



PHOTO BY THOMAS C. SHAW

RALEIGH'S LATEST LANDMARK HONORS THE NC STATE BELLTOWER

BY KATE DOBBS ARIAIL

Artist Thomas Sayre has been working in Raleigh for many years now, and has made several significant pieces that mark transitional moments in the city's maturation. Since the 1980s, when Sayre and partner Steve Schuster formed Clearscapes Architecture and led some of the first wave downtown redevelopment, Sayre has been an important voice in the conversation about the built environment, and the effect of its physical and visual qualities on the people who inhabit it.

Sayre's latest contribution to the cityscape has particular relevance for NC State. *Overtones*, located outside of the Aloft Hotel on Hillsborough Street, directly across from the landmark NC State Belltower, is both an homage to the memorial tower, and a new landmark in itself.

Throughout his career, Sayre has been notable for his refined combination of intellectual abstraction and tactility, and for his unerring sense of scale. *Overtones*, 51 feet tall, holds its own with the architecture around it. Made of highly polished curved steel strips visibly supported from within by a nexus of linear star shapes around a central axis, it shimmers in the light, changing to the view with perspective and time. It's a visual representation of how a bell

PHOTO BY BECKY KIRKLAND



makes sound, the aural wave-forms made visible to the eye. But the way the sculpture apparently changes with viewer position and time of day also offers a representation of how we perceive sound, depending on our relationship to its source during its duration.

Like the sound from a peal of bells, the general form of *Overtones* swells and diminishes. But due to the use of highly reflective material, the sculpture also provides a visual analog to the urban soundscape, in which many sounds break upon each other to create a multi-textured flow. The sculpture fractures and repeats reflections of everything encircling it – it echoes – in such a way that its firm and definite structure seems as insubstantial as a reflection in moving water. And like all successful sculpture, it activates the space around it.

Although it does not project a particular image, like the wonderful *Cree Shimmer Wall* which

Sayre designed in 2009 for the side of the Raleigh Convention Center, *Overtones* continues Sayre's exploration of spatial geometries through the simplest of forms, and the effects of light on those forms and on viewer perception. Another example in downtown Raleigh is the *Pas de Chat* pool in Lichtin Plaza fronting Raleigh Memorial Auditorium. *Overtones'* closest artistic ancestor, though, is Sayre's monumentally scaled *Gyre* (1999), with its three enormous earth-cast rings, on the grounds of the NC Museum of Art. Like *Overtones*, its power depends upon its simplicity and scale; its impact depends upon the light and the viewer's physical relationship to it. And in both pieces, there is music at the reverberant core. ●

Kate Dobbs Ariail has written widely on the arts since 1988. The Five Points Star, her cultural criticism blog, can be found at thefivepointstar.com.



THE SEPTEMBER 2015 NC STATE LIVE RESIDENCY WITH BANDALOOP INCLUDED AN OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE ON THE SIDE OF THE NEW ALOFT RALEIGH, WITH THE AERIAL DANCERS PERFORMING ALONGSIDE THOMAS SAYRE'S *OVERTONES*.

PHOTO BY THOMAS C. SHAW

