

# The New York Times

'Miss Brooklyn' and 'Miss Manhattan' Prepare for a Homecoming

By JAMES BARRONDEC. 20, 2016



Brian Tolle with the replicas that he designed. The long gestation period of the project allowed him to integrate new technologies into the finished results. CreditMichelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Two men were standing around, talking about two women not more than 20 feet away. The two men knew everything about the two women – every curve, every fold of their diaphanous gowns. And they had their opinions.

“The one on the right is the bully,” said Josh Young, who runs a foundry by the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn.

The other man, Brian Tolle, was not so sure. He said she looked “more relaxed” than the woman on the left, who looked like someone caught “at the moment when the photographer says, ‘Don’t move, I’m taking the picture.’” The one on the right had the grateful look of “the moment after.” Her expression, he said, showed relief that the shoot was finally over and the pressure was off.

The two men could talk like this because the two women are statues – replicas of statues,

actually. They were designed by Mr. Tolle, and the steelwork that will support them was fabricated by Mr. Young and his foundry crew.

By the morning rush on Wednesday, the statues will take their places at the Brooklyn approach to the Manhattan Bridge, where the originals stood for 50 years, until Robert Moses took them down in the 1960s.



Miss Brooklyn being moved to her new post in 1964. Both original statues stand outside the Brooklyn Museum.

Mr. Tolle, the creator of the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park in Manhattan, has reinterpreted the female allegories of the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn – Miss Manhattan and Miss Brooklyn, as they were widely known. The originals were sculpted by Daniel Chester French, who is perhaps best known for a later work, the enormous seated figure of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial. The original borough statues now stand outside the Brooklyn Museum.

Unlike the originals, Mr. Tolle’s reproductions were cast in resin – in Long Island City, Queens. They will be illuminated from within so they glow at night. They will rotate on two lamppost-like arms.

“I think it will become this beacon on Flatbush Avenue,” Mr. Tolle said.

He envisions not just a beacon, but a slow-dancing beacon. The originals stood still for all

**C**  
GALLERY  
**2 4**

those years. These will turn, probably no faster than a car stuck in traffic on a gridlock-alert day. They will survey their surroundings. At times, they will stare at each other. At times, their backs will be turned. At times, they will face Manhattan.

The originals never did that. They were more like bookends, solid and stationary, with cars and trucks rumbling between them. Moses wanted more traffic lanes, as he so often did. They were in the way.

“This area around Tillary Street and Flatbush Avenue was pretty much scraped clean with the extension of Flatbush Avenue,” said Regina Myer, the president of the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, which will look after the maintenance of the new statues. “It was a place, then it became a nonplace and now Brian’s work is making it a place again.”

Ms. Myer recounted the history. “This area in its heyday was a location for car dealerships and after that fell on hard times, with other uses and, honestly, a couple of triple-X uses,” she said. “Now this is an area where people are living and using Flatbush and Tillary as a connection between neighborhoods, so installing this sculpture now comes at a great moment.”



A postcard showing the statues in their original position at the Brooklyn approach to the Manhattan Bridge. Credit via Brooklyn Museum Libraries, Special Collections

The new statues will be set back from the entrance to the bridge. Wendy Feuer, the assistant commissioner for urban design, art and wayfinding with the city’s Department of Transportation, said the placement had been carefully considered and would not distract drivers.

“This will be something new, but you’ll see it from far away,” she said, “so it’s not like you’re

in a tunnel and coming out and suddenly come upon it. You'll see it in the distance and then go by it."

Mr. Tolle said that French was asked to design two allegorical figures – "one representing Miss Brooklyn, the other representing Miss Manhattan," he said. French's model for Miss Manhattan was one of his favorites, Audrey Munson. She was the model for nearly two dozen statues in Manhattan, among them the figures in Columbus Circle and Grand Army Plaza and atop the Municipal Building.

The \$450,000 project, commissioned by the city's Percent for Art program and underwritten by the Economic Development Corporation, took 10 years, starting with a design competition. Mr. Tolle said the unexpectedly long gestation allowed him to take advantage of new technologies. "The LED lighting we're using didn't exist when we proposed this," he said.

What would French say about the project and the 21st-century materials and methods that Mr. Tolle used?

"I think he'd be intrigued," Mr. Tolle said. "The way that sculptors worked back then and the way sculptors work now is not that different. He would make a maquette," he said, referring to the preliminary models sculptors often make.

"He didn't sculpt Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial, he made the models," Mr. Tolle said. "Craftsmen, men who carve stone, made the monument. He would have understood the computer-driven machines that made the full-scale models that were then cast in acrylic. It's a different process, but not that different."