



Media Announcement

MTA Arts & Design Unveils Photographic and Poetic Reflections on Place and Community as Part of 40th-Anniversary Programming

Photography Lightbox Activations at Grand Central Madison and 42 St-Bryant Park

Poetry in Motion Selections Now on View



#seen (2025) © Lionel Cruet, NYCT 42 St-Bryant Park. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design. Photo: Jason Mandella.

(NEW YORK, NY — November 18, 2025) MTA Arts & Design has unveiled new installations for its Photography and Poetry in Motion programs. At Grand Central Madison and 42 St-Bryant Park subway station, two lens-based exhibitions reflect on distinct New York communities. Two new poems are now on display across the MTA system, appearing in print and on digital screens in subway cars and platforms, commuter rail trains, and Metro-North Railroad and Long Island Rail Road stations, including Grand Central Terminal and Grand Central Madison. Selected in collaboration with the Poetry Society of America, the poems are thoughtfully paired with artworks from the MTA Arts & Design collection, creating a layered experience of language and visual art for riders.

“Since 1985, MTA Arts & Design has delivered innovative arts programming throughout the transit system,” said **Tina Vaz, Director, MTA Arts & Design**. “The Photography program offers a unique canvas for visual storytelling, while *Poetry in Motion*, recognized as one of the most popular public literary programs in American history, connects with riders in a way that is distinct among Arts & Design’s offerings. These new photographic meditations and evocative poems are a special and essential part of our year-long anniversary celebration.”

New Photography Projects

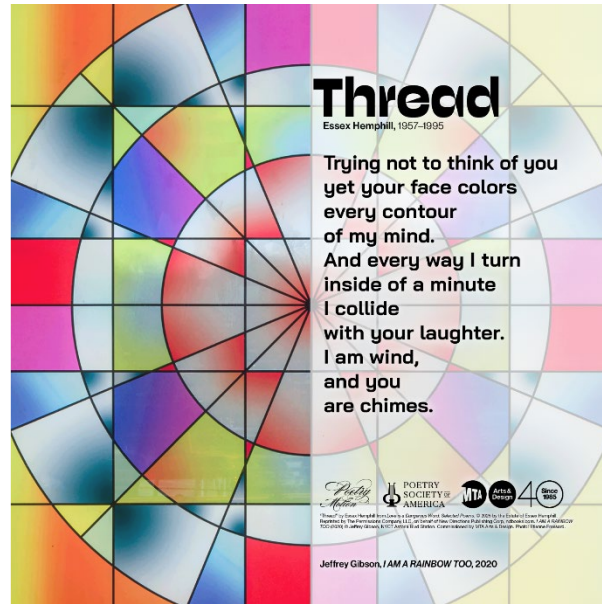
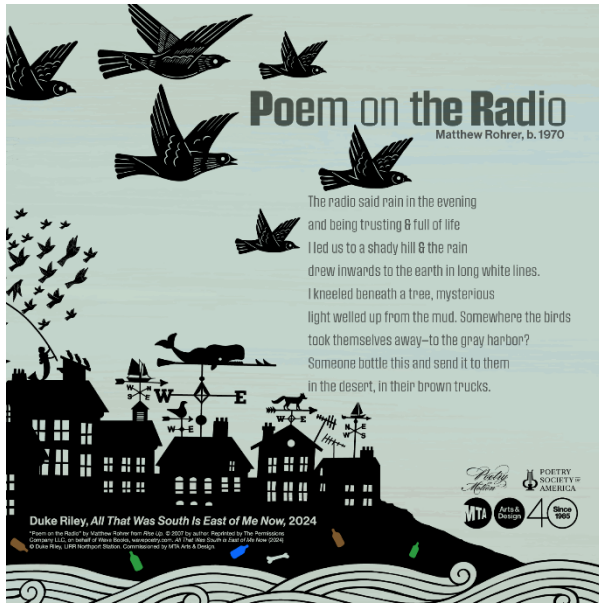
Set in lightboxes at the 42 St-Bryant Park station, **Lionel Cruet's** photographic installation *#seen* presents a series of highly saturated, tinted images that recede toward a vanishing point. The title references digital culture—specifically the moment when a message or image is marked as “seen”—and explores how images are mediated, circulated, and perceived. The installation begins with a black-and-white photograph of the artist's hand holding a shell found along the Puerto Rican shoreline. As the sequence progresses, the images shrink in scale and incorporate public domain visuals from NASA and NOAA archives, including satellite imagery and oceanic heat maps. This shift from personal relationship with the environment to scientific documentation of larger climate trends invites viewers to contend with their own understanding of tropical environments. The result is a meditation on perception, environment, and the evolving role of photography in shaping how we think about place. The exhibition will remain on view through March 2026.



Beach Umbrellas/Shore Front Parkway (2025) © Roe Ethridge, LIRR Grand Central Madison. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design. Photo: Jason Mandella.

