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Have a winning idea for Scioto Mile art?

By Joe Blundo

OK, so what type of sculpture would you put at the Scioto Mile?

Let's do a little brainstorming, just for fun.

The "cooling tower" by artist Brian Tolle has received mixed reviews, to put it charitably. If great art provokes debate, as he has said, the project is already a rousing success.

Tolle, who lives in New York, was in town last week, saying the artist renderings we've seen are just concepts.

He does seem wedded to the curvy "hyperboloid" shape that reminds me of power-plant architecture. The latest concept is less industrial-looking (I see echoes of an Amish haystack) and would have vegetation growing inside. So it's more rustic than the first idea.

Tolle was chosen by Downtown leaders to create a privately funded sculpture for public land along the Mile, the new riverfront string of paths, promenades and parks.

Part of his mandate, he said, is to create a landmark, something substantial enough to hold its own against the city skyline. That's asking a lot of a sculpture. It makes me wonder whether his hyperboloid can deliver, even at the proposed height of 75 feet. (Kobe, Japan, has a hyperboloid tower that reaches 354 feet.)

Tolle has a lot of experience creating public art — he designed the Irish Hunger Memorial in New York, for example — so maybe this will all end well. In the meantime, let's see what ideas you have for a monument on the Mile. What's your concept?

I have a couple that, if nothing else, should clear up any question about why I didn't study art.

Because the sculpture's location is so prominent, I can't get out of my head the idea that the work has to represent something about where we live.

So, if someone were to hand me a few million dollars and some art talent, I think I'd design an attractive glacier for the site. After all, glaciers played a big role in shaping Ohio — literally.

I haven't worked out the technical details yet, but I'd definitely have the glacier creep a fraction of an inch a day and slowly melt over time, revealing embedded boulders, mastodons and so forth. Then it would inch back, refreeze and start the process again.

It would, of course, glow at night. (I do like that aspect of Tolle's proposals.)

My second choice would be an abstract work with a strong “U” shape that could suggest either the bend in the Scioto River, a horseshoe (agricultural or athletic — take your pick) or the front end of a trilobite (the state fossil).

If these ideas alarm you even more than the cooling tower, it is your duty to propose an alternative. And I’m giving you an unlimited budget, so the only limit is your imagination. Think big, bold and beyond the Buckeyes.

Email your proposals to me or help save the U.S. Postal Service by mailing them to me by Jan. 3 at 34 S. 3rd St., Columbus, OH 43215.

Drawings are welcome. I’ll show a few of the best in a future column.

Joe Blundo is a Dispatch columnist.

jblundo@dispatch.com