

# 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