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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Restores and Enhances Poetry in Motion

Poems Now Paired With Arts for Transit Images; Poems Added to MetroCards and Digitized

Back by popular demand, poems are returning to the subway after a four-year hiatus. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the Poetry Society of America (PSA) today announced that the MTA is re-establishing Poetry in Motion, the popular program that brought thought-provoking poems and poetry excerpts to the subway between 1992 and 2008.

Not merely bringing the program back, the MTA is enhancing and expanding the program. Poems will be paired with details of work of art that appear in the MTA system. Within subway cars, the poems will be positioned in the prominent square poster wells at eye level of seated passengers. Previously, they had been in the overhead advertising spaces.

And the poems are expanding to new venues. The poems posted in the subway will now appear, for the first time, on the backs of select MetroCards. The poems also are being brought into the digital age. Animated sequences featuring the poems are being added to the MTA's "On the Go!" travel stations, which have been installed in a pilot program at five major transportation hubs: Grand Central Terminal, Pennsylvania Station, Bowling Green, Atlantic Av-Pacific St, and Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Av.

"Our customers tell us again and again that even a small investment in art and music underground makes a huge difference to them," said MTA Chairman Joseph J. Lhota. "It can really improve the entire experience of riding the subway. And the beauty of this program—and of poetry and art in general—is that it can really transport you."

"The Straphangers Campaign applauds the MTA's decision to bring back poetry in the subways," said Gene Russianoff, Staff Attorney of the Straphangers Campaign. "Poems in trains and on MetroCards will bring the unexpected to riders' days – the good kind of unexpected."

The poems are selected by MTA Arts for Transit in collaboration with the Poetry Society of America, partners in the program since its inception. In addition to context, aptness, and literary merit, the selections for Poetry in Motion will seek a diverse authorship reflective of the diversity within New York.

The first poem to be included in the new incarnation of Poetry in Motion is the timely "Graduation," by Dorothea Tanning, who passed away in January at the age of 101. The poem reads:

"He told us, *with the years, you will come
to love the world.*
And we sat there with our souls in our laps,
and comforted them."

"Dorothea Tanning was an outstanding American artist and the author of a novel and two memoirs when in her late 80s," said Alice Quinn, Executive Director of the Poetry Society of America. "She became an accomplished poet, too, publishing her first collection at 94 and her second a month after her 101st birthday. Her poem, 'Graduation,' speaks to the uncertainties of youth, to a mixture of skepticism and trust, and expresses a wistfulness about beginnings. The timing seemed great for this poem as so many all over the city will be graduating from one place or another all through May and June when the poem is up, a moment of embarkation Tanning's poem delicately enshrines."

"Graduation" is paired with images of the artwork "The Flora of Bensonhurst" by Joan Linder, a newly installed, but not yet unveiled, laminated glass artwork at the 71 st Street station on the D Line in Brooklyn. The artwork depicts six intricately drawn plants specimens flowing in the direction of the train. Linder created the drawings based upon wild vegetation discovered on the streets and lots within a 6-block radius of the station. These panels act as windows to a lost history – a place shaped by Native Americans and farmers. The botanical images offer passengers an experience that is a counterpoint to the built environment of the city.

As poems are selected, Arts for Transit will pair them with details from its more than 230 works of permanent art installed in subway and railroad stations. Any connection between the artwork displayed and the subject matter of the poetry may not always be immediately apparent.

"The artwork and the poetry are not meant to necessarily interpret each other but to create a dialog," said Sandra Bloodworth, Director of MTA Arts for Transit and Urban Design. "You may experience them individually or as one. Each stands in its own right, yet they can be viewed in tandem. The interpretation is up to the individual, so we don't expect everyone will experience the art or the poetry or the two together in the same way. It will be left to a multitude of interpretations."

The next poem will be released in April. After the initial launch period, the MTA will present two poems each season. Each of the poems will appear inside subway trains, on MetroCards, in "On the Go!" travel stations, and on the MTA's website under Arts for Transit. The poems will be printed on the backs of three million MetroCards per quarter, which is approximately 11% of the 27 million MetroCards sold each quarter.