

DEPARTMENTS

RADAR.....4  
 COVER STORY.....7  
 MUSIC.....12  
 DINING.....14  
 BEER.....19  
 THEATER.....20  
 CLASSICAL MUSIC.....23  
 VISUAL ART.....25  
 MOVIES.....27

LISTINGS

STAGE.....21  
 CLASSICAL MUSIC.....24  
 VISUAL ART.....24  
 EVENTS.....26  
 MOVIES.....28  
 MOVIE TIMES.....30

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**ON THE COVER**  
 Photo by Tim Fielding

# CONTENTS

## GRAB A BITE

5 places to try: from pizza to pasta, pastries to pad Thai — and biscuits! **PAGE 14**



**PLAY TIME**

“Whammock!” at the New Children’s Museum reflects artist’s passion for building interactive pieces for kids. **PAGE 25**



**SCREEN TO SPIRITS**

Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh will be in San Diego to promote his signature spirits brand. **PAGE 15**

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# A Walk in the Woods

by Lee Blessing

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# FOR ARTIST, WORK IS PLAY

'WHAMMOCK!' AT THE NEW CHILDREN'S MUSEUM REFLECTS MACADAM'S PASSION FOR BUILDING INTERACTIVE ART FOR KIDS

BY MARTINA SCHIMITSCHEK

In the 1960s, Japanese fiber artist Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam was captivated by form and space, creating ethereal museum and gallery installations in black and white that caught light and shadow. But something was missing.

"When I turned 30, I had an exhibit that was well received, but I was not totally satisfied. I was depressed that I spent so much energy and still felt empty," she said.



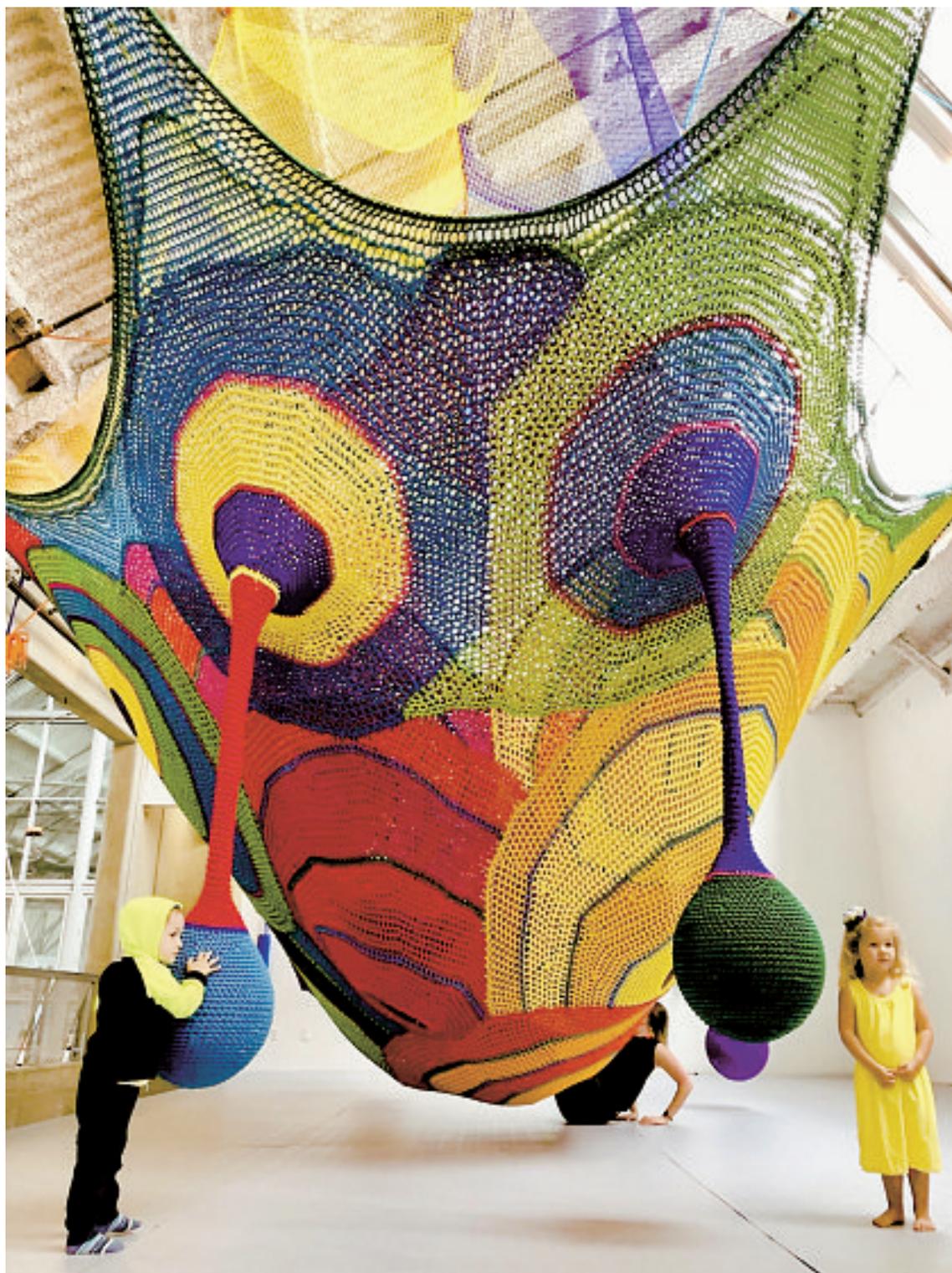
**Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam**

