



The New York City subway is one the world's most used and longest metro systems.





# MOSAICS IN THE NEW YORK SUBWAY

“PERFECT STRANGERS”, A GROUP OF MOSAICS OF EVERYDAY PEOPLE, ADORNS A NEW STATION ON THE SUBWAY

On Saturday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016, the Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio, and the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, together with hundreds of passengers who were simply curious, inaugurated the first section of the new stretch of the New York subway, the Second Avenue Subway.

At a cost of more than four billion US dollars, this has been the most ambitious project undertaken for the New York subway in recent years. It is an extension to the Q Line which connects the Upper East Side district to Coney Island and Brooklyn. The line has been extended by almost two and a half kilometres and currently has four new stops: 63<sup>rd</sup>, 72<sup>nd</sup>, 86<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Street, after which it connects to a stop that was already in use. The next phase, now in the planning stage, will see the line being extended right up to 125<sup>th</sup> Street in East Harlem.

The project was first proposed in 1920 but had been repeatedly interrupted and postponed. The actual work on the project officially started in 2007 and was completed at the beginning of 2017.

The New York subway is one of the most heavily congested in the world and carries an average of round 5.6 million passengers every day, with this particular used by more than 200,000 commuters on a daily basis.

## **ART AND TECHNIQUE FOR THE WALL MOSAICS**

On the first day of the New Year, passengers taking the subway had the chance to admire the works of art that adorn the

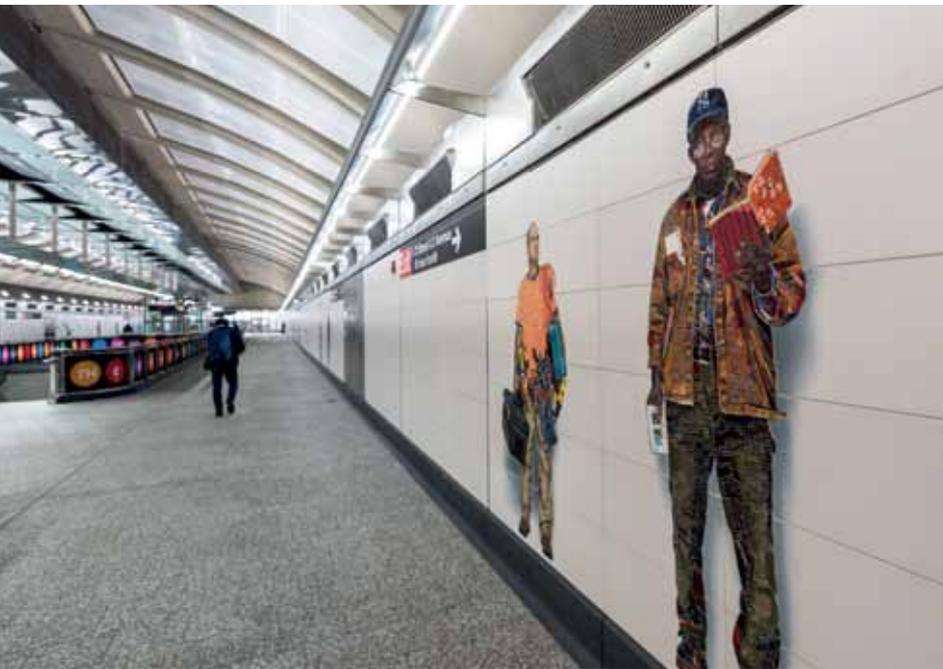
walls of the new stations.

They were created by four different artists and each station has a different theme: Lexington Avenue-63<sup>rd</sup> Street Station is enriched with the “Elevated” series of mosaics by the artist Jean Shin; the walls of 86<sup>th</sup> Street are decorated with “Subway Portraits” by Chuck Close; and 96<sup>th</sup> Street, the last stop along the line, has been illustrated with blue porcelain for the “Blueprint for a Landscape” series by Sarah Sze.

72<sup>nd</sup> Street, the first new station along the Second Avenue Subway, is adorned with life-size portraits of “Perfect Strangers”, a series of glass mosaics created by Brazilian-born New York-based artist Vik Muniz to represent the type of people who live, work or wait for the subway in New York. Apart from being an important infrastructure project within the public transport network, the Second Avenue Subway is also a work of public art combining art and transport promoted by A&D-MTA Arts & Design, an association with the aim of encouraging the use of the subway by local residents by offering the chance to live aesthetic experiences through art and design.

