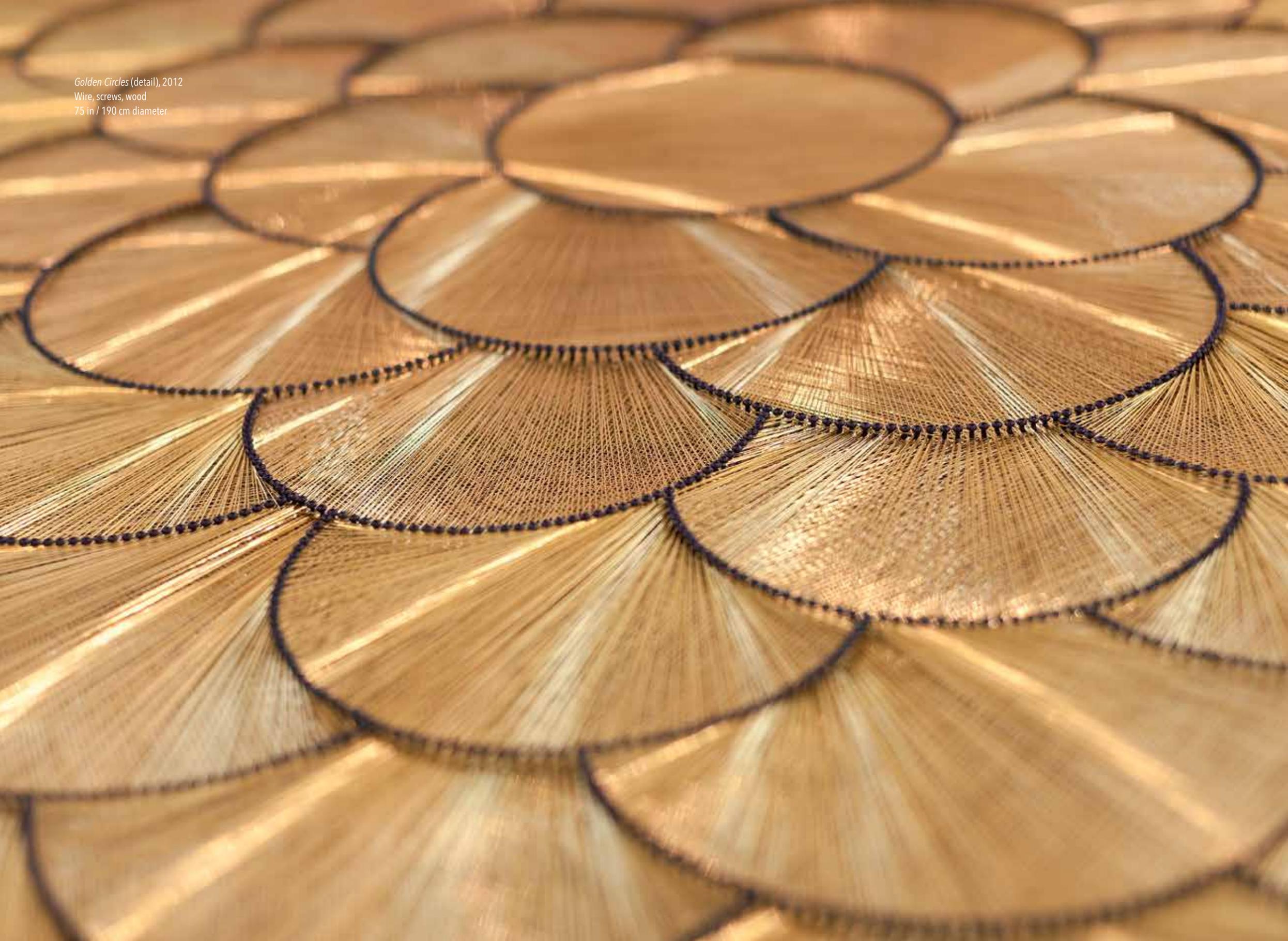
The background is a vibrant green with a fine, textured pattern of thin, parallel lines. A dark, teardrop-shaped void is centered vertically, with a thin, dark vertical line passing through its center. The overall effect is a sense of depth and movement.

