

Susanna Heron

Waterwindow
Coventry, UK

In December 2003, a £50 million large-scale urban regeneration project initiated by the City of Coventry opened after six years of planning and construction. The Phoenix Initiative transformed the downtown area of Coventry into a civic center called the Millennium Plaza—a combination of artist-designed public gardens, squares, and restored historical buildings. London-based art consulting agency Modus Operandi assisted with the selection of eight artists to collaborate with architects MacCormac Jamieson Prichard and landscape architects Robert Rummey Associates. The artists have created works stretching from the cathedral to the city's major ring road and commercial area. Large-scale projects such as Françoise Schein's illuminated timepiece *Time Zone Clock* and Susanna Heron's *Waterwindow* do more than just decorate public space—they form it.

London artist Susanna Heron has collaborated internationally with architects on a number of large-scale,

site-specific projects. Her work for the Phoenix Initiative embraces the overall plan of the Millennium Plaza—integrating art and architecture to create new urban environments. *Waterwindow* takes advantage of a dividing wall between an enclosed garden and a triangular plaza. Described by Heron as a “spatial work of sound and light,” the project dramatically uses a drop in elevation between the Priory Garden and the Priory Place adjacent to Coventry cathedral. The dividing wall supports a waterfall that flows into a black granite reflecting pool inlaid with a meandering “drawing” of colored granite and stainless steel grills. The water cascades in front of a copper panel and a copper-lined, angled window set deeply into the wall.

On the garden side, the window amplifies the sound of the waterfall, coaxing viewers down the path toward the plaza. When they arrive, they discover the curtain of water revealed through the window. Using the rush of water and the obscured view, *Waterwindow* encourages visitors to actively engage with the site, in what Heron calls a “journey of

light and sound.” Sunlight makes its own journey during the day, filtering through the window and casting reflections across the waterfall's arc. At night, visitors are welcomed to sit within bright beams of illumination.

Craig Kraft

Lightweb
Silver Spring, MD

Commissioned by Montgomery County and the Silver Spring Development Corporation, Washington, DC, artist Craig Kraft recently completed an illuminated sculpture for the new Silver Plaza in downtown Silver Spring. Art consultant Françoise Yohalem invited Kraft to submit a proposal, and his design was subsequently selected by committee to become the focal point of the space. The plaza is part of Silver Spring's recent wave of redevelopment, which includes an art center, restaurants, office buildings, and movie theaters.

Lightweb uses an architectural structure to create a large-scale light work, configuring rolled aluminum and neon tubing around an exterior elevator tower. Curved strokes of blue, green, and red neon light are beamed around the tower, giving a sense of fluid three-dimensionality. According

Below and detail: Susanna Heron, *Waterwindow*, 2003. Granite, copper, stainless steel, water, and illumination, 5.5 x 15 meters.





to Kraft, the sculptural effect was a challenge to fabricate: "Three-dimensional neon-lit sculpture on this scale is hard to find because of the difficulty in constructing a three-dimensional structure capable of securely holding fragile glass neon tubes." Kraft developed the design before the building itself was constructed. Using architectural drawings and models, he achieved the integration of "three-dimensional line and volumes of light with an open rectilinear structure."

The illuminated works of Cork Marcheschi, Stephen Antonakos, Dan Flavin, and Keith Sonnier influenced Kraft's design, but the real impetus

came from the unique structural challenge and the desire to integrate art and architecture. The synthesis may be viewed as symbolic of a rejuvenated community center. Kraft explains, "The plaza now has a sculptural mark, more than just marking a location. The image suggests importance, integration, vitality, and energy—a place where the community can come together and recognize each other."

Leni Schwendinger

Dreaming in Color
Seattle, WA

Known for her environmental sculpture and large-scale projection performances, Leni Schwendinger recently completed a light work for the Seattle Center's new opera venue, the Marion O. McCaw Hall. Commissioned by the Seattle Arts Commission, *Dreaming in Color* brings the theatrics of opera outdoors using an orchestrated play of colored light and metal scrims.

Dreaming in Color began as a collaboration of LMN Architects, the landscape design firm Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Ltd., and Schwendinger. The architectural plan called for nine nearly transparent, illuminated metal-mesh scrims to hang along the 300-foot opera house promenade. LMN Architects approached Schwendinger as the project evolved into a public art scheme. The team rejected an initial concept involving video projections as too expensive and insensitive to the potential for light contrast. Schwendinger had to conceive another method: "My studio assistant and I studied the scrims' sectional drawing and wondered, 'What is the absolutely simplest solution to this complex and monumental challenge?'" The solution was to project a changing array of colored lights onto the 45-foot-high scrims.

Above, left and right: Leni Schwendinger, *Dreaming in Color*, 2003. Illumination and computer controls, 45 x 30–50 x 150 ft. Below: Craig Kraft, *Lightweb*, 2004. Rolled aluminum and neon, 35 x 10 x 10 ft.

The final work—an immense "color field"—offers a contemporary approach to the aesthetic explorations of Mark Rothko and Helen Frankenthaler, among others. Schwendinger used their pursuit of chromatic "atmospheres" as an inspiration. In *Dreaming in Color*, color transcends the static, contained field to become an environment in constant flux. Two or three lights per scrim change the colors periodically. Color variations are dictated by an x/y-axis diagram developed by Schwendinger and her associates. Using the "visual score," the exact length of color projection on each scrim is mapped out down to the second. Perspective and elevation were also taken into consideration before the color/time combinations were finalized. In total, there are four color compositions: "Aquamarine, A Beguiling Song," "Sleepwalk Into Primary Red-Blue-Green," "Within the Northern Lights," and "Of Rothko, Section and Plane." These combinations of light, color, and pacing create a dramatic outdoor stage on which architecture and function are integrated for the general public to enjoy.

—Angela Melkisethian

Juries are convened each month to select works featured in Commissions. Information on recently completed commissions, along with quality 35mm slides or transparencies and an SASE for return of slides, should be sent to: Commissions, Sculpture, 1529 18th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

