

FROM THE EDITOR

Richard Serra's sculpture *Twain*, which has occupied a block of ground bordered by Market, Eleventh, Chestnut, and Tenth in downtown St. Louis since 1982, is a subtle piece of work. Eight slabs of two-inch thick steel—seven of them forty feet long, one ten feet longer—rust quietly in their imperfect triangle, a subversive presence before the gleaming Gateway Arch they mirror. "GET RID OF THIS ST. LOUIS," someone once spray-painted on each of the slabs.

I thought that Mary Miss, a New York artist who has been commissioned to develop the "front yard" of the new Thomas F. Eagleton Federal Courthouse, would have a lot to say about *Twain* when I toured downtown with her and the *Post-Dispatch's* Bob Duffy in June. She didn't. Instead, she was fascinated by the two blocks of green space east of Serra's work. "They seem so arid," she said. "Where are all the people? There should be people out here, using this space."

For Miss, the empty mall has become the most challenging aspect of her courthouse commission, even though it lies outside the confines of her designated courthouse lot. "In looking at the mall," she remembers, "I began to feel that much more was possible here." She went back to New York shortly after our tour, and when she returned to St. Louis a month later, she brought with her a vision that, if realized, could provide a long-needed model for how the rest of the mall might be configured.

In her mind's eye, Miss's project stretches from Market to Spruce between Ninth and Tenth Streets. It works with, rather than against, the lines of the highway on- and off-ramps; a curving footpath traverses the site from north to south, roughly following the shoreline of the former Chouteau's Pond. Along the footpath native grasses, shrubs, and trees grow, reintroducing natural elements that have been absent from the site for nearly 150 years.

Narrow rows of limestone walls in varying lengths break up the space beside the path. On the NationsBank portion, the limestone lies flush with the earth, a subtle reminder of how this land, after the draining of the pond, was divided and subdivided for human use. The courthouse lot also features limestone walls, but here they are raised to serve as benches. Between them are clusters of architectural fragments—cornices, columns, terra cotta. Finally, between the two highway ramps on the Clark-Spruce lot, very large architectural fragments, possibly an entire building facade, lie amid the trees, shrubs, and grasses.

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—Clark S. Davis

The progression from low to high suggests the growth of the city, from nature to metropolis, while the strategically placed architectural artifacts prevent any delusions of grandeur. Such layering of distant past, recent past, and present is not new to Miss's work. In her 1985 Laumeier Sculpture Park piece *Pool Complex: Orchard Valley*, a crumbling swimming pool, the remnant of an abandoned estate, is the centerpiece of a series of wooden walkways, trellises, and lattices that comment on the role the past plays in our lives. "The faint traces of aqua paint on the bottom of the pool, the cracked cement walkway, the overgrown tennis courts, and the ruined poolhouses," Nancy Princenthal wrote about the sculpture, "all testify to the stupefying speed with which a home and a way of life are reduced to cryptic relics."

Will her vision become reality? As Michael Merchant writes about whether or not the Continental Building can be saved, "That's for you, the people of St. Louis, to answer"—or, more accurately at this stage, it is up to the various local, state, and federal factions who have control over parts of downtown's destiny. Such competing interests have long been a concern for the Gateway Mall and for downtown in general. In 1988, Clark S. Davis, then-president of the American Institute of Architects, bemoaned the divisions that had prevented the mall from achieving a single unified vision. "After decades of planning for the Gateway Mall," he wrote in the *Post*, "the incredible fact is that there is no plan guiding the mall's proper completion."

Serra's *Twain* suffers from this lack of a cohesive vision. Today, it sits marooned among the sparse, practically grassless lots to the east; only Bob Cassilly's lion benches and some young trees break up the vista. It is an arid scene, not simply because of *Twain*, but because the entire site has never been developed in a way that will enrich either the sculpture or the city that surrounds it. Mary Miss is offering an ambitious idea that could reinvigorate the Gateway Mall, *Twain*, the new federal courthouse, even Highway 40 by bringing a sense of history—natural as well as architectural—to downtown. Let's hope she gets to build it.

—Tim Fox