

features

partnerships + collaboration



Artists like Alyson Shotz and the other alumni featured in the following three stories know that when they collaborate, they open up the possibilities for inspiring conversations, expanded production and new discoveries.



taking chances

THE PAST YEAR HAS PROVEN to be especially momentous for **Alyson Shotz** 87 TX, a Brooklyn-based artist who has been called a “poet of space” for spellbinding installations that play with light, gravity and mass, and appear to move and change like sentient beings.

After *Object for Reflection*, a large-scale undulating sculpture, was included in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao’s 2017–18 exhibition *Art and Space*, the museum added the work—made of thousands of tiny aluminum pieces hand-folded around stainless steel rings—to its permanent collection.

Likewise with *Scattering Screen*, an outdoor sculpture recently added to the collection at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, AR, where it’s now on view through April 2019. The mesmerizing drape of thousands of stainless steel disks is painstakingly hand-knit together with wire, forming a malleable and light-permeable piece that feels very different from traditional welded steel sculptures.





When installing intricate large-scale pieces like *Scattering Screen* (shown here and on the previous page), Shotz partners with assistants she can trust with painstakingly delicate work. In 2018 the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao acquired her sculpture *Object of Reflection* (previous page) and she completed *The Moon's Eyelid* (facing page) for a new building at NYU. In 2019 her thread drawings (below) will be on view in a solo show marking the installation of a stunning new commission at the Hunter Museum in Chattanooga, TN.

The Moon's Eyelid, Shotz's largest sculpture to date and her first major commission in NYC, also found a permanent home in 2018 and now greets visitors to the newly constructed Kimmel Pavilion at New York University's Langone Health campus at the corner of 34th Street and First Avenue in Manhattan. Taking its title from a line of poetry by **Adrienne Rich**, the dramatic piece is an ellipse folded into itself like an eyelid. It hangs in a four-story atrium, absorbing and refracting sunlight so that its appearance changes during the course of each day and each season.

After two and half years of work, Shotz says she's pleased with the result. "It was very good to see that my models and intuition about the scale of the sculpture in relationship to the space were correct," she says. "But as a physical, 50-foot object in space, it surprised me because it's even more dynamic than I thought it would be—and it looks really different from each floor."

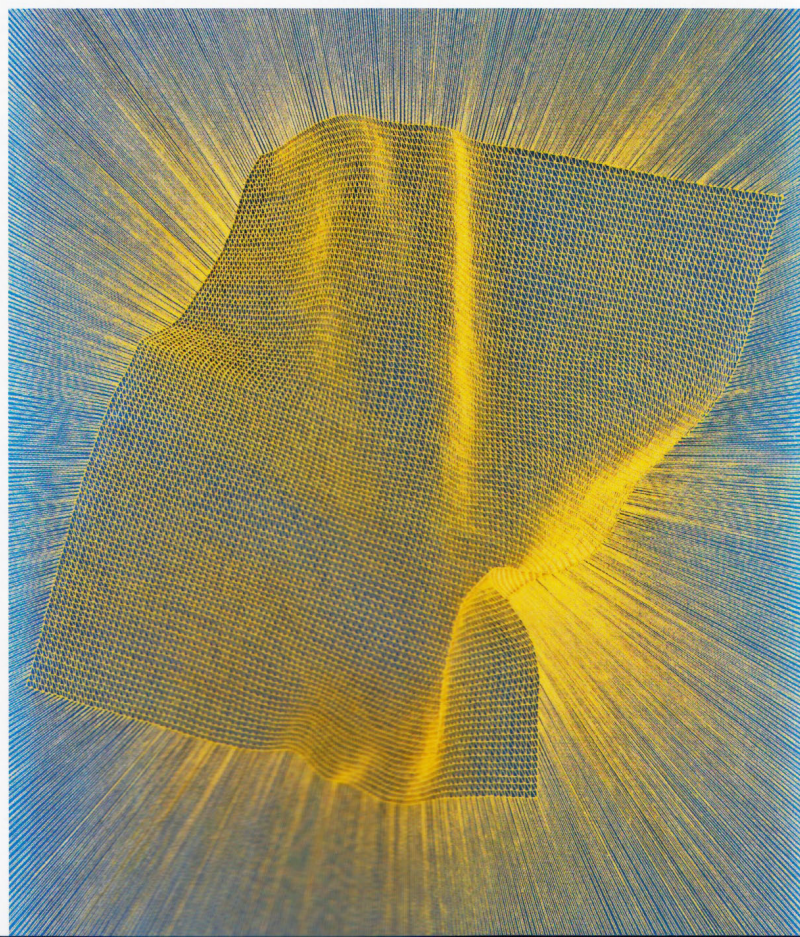
As 2018 came to a close, Shotz was finalizing a large-scale installation for the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga, TN that will be unveiled in March, along with a solo show of new thread drawings, a large white chain piece, a selection of ceramics and several crushed metal pieces. The as-yet-untitled installation will hang in the cathedral-like, glass-walled grand foyer of the museum's west wing, overlooking the Tennessee River.

