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**The sights and sounds of poetry**

by Michele D. Maniscalco  
Thursday Oct 13, 2016



Photo by Michele Maniscalco

**On display at South End Library**

On Thursday evening, October 6, the second-floor meeting room at the South End Branch Library rang out with poetry reflecting diverse themes, moods and life experiences while a standing room only audience laughed, gasped and called out in response.

The evening of verse celebrated a unique photography exhibit in the library windows featuring

local poets by Greg Jundanian, who took the photos in settings around the Boston area that are relevant to the poets themselves. Copies of the photos were also posted in the performance room so that guests could view them at the time of the readings.

Photographer Jundanian hosted the evening, which featured Didi Delgado of the Society of Urban Poets (S.O.U.P.), Krysten Hill, Valerie Loveland, April Penn, John Pinkham, Oliver Prato, Allegra Thaler and Oompa Williams of the Flatline Poetry workshop and educational group. Guests nibbled sushi, fruit and cheese and deserts and sipped wine and soft drinks while taking in poems that stirred the emotions and the imagination.

Loveland's verse was a dream-like musing on assuming the characteristics of a wolf, while Pinkham examined the human relationship with other species and the changing environment. Delgado reflected on attitudes toward blackness in all its forms, inspired by Fox broadcaster Megyn Kelly's on-air assertion that Santa Claus and Jesus were white.

The poem that followed was personal and poignant, an apology to Delgado's unborn child whose arrival is imminent and to the child's father. She apologized to her coming daughter for hardships she may well face, while saying "I'm sorry" to the child's father for the opportunities he will miss as an absent parent. Williams's face, body and voice were animated as she reflected emotionally on race and poverty, mental illness and addiction and the toll they take upon children.

Her second piece was "#SayHerName", a hip-hop rhyme written in tribute to Sandra Bland, who died in police custody in Texas after being stopped for failing to use a turn signal. Bland's death led to the formation of the #SayHerName hashtag and movement. April Penn began with a piece reflecting on gender perceptions regarding women and the limitations they can impose and followed it with a racy poem that considered a very intimate part of the female anatomy in a playful, even absurdist light.

Penn pondered aloud whether to read an "X rated" poem, discussing trigger alerts and deciding to proceed after audience members voiced interest.

With society's increasing dependence on technology, particularly smartphones, the posture of poetry performance has changed. Some of the poets recited from memory, from notes and from books, making eye contact, gesturing and engaging with the audience while others read from their phones and rarely raised their eyes. The varied presentations were intertwined with the poets' individual styles.

Jundanian's photo exhibit is the fifth in the South End Branch Library's Local Focus series showcasing local artists, and the exhibit and slam were sponsored by the Friends of the South End Library. Jundanian's photos can be purchased at the library, and 30 per cent of the proceeds will benefit the library's programming.



Photo by Michele Maniscalco



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