

Visual equations

An artist manipulates lines of color in mathematical ways to create three-dimensional works.

"When all the water is gone, the feeling lingers on," translucent adhesive vinyl on glass, Pasadena, California, 2008

By GWEN SHRIFT
STAFF WRITER

Photos by Megan Geckler

At Pennsbury High School circa 1992, Megan Geckler's idea of a fun elective was a science or math course.

These were logical choices for an aspiring doctor, but in a series of developments she never calculated, Geckler became a Los Angeles-based artist known for colorful installations in plastic tape and, more recently, rope.

Her works are exercises in line, color and light, executed in a material more commonly seen at construction sites and inspired by the rhythms and lyrics of bands such as Pavement, the Buggles, Guided by Voices, Arcade Fire and others.

"I find these songs with these strange kinds of emotional lyrics, like 'I laughed under my breath over your shoulder,'" says Geckler, quoting a line from "Soon" by Low, a group from Duluth.

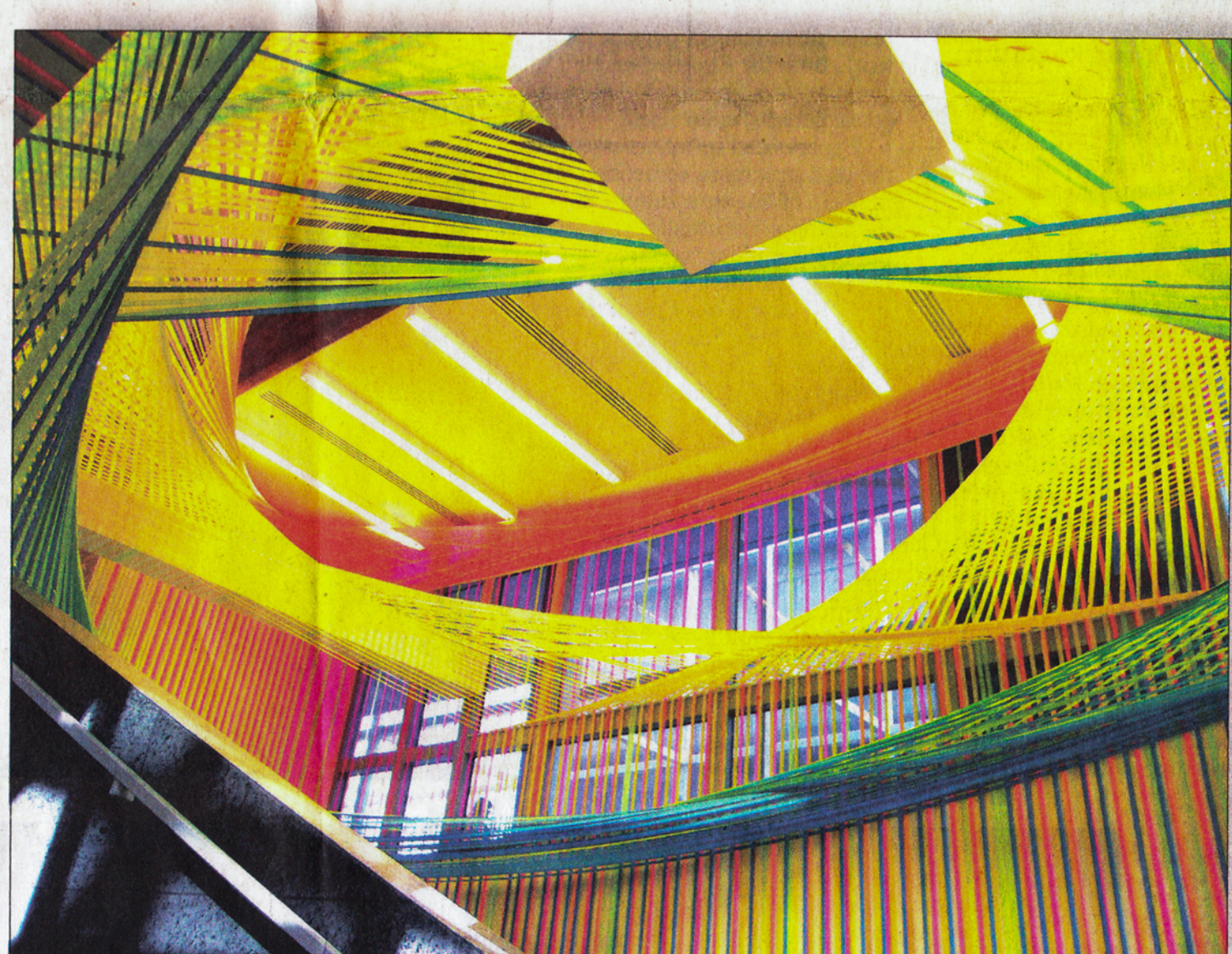
"I laughed under my breath," the installation, seems a study in speed, as a construction of angled tape in warm colors appears to trace the line of an object moving at high velocity, though it is firmly attached to a ceiling and pillar in a gallery.

