Phoenix Rising: Xu Bing at the Cathedral

The largest gothic Cathedral in the world will soon be visited by what, it can safely be assumed, are the largest phoenixes in the world: two 6-ton, 100-foot sculptures made by Xu Bing, one of the most prominent artists in China, former Brooklyn resident, and a MacArthur Fellow. These are massive, scary-beautiful pieces of art. Sinuous and elegant, sharp-edged and scrappy; the phoenixes are myth made flesh for our times, with the flesh being metals, chemicals, industrial tools and parts, and the dream/nightmare of explosive growth. They are birds of modern China—powerful, resurgent, rough, magnificent. They are also a reminder of ancient, medieval and early modern China, of the many great dynasties that have come and gone.

The envy, admiration and concern many in the West have felt for China in the last two decades are affected by the huge and fast-paced changes—the most rapid industrialization the world has ever seen, with concomitant cultural debris before, including a bicycle flattened by a tank in Tiananmen Square and dust from the 9/11 World Trade Center construction sites in China: steel beams, hoses, shovels, hardhats, fans, wheels and gears. The artist has used charged cultural debris before, including a bicycle flattened by a tank in Tiananmen Square and dust from the 9/11 World Trade Center destruction. These birds get to the heart of the matter, using the stuff of the global economic expansion to bring attention to humanity’s brazen assertion of immortality.

Xu Bing’s early work was deeply involved with language as communication, miscommunication, obfuscation and mystery, as a medium of exchange that is sneaky, transformative and often pitiless. In A Book from the Sky (1988), he invented characters that look Chinese but correspond to no alphabet; for English speakers: one-block words made of English letters written in the style of Chinese characters. In 2012, he wrote a novella, Dean’s Meditation, in pictograms that can be read by anyone—though one critic confessed her children found it far easier to follow the story than she did.

His work during his U.S. residence also includes live installation art with animals (the Silkworm Series, a Case Study of Transference and The Net, using, respectively, silkworms, pigs, and sheep) as well as installations, like this one, that draw on the symbolic meanings of real and mythical beasts. He currently resides in Beijing, where he serves as the vice president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

The Cathedral exhibition also includes preliminary models for the phoenixes, made of polyamide, and Background Story, a large lightbox presenting an illusion of a traditional Chinese landscape painting. Go around the back, though, and the three-dimensional artwork has a very different appearance and effect.

These phoenixes will hang from a sturdy scaffolding; Cathedral engineers were still working out the details of installation and placement when this issue went to press. Their effect on the daily life of the Cathedral—services, celebrations, and the solitary walk-throughs of visitors—will be profound, and can as yet only be imagined. What will these great birds tell us of the future, the past, the present, of human hubris and the mystery of resurrection?

The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine

Cathedral Christmas
Autumn in New York
Dean’s Meditation
Looking Ahead
Dreaming in Stone
Threads of Silver
Great Music in a Great Space
Hunger Clock
American Poet’s Corner
The Cathedral Invites You to Take a Pause
Spirit of the Season
Close Friends
Regents
Keep in Touch
Christmas at the Cathedral means familiar pleasures—the Cathedral Crafts Fair, the Christmas Concert, the Christmas Eve Festival Eucharist and New Year's Eve Concert for Peace—that are made new every year by the hard work and imagination of many people. The Crafts Fair, held on the first weekend in December, features beautiful handmade jewelry, textiles, wood and glasswork, as well as other surprises that make unique gifts and honor the tradition of handcrafts, which is an integral part of the Cathedral. For those who prefer to give a special experience, a Vertical Tour of the Cathedral is an unforgettable gift, as is Nightwatch's sleigh ride at the Cathedral—Nightwatch Medieval—for children ages 6–12 and their adult companions. Holiday concerts are a time of community and spiritual openness: rousing, solemn, exhilarating and joyous. The Cathedral is always crowded with happy faces and glad hearts at these events. Consider a ticket to the New Year's Eve Concert for Peace—or one of our many winter and spring concerts—as a stocking stuffer. Or browse the Pop-Up Shop for a tee shirt, handmade black tote bag, or environmentally-friendly water bottle.

