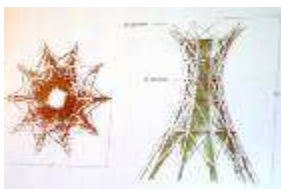


Let debate begin over proposed riverfront sculpture

A New York artist's concept for a six-story, mirrored-glass structure along the Scioto is meant to be a signature piece of public art for Columbus. The mayor likes the idea, but he wants it to be paid for with private funds.



THE HOT ISSUE

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By [Robert Vitale](#)



Rendering from Brian Tolle Studios

Tolle says the tentative title for his sculpture is *The Columbiad*. He says he has revised his initial concept four or five times, but intends to keep this shape.

It's big. It's modern. Its creator says it would "blur the line between architecture and sculpture."

But is it art?

Many people got their first glimpse yesterday of plans for a six-story, mirrored-glass sculpture proposed for Columbus' newly redesigned riverfront. And minutes after *The Dispatch* posted the image online, that age-old debate over the nature and purpose of art had a new focus.

"No! This is hideously ugly," one commenter wrote at Dispatch.com.

"AWESOME!!!" wrote another.

People involved say the design is still in flux — and private funding still is being solicited — but plans presented to the Columbus Art Commission this year show what's called a hyperboloid structure. It's the same shape used for power-plant cooling towers.

New York artist Brian Tolle, who was commissioned by Columbus developer and modern-art collector Ron Pizzuti, said he wants to create a steel-and-glass work that will be a signature for Columbus the way the Gateway Arch defines St. Louis or the Space Needle identifies Seattle.

Tolle has met about 30 times with business leaders, people in the arts community and city officials, said Rebecca Ibel, the curator of Pizzuti's art collection.

The artist has shown the plans to Mayor Michael B. Coleman, who is a fan of the design, according to his spokesman. Coleman's only demand, said aide Dan Williamson, is that the project be funded privately.

"Great cities have public art," said Williamson, who included debate as part of public art's purpose.

Tolle, who has created sculptures for New York and Miami Beach, said yesterday that his work is unique for each place. The New York piece is a memorial to the 19th century Irish famine. The Florida sculpture, he said, evokes ocean waves.

Tolle also created a portrait of Benjamin Franklin that Pizzuti donated in July to Franklin County for its new courts building.

The artist said his father's first job was in Columbus, designing cooling towers for American Electric Power.

"Columbus is wanting to be a very forward-looking city," Tolle said. "They're proud of their history, but they don't want to be defined by what's already happened."

The drawing presented to the city was an early version of the concept, he said, but current plans use the same shape. He said he has revised his design four or five times since, but declined to share more-recent renderings.

Its tentative title is *The Columbiad*.

“I’m not trying to create a replica of a cooling tower,” Tolle said.

The work would rest on piers that would leave room for people to walk inside. The shape has a natural cooling effect, he said, so the inside would offer comfort for people visiting the riverfront on hot summer days.

Chairwoman Diane Nance of the Columbus Art Commission, which was created in 2007 to inventory, oversee and approve plans for public-art installations, said she didn’t want to weigh in on Tolle’s design, because it’s not finished. However, the minutes from a May meeting of the commission indicate that some members expressed concern about the cooling-tower shape.

The sculpture would be built on the Scioto Mile, on an outcropping along the Scioto River at Town Street. Since plans for the Scioto Mile were developed in 2007, city officials have talked about what’s called the “Town Street prow” as an ideal spot for a major work of art.

The site is located where the former Town Street bridge once connected Franklinton and Downtown. The bridge closed in 2008 and is being rebuilt with Rich Street as its eastern terminus.

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