Then one day children climbed into an installation she designed with a friend for a Tokyo gallery. It changed her life.

"The textiles started moving. It looked like a monster. I thought, 'Fantastic. This is much more interesting than just making beautiful things,'" said Horiuchi MacAdam, who lives with her husband, Charles MacAdam, in Nova Scotia, Canada.

She turned her attention to creating play structures, crocheting giant, colorful, multilayered nets with portals to crawl through and balls to swing on at the bottom. Her latest piece — called "Whammock!" — will be unveiled Saturday at the New Children's Museum in downtown San Diego. Installed in the museum's upper floor, it has a footprint of approximately 24 feet by 38 feet.

"The net is interesting. You can jump and bounce on it, but you can also just relax on it and you just sway," said Tomoko Kuta, the museum's deputy director. "It's probably going to be another game-changer for the museum. It's so



THE NEW CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

**"Whammock!" will be unveiled Saturday at the New Children's Museum in downtown San Diego.**

unusual and so unique."

Horiuchi MacAdam creates the giant pieces almost entirely by hand, first dyeing batches of nylon cord and then crocheting hexagonal shapes that are assembled to form the nets. Since 1979, she has installed 18 large-scale play structures around the world, including Tokyo, Shanghai, Dubai and Rome.

"The basic concept is the same, but each project is specific to the site. The shape is based on whatever

it's attached to," said Charles MacAdam, who helps his wife on the projects through their business Interplay Design and Manufacturing. Her most famous piece is a massive 50-by-30-foot, 1-ton net inside a wood structure at Japan's Hakone Open Air Museum, which took a year to make.

The pieces rely on tension and gravity. To make sure the construction is sound, the MacAdams team with structural designer Norihide

Imagawa of the Japanese engineering firm TIS & Partners.

Additional structural beams have been installed at the New Children's Museum for the piece, which weighs more than 1,200 pounds. The net will hang off the floor and rise up to 14 feet inside.

"You're always held in the womb-like quality of the net. You can't fall or jump out of the thing," Kuta said. "It will be thrilling to go up high, but it will be safe."

## "WHAMMOCK!"

**When:** Opens Saturday

**Where:** New Children's Museum, 200 W. Island Ave., downtown San Diego

**Tickets:** \$10-\$14

**Phone:** (619) 232-8792

**Online:** thinkplaycreate.org

For kids too young to traverse the net, doughnut-shaped foam rings with a crocheted cover will be available on the floor.

When Horiuchi MacAdam decided to make play structures, she started by studying the parks in Tokyo.

"What I saw was so depressing," she said. "Kids were sitting in their high-rise apartments watching TV instead of playing."

Her idea was to get kids socializing and moving in a space of their own, letting them decide how they want to play in it.

"The textile jiggles when you touch it. Then kids start screaming, then laughing, and that's how they make friends," she said. "Kids naturally play together and learn social skills. A place to meet and have fun, that kind of space is important."

She has spent the last seven months working on the San Diego piece, crocheting at least five hours a day. At 78, she has arthritis and works with special splints on her fingers. She also wears gloves to protect her hands from the nylon.

Horiuchi MacAdam was born in 1940 in wartime Japan and lived for a time in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, where a nurse showed her how to crochet when she was 4. Her father was a doctor and her mother a pharmacist, and she thought she would follow her parents into medicine, but art was always a draw.

Eventually she enrolled at Tama Art University in Tokyo to study textiles and went on to the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan for graduate work in weaving. After a short period working as a textile designer in New York, she returned to Japan, where she met her husband, a native of Nova Scotia, in 1982.

"Going from gallery to public, that satisfies me," said Horiuchi MacAdam, whose first public play area was at Okinawa Memorial National Park in Japan. "I wanted to help people."

After she made the human connection with her art, she said, the empty part in her heart was filled.

"The children's smile is the reason I go on with the heavy work," she said.

Schimitschek is a freelance writer.