A brief Google search will turn up many people who have written about the Cathedral's effect on their Christmases. New York novelist Emma Straub wrote an essay in 2011 for The New York Times' "Twisties" series, an essay which she describes in her blog this way: "It's all about Christmas, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and my 6th grade boyfriend, and where I'm going to be buried." The Daily News, also in 2011, quoted Cathedral staff member Wilderson Dejesus as saying that Christmas Eve is the workday he looks forward to all year. A blogger, scapingartist.com, noted in 2009, "It might have been Philippe Petit who sold me on this particular church, or the doorman who told me not to be afraid, that cathedrals are for everyone, but I thought it might be enlightening, interesting, or entertaining to attend midnight mass on Christmas Eve. The two hour, forty-five minute service was definitely every one of those things." Looking a little further back, in January of 1977, Pamela (P.L.) Travers, Jungian scholar and writer of the six Mary Poppins books, visited the Cathedral. At a special service attended by 200, she read her story The Fox at the Manger surrounded by a circle of the youngest children. It was her second reading at the Cathedral. "The Dean wants to start a tradition," she said, according to The New York Times, "but I told him none of us lasts forever."

Indeed. But as long as we're here, let's celebrate the gifts of the Christmas spirit: love, family, friends, festivity, and music.

Spring Fever

A sunny September with just the right mix of warm and cool weather got us all in the mood for new art, new music, new theater and ideas. Artist in Residence Ralph Lee's superb Taliessin set the tone, encouraging all to see beyond the everyday world. The opening of Mary Bloom's Dog Bless You, which featured the former cathedral photographer's portraits of dogs—dogs alone, dogs with dogs, dogs with people—was full of enthusiastic attendees, both human and canine. Most of the animals photographed showed up, behaving extremely well, while still very much in a partying mood. The Dean spoke of Mary's years at the Cathedral and Paul Winter played his saxophone.

Great Music in a Great Space presented a dazzling array of concerts. The season opened on September 25, with Prayers of the Animals: All Creatures Great and Small, a cappella concert against the backdrop of the Cathedral's stunning Rose Windows. Audience members commented on how much they liked this experimental placement and approach, and how marvelous the acoustics were in this fascinating location.

Mary Bloom, as noted in the latest newsletter, was a big contributor to the creation of the St. Francis Day Blessing of the Animals, and her portraits were admired by many more animals on that occasion (October 6) which was marked, as usual, with high spirits, wonderful music and dance, and the deep appreciation of what animals contribute to the earth and our own sustenance and joy.

On October 15, The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche, Bishop of New York, installed The Reverend Julia E. Whitworth as Cathedral Canon for Liturgy and the Arts. Canon Whitworth has now been at the Cathedral for almost a year, her enthusiasm and vitality have made an enormous difference. The next three days were all about music and dance:

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We’re not going to be disrespected. We have to get something out of this. And I don’t know what that even is.”

U.S. Representative from Indiana, the Honorable Merlin Stutzman (R)

“I campaigned in 2012 all over this country for months: ‘Repeal and replace Obamacare.’ That was not the mandate of the voters. If they wanted to repeal Obamacare, the 2012 election would have been probably significantly different.”

Arizona Republican U.S. Senator and former Presidential candidate, the Honorable John McCain

“Negotiating in the classic diplomatic sense assumes parties more anxious to agree than to disagree.”

Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the Truman Administration

By the end of the month of the government shutdown, Texas Senator Ted Cruz had made his way to the Iowa GOP’s annual fundraising dinner in Des Moines. There he explained to an audience of 6000 that his key role in the partial shutdown had been a success because he had “got people talking,” as he asserted.

One of the things we accomplished in the fight over Obamacare is we elevated the national debate over what a disaster, what a train wreck, how much Obamacare is hurting millions of Americans across this country.

Economists at Standard & Poor’s estimate the total cost of the shutdown may total as much as 24 billion dollars. The collateral damage includes lost government services, non-government spending. Add in the loss in U.S. economic prestige every time a shutdown may total as much as 24 billion dollars. The collateral damage includes lost government services, non-government spending. Add in the loss in U.S. economic prestige every time a shutdown had been a success because he had “got people talking,” as he asserted.

There was no golden age in Washington when people were more high-minded than they are today. But 40 years ago, the rules and organizing framework of politics made it easier for the two parties to work together. Since then, a series of changes has led to the narrowing of American politics. Redistricting has created safe seats so that, for most House members, their only concern is a challenge from the right (for Republicans) and the left (for Democrats).