The four artists chosen for this project were allowed to let their imaginations run wild on the surfaces assigned to them in the new stations, as if they were blank canvases.

The mosaics were made from ceramic, terracotta and coloured glass tiles, along with other decorative features. The final result was made possible thanks to the use of materials of the highest quality,



72<sup>nd</sup> Street, the first new station along the Second Avenue Subway, is adorned with life-size mosaic portraits of New Yorkers. Joints were grouted with FLEXCOLOR 3D mortar.

**IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

**GRANIRAPID**

It is a two-component adhesive for bonding all kinds of interior and exterior ceramic tiles, conglomerate, artificial and natural stone and marble on walls or floors. GRANIRAPID has particularly fast setting and hydration times so that floors are set to light foot traffic after 3 hours and completely cured after only 24 hours. Its mechanical properties make it resistant to impact, vibration, temperature changes, ageing and dilute chemical agents.



the skill of the craftsmen who actually installed the mosaics and the innovative products used to bond and grout the tiles. To install his glass mosaics in the station at 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, Vik Muniz recommended using a team of installers from Franz Mayer of Munich, Inc.. This company was founded in 1847 and is still considered to be one of the best at installing artistic and architectural mosaics. The designer and the company chose products proposed by Mapei, among which one particularly worth mentioning is the translucent/iridescent grout FLEXCOLOR 3D. Presented at the 2017 US trade fair Coverings, FLEXCOLOR 3D is a ready-mixed mortar with an iridescent effect finish. The product is offered in 10 different shades with translucent characteristics that not only reflect but also refract light. This allows the grout to transition in color to complement the tile color. It was developed particularly for grouting joints of porcelain tiles, ceramic tiles, natural stone and glass mosaics in commercial or residential areas. It dries in around 24 hours and includes 70% recycled components, which establishes it as meeting the Level 3 criteria of the Green Squared Certification program, further helping to obtain the LEED certification.

The mosaics in the New York subway are the first project in the United States to have used FLEXCOLOR 3D, which

is manufactured and distributed on the USA market by Mapei Corp., the US subsidiary of the Mapei Group.

**INSTALLING MOSAICS IN A TUNNEL**

Vik Muniz designed the life-sized outlines of the mosaics after working on a series of life-sized photos he had taken. The team from Franz Mayer then worked in the studio to install the glass mosaics on panels using GRANIRAPID two-component cementitious adhesive, which dries quickly so that features may also be put

into service quickly.

Once they had been completed, the panels were transported to the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street station. Here, the installers cut white porcelain tiles along the platforms using water-jet cutting equipment to form the perimeters of the life-sized murals.

The porcelain tiles had previously been installed on the walls using ULTRAFLEX LFT adhesive while joints were grouted with KERACOLOR U mortar. Both products are manufactured and distributed on the US market by Mapei Corp.

The panels were then bonded in place using GRANIRAPID.

Once the mosaic figures had been put





The glass mosaics were bonded on panels with GRANIRAPID cementitious adhesive.

in the correct position, all joints were grouted with FLEXCOLOR 3D mortar. The artist chose the “Crystal Moon” shade, which is the most translucent of the ten available shades, and is perfect for reflecting and refracting the colours of the surrounding mosaic tiles, taking on different coloration in different parts of each mural.

MAPESIL T 100% silicone sealant, which is also manufactured and distributed on the US market by Mapei Corp., was used to seal expansion joints.

#### TECHNICAL DATA

**Second Avenue Subway Murals**, New York (USA)

**Period of construction:** 2007-2017

**Period of the intervention:** 2016-2017

**Intervention by Mapei:** supplying products for installing porcelain tiles and glass mosaics

**Design:** Vik Muniz

**Client:** New York City Mass Transit Authority

**Main contractor:** Judlau

**Installation company:** Franz Mayer of Munich, Inc.

**Mapei distributor:** Daltile Brooklyn

**Mapei coordinator:** Matt Hess, Mapei Corp. (USA)

#### MAPEI PRODUCTS

Installing and grouting ceramic tiles:

Ultraflex LFT\*, Keracolor U\*

Installing and grouting glass mosaics:

Granirapid, Flexcolor 3D\*,

Sealing expansion joints: Mapesil T\*

\*These products are manufactured and distributed on the US market by Mapei Corp. (USA)

For further information on products visit [www.mapei.com](http://www.mapei.com) and [www.mapei.us](http://www.mapei.us)

