



[Culture](#)

Lighthouses Along A Chicago Street Shine A Light On Issues Affecting People With Disabilities

"We are using public art to showcase ... what they are able to accomplish if given the chance."

[Claire Peltier @clairecpeltier](#)

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On a street in [Chicago](#), an assortment of lighthouses shine a light on the talented artists within the disabled community.

Called *Lighthouses on the Mag Mile*, the public art display along [Michigan Avenue's "Magnificent Mile" in Chicago](#) is part of an initiative by Dr. Janet Szlyk, president and CEO of [The Chicago Lighthouse](#). The Chicago Lighthouse is "a world-renowned social service organization serving the blind, visually impaired, disabled and Veteran communities with comprehensive vision care and support services," it says on its website.

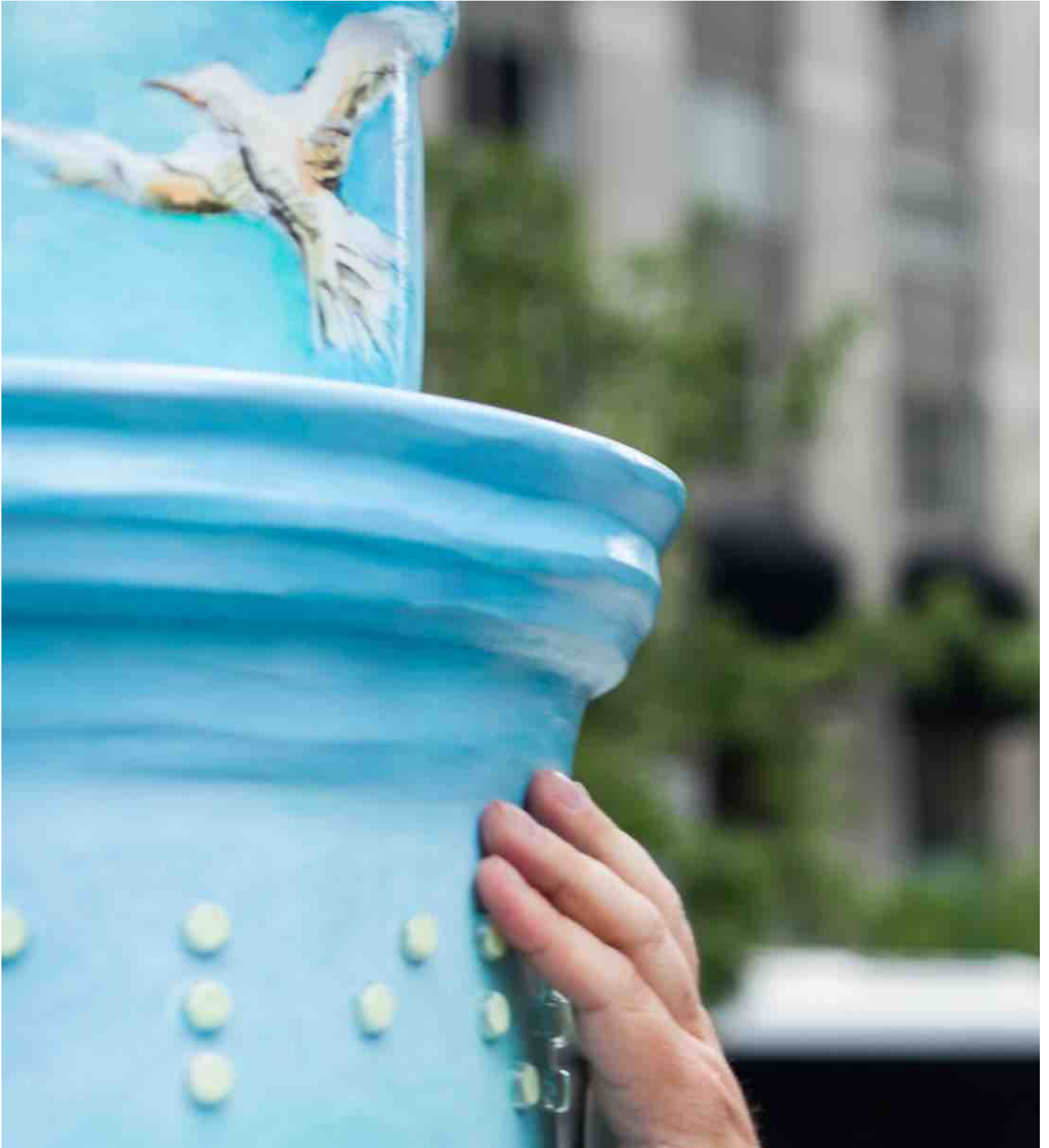
The campaign features 51 six-foot tall lighthouse sculptures "celebrating access and inclusion for people with disabilities," Chicago Lighthouse's Senior Vice President of Public Relations Dominic Calabrese explains to A Plus in an email. It's also partnered with [two smartphone-friendly apps that provide artist narration](#) and navigation for those who need it.

