

Poet of the Body: New York's Walt Whitman
May 15 – July 27, 2019
Curated by Susan Tane and Karen Karbiener
Press Release

How did a carpenter's son, grammar school dropout and sometime hack writer become America's greatest poet? To commemorate Whitman's 200th birthday on May 31, 2019, this landmark exhibition showcases New York's role in the extraordinary transformation of Walter Whitman Jr. to "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son."

Whitman is now universally acclaimed as the "Good Gray Poet" and for his Civil War writings, though less is known of his early years as a Long Islander, Brooklynite and self-described "Manhattanese." The exhibition presents the story of his coming of age as a poet through a unique assemblage of rare books, manuscripts, and artifacts, many never before seen, from the Whitman Collection of Susan Jaffe Tane; the world's most important archives of Whitman materials, including the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library; private family collections of the descendants of Whitman's friends and associates, including one of the original printers of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*; and forgotten treasures from such repositories as Bryn Mawr College's Special Collections and the Brooklyn College Library.

A celebration of Whitman's enduring relationship with the metropolis that sired and inspired him, the exhibition is curated by collector Ms. Tane and Dr. Karen Karbiener, NYU professor and internationally recognized Whitman scholar.

Highlights:

--every American edition of *Leaves of Grass* published during Whitman's lifetime, including three copies of America's "declaration of cultural independence," the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

--Whitman's annotated copies of *The Complete Works of Robert Burns* (1879), Shelley's *Works* (1847), Homer's *Iliad* (1857), and several other books from his personal library

--Manuscripts including a never-before-exhibited early iteration of the poem "So Long!", Whitman's technical specifications for building a Brooklyn house, his notes towards a self-help manual on "Manly Training", and his eighteen-page fair copy of the poem "A Carol of Harvest", the longest Whitman manuscript remaining in private hands

--correspondence to Whitman from Fred Vaughan (probably the poet's first serious love interest), Whitman's annotated photos and notes on Fred Gray (namesake of America's first gay men's club), the poet's notes towards the homoerotic poetic cluster "Live Oak, with Moss", and one of fifty copies of John Addington Symonds' *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), a landmark study of homosexuality

--a substantial collection of original images of the poet, including photographs by Mathew Brady and Thomas Eakins, a stereocard by Jeremiah Gurney, and an oil portrait of Whitman in his prime by fellow New Yorker Charles Hine

--Whitman's pen, cane, bronzed cast of his hand, and locks of his hair encased in exquisite Victorian rings designed by eminent New York jeweler John H. Johnston

--A collection of work by Whitman's most ardent supporters, including one of Horace Traubel's notebooks documenting the poet's words and actions and Henry Saunders' handmade *One Hundred Whitman Portraits*

--Examples of Whitman's legacy in the book arts, including books by Thomas Mosher and the Roycroft Press and original artwork by Brian Selznick and Allen Crawford

--Ephemera including a lively array of advertisements both by and about Whitman, such as an oversized broadside advertising *Leaves of Grass* designed by the poet himself and examples of Whitman's commercial appearance on cigar boxes, food labels, album art, and clothing catalogues

--Interactive features of the exhibition allow visitors to experience Whitman and his New York in 3-D using modern stereograph technology, to take a virtual walk with Walt down Broadway circa 1850, and examine a colorful, surprising array of Whitman-related ephemera.

Website:

www.poetofthebody.org

Catalog and commemorative medallion:

Poet of the Body: New York's Walt Whitman (Grolier Club, 2019), a book based on the exhibition with text by Ms. Tane and Dr. Karbiener, is available at the Club and from Oak Knoll Books after the exhibition opening. For information, please contact Grolier Club Administrative Assistant Maev Brennan: mbrennan@grolierclub.org

A commemorative three and one-half inch bronze medallion honoring Whitman's 200th birthday has been specially commissioned from sculptor Marc Mellon as part of the exhibition, and will be available beginning May 15. To order, please contact Ms. Brennan at the Club.

Events:

Exhibition Tours: May 15, 12-1pm; May 22, 11-12pm; May 30, 6:30-7:30pm. Curators Susan Tane and Karen Karbiener will lead guided tours of the exhibition.

Open to the public free of charge. No reservations required.

Wednesday, May 22, 12-1pm. "Printing Walt Whitman's Faces." Lecture by Barbara Henry, Harsimus Press

Thursday, May 30, 5:30-6:30pm. "This is the city, and I am one of the citizens': Walt Whitman, the Body, and the City". Lecture by Ed Folsom, University of Iowa

Tuesday, June 18, 12-1pm. "I Sing the Exhibition Digital." Presentation by Jesse Merandy and the Bard Graduate Center's Digital Media Lab

Thursday, June 20, 5:30-6:30pm. "A Year in the Basement with Walt Whitman." Presentation by Allen Crawford, illustrator

Tuesday, July 23, 5:30-6:30pm. Whitman's *Live Oak, with Moss*. Multimedia presentation by Brian Selznick and Karen Karbiener

Whitman Symposium: A full day Whitman Symposium will take place at the Grolier Club on Saturday, June 1 (9am – 5pm). Twelve internationally acclaimed scholars will deliver presentations on the theme of "Walt Whitman and New York," including one PechaKucha session; the Dessoff Choirs will perform a selection of Whitman song settings; and Whitman scholars Betsy Erkkila and Kenneth Price will deliver keynote lectures. Admission is free, but please reserve your seat by contacting Ms. Brennan at the Grolier Club: mbrennan@grolierclub.org

Whitman 2019 Consortium

Ms. Tane and Dr. Karbiener are also Co-Directors of the Whitman 2019 Consortium, a global collective of more than 70 institutions, organizations, venues and individuals celebrating Whitman's 200th birthday next year. For more information on events, please visit the Grolier Club and other participating venues for a print copy of the Whitman 2019 Consortium publication and schedule. An online version of the schedule is available:

<http://waltwhitmaninitiative.org/whitman-2019-consortium/>