

CREME BRULEE FRENCH TOAST / AFRAID OF SANTA / DISPATCHES FROM CUSTOMER SERVICE HELL

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PEACE TALKS
OLYMPICS
DREAMER FISH AND
HIS ANTAGONIST
DEMPSEY ON THE
CITY'S FUTURE



BOSTONIANS OF THE YEAR

JOHN FISH & CHRIS DEMPSEY

PLUS ➔ 13 HONORABLE MENTIONS WHO INSPIRED US WITH THEIR BRAVERY, TALENT, COMPASSION, BOLD IDEAS, AND MORE



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RITTER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

THE GAME CHANGER [MALCOLM BUTLER]

With the Patriots clinging to a 4-point lead over the Seattle Seahawks late in Super Bowl XLIX, an anticipatory despair had begun to percolate in New England. The Patriots had lost their last two Super Bowl appearances in the final moments. Both times astonishing catches by opposing receivers had aided the winning drive.

Now it was happening again. With 1 minute, 6 seconds remaining, Seahawks receiver Jermaine Kearse leapt in unison with Patriots defensive back Malcolm Butler in pursuit of an arcing pass by Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson. Butler succeeded in getting a hand on the football. But the football refused to tumble harmlessly to the turf.

Instead, it ricocheted off Kearse's various limbs before settling into his hands. Butler shoved him out of bounds at the 5-yard line. A play too implausible for a daydream had become the Patriots' nightmare again.

Defeat seemed imminent. Destiny or lady luck or any of those other weary sports tropes did not intervene. But an unassuming rookie from Vicksburg, Mississippi, via the University of West Alabama did. With 20 seconds left to play, Butler bolted in front of Seahawks receiver Ricardo Lockette at the goal

line, intercepted Wilson's pass, and changed everything. The Patriots were champions for the first time in a decade. The interception instantly ranked among the greatest plays in the history of Boston sports.

"Not a day goes by that I don't hear about it," Butler says during a recent interview. "Not a day. If I go out to lunch now and think that I'll be OK." He laughs. "It's not OK. But it's all love.

"I think about how I would be if I had been sitting at my house watching the game and everything goes down that way and someone makes an interception to help win the game, I'd be excited to meet them, too. I put myself in their shoes. I understand. It's called living."

Butler, who has thrived in his second NFL season, lost his obscurity while saving the Super Bowl. But he's been determined not to lose his identity. "I don't want to fall away, don't want to get lost off that play," says Butler, who endearingly fought back tears on the sideline after his interception. "But I know it will be something people will always want to talk about. That's why I got emotional after it happened. It was the feeling, knowing I did something special."

— CHAD FINN

THE AERIAL ARTIST [JANET ECHELMAN]

When Oxford Circus in central London shuts down for four nights in mid-January—its roads blocked off to cars, the entrances to its Underground station closed, and its famous red buses rerouted—Londoners will have Brookline artist Janet Echelman to thank.

And despite all the inconvenience, it's a safe bet they will thank her. Inhabitants of major cities around the world have been reacting with gratitude, wonder, and awe to Echelman's soaring, rippling sculptures for almost two decades now. The works themselves have been getting more sophisticated and more beautiful by the year.

Boston got its own first taste of Echelman's work this summer, when *As If It Were Already Here*, a vast, undulating, colored mesh web in three dimensions, was suspended between office towers over the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. The work, which came down in October, was the most galvanizing piece of public sculpture in Boston in living memory. "I was overwhelmed by what people told me this sculpture meant to them," says Echelman. "One resident told me the sculpture made her 'feel safer.' A curator told me it changed his view of Boston and that he could no longer say that any idea was impossible."

Echelman, 49, runs Studio Echelman, which fulfills prestigious commissions all over the world. Boston, she believes, is entering "a new renaissance." She lives here, she says, because "it's the best place in the world to create my art."

Almost 20 years ago, Echelman was inspired by fishing nets she saw on a beach in India. Her sculptures today use rope, knots, advanced engineering, and projected light to create extraordinary effects. The results are massive, kinetic works wherein the movement of any one element affects all the others. Echelman is trying, she says, "to make sense out of the physical shifts in our planet and the place where humans fit in."

She is quick to credit the many people—mechanical and aeronautical engineers, lighting designers, landscape architects, and fabricators—who help realize her vision. But for all its collaborative aspects, that vision is undoubtedly hers. No artist in the Boston area is working with greater ambition, on a grander scale, and with more impressive results.

— SEBASTIAN SMEE

