

the comm-unity newsletter

Communication Department Hosts Whitman on Walls! in Gaelic Park

by **Claire Ganguin**

The Communication Department hosted a never-before-held event in Gaelic Park: “Whitman on Walls.” The hybrid event had an in-person audience, seven live poets, and films featuring more poets on a large screen on the field. Whitman on Walls is one of several events going on this year to mark Manhattan College’s 100 year anniversary of having our campus in the Bronx.

Whitman on Walls is run by founding director, Karin Coonrod, and was founded two years ago during the pandemic. It is produced by Compagnia de’ Colombari, a New York-based Italian theater consortium. The production of Whitman on Walls started because of the pandemic, when theaters were closed and there was a great deal of instability in regard to the future.

Over the course of three weeks, over 50 performers around the world recorded themselves reading a section of “Song of Myself,” a radical poem written by the late great New York poet Walt Whitman. This evolved into the seven-part series that was adapted by Karin Coonrod called “More or Less I am.” Once venues started to open back up again, the theater company decided to take what they created and travel to different communities to see how people responded to what the 19th century poet had to say. From this emerged Whitman on Walls.

“When I heard about this project, I invited Karin to visit the Manhattan College campus,” Michael Grabowski, chair of the Communication Department, said. “She saw the location in Gaelic Park and the No. 1 train in the background, she said this would be the perfect location for hosting Whitman on Walls.”



The seven poets who participated were all rooted in the Bronx or had a connection to Manhattan College.

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Whitman on Walls has been traveling to several different cities and has invited poets local to that area to write short response poems to each section of the seven part series. When they came to Manhattan College, seven poets who were personally connected to the Bronx performed:

Haydil Henriquez, Mariposa Fernandez, David Mills, JC Pozo-Olano, Manhattan professors Melinda Wilson and Dominika Wrozynski and Manhattan alumna Gabriella DePinho.

“We wanted a mix of people from Manhattan College and from the community of Kingsbridge, Riverdale and other neighborhoods of the Bronx,” Grabowski said. “We really wanted this to be a Bronx centric local event.”

This production took almost a year to put together due to the uncertainty that the pandemic still caused. However, Grabowski was pleased with the turn out.

“We were thrilled to put this up ...we had over 100 people in attendance and everyone contributed,” Grabowski said. “All the different constituencies of the college and the larger community came together for this. This was a free event and everyone was invited. Part of my excitement about this was opening our doors to the community and welcoming everyone in.”

which not only allowed for the production to run smoothly, but also gave students the opportunity to produce a different kind of live event.

“It was a fairly simple event in the sense that we had a really good rundown and a good script to go with,” Ruggiero said. “We had a planned event for an hour and a half, so we knew where we were going. And it was a nice change of pace for the students compared to the live production of games.”

“I would love the opportunity to do more programming like this, so there’s more opportunities for programming and content,” Grabowski said. “We have the capabilities of pulling this off and more.” ★



Over 100 students, professors, faculty and Bronx locals came to the event in Gaelic Park, and over 50 poets performed online and in person.

Photo credit to Cuppek LLC

The event was also streamed live on BronxNet. The live stream was produced through the Manhattan College mobile production unit with producer/director Joe Ruggiero producing the event. Ruggiero worked with over 10 Manhattan College communication students,