Her work is meant to be viewed from beneath, or above. The eye is invited through her installations, as well.

"Everybody can have their own experience," says Geckler. "We're different heights. We walk at different speeds."

"What I like best about my work is, it's mathematical. We make working diagrams and figure out how to retrofit for the space. People walk in, and you kind of have an 'oh, wow!' factor to it."

Geckler's work involves complex mathematical sequences, geometry and trigonometry, producing catenary curves from sine waves. Using software designed for architects, she renders a plan for what she calls "a drawing in space."



"Spread the ashes of the colors," 2010 installation by Megan Geckler in flagging tape, wood, paint and hardware, at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University

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Geckler

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When interpreted in colorful tape, this high-powered brainwork yields dreamlike structures with emotional power, in which space itself seems to glow.

Crisscrossing lines of color at precise intervals also can produce shimmering optical illusions.

"They've made cars have fender-benders. When we've done stuff in public, it looks like it's moving. It does look very kinetic," says Geckler.

The artist has exhibited widely since 1998. Her work has been featured in numerous blogs and other publications such as *Elle Decor Italia*, *Martha Stewart Weddings* and *Digital Artist* magazine.

Back in high school, this would have looked like a long shot.

In addition to her science and math electives, Geckler tackled photography. "It's chemistry, and a lot of fine-tuning that happens in the lab," she says.

Geckler graduated from Pennsbury in 1993. Then, as a pre-med student at the University of Vermont, "I spent way more time in the photo lab than studying that (medical) stuff."

She applied to the Tyler School of Art, "and got in. That started everything," she recalls. At Tyler, Geckler studied design, crafts, woodworking, painting, printmaking and art history, among other decidedly non-medical subjects.

The artist landed in Los Angeles, working for her master's degree at Claremont Graduate University. At a certain point, she began seeking new directions in her artwork by using "throwaway" material she found in places other than art supply stores.

In the process, she happened upon flagging tape, a basic tool of engineering, surveying, mining and other industries. Workers use the tape to mark specific sites on construction projects, such as sewer or boundary lines.

She didn't know what flagging tape was, but soon discovered its potential. A manufacturer sent her samples of every color available.

"I know way too much about flagging tape," says Geckler, describing a manufacturing process that involves grinding up plastic, heating it, adding pigment and extruding it. "If you're doing a glow color, they come in 150-foot lengths, and the rest of the colors come in 300-foot," she says.

