

Pass Through the Land

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CATHERINE WIDGERY



CATHERINE WIDGERY, *Pass Through the Land*, 2002. Invesco Stadium, Mile High, Denver, CO. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

In each of my current projects some aspect of the natural world has been brought to our attention in the form of patterns, textures, or the play of wind and light. I am working to create a new vocabulary of images which marry the materials and structure of the built world with the beauty of natural elements and energy. I want to create a visual language that is a bridge between the two worlds, ordering organic materials such as stone and introducing the organic forms into built structures.

Pass Through the Land is located in the circular park designed by Civitas on the east side of the new Invesco Stadium at Mile High, near the Platte River in Denver, CO. The park design suggests the ancient form of the labyrinth: "The labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world." Where the paths cut through the park the stones are flush with the pavement, having

been cut down completely, much like the swath we cut in nature when we move into it. I wanted to bring the mountains (their colours, forms and textures) into the experience of walking through the park. The placement of the stones creates miniature labyrinths within each grouping. The boulders are left intact as much as possible, with their wind-sculpted form and the lichen found on these rocks in the mountains. One feels human intervention in the carefully ordered placement and leveling of the stones. This work speaks of a balance between the forms of nature and the ordering impulse of society.

The *Aspen Towers* are animated by light and wind. The work is a signal and gateway for the park visitors.

Each of the five towers is twenty-eight feet high and comprises two full silhouettes of an aspen tree and half of another. The whole work is made from 316 stainless steel. My source for the specific silhouette was a two-tone photo of an aspen grove. The photo itself was the first step in translating the imagery. The trees become simplified graphic images. I made a slide from this tiny silhouette and projected it onto a grid that corresponded to the perforated mesh that would be used.

I then drew in the discs to correspond to the density of the foliage in the photo. The structure is organized so that three poles (set in a triangle) correspond to the central trunk of each foliage silhouette. The "trunks" are six inches in diameter in the lower section, diminishing to four inches in the area of the "foliage." "Branches" are stainless angle and the "leaves" are 1 3/8" diameter stainless discs of varying thicknesses hung by a hardened steel ring in perforated stainless openings of 1 3/4". The varying thicknesses of the discs give each tree a different musical tone when the wind rustles them and a different speed of movement. The very thin discs tremble in a light breeze while the heavier ones turn more slowly.

The animation of the discs in response to the wind makes the wind visible as the discs catch the light. At times a whole tree facade may almost become invisible as it reflects only the colour of the sky. Then a breeze moves through it and the same facade seems on fire with light. It is the light which gives these aspens their form. The wind and the light give them their life. As anyone who has been in an aspen grove can

attest, the shimmering movement of the leaves in the wind and the way the silver coin-like leaves catch the light makes these trees magical. While I could not hope to match the rich majesty of the aspen, these towers are like the ghosts of the real trees, a whisper in our memory of the experience of them. Our mind, accustomed to the right angles and flat surfaces of urban surroundings, feels at home with the regular geometry of these structures. We "see" nature differently in the city; a new visual vocabulary reminds us of the sweet air and gentle light.

The *Aspen Towers* were built by Les Aciers Formatech, a large metal manufacturer located in Montreal. The structural design was done by Formatech in consultation with me and approved by the engineering firm Walter P. Moore. The budget for the construction of these towers was \$187,000, not including the foundations, which cost approximately another \$50,000. The towers were shipped from Montreal in two sections on a flat bed truck. They were installed by Hackett and Associates. The stone work *Mountainscape* was done by Alpha Masonry, based in Winnipeg, and the budget for that phase was \$325,000. ←