

Stephen Antonakos***Neon for the 59th Street Marine Transfer Station, 1990***

59th Marine Transfer Station, Manhattan

Sergio Pardo López

Percent for Art Director

Hi, I'm Sergio Pardo Lopez, Director of the Percent for Art program.

In this audio, I will be speaking about Stephen Antonakos' commission at the 59th Street Marine Transfer Station on the west side of Manhattan. Antonakos activates this Sanitation facility at Pier 99 with a neon work, located on both the north and east facades. On the east facade, which houses the entrance and faces the city, the artist welcomes users by framing the two building pediments with blue and red neon, and includes inside two incomplete green circles, one of which frames the NYC Department of Sanitation seal. In contrast, on the north facade, the most prominent, facing the river, park, and highway, 26 levelled windows organized in 5 sets, with the first having 4 windows followed by 6 6 6 and finally 4, are delimited with red neon.

Antonakos was one of the first artists to use neon as a medium, especially in public art, as until the 60s neon was primarily used for its commercial function.

It allowed him to continue exploring recurring themes in his practice, such as abstraction, geometry, and placement, but on a different scale and the possibility of relating to the city.

As Antonakos mentioned on multiple occasions, he liked to "do real things in real places". With this commission, he brought a special vitality to Manhattan's shoreline at dusk and sunset and a gateway to midtown. A piece that must be contemplated in motion, to enjoy how it comes to life and breathes as the day passes and relates to the life and traffic of the city, the park, and the river.

It was essential for the artist to be able to complete the spirit of the new building and emphasize its entrance, to honor the workers of Sanitation and also to make a nod to the old building, with its classic pediments, which also ties to his Greek Heritage.

A work that has become an icon of New York City and its citizens and connects with the words of Antonakos himself, who mentioned that every work of public art is a responsibility that implies a great trust between the artist and the community.