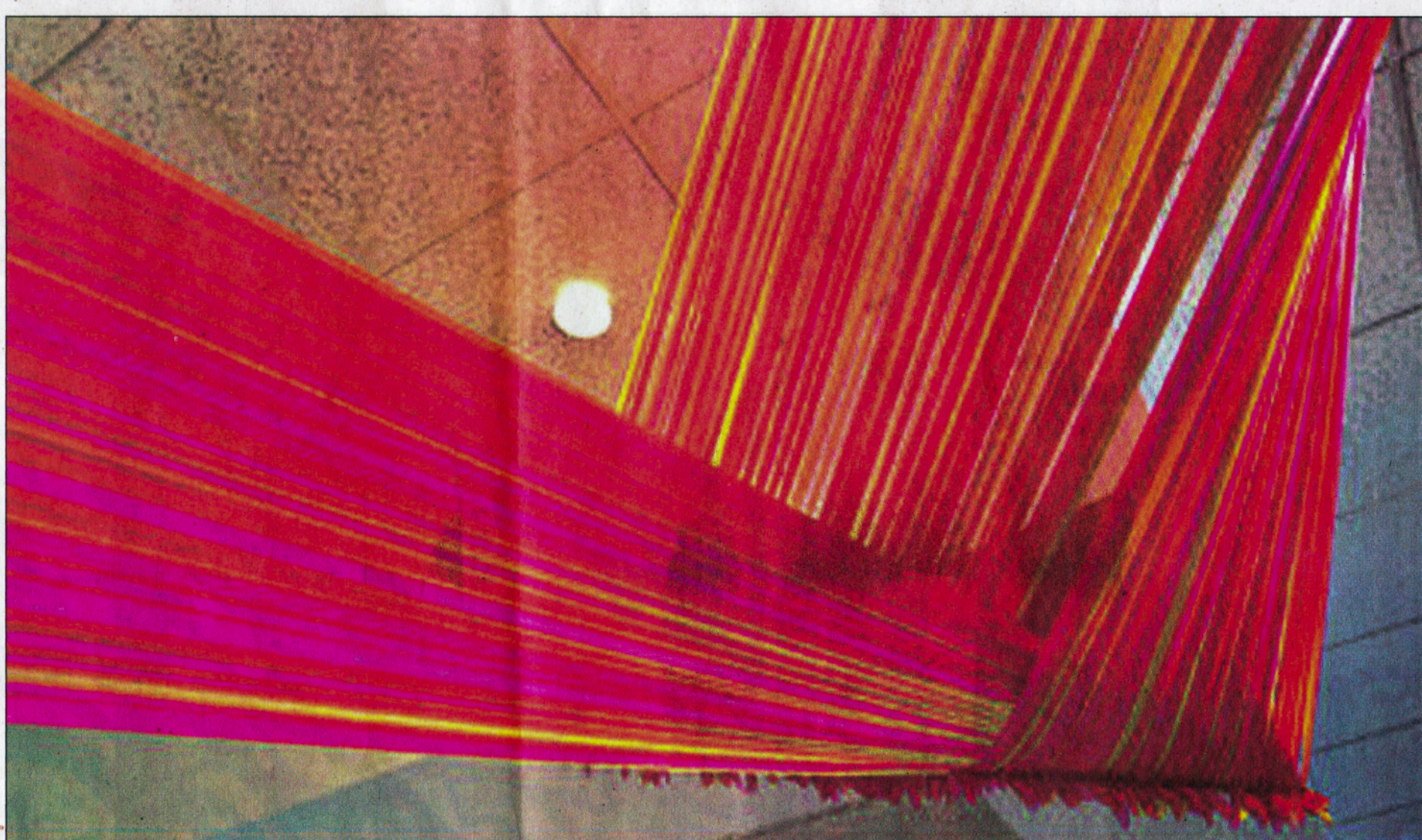
The artist educated herself thoroughly in the aesthetic capabilities of this novel medium.

"I started getting invited to make large pieces of art — doors, windows, ceilings," she recalls. "It was pretty easy to get into shows, because they were (installed in) the underused areas of the galleries."