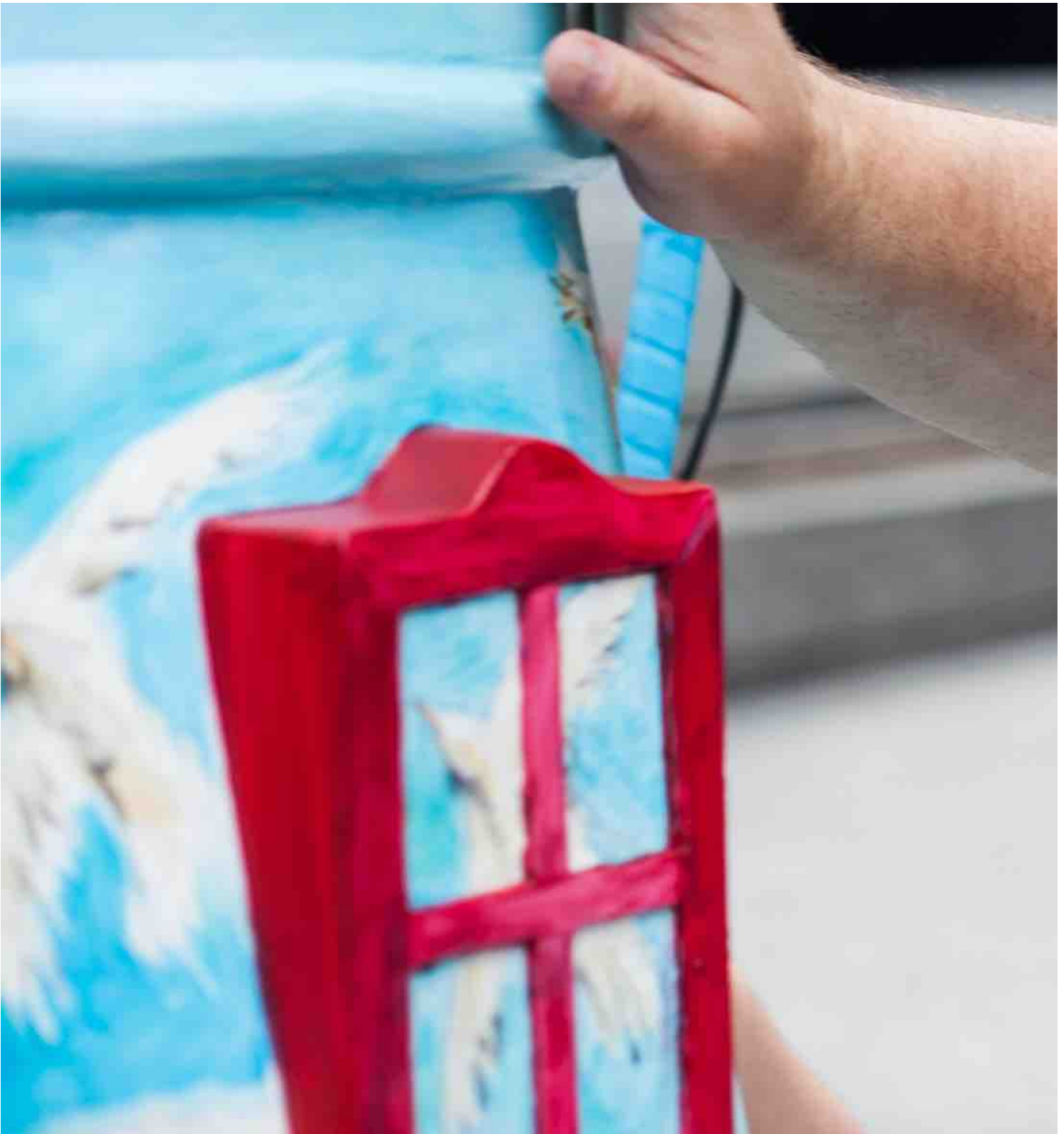
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"We are using public art to showcase the talents of people with disabilities and what they are able to accomplish if given the chance," Calabrese says, adding that a total of 103 artists participated in the project. More than half of the artists have a disability, including physical, mental, and intellectual disabilities as well as visual impairments.

