

ORLY GINGER  
REDEFINES WHAT IT  
MEANS TO BE GIVEN  
ENOUGH ROPE.

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# TRICK ROPESTER

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by CAROL KINO

IN ONLY A FEW SHORT YEARS, the sculptor Orly Genger has become known for creating massive, awe-inspiring installations using tons of recycled climbing and lobster-fishing rope. Early on, she knotted and piled the stuff into structures that absorbed entire rooms, like the black, lava-like expanse called *Masspeak* that filled a New York gallery in 2007, or *Big Boss*, a vermilion-painted tower that toppled and sprawled for more than twenty-eight feet across the floor, built in 2010 for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Genger's labor-intensive construction process involves knotting the rope into long bulky strands, and then layering and sculpting those strands on-site, with results that often suggest a surreal mix of 1970s earthworks, the minimalist arcs and stacks of Richard Serra or Donald Judd, and Faith Wilding's tactile 1971 *Crocheted Environment* (later named *Womb Room*).

Since May 2013, Genger has been lauded for her public sculptures, too: that's when she transformed 1.4 million feet of rope into three soaring enclosures, each painted a different primary color, in New York's Madison Square Park. Called *Red, Yellow and Blue*, the work drew steady crowds, becoming the most popular commission in the park's history. Genger has since created several more sculptures for other places, including Austin and Chicago. On October 20, 2014, she unveils *Terra*, a new work in Oklahoma City's Campbell Park, across the street from the site of the future home of Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center.

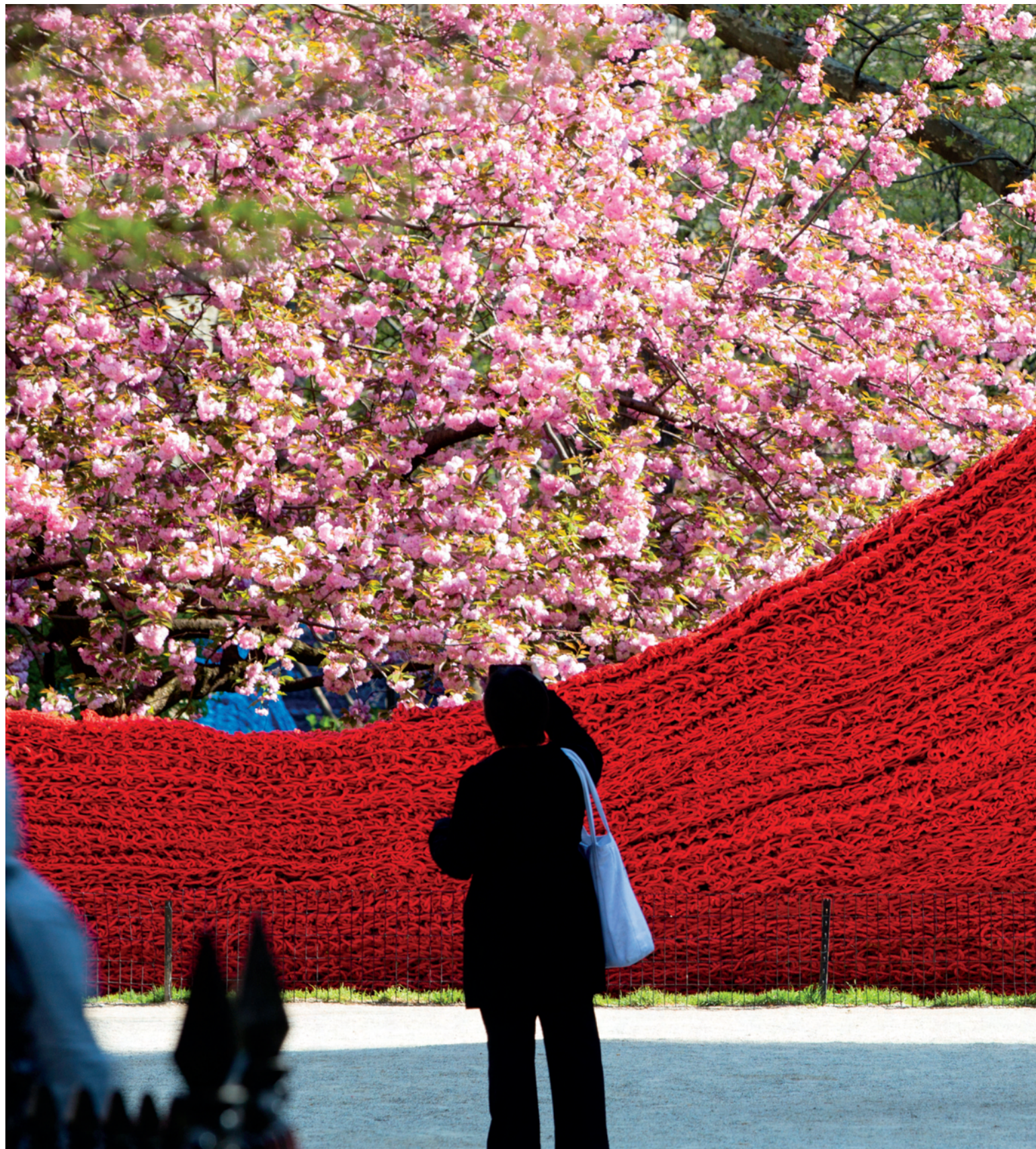
*Terra* will fill the park's central lawn with a 220-foot-long zigzagging wall whose top will dip and swell like waves. Genger describes the piece, which will morph from two to eight feet high, as "voluptuous," with "a lot of curves to it, both horizontal and vertical." She intends to paint it a deep brick color, to suggest the iron-rich red dirt of Oklahoma.