Variations on Line

Gulay Semercioglu

Golden Circles (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter



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Variations on Line

Gulay Semercioglu
October 11 - November 12, 2012
Leila Heller Gallery, New York

Variations on Line

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The artworld has, for some time, been in search of a definitive manifestation of contemporary Turkish art – a cohering style, a distinctive école or individual, a bohemian quarter where artists dwell - something anything that might furnish a frame of reference for the global art market and its intellectual outriders to grasp. In the field of literature, opinionmakers have anointed Orhan Pamuk as a designated figure. In movies, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and the Berlin-based Fatih Akin have, between them, shared various top directing awards in Venice, Berlin and elsewhere. As Turkey hesitantly emerges from post-Cold War isolation and finds itself strategically and economically significant, the world is athirst for the Turks to reveal themselves. Whose side are they on? Which tradition, which continuum? Will they tilt the balance for the West or against? Who are they deep down?

Culture furnishes the surest signposts for the long term incline of Turkey, offering a window onto the Turkish 'soul' in a way that politics or the economy or religion or business cannot. Alas, though, compared to movies and books, contemporary art is a tricky medium for this purpose. Movies and books must at least use culturally identifiable protagonists or settings because a narrative must exist in time and place. Since the advent of modernism, art can have a mysterious, ineffable identity of its own, geometric, abstract, occluded, belonging to no particular extraction, floating in esthetic dimensions rather than inhabiting national borders. Indeed, these days, visual artists from a specific background may object strenuously to being identified according to their geographical or ethnic origins, according to the accident of their birth. Artists who don't surmount their surroundings and forge an international visual language run the risk of seeming parochial, subcultural, and ultimately trivial. Which is why Gulay Semercioglu may be precisely the 'Turkish Artist' that the outside world is looking for.

A woman (in her early forties) who trained in Turkey's premier art college – Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul – and who first painted in acrylics before discovering her intricate, personal and universal medium, Gulay creates objects that occupy exactly the requisite distance between her cultural roots and the global ether. There is a reason why her creations have garnered a following beyond Turkey, why collectors from Hong Kong to the Gulf to Europe

have sought out her work. It all points, in fact, to the same space that is occupied by the Turkish consciousness – equidistant from the four points of the compass but informed by their forces, steeped in polarities. Her work is made of finely fretted steel threads stretched densely between tiny screws on wooden frames. At first glance the eye is unsure whether it is looking at a textile or industrial object, at handicraft or machine product. There is in the work a suggestion simultaneously of Oriental sumptuousness and of futurist design. Indeed, the eye is unsure all around, but it feels ravished by a profound and striking visual utterance that keeps echoing.

"I am aware that my work evokes dualities," says Gulay, "I like that it makes contradictions exist and reconcile". She enumerates them: East and West, ancient and hi-tech, art and craft, sculptural and painterly, silken and textured. One might add that her ultra-fine steely tapestries seem at once representational, suggestive of other things - peacocks tails, glossy fans - and yet only of themselves and the integrity of their material. "People like to touch them" she says, "as if they were piano or harp strings. That is as it should be - they are tactile, made by touch. They communicate also on that level." It takes Gulay weeks, even months of painstaking handiwork, often using miles of wire, to create her pieces, rather as textile makers of old used to do. Her family originally hailed from Turkey's eastern city of Gaziantep where such crafts once flourished. "My grandfather, when he was bored or unhappy, used to resort to weaving. My grandmother used to win prizes for her embroidery and jewelry. It's in my genes and in the process." To that organic process she has added the rigors of structure and form. "What I have discovered in myself is a calling, an appetite for architectural design. In my thoughts I am designing buildings."

The mind travels to the glorious notion of Gulay's iridescent shapes writ large on city streets and, inevitably, one thinks about the play of light. Walking past one of her sculptures generates such a riot of evanescent light, the fretwork almost changing shape as it luminesces at different angles – giving the illusion, she says, that "they are alive and sending messages". Protean, moody, intense, volatile messages open to infinite interpretation, and misinterpretation, perhaps a metaphor for the Turkish consciousness as viewed by an outside eye.

