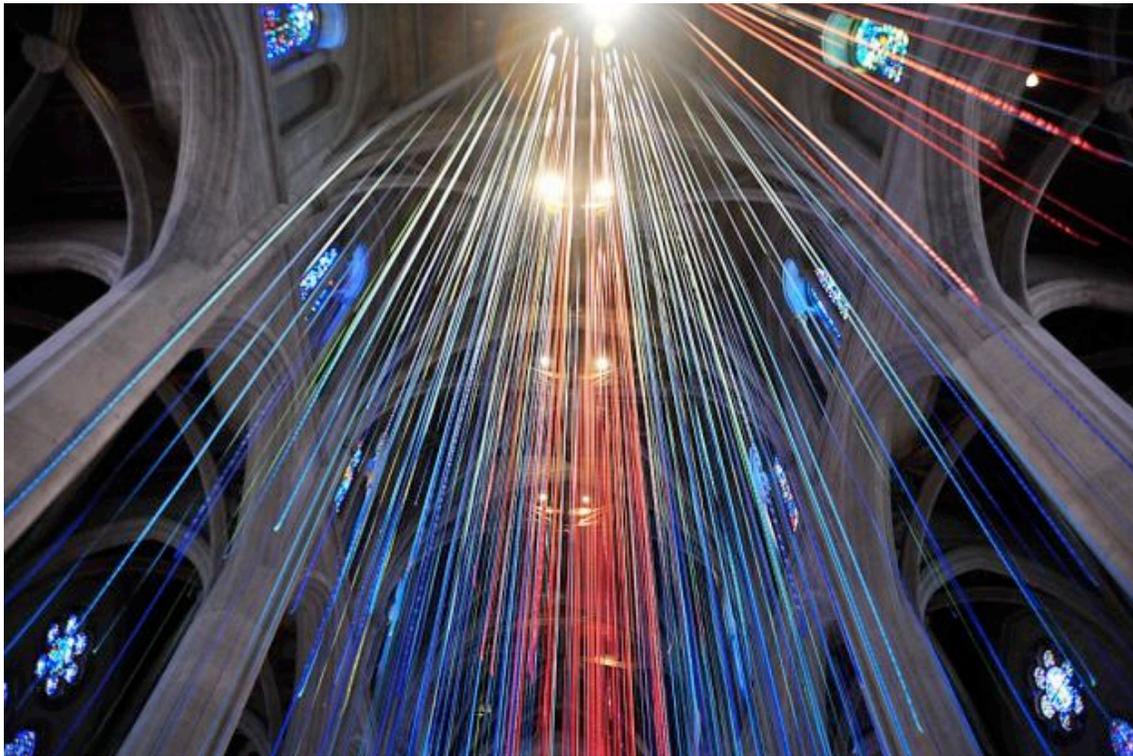


Cade Tompkins Projects
198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888

SFGate

'Graced With Light' art installation has 20 miles of ribbons

by Anh-Minh Le
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The "Graced With Light" installation consists of about 1,100 strands of ribbon, each 86 feet in length, in shades of blue, green and red. They cascade from the cathedral's attic. Photo: Fiestaban Photography

There are plenty of reasons for art and music lovers to visit Grace Cathedral: John De Rosen murals, a replica of Lorenzo Ghiberti's "Gates of Paradise," two labyrinths, a Keith Haring altarpiece and a 44-bell carillon. For nearly a year, Anne Patterson, the cathedral's 2013 artist in residence, has provided yet another reason.

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Patterson, a New York installation artist and director, is responsible for "Graced With Light" - a music-inspired installation that features nearly 20 miles of multihued ribbons cascading from the church's vaulted ceiling arches. The piece - which was to be on view through early fall last year - has proven so popular that it will stay up until the end of February.

"It's been this incredible thing we've lived with," says the Very Rev. Jane Shaw, dean of Grace Cathedral. "It absolutely fills the space in the best way, taking colors from the stained glass literally. And it just lifts people's spirits."

With 2013 marking the 100th anniversary of Grace Cathedral's Choir of Men & Boys, and drawing on Patterson's background such as a collaboration with the San Francisco Symphony's 2012 production of "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastien," incorporating music into her residency was a given.

The first phase of "Graced With Light" was a March performance by cellist Joshua Roman, along with the unveiling of Patterson's ribbon installation. The latter consisted of 632 86-foot strands of ribbon, each less than an inch wide, in three shades of blue and two shades of green.

'Exchange of energy'

Patterson describes it as an "incredible exchange of energy." During the final number, the audience was invited to scatter throughout the cathedral. "Many people chose to lay down in the pews," says Patterson. "One audience member told me that it was the best therapy session he had ever experienced. As he was lying down looking up at the ribbons, he imagined the things he wanted out of his life flowing up the ribbons and the things he wanted to welcome into his life streaming down the ribbons into him."

The installation at the Nob Hill cathedral was the result of months of prep work that Patterson did from her art studio in Manhattan. She constructed a 3/16-inch scale model with embroidery floss. She hung ribbons in the hallway outside her studio to help determine the density and color pattern. She devised technical drawings. "I did as much as I could in advance," she says, "but didn't really know what it would be until I got in there."

With a small crew of volunteers and riggers, Patterson spent eight days assembling the inaugural part of the project: It took four days to attach the ribbons to the ropes from which they are suspended, two days to get the ropes in place in the church's attic, and two more days to finesse the ribbons to look just right. (According to Patterson, once unfurled, almost a fifth of the ribbons had knots or tangles.)

In June, Patterson completed the second phase - adding 473 pink, red and burgundy ribbons to the ropes.

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The additional ribbons allowed for an interactive element, which was important to the artist: Members of the community attended workshops where they wrote their "dreams, prayers and wishes" on the ribbons, says Patterson. "Their prayers are now floating in the cathedral. And since they're at the top, there's still this sense of anonymity and privacy."

In October, for the third component of her residency - "Seeing the Voice: State of Grace" - Patterson teamed up with composer and conductor Paul Haas and artist, projection designer and filmmaker Adam Larsen.

Haas, who is a former Grace Cathedral chorister and attended the Cathedral School for Boys, created a one-time showing of a 70-minute musical installation.

Film still showing

Visitors can still enjoy Larsen's film, which is scheduled to play in the afternoons until mid-January. It includes video and still footage of dancers, doves, trees, waves and paintings by Patterson, projected onto a series of 13 panels that she refers to as "string curtains."

"The projected images are held on the panels, yet also pass through them on to the ribbons and church architecture," she says. "It has this ephemeral feel."

Once "Graced With Light" comes to a close, Patterson hopes to use parts of it to construct a new art piece for the cathedral. She is still mulling over ideas, such as a sculpture comprised of some of the ribbons woven together.

"There's a lot of people who don't want to see it go away," Shaw says, "but, you know, everything has its life."

Graced With Light: Installation on view through Feb. 28. Grace Cathedral, 1100 California St., San Francisco. Sunday, 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.; Thursday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Free. (415) 749-6300. www.gracecathedral.org.