

Art in the City / Week 6

Parabolic Mirror, Kentucky Science Center



Parabolic Mirror, Kentucky Science Center

Art and science meet in a multi-sensory experience at the entrance of the Kentucky Science Center on Main Street. The Parabolic Mirror, or Whispering Dish, is made up of thousands of small mirrored tiles that together reflect optical illusions to the endless delight of visitors of every age. I had the pleasure of enjoying the Parabolic Mirror today with 24 first graders who happily tested the acoustic effect of the form. I now challenge the title “Whisper Dish”! Their laughter and shouts of joy were truly deafening.

The principle of parabolic reflectors has been known to scientists (and artists) since classical antiquity, and continues to be reimagined. In public art, the form is well known through the work of Anish Kapoor (born 1952), whose exploration of the mirrored, concave dish form is found in collections worldwide, including the High Museum of Art, Atlanta and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Kapoor has created numerous works based on the form in a variety of materials and colors (see anishkapoor.com for images of his work).

Often found in science museums, a whisper dish reflects sound waves. With the addition of mirrors, the form collects and projects light and reflects images onto a central focal point. The Parabolic Mirror demonstrates how energy is reflected in many things that we use every day, such as a satellite dish or headlights on your car.

[Sarah Lindgren]