that is why confidence plays an important role. I make sure not to put pressure on myself to achieve things by a certain age; wherever life takes me is where I am going, I am always flexible enough to embrace the unknown. I like to refer to these moments as a *romance with the unknown...*

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LIGHT BETWEEN THE ISLANDS
2013, Tel Aviv, Israel