

THINGS TO DO

O, Miami Poetry Festival Returns in 2024 With Crowd-Sourced Projects

In 2024, O, Miami continues its innovative approach to showcasing poetry and engaging the community.

By Caroline Val | April 1, 2024



Yucef Merhi's "Wish-a-Poem" will pop up at three public libraries in Miami-Dade during O, Miami Poetry Festival. **O, Miami photo**

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I/I took the one leading to the **O, Miami Poetry Festival.**"

It's that time of year again when Miami gears up to celebrate one of its most cherished cultural events. The festival, now in its 13th year and having been brought to the public with support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, is well-known for its innovative approach to showcasing poetry and engaging the community.

Founded in 2011, O, Miami's mission every April is to ensure that every single person in Miami-Dade County encounters a poem, uniting local poets, artists, and enthusiasts from all walks of life to engage in accessible, citywide literary expression.


"Since its founding, the organization has expanded from a singular encounter to a year-round platform of educational programming and civic publishing initiatives, all of which are guided by the belief that poetry is for everyone, and anyone can be a poet," says Allison Brainard, a representative for O, Miami.

One of the primary ways this year's festival continues to bring poetry to the community is through a series of interactive workshops, including the O, Paper Mill fellowship and workshop pieced together by local artist Ingrid Schindall. After four fellows are selected by April 1, they will create a project for the festival while learning skills that include everything from bookbinding to papermaking. They will even participate in a roundtable discussion with various Miami poets and artists to help tear down the fear of a blank page and find inspiration.

"Most projects and events are crowd-sourced, and we want people to share their creative ideas with us for this year," says Melissa Gomez, communications director for O, Miami. "This festival only happens with us collaborating with Miamians, and we're always thrilled to see an attendee or volunteer become a creative collaborator. That can be a teacher, a poet, a botanist, a librarian – anyone can submit a festival project."

In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, the festival has also expanded its virtual offerings, allowing poetry lovers from around the world to participate in the festivities from the comfort of their homes. Through livestreamed events, virtual readings, and digital workshops, O, Miami collaborators hope to continue making the festival's accessibility as fluid as possible.

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But this isn't the only way technology is being incorporated into the poetry festival's lineup, with **artist Yucef Merhi's new installation "Wish-a-Poem"** set to be displayed at three public libraries in Miami-Dade. Having won O, Miami's first \$30,000 commission for artists working to combine poetry and tech, Merhi was inspired by the literary iconography of magic lamps. As visitors rub a lamp at one library, a verse will appear on one of the screens in front of them and on the screen at the other locations, allowing three people in three different locations to co-author poems.

For anyone passing through various Miami neighborhoods, poetry lovers can also **meet a local poet at Books & Books in Coral Gables**, find pieces throughout Coconut Grove **made by students in the National English Honor Society at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart**, and even be the unsuspecting victim of poetry with **makeshift parking tickets that are crafted with a local writer's work**.

There will be plenty of events highlighting poetry as a means of civil disobedience, with events like **"Bad Poems: Poetry of Resistance, Defiance & Dissent"** at Red Rooster in Overtown discussing the power of poems and resistance, or **"Drag Poetry Slam II: Kin,"** set to highlight the intricacies of drag and queer culture during Miami Beach Pride. Each of these events hopes to look at poetry as a form of protest while enabling locals to work together and create their own small pieces of activism.

Altogether, each year's variation on O, Miami promises to highlight its traditions while experimenting with new ideas, with this year's rendition aiming to take the festival to even newer heights.

"Each festival will always be a mix of old favorites and new projects," Brainard says. "Newer projects to highlight include O, Miami's **first photobook, *Ventanitas: A Window Into Miami's Coffee Culture***, the 'Wish-a-Poem' project, and the education showcase happening in early April."

And while there's a particular emphasis on the city as the festival's focus every year, there are always some prominent outsourced guests that poetry lovers can look forward to. This year, writers Angel Nafis, author of *BlackGirl Mansion*, and Raymond Antrobus, author of *The Perseverance*, will be doing featured readings and book signings in partnership with the Bass on April 18. Nafis and Antrobus have won various literary awards and will be joined by local poets Jubi Arriola-Headley and Frances Dunbar.

As Miami prepares to welcome the O, Miami Poetry Festival once again, anticipation is running high for what promises to be a celebration of creativity, community, and the power of the written word. For seasoned poetry aficionados and curious newcomers, the O, Miami team is ready to offer something for everyone, inviting all to immerse themselves in the beauty and wonder of one of literature's greatest assets.

"O, Miami's ultimate goal is to broadcast Miami's stories and create a new shared narrative," Gomez says. "We're guided by the belief that Miami is the most poetic place in the world."

O, Miami Poetry Festival 2024. *Monday, April 1, through Tuesday, April 30, at various locations; omiami.org.*



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