

2024 O, Miami Poetry Festival Project
A Collaboration between Coral Gables Art in Public Places and
Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami
Drafted by Tola Porter, Ph.D., Lowe Art Museum

Project Title: Dear Human

Describe your project idea:

Public art can enhance our surroundings and activate our imaginations with its beautiful or challenging forms. The art in our city of Coral Gables, including the art on the campus of the University of Miami, was put there to create these beneficial outcomes. However, some public art can be hard to decipher by non-experts, or it becomes familiar and fades into the background of our everyday lives. In these circumstances public arts' ability to beneficially impact people, the very reason it was installed in the first place, declines. But what if these inanimate, yet manmade, artworks could engage with us through our gift of language?

Dear Human is a project that envisions a dialogue between people and public art through poetry. This project revives the beneficial impact of public art by prompting people to think with the sculpture, mural, or wall relief, long enough to turn the interaction into a poem, thereby activating the artwork. Working collaboratively, Coral Gables Art in Public Places and the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami imagine a project in which everyday citizens, students, and visitors use the public artworks throughout Coral Gables and the University of Miami campus as springboards to write a poem. We seek guidance from O, Miami on which poetic form would work best. Perhaps haiku with its brevity and structure, or an ekphrastic poem in which we limit the length? Whatever the form, we have developed two prompts to inspire passersby that will "come from" over 50 public artworks in the city and campus:

Prompt # 1 - May I inspire you?

Dear Human, I am here for you. I am your public artwork. Look at me and let my form inspire you to craft a poem.

Prompt # 2 - Help me speak.

Dear Human, I have no voice beyond my form. Lend me your language and craft a poem from my perspective.

These prompts will be available on marketing materials in digital and hard copy (exact materials tbd), through a QR code placed on physical signage next to the selected public artworks, and on a website created especially for this project which will also contain a map of public art locations. The writer may choose to respond to either or both prompts. Once the writer has drafted their poem, they email it to a designated email address for review by O, Miami staff and project partners. Vetted poems will be posted to the online platform and shown (in a method tbd) next to the artwork that inspired them. Thus, a dialogue is created between people and public art through poetry, offering agency to inanimate artworks and building relationships between the public and their public art through poetry. Additionally, public signage adjacent to the public art with rotating displays of poems will draw interest from all passersby, whether they write a poem or themselves or just enjoy those written by others.

How is it surprising?

Dear Human is a surprising idea because of the reciprocal relationship it aspires to develop between people and public art (often the very same public art they walk by every day). In this project, as with the talking statues of Rome, inanimate public art is used as a voice through which people can share a variety of human emotions and experiences in poetic form. When inanimate objects come to life and join us in our daily lives, our cognitive awareness expands, empathy develops, and our focus orients outward to our physical surroundings, giving us the sense that our environment is on our side. People will be puzzled, confused, delighted, and finally convinced to answer the artwork’s Dear Human call. These prompts make precious our gift of language, amplifying poetry’s capacity to capture nuances of experience in the magical city of Coral Gables.

Project plan:

- October, identify list of public artworks, select poetic format, and begin developing digital map.
- October-November, develop the website/online platform and make final drafts of language, prompts, and background info needed for the site.
- November-December, determine the real-world public art-adjacent method for showcasing poems.
- January-February, finalize online platform content and troubleshoot.
- January-March, fabricate and test real-world visual displays. Develop marketing look, language, materials, and outreach plan.
- March, install real-world displays and test.
- In April craft 4 events to occur across the month – one per week.
 - Week of April 1, launch with public event in Coral Gables – invite public to participate in the program and watch as poems begin to populate to online and real-world platforms
 - Week of April 8, public event on the University of Miami campus headquartered at the Lowe Art Museum
 - Week of April 15, the University of Miami public event featuring specially invited groups onto the campus, including O, Miami Education students and teachers.
 - Week of April 22, public event in Coral Gables to close the program

Number of people we hope to reach:

	Acreage	Population	Public artworks
City of Coral Gables	23,878	48,375	23
University of Miami Coral Gables Campus	239	37,563 (Faculty: 3,328, staff: 14,773, students: 19,402)	30
		85,938	53

Who are you?

City of Coral Gables Art in Public Places

- Catherine Cathers, Arts and Culture Specialist, Historical Resources and Cultural Arts. With a vibrant background of arts programming, administration, curation and creation, Cathers’ love of the arts has led her from exhibiting works of her own to administration of generously funded public art commissions and installations. Ms. Cathers is the City of Coral Gables’ Arts & Culture Specialist, administering the City’s annual Cultural Grant and Art in Public Places programs. Her position with the City includes working closely with community stakeholders including private developers seeking to incorporate public art within their projects. Ms. Cathers believes in the power of art to transform, educate, and indulge our senses while enriching our community.

The Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami

- Mark Osterman, Ed.D., Assistant Director for Technology and Engagement
With expertise as a technologist, administrator, artist, and researcher, Dr. Osterman brings a unique combination of skills and perspectives to museums. He employs technology for innovative solutions and engagement opportunities, bringing a creative and aesthetic sensibility to curatorial decisions and exhibition design, fostering immersive and impactful experiences through programming, and offering strategic planning for managing resources to effectively ensure a museum's relevancy and sustainability.
- Tola Porter, Ph.D., Museum Educator for Academic and Public Programs
Dr. Porter is an art historian and museum educator who leads the development of public and academic programs at the Lowe Art Museum, including artist talks, lectures, symposia, panel discussions, workshops, and a variety of gallery programs to enhance student, faculty, and community engagement. A specialist in modern sculpture, her dissertation, “Modernism as Public Art: Awakening Social Agency in Abstract Public Sculpture, 1950-1980,” evaluates the function and resonance of non-figurative public sculpture from the mid-to-late twentieth century. Her work is in league with the global reassessment of monuments and the resulting critical engagement with public symbols.

Additional materials:

- <https://www.coralgables.com/department/historical-resources-cultural-arts/art-public-places>
- <https://geomuse.as.miami.edu/index.php>
- Bloomberg Connect, Lowe Art Museum, Art Outdoors!