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**Purchase College Design Class and White Plains BID Collaborate on
Art in Vacant Spaces Project for Third Year in a Row
Project Wins Design Educators Award**

Purchase, NY. December 12, 2017. For the third year in a row, Purchase College, SUNY's School of the Arts has collaborated with the White Plains BID (Business Improvement District) to exhibit **Art in Vacant Spaces**, an innovative art project in empty storefronts in downtown White Plains.

First launched in 2015, the project was created to improve the visual appearance of several vacant storefronts, thereby enhancing the overall ambiance and pedestrian experience in the downtown.

This year, as in the last two years, Professor Warren Lehrer worked with his Community Design class to populate the storefronts with visual poetry as part of their pro-bono work for the semester. The School of the Arts hired poet Judith Sloan to research and interview people in White Plains, and to write site-specific poems for the project that represent the hopes, desires, memories, and soul of people working and or living in White Plains, leaving room for evocative interpretations by student designers. Sloan wrote poems that would invite experimental and evocative visualizations and collaborations with student designers.

In writing the text for the fall of 2017, Sloan wanted to give voice to the fact that students and community members are living in a difficult, 'divided' country. "I wanted to reveal the things that are holding communities together including ideas around what it takes to create a community and maintain a community," says Sloan. The students in Lehrer's class visualized the poems, making many variations, using typography, image, shape, and color, then refining their solutions, and making final presentations.

This year, the project transformed three vacant storefronts on Mamaroneck Avenue, and included second floor windows for the first time. For her setting of the poem *Recipe for a*

Loving Community, Madeline Friedman designed suggestive silhouetted scenes for each of nine sets of second floor windows at 131 Mamaroneck Ave, “inviting the public to engage their imagination and enter the world of the inhabitants.” For the trilingual poem *I’m Here*, Kelly Mertz interwove the different languages into line drawings of buildings as a way to evoke the diversity and co-existence found in White Plains. Hailee Knadle’s eye-catching interpretation of *New Rhythms* celebrates the seasons of life cycling through time via evolving shapes and vibrant colors.

White Plains Mayor Thomas Roach said, “This initiative between the White Plains BID and and SUNY Purchase Community Design students showcases a creative and collaborative approach to public art in an urban setting. The work has enlivened our streetscape and created inspiring and thought-provoking messages about community and place.”

Brittany Brandwein, the Director of Events and Business Promotions for the White Plains BID and the project manager said, Collaborating with property owners, City Hall, artists, and students is the essence of the project and exemplifies the unifying message we have portrayed in the artworks. For the second year in a row, we incorporated the free downloadable app Otocast into the project that gives viewers detailed information about window designs from all three years that are currently on view.”

Warren Lehrer said, “This class enables senior graphic students to work on projects with real clients, collaborators, budgets, deadlines. But the scale of this project is especially exciting for the students. And I like that it engages students to think about poetry, and issues having to do with community and public art.”

Lehrer received a 2017 Design Educators Award for the White Plains Storefront project from Design Incubation, a national organization that fosters dialogue between design educators, and grants awards for excellence in teaching and research.

The White Plains Storefront Project was one of 5 projects the Community Design class worked on this semester. Other projects include a public art project for the Harrison Public Library, a catalogue for an exhibition of activist graphics, a poster campaign for WESPAC’s Westchester Social Forum, and campaigns for Purchase College’s Natural & Social Science symposium and lecture series.

The White Plains BID appreciates the City of White Plains for their support, and for the generous sponsorship from LANline, Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, and the Eugene & Emily Grant Faculty Incentive Fund.

Images and text of the poems and interviews with Professor Lehrer, Judith Sloan, Brittany Brandwein and/or any of the students are available upon request.

For more information, visit www.wpbid.com/art.

About Purchase College–SUNY

Purchase College, part of the State University of New York (SUNY) network of 64 universities and colleges, was founded in 1967 by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. His aspiration for Purchase was to create a dynamic campus that combined conservatory training in the visual and performing arts with programs in the liberal arts and sciences, in order to inspire an appreciation for both intellectual and artistic talents in all students. Today, Purchase College–SUNY is a community of students, faculty, and friends where open-minded engagement with the creative process leads to a lifetime of intellectual growth and professional opportunity. For more information about the College, visit www.purchase.edu.

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