Melik Kaylan

Black Gap, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 59 in / 180 x 150 cm





Black Gap (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 59 in / 180 x 150 cm

Face to Face, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter



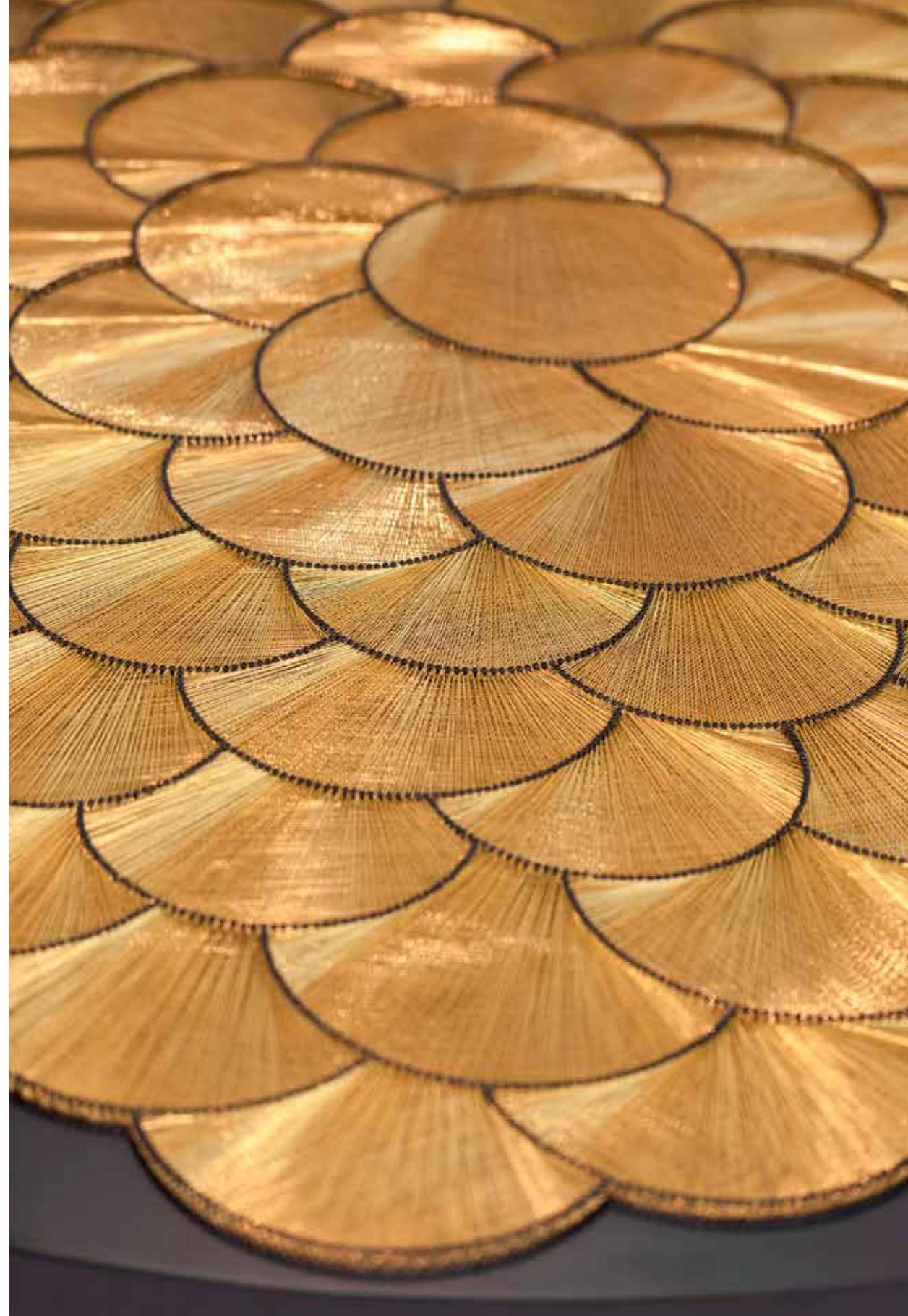


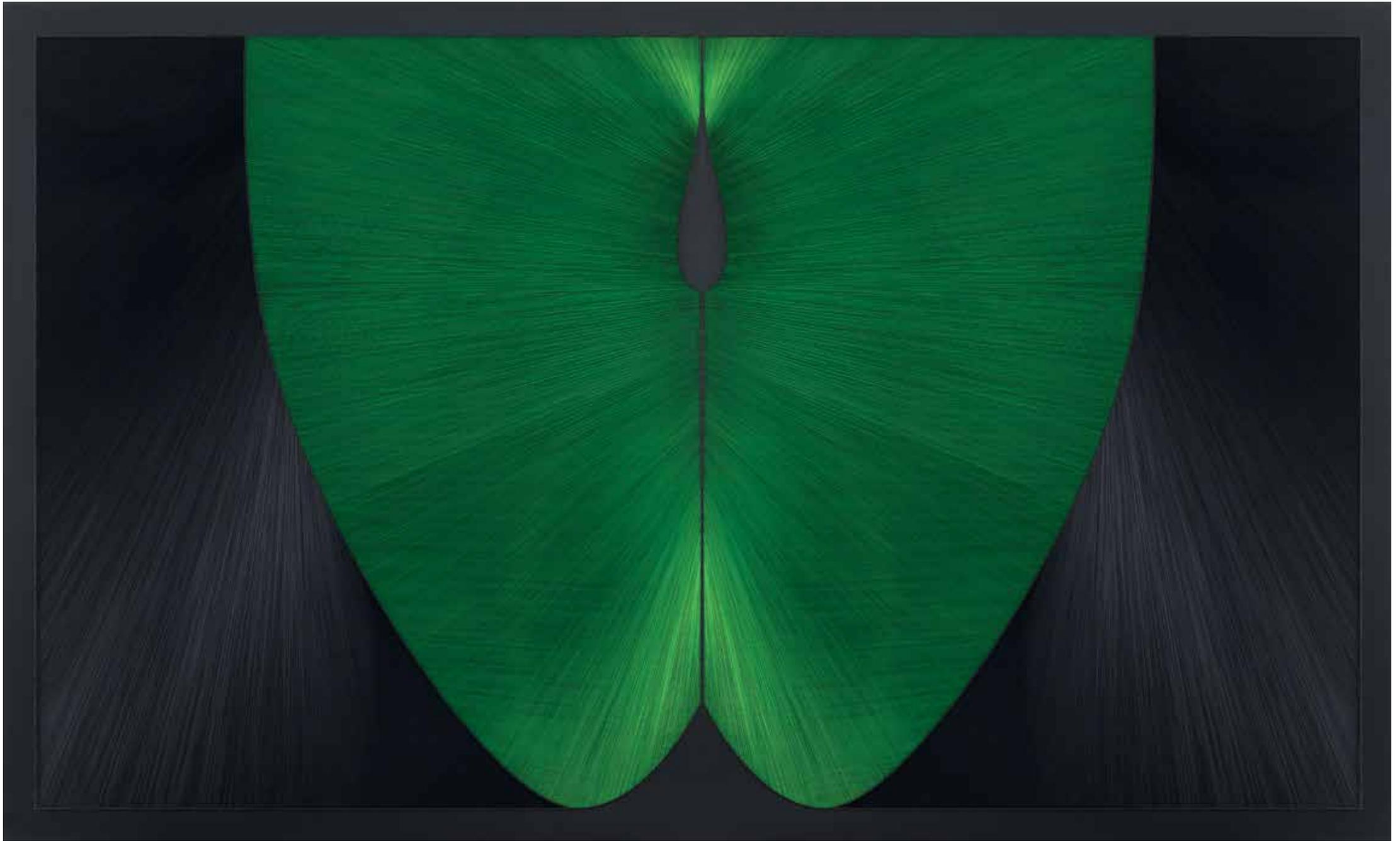
Face to Face (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter