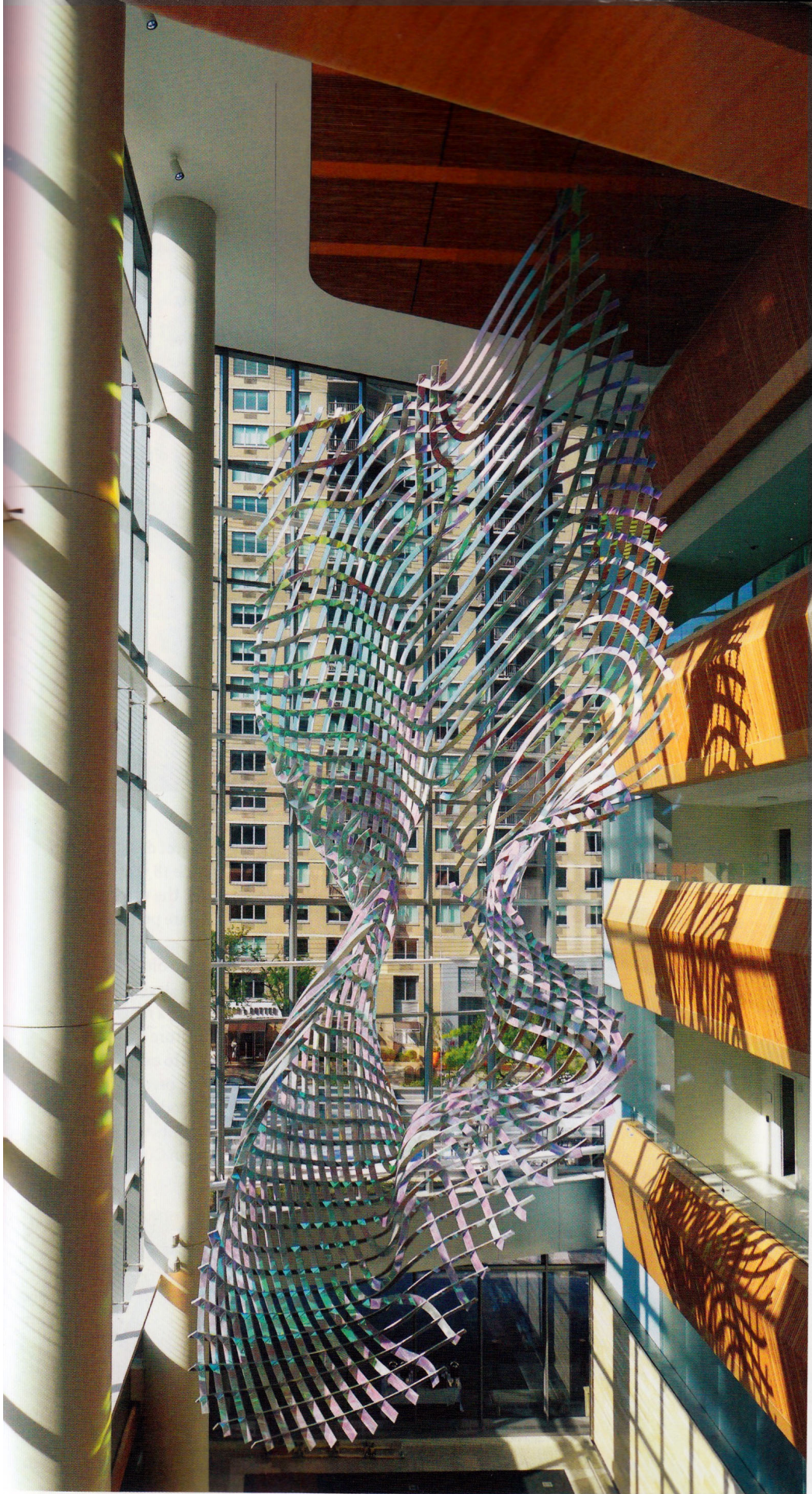
"The Acquisitions Committee was enamored with the alluring quality of Alyson's work and felt the dynamic nature of her proposal would be the perfect complement to the

grandeur of the foyer—beautiful, welcoming, always changing," notes **Virginia Anne Sharber**, executive director of the Hunter Museum.

For her part, Shotz acknowledges that it's a huge honor to be selected for the Hunter Museum commission after an exhaustive, three-year process. "From the start I was excited because it's for a museum collection and there couldn't be a better context for my work," she says. "But there are

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challenges all the way through this kind of process. I have to make the piece fit the budget while making it ambitious enough so that it's exciting for me and for the museum. I have to assemble a really good team and supervise everything to make sure details are all done right. And I have to work with a lot of different people and keep communication going between them."

As a well-established artist full of energy and endless ideas, Shotz likes experimenting with a wide range of materials—from aluminum, acrylic and steel to mirrors and lenses to porcelain and thread—and creating new work and processes by "trial and error." She sees commissions as valuable opportunities "to do expensive or very large-scale work I could not do otherwise," as she puts it. "When I'm conceptualizing something or shaping it, I have to do that work alone in my studio with no distractions. But many of these commissions have allowed me to stretch and be way more ambitious than I ever could have been just working on my own."

Shotz, who's represented by Derek Eller Gallery in NYC and whose work is included in major collections at the Whitney, the Guggenheim in NYC, the Hirshhorn and San Francisco MoMA, among others, has always been selective about commissions, eager to make sure the opportunities match the challenges involved.

"I want to work with people who will take a chance on new work and who will be enthusiastic partners," she explains. "When I did a commission at Stanford University in 2013, the committee was really excited and willing to step into the unknown with me. I had never made that type of sculpture at that type of scale and they gave me the opportunity. It was a huge honor—and a lot of fun!"

Six years later the opportunities keep coming for Shotz. In that time she has not only pushed her own practice but really come to understand the importance of trust to successful collaborations. "When you're working on this scale, you can't do it alone," the artist acknowledges. "In the days when I did everything myself, I got about 1/100th as much work done as I do now."

As so many creative practitioners know, however, finding the right people to work with isn't easy. "Last time I hired, I went through hundreds of applications to find the wonderful assistants I have now," Shotz says. "It was a lot of work, but that work paid off. There has to be a huge amount of trust in the studio." ■