Bill Schneider, a professor of public and international affairs at George Mason University, wrote last July in Reuters about the upheaval in Egypt. Only last year, Mohamed Morsi was Egypt’s first freely elected president, actually garnering 51.7 percent of the vote—slightly more than the percentage by which President Obama won reelection last year. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had been banned and persecuted for some 60 years, emerged as the party in power. And Morsi would be overthrown despite having been democratically elected. Why? Schneider explained: “Egypt is the only example where a person who changed the constitution and removed the president from power after an election has been elected to the presidency.”

The Morsi government may have been elected, but there are other requirements for a democracy. A democratic government has to guarantee minority rights. It has to accept the opposition as legitimate. It has to be willing to abide by the rules. And the truest test of a democracy: the government has to give up power if it is defeated at the polls.

I left the Cairo airport just as the so-called Arab Spring was beginning. I had met people involved in tourism who had jobs and who had assumed that the Mubarak family was another political franchise. They expected stability and hoped their lives would continue to improve. But they either misread or simply could not see the many people around them—lots of young adults with advanced degrees and no jobs—who were ready to demand change and take their demands to the street.

In the midst of the vitriol about healthcare the focus zeroed in on the problems with websites and rollouts, and seemed to ignore or forget the underlying need to address the costs to all of us when people do not have coverage. Do we refuse to see the problems or simply create crises rather than work to fix them? Barbie Ruth used to say, “Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.” Are we moving forward?

Jason Pontin is the Editor in Chief and Publisher of MIT Technology Review. That school is revered for its prowess in things technical. On October 24 one year ago, Pontin wrote an article titled, “We Can’t Solve Big Problems!”

It’s not true that we can’t solve big problems through technology; we can. We must. But all these elements must be present: political will, the public care to solve a problem, our institutions must support its solution, it must really be a technological problem, and we must understand it.

Pontin tells the story about the Apollo program. He uses it as a metaphor for the capacity of technology to solve big problems. Pontin concedes that the Apollo program is not reproducible as a model—“This is not 1961, there is no galvanizing historical context akin to the Cold War, no likely politician who can harness the danger and dangerous, no body of engineers who yean for the production regenerative they had experienced in the military, and no popular faith in a science-fictional mythology such as exploring the solar system.” Pontin muses that perhaps “going to the moon was easy…It was only three days away.”

But more importantly, he acknowledges that we certainly do not lack for challenges, which he illustrates: A billion people want electricity, millions are without clean water, the climate is changing, manufacturing is inefficient, traffic snarls cities, education is a luxury, and dementia or cancer will strike almost all of us if we live long enough.

The good news he presents is that there are “indefatigable technologists who refuse to give up trying to solve” the big problems of our time. He created in that article a “special package of stories” to introduce them to us.

Nelson Mandela is likewise indefatigable. “I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to fail. I have made mistakes along the way. But I have discovered the secret that appeared after a great climb, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.”

And Mandela’s persistence reminded me of that long-ago walk so eloquently depicted by Phillips Brooks in “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”

How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given; So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of His heaven. Such conversations, wrought in humble and selfless commitment, challenge us not to linger with the gifts of freedom and responsibility entrusted to us.

Looking Ahead

Theresa Thomason, Forces of Nature Dance Theatre and special guests to be announced.

The annual Christmas Concert, December 14, will take place in the Great Crossing and will feature the combined Cathedral Choristers and Halleluiah a cappella with soloists. Ottovino Rocca’s delightful “Lead us to the Nativity” will be the centerpiece of this festive concert, together with Renaissance motets. There will also be traditional Christmas carols, with the audience invited to join in. While you’re here, take a look at the Peace Tree, decorated by Cathedral School students.

For those who you don’t enjoy fighting the crowds in Times Square, but want to be part of a larger community on the last night of the year; the New Year’s Eve Concert for Peace is an inspiring event. Kelt Trinité will conduct, joined by James Piltman, soprano and John Moore, baritone in a concert featuring Handel, Haydn, Mozart and the spirituals of Moses Hogan. Cathedral Artist in Residence Judy Collins makes a special appearance. Concertgoers leave with the exquisite music still echoing in their thoughts, feel a little more hopeful about our beautiful and troubled world. Great Music in Great Space will present concerts throughout the winter and spring. Check the box on page 7 and the calendar for more details.