Golden Circles, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter



Golden Circles (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter





Green Apple, 2011
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 118 in / 180 x 300 cm

Inside, 2011
Wire, screws, wood
64 x 44 in / 162 x 112 cm





Inside (detail), 2011
Wire, screws, wood
64 x 44 in / 162 x 112 cm

One Way, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
69 x 69 in / 175 x 175 cm

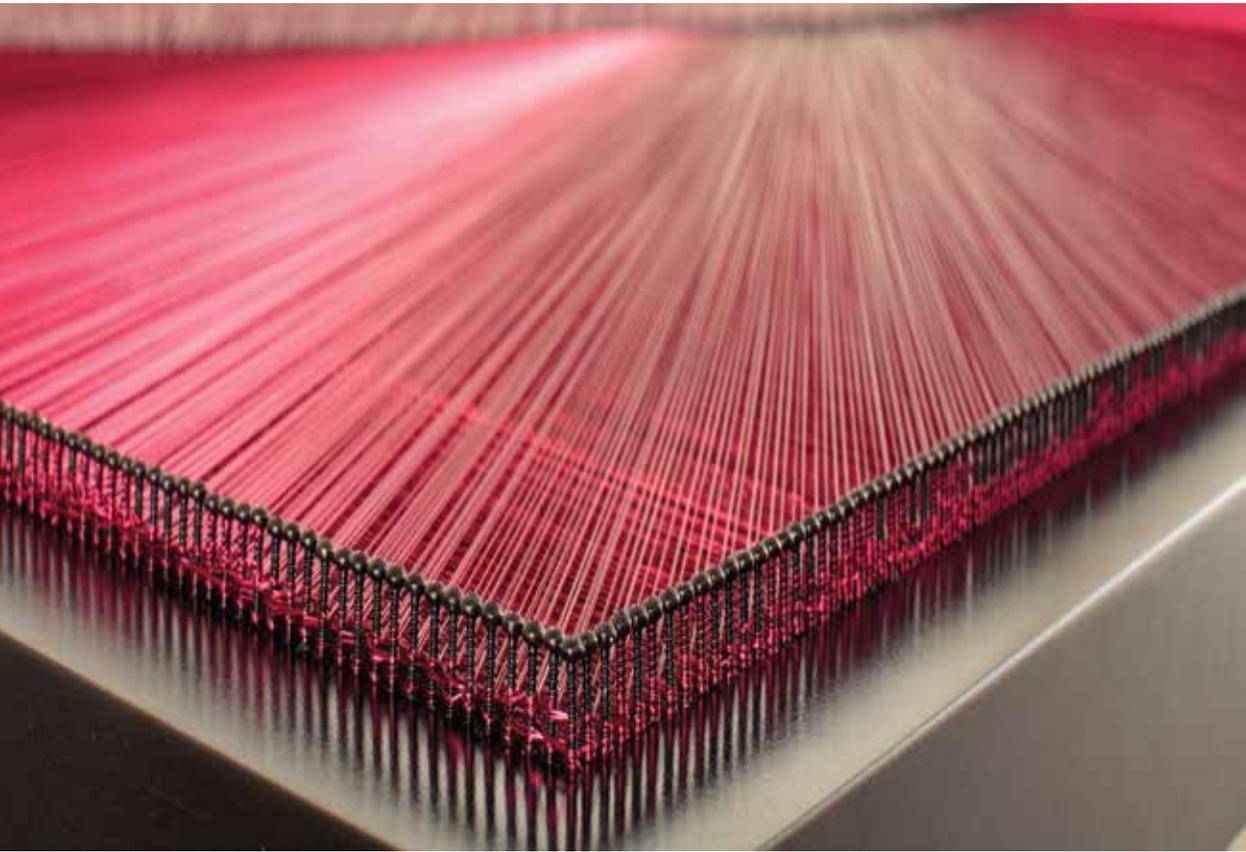




One Way (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
69 x 69 in / 175 x 175 cm

