# A Room of One’s Own

What’s next for the New York City AIDS Memorial?

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The engraved poemCourtesy of NYC AIDS Memorial/Max Flatow Photograpy

On a chilly but sunny World AIDS Day 2016, December 1, members of theHIV community celebrated the public dedication of the New York City AIDS Memorial. Located on the corner of a triangular park in Greenwich Village, across from what used to be St. Vincent’s Hospital—ground zero of the early epidemic—the structure consists of a steel canopy over two stone benches. A central fountain is encircled by granite stones engraved with text from Walt Whitman’s 1855 poem “Song of Myself.”

“We didn’t want the memorial to be a sculpture that you just walked by,” explains Christopher Tepper, who cofounded the project with Paul Kelterborn. “We wanted to create a space, a very nice room that invites you to contemplate and reflect.”

But the physical structure is only part of the memorial. Phase 2 consists of developing educational opportunities and arts programming. Noting that over 100,000 New Yorkers have died of AIDS-related illness, Tepper hopes the memorial will “get people to engage and to create a dialogue—an intergenerational dialogue—about what happened and why and what we can learn from it.”

Memorial cofounder Paul Kelterborn, chairman Keith Fox, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman and cofounder Christopher TepperCourtesy of NYC AIDS Memorial/Max Flatow Photograpy

The memorial organization is currently exploring ways to create historical content and first-person narratives that visitors can access on their smartphones. Ideally, people will also be able to share and upload stories and photos of friends and loved ones lost to the virus. Whether they were activists, professional caregivers or regular citizens, Tepper says, “we want to document and record the history of what it was like to live through the epidemic.”

To read POZ’s complete Q&A with Tepper, including several new images of the memorial, click here.

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