



BACKGROUNDER: Cloud Arbor

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Located near the center of Buhl Community Public Park at Allegheny Center, “Cloud Arbor,” is as a destination-worthy work of public art by California artist Ned Kahn that harmonizes with its surroundings and allows the neighborhood functions of the park to continue unimpeded. .

Kahn’s previous work for the Children’s Museum “Articulated Cloud,” the upper façade of the Children’s Museum building addition, consists of screens of hinged translucent squares that wrap around the structure and cause the motion of the wind to appear on the building façade like ripples on water.

Early in the design process for Buhl Community Park, the Children’s Museum was eager to contemplate another artwork by Kahn as a companion to “Articulated Cloud.” Because the earlier piece works best with active wind, the Children’s Museum hoped for something that would “really work best on a calm day,” says Executive Director Jane Werner. With substantial historic and modern buildings nearby, Kahn imagined as a contrast “...something that would maybe suggest the ghost of a building, but would dematerialize and dissolve into landscape and atmosphere.”

The piece itself consists of a grid of 64 slender stainless steel poles, each 32 feet tall and placed 4 feet apart. 24 of the poles have fog nozzles placed to emit mist (or fog) in the shape of a ball approximately 22 feet in diameter within the grid of poles. The poles are insulated and heated so that the fog will operate between 35 and 100+ degrees Fahrenheit. The effect will change with the weather. A sphere of mist will form and hover in calm conditions, while a more dissipated fog will result from wind. It will rise in cold weather and sink in the heat.

“People will be able to enter this forest of poles and have a rewarding experience,” says Kahn, who is known for using wind and fog frequently in his art. He says that the sound of the mist will contribute to the experiential quality, as will the changing play of light, shadow, and reflection among the poles and amid the nearby landscape and buildings. “The intent is to create a porous environment that merges with the atmosphere in the same way that the ‘Articulated Cloud’ building façade blurs the boundary between atmosphere and architecture.”

Jane Werner says that while the park will serve all sorts of users for informal and scheduled occasions, she believes that Cloud Arbor will become a destination. “I really believe the sculpture will become iconic.”