Pure, 2011
Wire, screws, wood
64 x 44 in / 162 x 112 cm

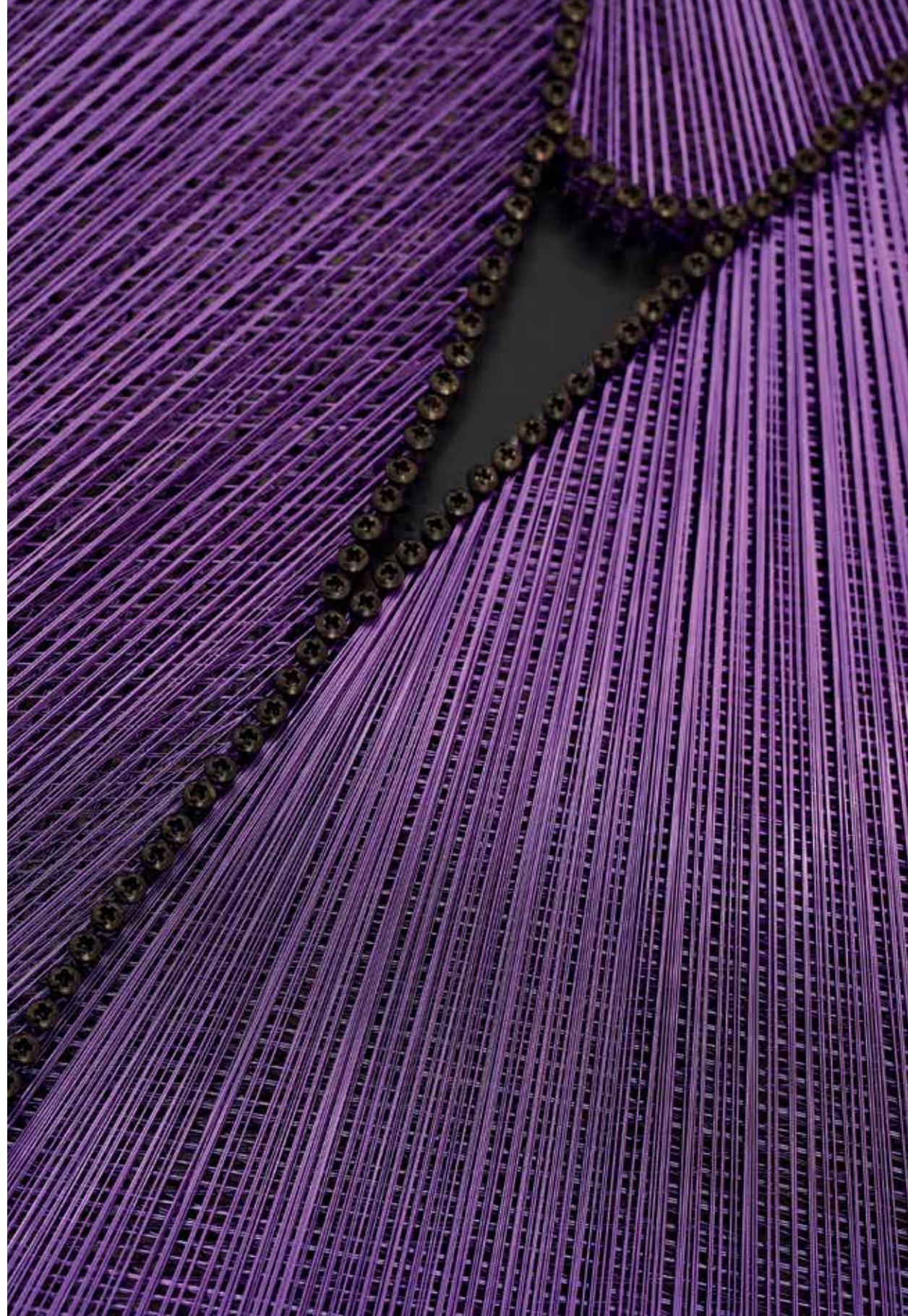




Pure (detail), 2011
Wire, screws, wood
64 x 44 in / 162 x 112 cm

Separate Pieces, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 59 in / 180 x 150 cm





