PROCLAMATION

The City of Philadelphia’s profound legacy as the birthplace of American democracy has inspired generations of great politicians, activists, civil rights leaders, journalists, authors, poets, and many more to spread our phenomenal spirit and use that energy to continue to change lives and create good in this world. The groundbreaking actions of our Founding Fathers and the people of our country’s Revolutionary times set our world on a path to a freer and more equal society. The City of Philadelphia strongly supports and appreciates the efforts of those who added to our legacy as the birthplace of freedom and believes their place in history should always be remembered and honored.

In Philadelphia, the poet Walt Whitman brought great awareness and understanding for many during a time of great uncertainty and change in American politics, culture, and society. The poet, essayist, and journalist is often revered for being the “poet of democracy” and an early proponent for freedom of expression. On Friday, May 31, 2019, which would have been the acclaimed poet’s 200th birthday, an ambitious and far reaching City-wide initiative will celebrate his unique work and apply his many intuitive lessons to today’s political climate.

Whitman at 200: Art and Democracy will be a series of cultural events, artistic commissions, exhibitions, performances, and programs to honor his history in the City of Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey, and assess his contributions to American life. Organized by the University of Pennsylvania Libraries Kislak Center – through support from The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage – the events take place all year, but mainly focus between Friday, May 24 and Sunday, June 9, 2019, the two weeks around the anniversary of his birthday. Other partnering organizations include the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; the Free Library of Philadelphia; and the Independence Seaport Museum.

The organizers hope to generate a type of the egalitarian style community Whitman imagined by bringing his selective works to the public for everyone to access and appreciate. Among the many exciting features is a performance of Whitman’s poetry by singer, songwriter, and poet Patti Smith at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. There are four commissioned pieces of art, including Spencer Finch’s installation of two interactive color wheels on the RiverLink ferry based on Whitman’s observations of the Delaware River; a multimedia performance by Carolyn Healy and John Phillips aboard a 110-foot-long industrial barge moving along the Delaware River; a birthday pageant at Penn’s Landing conceived by John Jarboe and the Bearded Ladies Cabaret that explores Whitman’s role as a gay hero; and four walks in different Philadelphia neighborhoods organized by Homer Jackson, inspired by Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road.”

THEREFORE...

I, James F. Kenney, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, do hereby proclaim Friday, May 31, 2019 to be

WALT WHITMAN’S 200TH BIRTHDAY

and urge all Philadelphians to use this opportunity to learn more about one of our City’s most legendary artists who was a true believer in democracy and freedom for all and applaud the event’s organizers for remembering this beloved figure of our City’s history.

James F. Kenney
Mayor

Given under my hand and the seal of the City of Philadelphia on this thirty-first day of May, two thousand and nineteen