

The Making of Bryant Park's Italian Hero

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An exclusive look at the making of Antonio Pio Saracino's gigantic statue inspired by Michelangelo's David. Hero is a gift from Italy to the United States, donated by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassy of Italy, Washington, D.C., and the Consulate General of Italy, New York; with the support of the worldwide energy company Eni. "David: a premier symbol of Italian cultural heritage, is now a Guardian of the friendship between our two countries. The Year of Italian Culture in the U.S. couldn't have left a better legacy. (Claudio Bisogniero, Ambassador of Italy to the US)."

For all its simplicity, it is still fascinating and complex. The human figure, a statue, an architectural element made with traditional building blocks—two pilasters and an architrave.



It's white, like the pure marble used to make it. The marble comes from a quarry in Danby, Vermont, owned by a citizen of Carrara, the Italian capital of marble. The general manager of the quarry also comes from Carrara, as do many of its workers, and all the equipment is Italian too. The statue stands for Italian character, or Italian-ness.

The project began as part of the Year of Italian Culture in the US, but it will remain on display indefinitely.

The sculptor chose to recreate Michelangelo's David, defender of the city of Florence, the emblem of an old culture but also an emblem of the timelessness of culture.

To what are we referring? Our "Man of the Year," The Hero, one of the two Guardians of Bryant Park made by architect and designer Antonio Pio Saracino.

The 36 year old from San Giovanni Rotondo, Apulia, was in fact entrusted with making two large statues to put on permanent display in Bryant Park Plaza, in the heart of Manhattan.

The installation was commissioned by Bill Edward, vice director of Equity Office, the owner of the plaza which is located at 1095 Avenue of the Americas and serves as a gateway to Bryant Park.

A recent \$10 million renovation of the plaza was designed by architect Dan Shannon, who approved Saracino's design. The curator of The Guardians is Helen Varola.

Guardians of past and present

Two 13-foot-tall sculptures, one a stylized replica of Michelangelo's David, the other an American superhero.

The former, Hero, is made of white marble and was commissioned with the support of Eni. The latter, Superhero, is made of stainless steel and was commissioned by Equity Office. Together they're known as "The Guardians." The statues symbolize the past and present, but in reality the past and present, you'll notice, coalesce.

The 8,000-pound marble Hero gazes uptown from 42nd Street, protector of the past. Its counterpart, Superhero, who dons a cape and is an icon of the present, watches over downtown from 41st Street. Superhero is made of stainless steel and weighs 15,000 pounds. Both sculptures were manufactured in New York.

Hero and Superhero soar upward in layers of planar marble and stainless steel, a nod to the surrounding skyscrapers. The materials are stacked, creating an outline that makes the figures look as if they're moving in space.

The idea is the result of the architect's intuition and digital skills, and sends a powerful, timeless message of resiliency and innovation. On view indefinitely, the statues are a new landmark in a city that morphs and expands year after year.

Inspired by Michelangelo

As a classic work revisited, Hero is at once a man of the future and the past, or rather, a timeline linking the past to the present. Art and architecture get mixed together; the former human figure evolves into a bit of architectural design.

The result is the story of how a man embraces his surroundings and fuses with New York.

As Saracino explains, "I was asked by the Italian Embassy to look at Michelangelo's David as an inspiration. Clearly such a momentous reference was daunting.

Yet I was so honored to create a symbol that could represent a gift from my native Italy to New York that I accepted the extraordinary invitation. I wanted to create two symbolic protectors of New York City that celebrate the superhuman and the inspiration that it channels.

The two anthropomorphic layered architectural constructions display the universal ability of mankind



to cement its own presence in the world with its perennial construction skills.”

Throughout his career, Saracino has designed buildings, monuments, and modern furniture, and his work is housed in prominent museum collections around the world.

Follow the story with us

i-ItalyNY followed the artist every step of the way, from the Dunby quarry, where he selected his marble on one dusk-till-dawn day; to the Precision Stone Studio on Long Island where

Hero was built; to the Equity Office where engineers, architects, and sponsors met to discuss the details of the installation. It was a fascinating experience.

We documented this very Italian adventure in 5 episodes for i-Italy TV (airing every Saturday and Sunday on NYCTV-Channel 25). For those who missed it, you can watch it on demand at [i-ItalyTV.com](http://ItalyTV.com)

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