"People in Oklahoma are connected to the land," says Genger, thirty-five, herself a native New Yorker.

ORLY GINGER, *Current*  
The Contemporary Austin, Austin, Texas (2014) ▶  
photograph by BRIAN FITZSIMMONS







*Red, Yellow and Blue*  
Madison Square Park, New York City (2013)  
photograph by JAMES ERWIN



ORLY GINGER (2014)  
photograph by ROBERT BANAT

“So I felt it would be interesting to do something that refers to it,” while also creating something dramatically different from the “stereotypically flat” surrounding landscape. Seen from above, the 700-foot piece suggests a sinuously snaking line—one that should provide lots of interesting nooks and crannies likely to entice passersby.

“People will be able to fit their bodies in there,” Genger says, adding, “Once a piece is up, there’s usually a very visceral reaction to it that I don’t think you can predict.” (While she personally would enjoy seeing visitors climbing on the piece, Genger notes that’s unlikely to be permitted.)

It’s precisely this promise of interactivity that prompted Oklahoma Contemporary to pursue Genger. “The public can get involved in all sorts of ways with Orly’s work, even if they’re just picnicking beside it,” says Mary Ann Prior, former Oklahoma Contemporary artistic director and now director of art collections at Vulcan, a Seattle investment group started by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. “That makes it extremely memorable, and joyful. We thought it would be something very new and different for Oklahoma City.”

Since most of Genger’s public installations are site-specific and temporary, she usually repurposes her raw materials, and *Terra* is no exception. It will use much of the fifty tons of rope that went into *Red, Yellow and Blue*—which has been transformed once already, into a second piece with the same title, for the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Reconfigured as a single line that meandered around the building and the grounds, it stayed there for nearly a year.

*Terra* is a bit of a performance piece, too. As with all of Genger’s installations, it will be assembled in the park, from long chunky strips of knotted rope that the artist, together with a small team, will essentially sculpt in public.

While Genger has a sense of what the finished work will look like, “it’s always different in real life,” she says. “That’s the exciting part of these projects—the unpredictable nature of working with this material and figuring things out on the spot.” ✕



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DeCordova Sculpture Park featuring *Red, Yellow and Blue*  
Lincoln, Massachusetts (2013), photograph by ANDY CAULFIELD