

The orb is an icon that's alive. Towering but vulnerable, object but also being. A gentle giant based on the archetype of a sphere, abstract and recognizable at the same time. The orb's skin is malleable, expressive and interactive. Under the thin exterior membrane, a soft robotics mechanism provides movement and illumination, shifting the appearance of the orb at will. The surface ripples and glows, responds to its surroundings, even appears to be breathing.

The orb meets the site at Arena Green East, inviting people across the river. It is visible from the park and the highway alike, something to be perceived both intimately and fleetingly. The park folds gently to receive it, giving the impression that it isn't built on the ground, but rather resting on it, or having just landed. The contact of the object and the park creates a new place with a central focus, an amphitheater that can be both a playground and a forum. The new topography peels off the ground at the edges, inviting people under the orb and then through an elevator into its core, an introspective, otherworldly space with a second communication surface. The interior could be the home of a museum of the valley, a planetarium, or a space for art.

The double skin is also the thermal envelope and the energy cell. Under the translucent membrane, all pneumatic and illumination units are equipped with solar cells, exposed all year round to the Californian sun, allowing for the overall design to reach net-zero energy goals. The structure attempts to have the largest impact with the least amount of material, using membranes and tensile structures and supporting only its own weight. The intensity, color and directionality of the light emitted by the orb can be adjusted dynamically to interfere the least with bird migration and riparian wildlife.

The orb is a 21st century take on Buckminster Fuller's Geoscope, a commons for information and art. The chameleonic nature of the orb is an invitation for everyone to decide what face it is going to take. Somewhere between technology and art, artificial and natural, awe and empathy, it is a hopeful symbol of a contemporary Silicon Valley.