

02.07.10 > BOSTON UNCOMMON

> FIRST PERSON

Up in the Air

Brookline sculptor *Janet Echelman's* 75,000-square-foot Water Sky Garden undulates with the wind. It debuts at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games, outside the Richmond Olympic Oval.



Tell me about your project at the Olympics. Above you are 75-foot-wide giant red sky lanterns – a huge curvy net with a funnel up the middle. Below, in the water, I'm using air bubbles to draw white frothy circles. My goal was to transform what was going to be a gray, uninviting space into a dream-like environment. It's saturated with red color above and below you and moving with the

clouds, reflecting in the surface of the water and glowing at night.

> How did you come to be making larger scale, environmentally themed art? I went to India on a Fulbright. I was a painter, and I shipped all my paints through the diplomatic pouch, but they never arrived. So I decided to embrace what was there. Every evening I'd go for a walk on the beach. The fishermen

were bringing in their nets. It occurred to me that that was a different approach to creating form without mass. Once I made some big net forms and hoisted them up in the air, I discovered they made the unseen dance of the wind visible. It was mesmerizing. They're like living things.

> How long does one take? Two or three years. It takes at least a year to design it. To let it evolve, I have to sit

with it awhile. And it takes at least a year to build it.

> How many are you working on now? Three.

> What will you be doing next? Right now we're testing the color, lights, and wind for the San Francisco airport. I'm cutting three circles out of the roof and creating skylights that stream through colorful cloud-like sculptural nets that swoop down from the sky. We have hidden wind

machines that will suddenly make them billow, which I think will be a magical moment.

> Your website (echelman.com) also shows works in Japan, Spain, the Netherlands. Any chance we'll see a project in the Boston area in the future? I certainly hope so. I've been approached by an important public site. All that's needed is a private donor.

– Cate McQuaid