In the Grand Central Madison Concourse, **Roe Ethridge's** photographs from his *Shore Front Parkway* and *Beach Umbrella* series are presented in ten large-scale SEG fabric lightbox displays. All images were taken at Rockaway Beach where the artist lives and works. The *Beach Umbrella* series features photographs captured on four consecutive Mondays in July and August of 2020, shortly after the beaches reopened during the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic. Broken umbrellas in vivid colors appear as geometric abstractions, juxtaposed with familiar beach-day elements: a model with a body board, a vision of flipflops in the sand, and sunflowers. The artist described the objects as “joyful in an archaeological way, like discovering the remains of a party or ritual celebration” after a period spent in isolation. The five images are paired with selections from *Shore Front Parkway*, which trace the seasonal shift from the waning of summer into the spectral tones of autumn. The photographs are unified by their exploration of light — both natural and artificial — including a captured rainbow, sun rays in a still life, a sunny-side-up egg, an artificial sunset backdrop, and glowing LED globe lights. Composed in the polished style of commercial editorial photography, the works blend digital manipulation and staged portraiture to create images that are at once surreal and beautiful. The exhibition will remain on view through March 2026.

New Poetry in Motion Selections



Left: "Poem on the Radio" by Matthew Rohrer from *Rise Up*. © 2007 by author. Reprinted by The Permissions Company LLC, on behalf of Wave Books, wavepoetry.com. *All That Was South Is East of Me Now* (2024) © Duke Riley, LIRR Northport Station. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design.

Right: "Thread" by Essex Hemphill from *Love is a Dangerous Word: Selected Poems*. © 2025 by the Estate of Essex Hemphill. Reprinted by The Permissions Company LLC, on behalf of New Directions Publishing Corp, ndbooks.com. *I AM A RAINBOW TOO* (2020) © Jeffrey Gibson, NYCT Astoria Blvd Station. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design. Photo: Etienne Frossard.

Essex Hemphill's "Thread" is paired with a detail from **Jeffrey Gibson's** *I AM A RAINBOW TOO* (2020), a polychromatic glass installation at NYCT Astoria Blvd Station. Gibson's work draws upon the rainbow of colors that make up the light spectrum, honoring and reflecting the vibrant diversity of backgrounds and cultures within the Astoria community. The emotional resonance and lyrical intimacy of Hemphill's poem complement Gibson's exploration of community and belonging.

Following is the text of "Thread":

Trying not to think of you
yet your face colors
every contour
of my mind.
And every way I turn
inside of a minute
I collide
with your laughter.
I am wind,
and you
are chimes.

Matthew Rohrer's "Poem on the Radio" is paired with imagery from *All That Was South Is East of Me Now* (2024), a glass and metal artwork by **Duke Riley** at LIRR Northport Station. Riley's work, inspired by maritime history and urban waterways, complements Rohrer's meditative, nature-infused verse.

"We are delighted to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Arts & Design, our longtime partners on Poetry in Motion," said **Matt Brogan, Executive Director of the Poetry Society of America**. These new poems by Essex Hemphill and Matthew Rohrer are themselves acts of celebration, of the ways people come together and illuminate each other's lives. "Mysterious light welled up," writes Rohrer, and Hemphill responds, "your face colors every contour of my mind."

Following is the text of "Poem on the Radio":

The radio said rain in the evening
and being trusting & full of life
I led us to a shady hill & the rain
drew inwards to the earth in long white lines.
I kneeled beneath a tree, mysterious
light welled up from the mud. Somewhere the birds
took themselves away—to the gray harbor?
Someone bottle this and send it to them
in the desert, in their brown trucks.

About the Artists

Lionel Cruet (b. 1989, San Juan, PR) currently lives and works in both New York City and San Juan. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from La Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño in Puerto Rico, a Master of Fine Arts in Digital Interdisciplinary Art Practice from CUNY - The City College of New York, and a Master of Education from the College of Saint Rose. In 2013, he was a recipient of the Juan Downey Audiovisual Award at the 11th Media Arts Biennale at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile. In 2018, he was a Fellow at the Socrates Sculpture Park in New York City and a Fellow from The Laundromat Project, an organization that focuses on the arts and social engagement in New York City. In 2021, he continued his research on art projects during a residency at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Quito, Ecuador.

Roe Ethridge (b. 1969, Miami, FL) takes equally from his work as a commercial photographer, and artist. Blurring the lines that separate the two, Ethridge creates images that are simultaneously generic and intimate, often treading between humor and cynicism. Functioning in tandem, these motivations coalesce into an ongoing investigation into the mechanics of photographs, and their ability to both retreat into the personal, and expand to relay collective experiences.

