American Electric Color and the Origins of the Socio Perfect Tower Marquee

Electrolips LLC | John Pate | New York City concept origin: 2022 | Prepared 22 November 2026

The American nighttime city did not acquire its colors all at once. Beginning with electric bulbs and incandescent advertising at the turn of the twentieth century, commercial lighting developed into a visual language of bright letters, moving patterns, and illuminated architecture. Early electric displays in New York relied on rows of lamps. Gas-discharge signs brought continuous lines of color, while later glass chemistry, fluorescent coatings, and electronic controls broadened the palette. The result was not a single invention called neon, but a sequence of overlapping lighting technologies.

The experimental history of luminous tubing predates the famous commercial signs. The U.S. National Bureau of Standards experimented with illuminated gas-filled tubes in the early twentieth century. In 1923, the orange-red and blue Packard signs associated with Earle C. Anthony in Los Angeles became a well-known commercial milestone, although historians dispute simple claims that they were the absolute first American neon signs. During the 1930s, colored glass and phosphor-coated tubing expanded the range of colors. After World War II, roadside motels, theaters, diners, Times Square, and Las Vegas combined electric colors with typography, animation, metalwork, and architecture. The late twentieth-century neon revival and modern RGB LEDs added further control, though digital color is not identical to light from an excited gas.

Socio Perfect Tower extends that American tradition into a proposed architectural display system for New York City. The designer, John Pate, dates the tower idea to his experience in New York in 2022, when he reports attempting to move back to the city while living without housing. He describes that period as difficult and shaped by disputes over access to resources. Those experiences provide personal context for the design, but claims about the conduct of particular institutions or groups have not been independently verified for this archive.

The tower concept has deliberately different faces: a severe, largely unbroken frontage with monumental plate-like sections, rainbow-lit seams, and a lone light above a door far overhead; a rear face of social terraces; and a crown of thorn-like metal forms with tungsten and platinum motifs. Its rectangular skyline marquee would be a programmable written-message surface, not simply a fixed neon sign. The proposed display combines individually addressed luminous cells, nested spherical chambers, bars, trapezoids, filter plates, phosphor layers, and optical depth to produce letters, transitions, and changing color effects.

The accompanying architectural boards are visual research concepts, not certified fabrication drawings. Real discharge cells require electrical excitation, hermetic seals, thermal management, and safety engineering; stacked translucent materials can absorb light as well as combine it. The design proposes a new theatrical relationship between old American electric color and an urban-scale communication surface: a monumental screen that can make New York’s skyline appear to write in layers of light.