Separate Pieces (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 59 in / 180 x 150 cm

Split in Two, 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter





Split in Two (detail), 2012
Wire, screws, wood
75 in / 190 cm diameter

Q&A with Gulay Semercioglu

There is something at once masculine and feminine in your work, to use those categorizations loosely. Something about minimalism and fibers simultaneously, like industry and craft at the same time. The thread that you use has a metallic sheen. Can you talk about what sorts of art traditions you would like your work to be read through?

I have never desired my works to be read through any tradition-based understanding. They created their own tradition. They have grown up, ripened in time and this process is still going on. As I confront craft with industrial, I confront masculine with feminine. I am living on contradictions and my dynamics are kind of based on them. As the geography I live on is full of these contradictions, I can't survive without living, seeing or feeling them. I think my works emerge as a result of these contradictions.

You have used limited materials to achieve very different works: The Kinetic Line series for instance are very different from your current work, or even from the Erotic Line series. You have used the thread to create op-art style geometric patterns, but also to create volume, and curves and suggestive forms. Can you talk about your attachment to thread?

I use wire as a painter uses paint. When I hold it, I feel like I have an amazing set of light, as if it was just waiting for me to direct it. I often spend time watching the wire racks in my atelier and those moments I usually start thinking about which one to choose and I lose my mind like a child who enters a candy shop. They arouse my inspiration, and sometimes the way I should use them becomes obvious, as if they were telling me what they want to be turned into. For me they are not limited materials, but wonderful things offering me unlimited possibilities. Indeed, in each of my exhibitions I use them in a different way, because I am changing and they follow me on my journey.

There is something fascinating in these limitations that you set for yourself in the work. You essentially have an endless array of combinations between composition, direction of the thread and color. Those variables offer exponentially increasing possibilities with their relationship to light. Can you talk about light and reflection in your work?

Light has been the most important issue for painters throughout art history. Artists always tried to control light. I also received a traditional painting education: for years I made oil paintings, and light had always been my biggest concern. On the other hand, when I realized that I wanted to create a light which would look more real and touchable, I started searching for new materials. I tried many, and I think wire appeared as the best one to express myself. Wire creates a kinetic effect in my paintings; depending on the location of the painting, the lightening of the place or the position of the audience, the light changes.

The paintings compose their own light. Of course there is a true light for me in the place where I put the paintings; but once they are taken away from their first environment and moved to another place, they find their own light there, which is actually the most proper one. That makes me very happy.

Often there are gaps, or holes in the threaded surface. These seem to open up to deep space (perhaps even infinite ones like Fontana's punctures in canvas) Can you talk about those interruptions in the surface? What dimensionality are you trying to create in these moments?