"Each of their lighthouses shares a beautiful story and speaks to the valuable contributions of [people with disabilities](#) in our society."





Othervertical for [The Chicago Lighthouse](#) and Rachel Bires

Calabrese explains that the artists all come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, which allows for various perspectives within the campaign. Calabrese says:

"Some of our artists, including Kristine Metoyer and Kyle Langer, used their artwork to shed light on the experiences of people living with mental illness. Others, such as Kristi O'Meara and Deborah Maris Lader, used Braille on their lighthouses to share positive and empowering words. Mark Nelson aimed to bring calm and harmony to visitors of his lighthouse by installing a harp inside of it that hums whenever the wind blows through it. Jeff Hanson, an artist who is visually impaired, added heavy texture to his piece to communicate that "art is for touching as well as viewing." Holly Wolf-Mattick, a glass artist and arts educator, worked with elementary school students to create hundreds of unique colorful clay tiles that symbolize strength for her lighthouse ... Trained in the medical arts of prosthetics, artists Yu-hui Huang and Eduardo Arias created prosthetic hands for their lighthouse which are reaching through the sculpture's surface to represent breaking down of barriers for people with disabilities."

And then there's artist Pooja Pittie, who's "lighthouse reflects her positive attitude and optimism despite her struggles with muscular dystrophy," Calabrese says.

"It's called 'Boundless,' " [Pittie tells CBS News](#). "And to me, that word, it just evokes a world full of possibilities."





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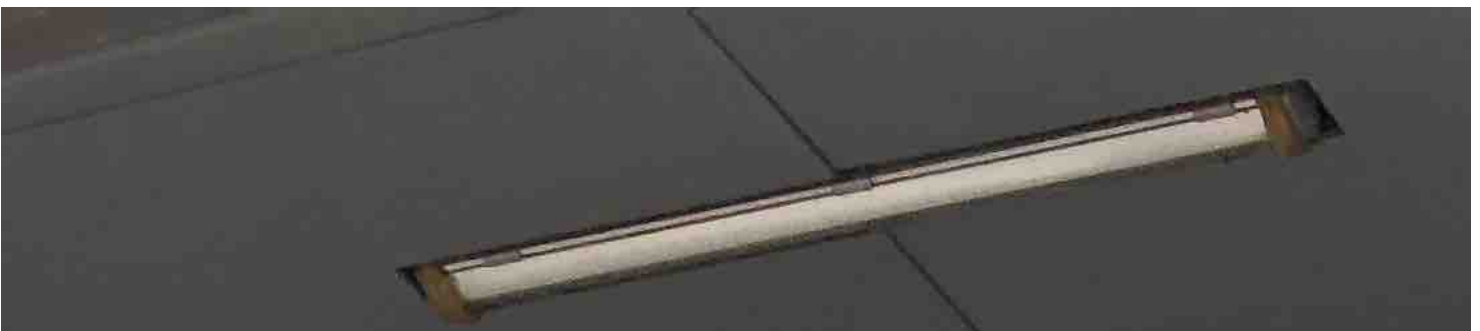
The project also sheds light on some of the biggest [misconceptions](#) about [people with disabilities](#). For example, Calabrese explains, there are those who believe that people with disabilities are not capable of doing the same things as everybody else.

But that "could not be further from the truth," Calabrese says. "People with disabilities can do the same things as people without disabilities — they just need the chance to do so."

That being said, The Chicago Lighthouse hopes that its campaign will inspire the public to help break down barriers for those within the disabled community. Additionally, it's calling for more opportunities within the workplace.

And it's much needed: in 2016, only about 36.2 percent of people with a disability — who were non-institutionalized, male or female, ages 21-64, of all races, regardless of ethnicity, and with all education levels in the United States — were employed, [Cornell University reports](#).

