The Select Ten

Design’s leading voices help us identify the next wave of burgeoning talent.

Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, Jade Chang, and staff

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**Ball-Nogues**

Los Angeles, Established 2004

Installation art

Selected by Christopher Hawthorne

Euphony might look like a diaphanous swirl, but the 110-foot installation in Nashville’s Music City Center weighs 1,800 pounds and is made of precisely draped lengths of stainless steel ball chain.

Courtesy Bruce Cain, portrait courtesy Robin Black
From the beginning, Ball-Nogues has occupied an unusual space between art and design-build. The Los Angeles–based studio’s two principals, Benjamin Ball (pictured left) and Gaston Nogues, are both 45-year-old SCI-Arc grads who have done stints at Gehry Partners—one of their first projects together was a giant, golden shade structure constructed of deftly manipulated Mylar that floated over a courtyard on a busy street in the Silver Lake neighborhood of L.A. Their work remains more an examination of materials than it is a creation of forms.

Take *Euphony*, a recent project inside the atrium of the Music City Center in Nashville. The building was conceived as a giant guitar, and within it, Ball-Nogues’s 110-foot-high draped sculpture seems to quiver in space. This evanescence is extraordinary when you realize that it’s achieved with 28 miles of stainless steel ball chain, and 1,800 pounds of material arranged in catenary curves that form a spiraling, twisted surface. “It’s about finding the vocabulary that’s feasible for chain,” Ball says. “We wouldn’t know the full extent of what it could be if we didn’t know the full extent of the logistics.”
The studio has done earlier projects along these lines, including a 2009 installation for Museum of Contemporary Art that involved 3,604 separate lengths of colored twine. *Euphony* grew from that, allowing Ball and Nogues to refine certain techniques—including the creation of a custom software, which enabled them to control and design the proximity between the lines, as well as a machine that colors and cuts the individual lengths of twine or chains. —Jade Chang

“The funny little secret of digitally enabled architecture is how much craft, how much painstaking hands-on work, is required to build the most fluid designs,” says Christopher Hawthorne of the Los Angeles Times. “Ball-Nogues fundamentally understands and embraces that.”