

THE HYPERBOLOID

Before I share some thoughts on the proposed public art at the Scioto Mile, I should disclose that I am the target audience for bold, provocative projects. In fact, I loved the idea of the blue glass snake hovering over the Broad Street Bridge that got shot down years ago.

And I respect developer Ron Pizzuti's passion for and knowledge of art. He owns a world-class private collection and plans to open a gallery in the Short North to display some of it. That could be a civic treat. He's a leading force on the panel that chose the artist, New York City-based Brian Tolle, to create the artwork on the Scioto Mile. He should be congratulated for tackling this controversial task.

Yet, when the *Dispatch* first printed a rendering of Tolle's vision for the prominent downtown spot, I thought it was a mistake. Everything felt wrong. What did a cooling tower/nuclear reactor have to do with Columbus? The ominous presence would disrupt the serenity of the promenade and clash with the skyline.

So I was eager and skeptical when I saw Tolle speak at the Columbus Metropolitan Club on Dec. 14. There's no doubt he's a highly accomplished, creative artist whose work is rooted in extensive research and not ego-driven impulse. He gave a thoughtful, reasoned presentation, explaining the genesis of his idea. The part about the tower being some kind of homage to his father, a mechanical engineer who once worked for AEP in Columbus, isn't the case, he suggested. A conversation with his dad merely sparked his interest in the shape, which is a hyperboloid.

Tolle gave a brief and illuminating history lesson on the form, which has been used for lighthouses, skyscrapers and other buildings. He also said some scientists theorize that the universe is

shaped like a hyperboloid. (Hmm, not a bad argument in building his case.)

But more convincing were his revisions, which he said had been completed before the *Dispatch* article ran in early December. It is a much more elegant shape of stainless steel girders.



Brian Tolle's proposed artwork for the Scioto Mile.

COURTESY BRIAN TOLLE STUDIO

Gone are the mirrored glass panels (bird problems), and it doesn't look like a nuclear reactor anymore. Perhaps the coolest idea is an inner vertical garden of the native Virginia creeper. In the fall, it turns red, so you'll see a column of vibrant color climbing up the 75-foot-high structure. And at night, the

artwork will shine with LED lighting. Wonder how the folks at nearby Waterford Tower and Miranova, where Pizzuti lives, will feel about that.

His talk and changes have swayed me, although I still have concerns about the scale along the river. Now, I look forward to the scrum that will begin over the proposal—once an application is submitted to the Columbus Art Commission, which has authority for the design and placement of public art. Formed in 2007, it has never dealt with anything remotely close to this project. (The seven members include artist Malcolm Cochran and Columbus Museum of Art executive director Nannette Maciejunes.) And then there's the cost, which hasn't been disclosed. The project is supposed to be privately funded. We'll see if that remains the case.

No doubt there will be plenty of heat surrounding the debate. My fear is that an attempt to appease everyone will result in no action or, worse, a dreadfully bland permanent installation. As someone joked to me recently about public art in Columbus, if we try to find a consensus, then we'll just end up with statues of Woody Hayes.

B. Paprocki