



MTA Press Releases

[Select Language](#) | ▼

Press Release

March 29, 2017

[MTA Headquarters](#)

IMMEDIATE

Billy Collins Pens ‘Subway’ for New Second Avenue Line

Poetry in Motion Card Pairs Poem with Sarah Sze’s Artwork at 96 St Station

A poetic homage to the workers who dig subway tunnels, written for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority by the former U.S. Poet Laureate and former New York State Poet Laureate Billy Collins, is the newest addition to MTA Arts & Design’s Poetry in Motion program as the MTA continues to celebrate the opening of the new Second Avenue Subway this year.

Written for the opening of MTA’s first new subway line in decades, “Subway” is an ode to those who took on the monumental task of building the underground public transportation system that moves millions of New Yorkers every day. The poem also is a reminder that this work is not in the distant past and remains a presence in the city: digging for the first phase of Second Avenue Subway took place just a few years ago, and more work is planned to extend the line north on Second Avenue to Harlem in Phase 2 of the project.

“We invited Billy Collins to write a poem to celebrate the completion of Second Avenue Subway since his way with words speaks to all New Yorkers, with a purity of thought that gets to the meaning in a way we all understand, and he does it with a lyrical brilliance. Pairing his verses with Sarah’s expansive artwork was a great match of creative spirits, as together they were thinking of those who built the new subway and those who use it today and for generations to come,” said Sandra Bloodworth, Director of MTA Arts & Design.

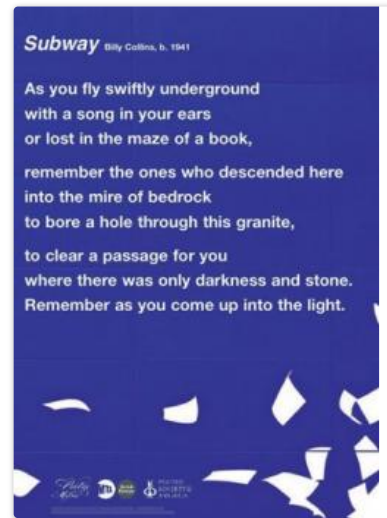
The Poetry in Motion program, presented by MTA Arts & Design in partnership with the Poetry Society of America, pairs selected poems with artwork from the MTA’s permanent art collection. The artwork paired with “Subway” is a detail from Sze’s immersive installation at the 96 St station on the Second Avenue line, and graphically links the poem to this new chapter of a century-old subway system.

“When I was asked by MTA Arts & Design to write a short poem for the occasion of the opening of the Second Avenue Subway, my first thought was the Herculean construction effort of digging the tunnel and the many workers whose dedicated labor went into its making. I grew up in Queens, so I had long heard about the ‘sandhogs,’ those who burrowed while others went about their business on the surface. And I had read Mary Beth Keane’s ‘The Walking People,’ a fictional tribute to them. I wanted the little poem to remind riders of the nearly unimaginable physical effort that went into the making of the tunnel they were speeding through—the years of blasting and underground drilling, and the dangers involved. I hoped the poem would create a moment of reflection in the rush of city life, a moment of gratitude for the men and women who created this engineering wonder,” said Billy Collins, the former U.S. Poet Laureate and former New York State Poet Laureate.

“Coupling my piece at 96 St with Billy Collins’ poem is a beautiful marrying of language and visuals — both capturing a fleeting moment of reflection. I love finding a Poetry in Motion moment on my subway ride. The velocity of moments described in my installation at the 96 St station now extends through the discovery of a trail of Billy Collins’ work in posters of blue and paper dispersed throughout the subway system,” said artist Sarah Sze.

About MTA Arts & Design

MTA Arts & Design encourages the use of mass transit in the metropolitan New York area by providing visual and performing arts in the transit environment. The MTA Percent for Art program is one of the largest and most diverse collections of public art in the world, with more than 300 commissioned works by well-known, mid-career and emerging artists including Jacob Lawrence, Nancy Spero, Romare Bearden, Milton Glaser, Xenobia Bailey, Elizabeth Murray, Roy Lichtenstein, Shinique Smith, Al Held, Duke Riley, Faith Ringgold and new projects by Chuck Close, Vik Muniz, Jean Shin and Sarah Sze. Arts & Design produces award-winning graphic and digital art, photography installations, live musical performances, the Poetry in Motion program and other special events. It serves more than 2.6 billion people who ride MTA subways and trains each year and strives to create meaningful connections between sites, neighborhoods, and people. To learn more, visit mta.info/art.



“Subway” by Billy Collins. Artwork by Sarah Sze.