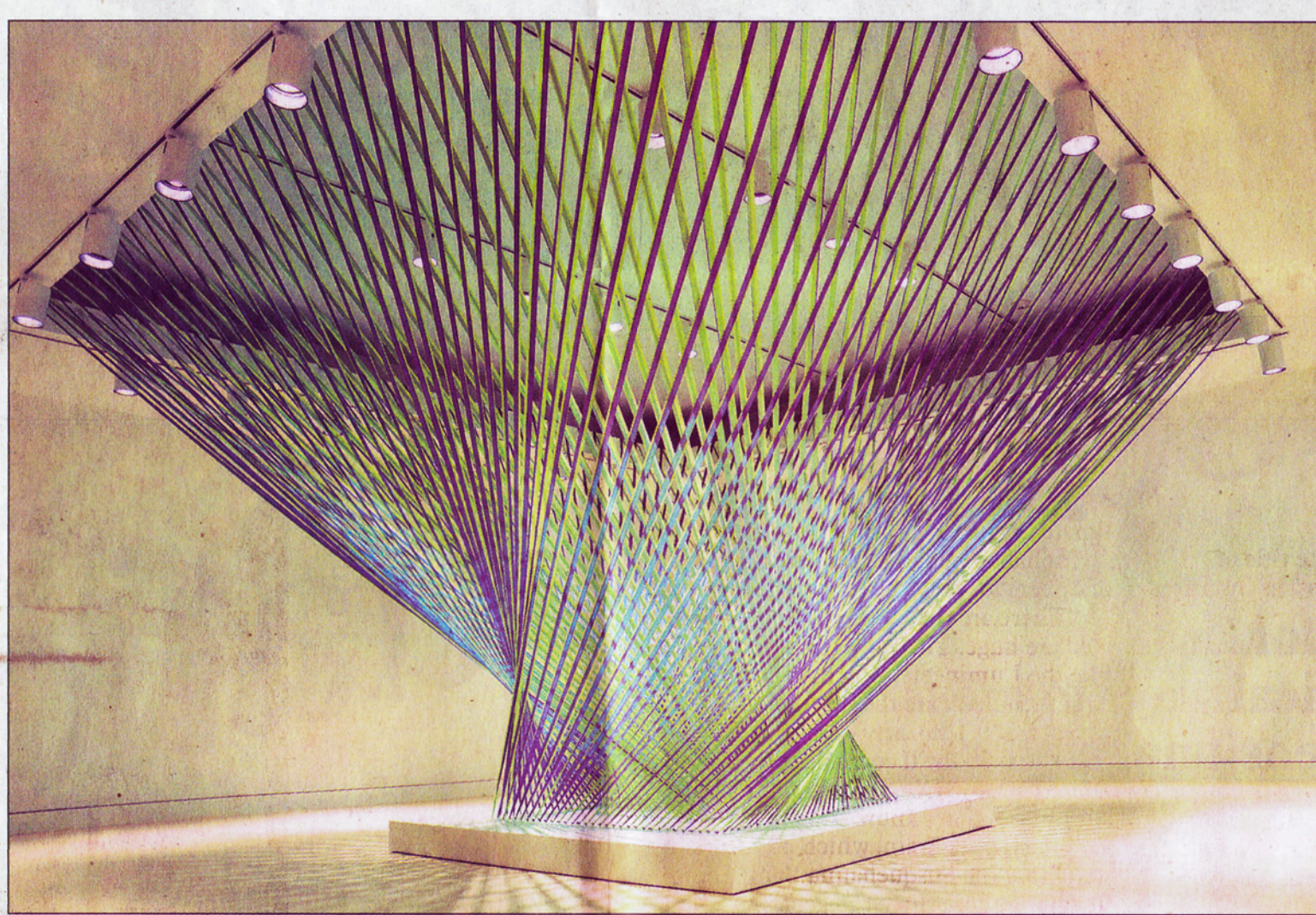
Geckler's installations explode with color, including a red-violet that, "when you backlight it, it looks kinda like stained glass."

With flagging tape, she was able to construct airy illusions, twisted forms leaping from floor to ceiling, curtains of rainbow fringe, separate rays of color woven into a focal point.

Depending on the spaces in which they are set, installations



"I laughed under my breath over your shoulder," flagging tape and hardware, at the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood, California, 2001



Photos by Megan Geckler

Left: "Fill it up and pour it down the inside," flagging tape, hardware and pedestal, at the Torrance Art Museum in Torrance, California, 2006

Below: "Here in my car, where the image breaks down," flagging tape and hardware, Lendrum Fine Art in Hollywood, California, 2008

resemble tunnels or portals. One work, built for a bottled-water company, is a tiny room that seems constructed of color itself.

Experienced installers assemble the tape structures, sometimes with the help of museum volunteers. The installations are usually temporary, but one from four years ago is still in place, according to the artist.

"We just did our first permanent one at the Four Seasons (Resort) at Disney World, that is made of colored rope," says Geckler.

She hopes to cast her net more widely into the sea of public art — "Placemaking, the identity of a city, or a campus. That would be really something to get involved with."

"We work with engineers and fabricators and city planners. Eventually, we'll have more permanent stuff."

Artist's website: megangeckler.com.

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"Lay it down and start up," flagging tape, Artists Agency, Los Angeles, California, 2011



"I spent way more time in the photo lab than studying that (medical) stuff."

— Megan Geckler, on her stint as a pre-med student at the University of Vermont