



# Secret Tales Of The Cities

Words and images courtesy  
of Jessica Furseth  
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If you look closely, cities are full of poetry. **QH** contributor **Jessica Furseth** scoured the globe in search of random and obscure **poetic attractions** and found plenty to love. Here are her picks for **New York, London, San Francisco, and Seattle.**

**F**or a visitor, sights that only show up when they feel like it can be frustrating when you're on a schedule. In New York, anyone can go look at the Statue of Liberty, but if you wanted to see the larger-than-life art of Jenny Holzer at the Guggenheim, you had to be there at the right moment in 2008. That's when it was projected across the front of the museum: "*More people and new offences have sprung up beside the old ones - real, make-believe, short-lived.*" For a moment, Holzer's bold poetry prompted New Yorkers to stop in their tracks.

Temporary sights are often all the more magical; you've seen something that was only there for a brief moment in time. The permanent attractions are there for anyone, but these subtle, poetic



installations are often the purview of locals. Created by artists, they're placed not in galleries but where people might not expect to come across them, rendering them all the more powerful.

A few years back, visitors to London's Shoreditch area could briefly spot the poetic art of Robert Montgomery: "*This city is wilder than you think*

*and kinder than you think. It is a valley and you are a horse in it. It is a house and you are a child in it. Safe and warm here, in the fire of each other.*" It read, across a giant billboard.

Street poetry will often feel hard-hitting, in part, because we don't expect to find it. Last year, locals and visitors in Seattle were treated to what was





London's *Poetry on the Underground* scheme is 30 years old this year, initially launched to bring poetry to a wider audience. Shakespeare features frequently among London's Tube poems, which may well be the perfect place to contemplate the meaning of sonnets written in Early Modern English, "*Where the bee sucks, there suck I / In a cowslip's bell I lie.*"



The marquee at the corner of Turk and Larkin streets in San Francisco's Tenderloin has been called the world's largest fortune cookie because there's always something new to see there. The sign, with its rotating selection of quotes, is managed by Bill Brinnon, who works at the tire shop next to the sign. It's been going since 1958, and it's still changing every three to six weeks, depending on feedback and current events. This winter, a David Bowie quote appeared a few days after his death: "*The truth is of course that there is no journey. We are all arriving and departing all at the same time.*"

In New York, there's a fantastic piece of city poetry that you can still catch if you're quick. It's painted across the entirety of a Brooklyn parking garage, courtesy of Steve Powers. "*Euphoria is you for me.*" the garage boldly declares, in what has become known as a love letter to the borough.

Earlier this year, the garage's owner announced it will be torn down, causing an outcry among people who've come to love the upbeat poetry that you can't help but read every time you pass it. The black and white text wraps around the entire building, creating what the artist calls a "block-long poem". The garage is still standing, but don't wait too long: by the spring the building and the poem too, will be but rubble on the ground. ■

literally a rainy day project: local magician Peregrine Church adorned the city's pavements with words that can only be seen when it rains. "Rainworks" used biodegradable, water-repellent spray to stencil poems onto the concrete pavement, rendering the letters dry when it rained and hence readable.

"*Worry is a misuse of the imagination,*" declared the wet pavement, cheerily. Each poem wears off after about six weeks, but Rainworks sells kits to anyone who wants to create their own rain poetry - meaning they could pop up everywhere!

The New York City subway has been treating its passengers with random moments of poetry since 1992 when the Metropolitan Transportation Authority launched *Poetry In Motion*. First off, was an excerpt from the Walt Whitman poem - Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, "*Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt / Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd.*"

