The Menil Drawing Institute
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In 2009, as part of an effort to improve the civic spaces and infrastructure in downtown Philadelphia, firms KieranTimberlake and OLIN were asked to transform Dilworth Park. While working on the redesign, they and the client Center City District selected sculptor Janet Echelman for a public installation project that would help bring attention to the new square. Though well known for her aerial, netlike sculptures, Echelman hoped to do something that wouldn't disrupt views of the historic City Hall, which sits next to the park. “I didn’t want to compete with the lyrical architecture begun in 1871,” she says. “There will never be another building like it.” This impulse led the artist to create a tribute to the downtown district’s long history as a transportation and water-supply hub by embedding the public artwork in the park’s 11,600-square-foot fountain. Over the next nine years, Echelman worked with OLIN, Arup Lighting, and consulting firm Urban Engineers to create Pulse, a 60-foot by 230-foot mechanical system that playfully emits 4-foot-tall walls of atomized water whenever subways pass underneath. The team also added LEDs to colorfully illuminate the spray. Says Echelman, “My goal for the colored lighting of my mist curtains was to create a 3-D experience of walking into a Mark Rothko painting.”

Justin Chan