

Walk This Way

By AARON SEWARD • May 22, 2008

News



A new light installation in Dumbo seeks to illuminate the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge

Seth Ely/Courtesy Tillett Lighting Design

Last night, the New York City Department of Transportation turned on This Way, a permanent light art installation that illuminates and points the way to the Dumbo entrance of the Brooklyn Bridge's pedestrian walkway. Designed by Linnaea Tillett, principal of [Tillett Lighting Design](#), in collaboration with architect Karin Tehve of [KT3D](#), the project was commissioned by the city's [Percent for Art](#) program and the Dumbo Business Improvement District to commemorate the bridge's 125th Anniversary.

According to Tillett, the installation seeks to achieve two goals: point the way to the difficult-to-find entrance and transform the dark, somewhat scary underpass into a comfortable, inviting urban environment. "You have this sublime bridge, then this back of house space," said Tillett, who has a background as an environmental psychologist. "It looked ugly, but felt awful."

To indicate the location of the entrance without falling back on straightforward signage, the designers looked to the structure of the bridge for inspiration, specifically to the span's twisting steel suspender cables. This led them to a fiber optic product that consists of many tiny fibers twisted together to form individual lines. Tehve arranged the lines into several tentacular arrow forms that attach to the underside of the overpass and together, in a playful flowing trail, point the way to the entrance. Each arrow is lit by 150-watt metal halide lamps.

The installation also had to light the roadway, and, as with the wayfinding, the designers wanted to do so in a new way. Tillett decided on an LED fixture from Wisconsin-based manufacturer [Beta LED](#) that achieves significant coverage at relatively low wattage. In fact, during the year or so that the project was under development, Beta LED kept increasing the fixture's efficiency so that the team was able to continue to tighten the overall wattage.

The fixtures in use now range from 79 watts to 128 watts, each one containing an equivalent amount of 1-watt LED lamps. To soften the LED's somewhat harsh light, Tillett covered each fixture with a soft blue filter. The blue light also aids wayfinding from a distance, as residents can now show the way to visitors by simply pointing them toward the blue light.

"For us what makes a piece like this work is that it's not only beautiful, but it has a civic function," Tillett said. "The kind of work I'm interested in increases the quality of civic life at night."

Unlike the [Empire State Building](#) and other light installations throughout the city, This Way will be on all night, from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Call it Dumbo's night light.

Aaron Seward



The installation, by Tillett Lighting Design and KT3D, provides light and protection in the darkness of the overpass. All photos by Seth ely/Courtesy Tillett Lighting Design



To help with wayfinding, the lights resemble abstract arrows.



The installation is meant to serve as a marker even from afar.



As one of the most popular attractions in brooklyn, it was important that the brooklyn bridge be both safe and accessible.



It also adds a touch of dynamism to the stolid architecture of the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. The latter stands guard in the background.