

The Sound of Presence

Path with Art's Jennifer Lobsenz traces a year-long project that gives voice and visibility to homelessness.

PATH WITH ART provides access to the arts for no- to low-income adults recovering from homelessness, addiction and trauma. Through various partnerships with social service agencies and arts organizations, they offer free art classes, lead group outings to arts and cultural events, and present public exhibitions and showcases. The nonprofit recently moved its headquarters into a Pioneer Square storefront, which doubles as an art gallery. Currently hanging is an exhibit of student work created in a recent collage class taught by Deborah Faye Lawrence.

One of Path with Art's most ambitious efforts to date is *We Are All Here*, a year-long multidisciplinary project in which art is a vehicle to discuss Seattle's changing social and economic landscape. The project began with poems and painted canvases last spring and culminates this month at Benaroya Hall when a Seattle Symphony chamber ensemble performs an original score created by Path with Art students. Program director Jennifer Lobsenz sat down to talk with us about the project.

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How was this collaboration born?

We Are All Here emerged from conversations taking place in our classrooms. Seattle is a rapidly evolving city, and real consequences accompany the pace and direction of change. We wanted to explore channeling those conversations into art—so we started writing poems. Then we translated those poems into visual art in the form of gorgeous banners, which were installed in Occidental Square last summer.

We also installed poetry drop boxes throughout Pioneer Square and encouraged public submissions. We received hundreds and chose four—local poets Jane Wong, Nikkita Oliver and Pam Winter were our jurors—to serve as inspiration for additional banners. We hosted public banner-painting parties and installed those banners alongside the originals. It was awesome: Imagine a collective poem accumulating in the park over the course of the summer.

How do the banners connect to the music?

This winter Path with Art students spent 16 weeks working with Seattle Symphony musicians to compose a score inspired by the banners. The score draws inspiration from some of the deepest themes of this project and expresses them in a new medium.

What does it sound like?

The score speaks directly to the reality of experiencing homelessness. Musical influences include stormy weather (literal and metaphorical), varied conversations in tent cities, feelings of loss and mourning, as well as enduring hope in a world filled with beauty, kindness and love for people from all backgrounds. The score features frantic string lines and improvised percussion, and draws inspiration from blues, pentatonic folk and conversational motifs.

How many students were involved?

A little over 100 Path with Art students have participated. Some folks submitted poems, others painted banners and others created the score. Many of the people we serve are currently experiencing or have previously experienced homelessness, so the issues *We Are All Here* explores are far from abstract.

Do any of them have background in art or music?

Some have a deep background in the arts; some don't have any. Last year we served nearly 500 students, so there's certainly a range of life stories. Some folks have a master's degree in music theory; some are picking up a paintbrush for the first time.

How is this project different from your other programs?

I'm always motivated by the fierce strength and warm spirit that drives the Path with Art community. Through *We Are All Here* specifically, I was really inspired to

see how dedicated folks were to this important conversation [about the evolution of Seattle]. We work with some wildly talented artists and it was amazing to see how deeply they drove themselves into their practice through this project.

Is *We Are All Here* open to the public?

Yes, it's free and all are welcome. The performance will be kind of a microcosm of the project at large, so the audience will really experience the arc of the project. If you're into things like being punched in the stomach by the grace of human beings and the power of art, definitely come out!

We Are All Here takes place at Benaroya Hall on March 8. *Spring Voices*, Path with Art's annual showcase of poetry, prose, performance and song takes place at Seattle Art Museum on March 28.



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