In early 2025, Andrew Kreps Gallery presented Shore Front Parkway, Roe Ethridge's eleventh exhibition with the gallery, accompanied by a new catalog of the same title. In 2024, 10 Corso Como, Milan presented a survey exhibition of his work titled Happy Birthday Louise Parker, curated by Alessandro Rabottini. In 2023, his work was the subject of the solo show AMERICAN POLYCHRONIC, presented in collaboration with Gagosian in New York, to coincide with the publication of AMERICAN POLYCHRONIC, the most comprehensive monograph on Ethridge's work to date. In 2022, his work was featured in Objects of Desire: Photography and the Language of Advertising, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and in 2020 he participated in the Henie Onstad Triennial for Photography and New Media, Høvikodden, Norway. From 2016 to 2017, the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati hosted the first comprehensive survey of Ethridge's work in the United States, titled Roe Ethridge: Nearest Neighbor. Other solo exhibitions include Shelter Island at Foam, Amsterdam, 2016, and Roe Ethridge, curated by Anne Pontégnie, at Le Consortium, Dijon, France, 2012, which traveled to Museum Leuven, Belgium later that year.

Jeffrey Gibson (American b. 1972) is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and convener celebrated for his work in painting, installation, video, and performance. For over two decades, he has examined how language, pattern, and music construct meaning, synthesizing Indigenous and Western traditions through vibrant color, complex patterning, and layered sound. A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and of Cherokee descent, Gibson represented the U.S. at the 2024 Venice Biennale with his acclaimed exhibition *the space in which to place me*, which made its U.S. debut at The Broad in Los Angeles in May 2025. In June 2025 he unveiled a site-specific installation at Kunsthaus Zurich. Gibson was selected for the Metropolitan Museum's 2025 Genesis Facade Commission and will present new work for the historic exterior this September. His work is held in major collections including MoMA, the Whitney, and the National Gallery of Art. He lives in New York's Hudson Valley and is artist-in-residence at Bard College.

Duke Riley received his BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and his MFA from Pratt Institute. Riley is fascinated by maritime history and events around urban waterways. His signature style interweaves historical and contemporary events with elements of folklore and myth to create allegorical histories. His re-imagined narratives comment on a range of issues from the cultural impact of over development and environmental destruction of waterfront communities to contradictions within political ideologies and the role of the artist in society. His public installations include three artworks commissioned by MTA Arts & Design: NYCT Beach 98 St Station, LIRR Northport Station, and a 2010 art card.

About the Poets

Essex Hemphill (1957–1995) was born in Chicago and raised in Washington, D.C. He was a member of the poetry collective Cinque, a frequent collaborator with the Emmy award-winning filmmaker Marlon Riggs, and the editor of the Lambda Literary Award-winning anthology *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men* (1991). His collection *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry* (1992) won the National Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual New Author Award. His selected poems, *Love Is a Dangerous Word*, edited by John Keene and Robert F. Reid-Pharr, was published by New Directions in 2025.

Matthew Rohrer (b. 1970) is the author of several books of poetry including *Army of Giants* (2024); *The Others* (2017), which was the winner of the 2017 Believer Book Award; *Surrounded by Friends* (2015); *Destroyer and Preserver* (2011); *Rise Up* (2007); and *A Green Light* (2004), which was shortlisted for the 2005 Griffin Poetry Prize. He is also co-author, with Joshua Beckman, of *Nice Hat. Thanks.* and the audio CD *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*. He has appeared on NPR's *All Things Considered* and *The Next Big Thing*. His first book, *A Hummock in the Malookas* was selected for the National Poetry Series by Mary Oliver in 1994. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and teaches at NYU.

About Photography

The Photography program showcases the work of primarily New York-based photographers. Bright, vivid photographs enliven subway passageways and the underground environment. Large scale lightboxes are illuminated from within, and the images are printed on transparency film and fabric by local providers. Exhibitions rotate periodically and feature a wide range of photographic work through research and curatorial practice.

To learn more about this MTA Arts & Design program, visit <https://www.mta.info/agency/arts-design/photography>.

About Poetry in Motion

Launched in 1992, *Poetry in Motion* has featured more than 200 poems or excerpts throughout the

MTA system. After a brief hiatus from 2008 through 2011, the program returned in March 2012 and continues to bring poetry to millions of riders each day.

To learn more about this MTA Arts & Design program, visit <https://new.mta.info/agency/arts-design/poetry-in-motion>.

To learn more about the Poetry Society of America, visit <https://poetrysociety.org/>.

About MTA Arts & Design

Since 1985, MTA Arts & Design has delivered innovative arts programming throughout New York's transit system. Over four decades Arts & Design has built a collection of award-winning art that reflects the diversity of the New York City region and makes travel a more engaging experience for millions of riders every day. The program has commissioned more than 400 permanent artworks and activated subway and railroad stations, train cars, and bus depots with Music Under New York performances, Poetry in Motion, posters, photography, digital art, and special events.

PRESS CONTACT

MTA Press Office
(212) 878-7440
arts@mtahq.org

CONNECT

[mta.info/art](https://new.mta.info/art)
Instagram: @mtaartsdesign