

Brian Brush

"Leaven"

Description

LEAVEN is a faceted, vine-like relief sculpture that mimics and magnifies the adjacent natural elements native to the southern side of East Stadium Blvd. Taking cues from the repetition of stones and leaves, and the branches that pattern the site's verdant edge, LEAVEN will visually soften the hard boundary of the new concrete retaining wall by creating 'windows' to nature with flowing tendrils of reflective aluminum 'leaves' nestled in the recessed pockets of the wall. The myriad reflections on the aluminum 'leaves' intend to embody Ann Arbor's many colors at different times of the day and year, while also mediating the contrast between the surrounding natural material and the built environment.

Materiality and Effect

LEAVEN's aluminum 'leaves', each a 9"x9" square rotated in a "diamond" orientation, are anodized to create diffuse reflections of light that will translate the movement of clouds, the sky, leaves and trees, and the various colors of cars and people that pass by. The reflections are achieved by folding the bottom half of each 'leaf' upwards according to three distinct angles. Each angle corresponds to the distance the leaf bottom protrudes from the recessed wall surface. A 1", 2", or 3" bend is utilized to control these angles ensuring that no leaves extend beyond the 3" recess in the wall. This limits the potential for catching or snagging by any pedestrians. The bend angles within that range can be varied randomly or according to a specific visual pattern integrated with the overall composition.

As its primary material, LEAVEN utilizes anodized aluminum for its ability to create soft and diffused reflections of its surroundings. The 'leaves' will create subtle gradients of color by blurring the surrounding context of city, trees, and people. This effect will be especially spectacular when moving past the wall at fast speeds such as from a car or bicycle. The quick changes in viewpoint will create the illusion of rustling leaves and flowing shifts of color. This effect can be seen to a limited extent in the accompanying time-lapse video submitted with the proposal.

Compositional Organization

The organization and distribution of the 'leaves' throughout the wall recesses is inspired by the flowing stacks of stones that construct the stone wall located on site. Although the stones are self-similar units, their arrangement produces an irregular yet continuous 'branching' pattern where stones appear to follow invisible curvilinear lines that converge and bifurcate. LEAVEN duplicates this logic of flow lines by arranging the 'leaves' in a continuously changing, overlapping sequence that is smooth yet variable as it meanders the length of the wall. The invisible ordering 'branches' rise, fall, sweep, and sway guiding the placement of 'leaves' in a visually dynamic form. This curving, dynamic, flow contributes to LEAVEN's energetic appearance to viewers on foot and in cars.

Construction

Aluminum is one of the lightest structural metals so it can easily be folded into position at the specified increments. This can be done before mounting the 'leaves' onto the wall or during installation for maximum compositional flexibility. The 'leaves' will be mounted according to a removable/disposable paper template placed on the wall recess surfaces and anchored using simple concrete screws or anchors that could be pre-drilled if necessary. The template also allows for adjustments to be made on site to allow the 'leaves' to reflect the most desirable visual conditions. Most anchors will be hidden from view in the folds of the 'leaves' and those that support the lower folded-up sides of the 'leaves' will be encased in hollow aluminum standoff spacers to preserve the clean visual sophistication of the piece. With a high heat-capacity, the aluminum 'leaves' will not absorb or release heat that can burn passersby and anodized aluminum is also very durable, so it will not rust or stain the concrete wall. As such the material should be safe, secure, long-lasting, and easy to maintain while providing amazing artistic quality.

Concluding Statements

LEAVEN is designed to maximize the visual character of East Stadium Boulevard as it transitions from a wild, natural threshold to a formal, developed boundary. Although this change will be abrupt it can be most effectively and beautifully softened with a nature-inspired artwork that recalls natural materials and textures yet abstracts them through light, shape, and form in a way that augments the site's evolution as a developing place. Having visited the site myself, I see this change as a unique opportunity to create an artwork that will preserve the inherent character of that natural threshold with the very same materials that will lend it a fresh new look and lighten, uplift, and activate the entire East Stadium Boulevard streetscape.

My work is always very sensitive to context and the kind of symbolic detail that can contribute to identity of place, both of which will give the project distinct richness. Hopefully these traits are evident in the proposal. If you need any other information or clarification on LEAVEN, please reach out. It still has a ways to go, but I'm very enthusiastic about the project's development and appreciate the opportunity to apply. Thank You