



Art in Odd Places artinoddplaces.org

Michele Brody

14th Street Manhole Covers

self-guided tour

About 14th Street Manhole Covers

Manhole covers, as we know them, first appeared with the advent of gas companies and waterworks beginning in the late 1840s. Their surfaces were originally designed with raised patterns to prevent horses' hooves from slipping when wet. These decorative cast-iron covers protect and allow easy access to the city's vast underground network of sewer systems, water pipes, and utility and telephone lines. Behind each one lies an underground world that can be traced by the names, initials, and symbols of each cover's patterns.

As works of public art, manhole covers are distinguished by their originality, precision, and durability. A growing number of contemporary artists are interested in and inspired by these medallions found in the streets everywhere.

About the Artist

Michele Brody designed the tour of 14th Street manhole covers. Ms. Brody's passion for the beauty and intricacy of manhole covers started when she moved to SoHo and began walking to work rather than driving or taking public transportation. In 2002, with the support of Con Edison, the New York City Design Commission, and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Ms. Brody installed the first of 10 manhole-cover designs commemorating lost New York City architecture at 30 Wall Street. Learn more about this project at recoveringthecityscape.com. She also produces a unique line of lighting from manhole covers for Urban Illuminations.

Born in Brooklyn in 1967, Ms. Brody received a bachelor of arts from Sarah Lawrence College in 1989 and a master of fine arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1994. michelebrody.com



14th Street Manhole Covers



DPW

This manhole cover was installed by the New York City Department of Public Works, which began in 1849 as the Department of Repairs and Supplies, and is now part of the city's Department of Environmental Protection. At triangular plot between Ninth Avenue and Hudson Street on the south side of West 14th Street.



M.R. Co. NY

These uniquely shaped covers of the Manhattan Refrigeration Company date back to the turn of the 20th century and were designed to cover large holding tanks for refrigeration that once supplied the meatpacking companies that gave the neighborhood its name. The round part of the cover allowed people to enter the manhole, and the rectangular section gave access to the valves. Clustered around Ninth Avenue between Little West 12th and 15th Streets.



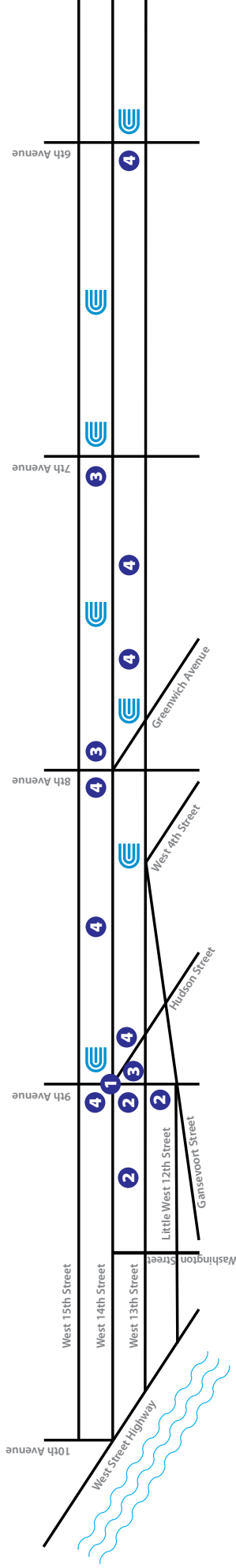
ECS Co. Ltd

The Empire City Subway Company was created in 1890 by the Metropolitan Telephone & Telegraph Company (the predecessor of New York Telephone) to construct, maintain, and operate underground ducts for telephone and telegraph conductors. These covers date back to the 1890s. At various locations along 14th Street.



N.Y.C. Sewer

This is an example of the ubiquitous New York City sewer cover. Starting in the 1980s, it was cheaper to use covers made in India or China rather than the United States. At various locations along 14th Street.



In Direct Line with Another & The Next

Designed by Lawrence Weiner and installed in 2000, this cover resulted from a collaboration between Con Edison and the Public Art Fund. The title refers to the grid of the city and how the street surface is merely a barrier-between skyscrapers, buildings, sidewalks, subways, and other underground structures. At two locations at Union Square Park: on the south side along 14th Street, and on the west side by the stairs near the subway entrance.



Con Edison

One of Con Edison's vented covers sits next to an historic map of Union Square Park. Just outside of Union Square Park at the northwest corner of Union Square East at 14th Street, by the stairs near the subway entrance.



Con Edison Millennium 2000

Karim Rashid designed this cover, which won an artist open call. Con Edison installed a limited edition of 150 of these covers throughout the city to commemorate the turn of the 21st century. At 4 Irving Place, between 14th and 15th Streets, east sidewalk.



Con Edison

Con Edison has a long-standing tradition of partnering with visual and performing arts groups and is proud to support 14th Street Manhole Covers. The company has about 250,000 manhole covers and service boxes in New York City and Westchester County. A standard manhole cover is about 32 inches in circumference and weighs between 290 and 320 pounds. www.coned.com

