In Seattle, a Giant X Marks the AIDS Memorial Spot

Check out The AMP: AIDS Memorial Pathway in Seattle—and learn why there's a huge X sculpture made of speakers! [SLIDESHOW]

July 2, 2021 By Trent Straube

Amid a record-breaking heat wave, members of Washington state's HIV community gathered outside for the dedication of The AMP: AIDS Memorial Pathway. Located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, in Cal Anderson Park and the adjacent plaza, the $2.8 million AMP consists of four installations by regional artists and commemorates those living with and lost to HIV/AIDS.

The artists, local politicians and AMP committee members braved the heat to speak at the dedication. You can watch the entire ceremony in the above video. As several people noted, when lifesaving antiretroviral HIV treatment became available in 1996, records from King County, which includes Seattle, showed that 5,111 county residents had been diagnosed with AIDS and 3,273 had died of the disease; statewide, the total loss grows to nearly 8,000 people. Many were gay men, but, as a city proclamation that was read during the dedication stated: "While AIDS affects all communities, AIDS has disproportionately affected gay men, transgender communities, people of color—particularly Black and brown communities and refugees and immigrant communities."

"Their names and stories are central to what we're trying to do," AMP steering committee member and former Seattle council member Tom Rasmussen told the crowd, explaining that the neighborhood where the AMP is located has been central to the LGBTQ community for decades.

To that end, the related website TheAMP.org offers a collection of videos and interviews with local people affected by HIV; visitors to the site are invited to share their own recollections and add to the narrative. What's more, an app allows viewers anywhere in the world to experience the memorial in 3-D augmented reality.

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by The AMP: AIDS Memorial Pathway (@theampmemorial)

“This memorial cannot be ignored,” Rasmussen said. “We wanted it to be prominent and accessible—and it is.”

Six years in the making—and being dedicated during a month that marks 40 years of AIDS—the AMP will be managed and maintained by Gay City, a local LGBTQ center. The agency makes an apt custodian on the memorial. As Gay City’s Melvin Givens told the crowd, when the LGBTQ center opened in 1995, its original tagline was “Building a Community Stronger Than HIV.” But then lifesaving combination therapy came out the next year, and the center’s focus became more about living as a community with HIV.

According to an AMP press release, and the artworks that are part of the memorial will be incorporated into Seattle’s Civic Art Collection. Below are explanations and slideshows of the four main pieces that constitute The AMP:

“andimgonnamisseverybody,” by Christopher Paul JordanCourtesy of The AMP

andimgonnamisseverybody

by Christopher Paul Jordan

“The piece,” explains an AMP press release, “is a portal into the spaces of radical gathering, hospitality, celebration and care that Black, Brown, poor, trans, queer and otherwise excluded communities have forged to take care of their own. The speakers form an X, or a positive sign on its side, engaging our connections to the ongoing AIDS crisis, our connections to those no longer with us and our ties to our communities of resilience.”

But why the music speakers? Jordan explained that during his research phase for the project, he came across an inspirational anecdote by AIDS activist Krishna Stone, who recalled that in the early days of the epidemic she was losing so many friends that she stopped attending memorial services. Instead, she chose to hit the dance floors at clubs, asking herself each time, Who am I dancing for tonight?

“We have to keep dancing, we have to keep celebrating, we have to keep remembering.” Jordan told the crowd. “This is a space for reclaiming space, for voguing and dancing.” If you were to lose a loved one, he added, wouldn’t they “expect you to keep living and expect you to refuse to be erased and refuse [to accept] racism and homophobia and transphobia and ableism? We’re here to demolish all of that. That’s what this space if for.”

Detail of “In This Way We Loved One Another,” by Storme WebberCourtesy of The AMP

In This Way We Loved One Another

by Storme Webber

“I create work that restores missing narratives of Seattle’s history,” Webber, who is also a poet and spoken-word two-spirit artist, told the crowd about her piece that is part of the Cathy Hillenbrand Community Room in the Station House Building. The AMP press release sums up her contribution as follows:

“This is a historical remediation, restoring missing narratives of working-class activists, healers, leaders, witnesses and ancestors lost to the AIDS crisis. The images and narratives presented were collected through decades of community building and more recent oral histories. HIV and AIDS continue to affect communities of color globally, most specifically Black communities. This artwork lifts up the lives of people who transformed the world through their work and struggle, and who made a path by walking through racism, homophobia, fear and structural oppression, and found joy with each other. The subjects at the center of this artwork changed lives by confronting discrimination and building communities of fellowship for activism and healing. The artwork remedies the absence of stories of women as leaders and transformative forces in the fight against HIV. The installation illuminates the triumphs of marginalized working-class community

members of color and glorifies the ways in which they found strength and vision to create safe harbors with each other.”

“We’re Already Here,” South Plaza, by CivilizationCourtesy of The AMP

We’re Already Here

by Civilization (an artist collaborative initially made up of Gabriel Stromberg, Corey Gutch and Michael Ellsworth)

“We’re Already Here commemorates the collective action that defines Seattle’s dynamic response to the AIDS crisis,” states the press release. “The work consists of three tableaus that use protest signs and their accompanying messages to evoke historic moments of public convergence. Within the timeline of the epidemic, there are countless examples of such moments. Protests, demonstrations, parades, vigils and memorials were events where diverse communities came together in alliance against the shared exigency of AIDS and HIV. These civic spectacles were crucial in breaking through the silence, apathy and ignorance that accompanied the deaths of thousands during the first decade of the epidemic. The specific artifacts referenced in We’re Already Here were sourced from actual demonstrations that took place throughout the region during the ’80s and ’90s.”

"Ribbon of Light," Station 1: Monolith, by Horatio Hung-Yan LawCourtesy of The AMP

Ribbon of Light

by Horatio Hung-Yan Law

“This is a series of three human-scale laminated glass sculptures placed along a landscaped pathway adjacent to the main trail on the north edge of Cal Anderson Park,” notes the press release. The sculptures, which are made of glass and have words etched inside them, will be installed later this summer. Law, who is also responsible for the master plan of The AMP, told the crowd, “Because of the frosted surface of the glass, the words may appear or disappear depending on the lighting conditions. These words I call ‘murmurs’ I mean to tease out some of the many different emotions connected with our experience of the AIDS pandemic. Some of us might have buried these feelings deep inside, or we might put them aside simply because we have to continue to live. But we carry them with us always. Whether we know it or not, these murmurs of love and loss, whether they are visible or hidden, make us who we are.”

Born in Hong Kong, Law lived in New York City during the early AIDS crisis and its unfathomable losses. That experience, he said, led him to envision the AIDS pandemic as a meteoric, shattering event “as if a piece of the sky has fallen to the ground and broken into large and small sculptural fragments.”

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/seattle-giant-x-marks-aids-memorial-spot-hiv-amp