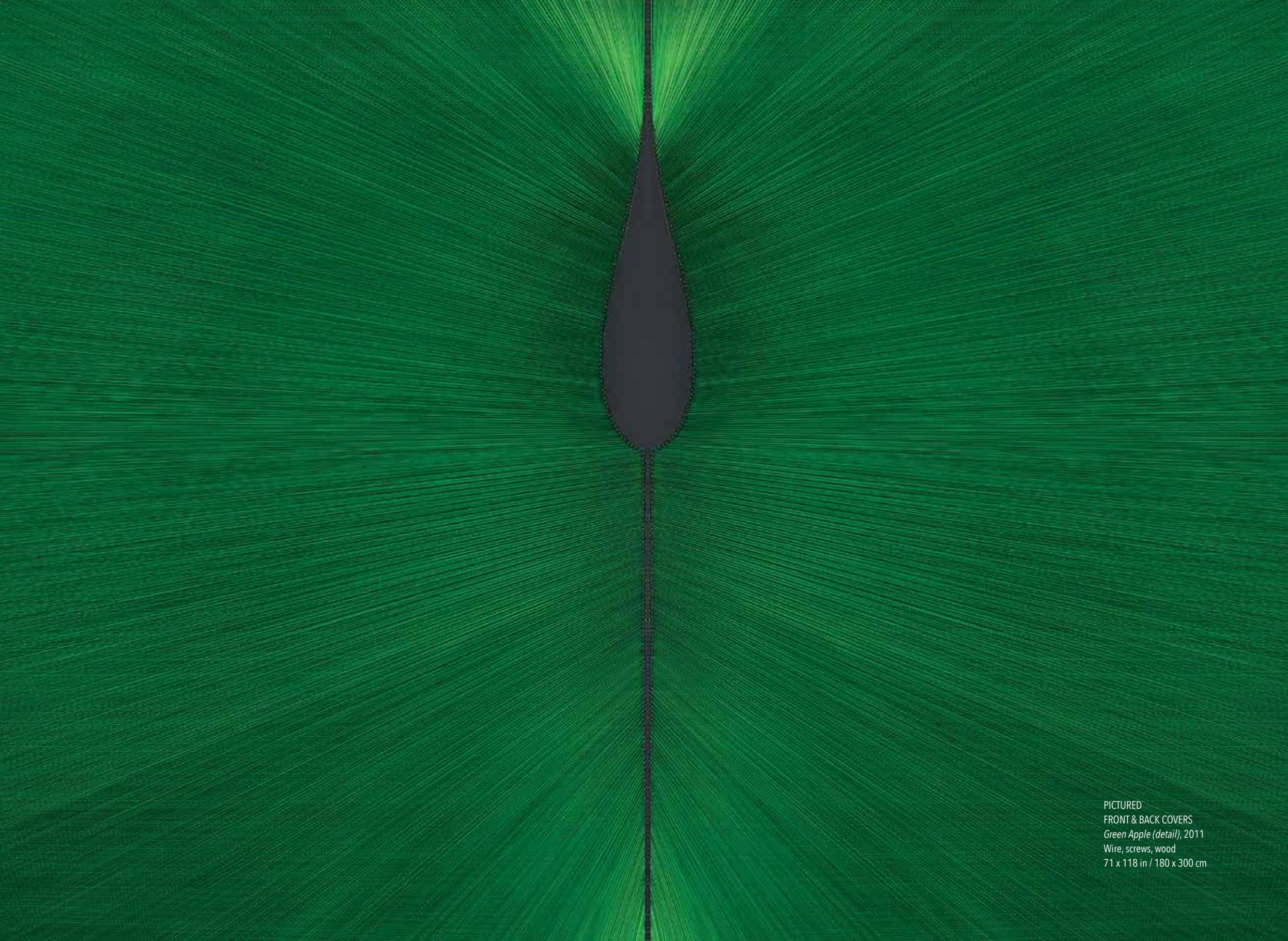
My works are like my secret diaries, in each layer of them I hide my daily feelings, my sufferings, joys and dreams. I hide them so you have to look in depth to recognise them. My work always provokes the audience to touch them, feel them, and they often try to see what is behind, what is inside, by putting their fingers in those gaps. As wires are very fragile, exactly like I am, it is a hard situation for me because paintings can get damaged. Actually, I both want and do not want them to be touched. Here I am in a contradiction again.

Are you planning to force the boundaries of the technique and material you use in different ways? Can you talk about the future of your works and your relationship with the material? What kind of approaches can you adopt to your compositions and subjects?

My works recently started to have multiple parts, colorful and also more laborious. While the parts have been increasing, the relief effect increases as well, and I know they will gain a more sculptural dimension in the near future. My next exhibition will include an installation that I have been wanting to make for a long time. I will create a bedroom, which will be reminiscent of my quilted work from previous years in that I will knit wires with awl to gain more meters. It will be the expression of a private space which is related to my own privacy and to the privacy of all women. If everything goes well, this project will be exhibited in May 2013 at Pi Artworks. The production process will take a long time and there are still so many details to be considered.

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PICTURED
FRONT & BACK COVERS
Green Apple (detail), 2011
Wire, screws, wood
71 x 118 in / 180 x 300 cm



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