

IN REVIEW

Indianapolis, Indiana

Reviewed by Susan Watt Grade

Ball-Nogues Studio: Gravity's Loom Indianapolis Museum of Art

Inflowing into the forty-foot-tall Efroymson Family Entrance Pavilion—an oval and open space with a curved wall of windows rising above an escalator and a second floor balcony to meet a soaring white ceiling—visitors to the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) were immediately immersed into a dynamic art experience: *Ball-Nogues Studio: Gravity's Loom*. If the Pavilion could drape itself in a cloak, this would be it—a garment of precisely crafted geometry that morphed into an interactive display of painterly wonder (September 3, 2010–March 6, 2011).

Los Angeles-based Ball-Nogues Studio, headed by Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, bridges the disciplines of art, design and architecture through handcrafted and technology-aided methods. Both artists, trained as architects, have diverse cross-disciplinary creative experiences and first collaborated in 2005. *Gravity's Loom* is one of multiple works in the Studio's *Suspensions* series that mounts installations from a ceiling area. IMA commissioned their woven architectural installation of more than thirty miles of ink-dyed nylon twine precisely

cut into 1,900 strings of various lengths. The parts were fabricated in Los Angeles, but assembled by hand on site. Systematically, each cord was unwrapped from its spool and attached end-to-end to an aluminum hanging system placed around the Pavilion's circumference towards the top quarter of the space. Straight white fringe dangled neatly from points of attachment.

Like a net that merged with the site's architecture, the whole of *Gravity's Loom* defined forms in the air with an atmospheric openness and delineated the space through swooping colored-filled catenaries. Shaped by gravitational force and highlighted through refractions of the Pavilion's changing natural light, the installation billowed, then rose into the intended inverse form of an architectural dome. Specifically, Ball explained in a video produced for the installation, the work's form and imagery was designed to be, "an abstract graphic of the cornice line of the Baroque Dome in Germany—the Steinhausen Church."

The elliptical structure of the Pavilion is an archetypal Baroque shape. Like Baroque form, *Gravity's Loom* was dramatically visual with a sense of upward movement as if it were suspended in flight. The earth's grounding pull emphasized the nylon's structural limitations as twine curved deeply towards the floor. The lowest arc dropped to below four feet from the ground floor to greet IMA visitors, literally directing people's movements throughout the space. Lines of color then lifted and gesticulated to block or highlight areas of the architecture. The color patterns, based on Baroque ceilings, were united into bands or areas of fuzzy-bordered hues. The

palette ranged from white to brights such as fuchsia, purple and red plus pastels in shades of pink, blue, yellow, and green.

In past architecturally based installations, Balls-Nogues Studio calculated lengths and dyed and cut its twine by hand, but the labor was enormous. They turned to the aid of technology and made their own programmable machine called the "Insta-llator 2 with Variable Information Atomizing Module." Four computer-controlled air-brushes now color strings precisely and snip cords to lengths determined by software using mathematical calculations. The Studio compares this application of vibrant colors to Ikat, a resist dye procedure that creates blurry-edged patterns when woven. Production of the art is still intricate and time-consuming (a project team of sixteen was recognized on the exhibition label at IMA), but the Studio has been able to use technology effectively as a tool in service to the art rather than in competition with completely traditional processes. Would the effect of the colors be different if dyed by hand? Not that I can detect. In fact, all the colorations would probably not be possible without the aid of the Studio's machine, as noted by Nogues in the exhibition's video.

Gravity's Loom changed one's perception of IMA's existing architecture. With multiple vantage points for approaching the installation—from the lower or upper escalators or the ground floor's main glass doors—the pictorial experience of *Gravity's Loom* was altered. Gazing up from the lower escalator to the Pavilion's ceiling, the alignment was particularly dramatic as patterns were more distinguishable and acted like paint on a gessoed canvas. Looking

through the installation from the second story—taking in the strings, the negative space between, and the view through the windows to the outside landscape and ever-changing sky—was like experiencing an Impressionist painting. The three-dimensional layers melted together visually and appeared not unlike a rolling mist. The conservatively modern structure of IMA became akin to a glass-enclosed conservatory.

For more information about the installation, visit <http://www.ball-nogues.com> or <http://www.imamuseum.org/exhibition/ball-nogues-studio-gravitys-loom> and view the related video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjsCsvGHtXk&feature=youtube_gdata.

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BALL-NOGUES STUDIO *Gravity's Loom* Site-specific installation at Indianapolis Museum of Art. Machine-dyed nylon twine, aluminum and paint (dye), approx.36' by 93' x 61', 2010. Photo: Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art.