Moreover, "most workers with disabilities require no special accommodations and the cost for those who do is minimal or much lower than many employers believe," the [Michigan Community Service Commission reports](#).









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But after the campaign ends, Calabrese explains The Chicago Lighthouse hopes that people will continue being "beacons in their communities by continuing to share the lighthouses' messages of access and inclusion."

For those interested in helping the cause, the lighthouses will be going up for auction in August with all proceeds benefitting the programs at The Chicago Lighthouse. [You can also donate here](#) and check out more of the art below:

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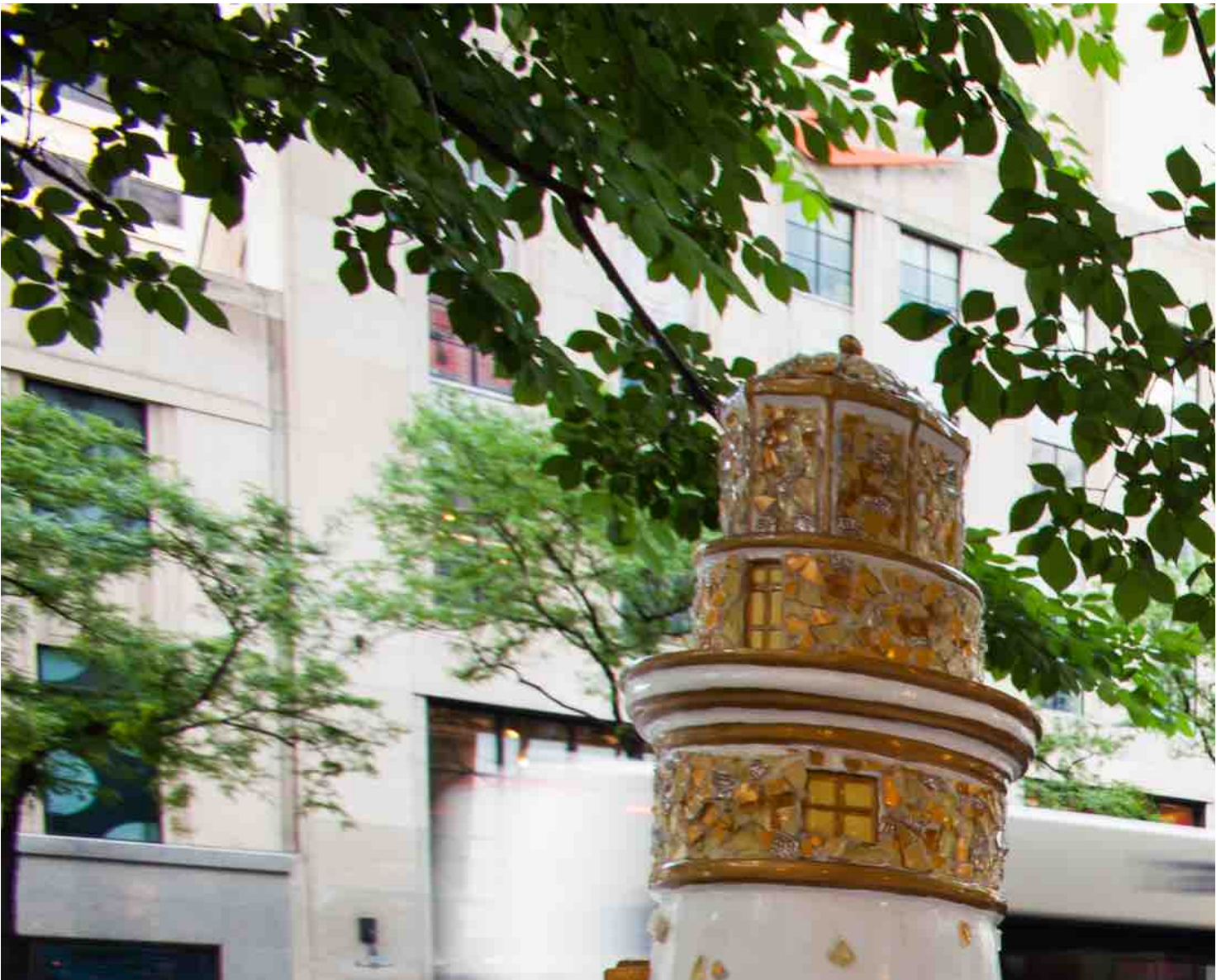






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