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Artist Raul Cordero's Large-Scale Sanctuary Opens In Times Square This April

THE POEM intends to provide a unique and transformative experience in which visitors can momentarily transcend the bustling activity of Times Square.

by A.A. Cristi Mar. 17, 2022



Times Square Arts, the largest public platform for contemporary performance and visual arts, is pleased to present THE POEM, an immersive public art installation by Cuban artist Raúl Cordero, on view April 8 - May 4, 2022.

THE POEM intends to provide a unique and transformative experience in which visitors can momentarily transcend the bustling activity of Times Square and the district's monumental scale and energy. In the heart of an attention economy, Cordero plays with the architecture of Times Square to offer us a gift of poetry and art.

"It's difficult to create meaningful art for people in an era when their attention is scattered across so many mediums and technologies simultaneously. THE POEM seeks to stop time, reminding us that humans also have the capacity to invest in one thing at a time - like listen to "the secret dialogue of trees" (as put poetically by Reinaldo Arenas) and read a haiku, even when standing in the center of Times Square," said Raúl Cordero.

THE POEM is a large-scale sculptural tower that features an illuminated text interior juxtaposed by a landscaped exterior of cascading mountain laurel foliage designed by Canal Gardens Inc. Affixed to the interior of the temple-like structure are words from a haiku written by poet Barry Schwabsky, visible to visitors who step inside and look up. Schwabsky is a writer, educator, and art world luminary whose poetry concerns the minute nuances of sense and sensation in the overlooked elements of language, balancing thoughtful details with the complexities of art.

THE POEM is a continuation of Cordero's extensive use of juxtaposing text and abstract imagery in his practice, serving as a commentary on the distracted nature of modern living in which technological advancements have created a wealth of information alongside a decline in attention spans. The artist created a special alphabet composed of almost illegible symbols to toy with the human brain and force viewers to linger longer to decipher his message— emblematic of Cordero's belief that the digital age has re-wired the human brain, compelling audiences to focus more intently when the mind multitasks. With his text-based trickery at play, Cordero also offers a natural landscape as a framing device and temporary hiatus from the sensory overload of Times Square. To experience THE POEM, viewers must step underneath a 20 ft tall cascade of mountain laurel, where their only line of vision becomes the open sky and the haiku in black light above them.

"Playing to the monumental scale of Times Square, THE POEM merges poetry and the natural world to physically ground us, and hold open a contemplative space in a place that is fundamentally reliant on our fractured attention," said Times Square Arts Director Jean Cooney.

Times Square is an apt site for the installation in that it emphasizes the influence of the "attention economy" on Cordero's work, as the neon billboards, busy passersby, and city sounds create a cacophony of sensory overload. THE POEM is a practice in thought and care, with the hopes that viewers will devote their attention to the structure in order to ponder the

conundrum of modern life.

Cordero's project is both inspired by and dedicated to fellow Cuban and poet Reinaldo Arenas, an exile of the Cuban government who battled AIDS which led to death by suicide in 1990. Arenas would write poems while sitting in a tree as a child, a pastime that inspired the

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height and foliage feel of Cordero's installation. Arenas spent his final years as a creative in New York City, living only two blocks away from THE POEM's location.

In conjunction with the project, Cordero will be presenting text-based video works across billboards and free public programming featuring New York City's diverse poetry community on the ground. Throughout the run of the exhibition, LaTasha Nevada Diggs, Paolo Javier, Barry Schwabsky, and PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) with PEN International will each curate an evening of poetry readings and live performance celebrating THE POEM and New York City's poetry community open to the public. The programming will also run alongside his first New York solo exhibition in almost fifteen years at RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY located at 154 Ludlow Street, New York, NY. The solo exhibition HEAVEN IS A PLACE IN THE MIND, features a collection of 24 works, including 17 paintings, 2 installations and 4 NFTs. It will be on view through April 24, 2022.

THE POEM is commissioned by Times Square Arts with generous support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and in part through support from Morgan Stanley, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



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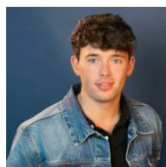


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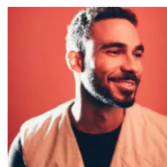


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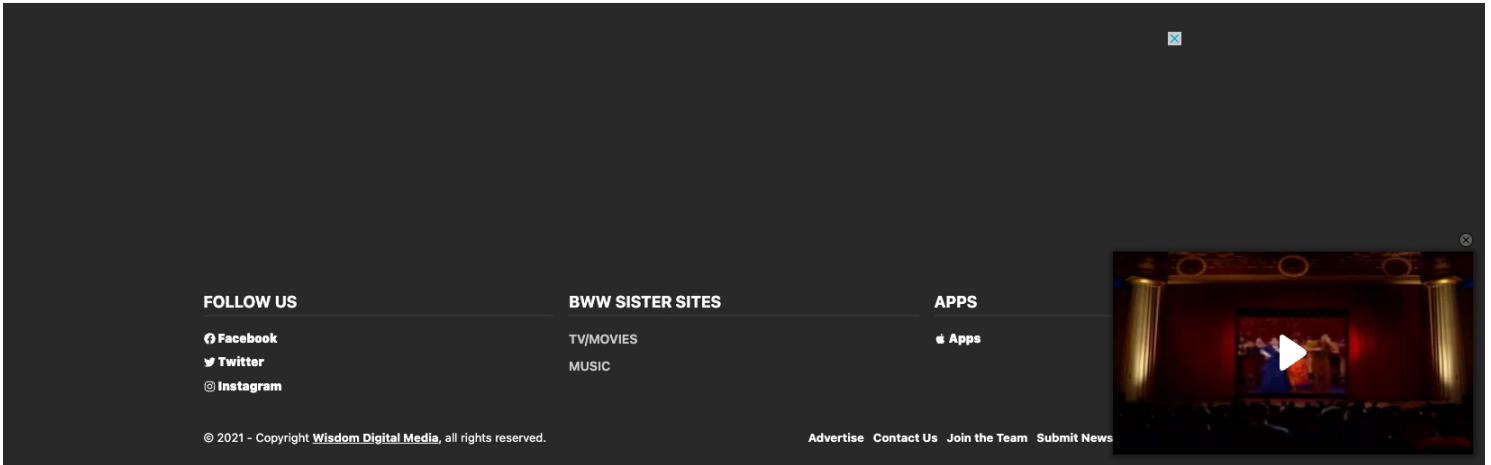
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