It will take some weeks to complete, but by January 30th, Chinese artist Xu Bing’s amazing 6-ton phoebines, celebrating the raw power of modern industrial society and its perhaps quixotic desire for immortality, will be hanging in the Cathedral (see article). Come look at these mighty and fiercebird animals, guaranteed to be unlike any you have ever seen, in art or nature.
suggested contribution” events may be purchased directly from the Cathedral’s website, stjohndivine.org, or by calling (866) 811-4111.

Your contributions make it possible for the Cathedral to offer the many programs listed below. Please fill out the enclosed envelope.

Please visit the Cathedral’s website, stjohndivine.org or call the Visitor Center (212) 316-5450 for updates and additional event and tour information.

Don’t forget to become a fan of the Cathedral on Facebook, where previews of events are listed and the adventures of resident peacocks Phil, Jim, and Harry can be followed in detail at www.facebook.com/stjohndivine.

Please visit the Cathedral’s website, stjohndivine.org or call (212) 316-5450 for updates and additional event and tour information.

The Great Organ: It’s Sunday

The Great Organ: Midday Monday

Cathedral organists provide a 30-minute break for mind, body and spirit at 1:00 pm with an entertaining and informative demonstration of the Cathedral’s unparalleled Great Organ.

The Great Organ: It’s Sunday

The Great Organ. It’s Sunday invites established and emerging organists from across the U.S. and around the world to take their turn at the Great Organ and present a free 6:15 pm concert.

PUBLIC EDUCATION & VISITOR SERVICES

PUBLIC EDUCATION & VISITOR SERVICES OFFERS CATHEDRAL HIGHLIGHTS, Vertical, and Spotlight Tours. All tours meet for registration at the Visitor Center inside the Cathedral entrance, at 112th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Highlights Tours: $6 per person, $5 per student/senior. Vertical Tours: $15 per person, $12 per student/ senior. Spotlight Tours: $10 per person, $8 per student/senior.

Highlights Tours

Mondays, 11 am–Noon & 2–3 pm; Tuesdays–Saturdays, 11 am–Noon & 1 pm–2 pm; Select Sundays 1 pm–2 pm

Explore the many highlights of the Cathedral’s history, architecture, and artwork, from the Great Bronze Doors to the seven Chapels of the Tongues. Learn about the Cathedral’s services, events, and programs that welcome and inspire visitors from around the world. $6 per person, $5 per student/ senior. No prior reservation necessary. Meet at Visitor Center.

Vertical Tours

Wednesdays, Noon–1 pm; Fridays, Noon–1 pm; Saturdays, Noon–1 pm & 2 pm–3 pm

On this adventurous, “behind-the-scenes” tour, climb more than 124 feet through spiral staircases to the top of the largest cathedral. Learn stories through stained glass windows and sculpture and study the grand architecture of the Cathedral while standing on a buttress. The tour culminates on the roof with a wonderful view of Manhattan. $15 per person, $12 per student/ senior. Space is limited to 20 people 12 years of age and older, and reservations are recommended. For reservations, visit the Cathedral website or call (866) 811-4111. Bring a flashlight. Meet at Visitor Center.

Textile Treasures

Fridays, December 13, January 17, and February 28, 2 pm–4 pm

Explore the Cathedral’s magnificent art collection with a special focus on textiles! This unique opportunity includes a behind-the-scenes tour of the Cathedral’s world-renowned Textile Conservation Lab, which conserves tapestries, needlepoint, upholstery, costumes, and other textiles. Particular attention will be paid to the Barbieris collection of the Life of Christ tapestries, given before there was even a cathedral to display them in, and the Acts of the Apostles tapestries, based on cartoons by Raphael. $20 per person, $15 per student/senior.

Space is limited to 20 people 12 years of age and older. For a schedule of tours and reservations, visit the Cathedral’s website or call (866) 811-4111. Meet at Visitor Center.

Winter Birthday Parties

Saturdays & Sundays, by availability

Celebrate your child’s birthday with a two-hour party in the Medieval Arts Workshop, where children sculpt gargoyles, weave, make brass rubbings, carve a block of limestone, and much more! For children ages 5 & up. Call the Public Education & Visitor Services Department at (212) 932-7347 for more information and reservations.

NIGHTWATCH

The Nightwatch program has been updated and expanded with three exciting and innovative offerings: Nightwatch Crossroads, Nightwatch Medieval and Nightwatch Dusk & Dawn. For more information visit stjohndivine.org or contact (212) 316-5819 / nightwatch@stjohndivine.org.

ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN TRUST (A.C.T.)

To learn about the many nurturing year-round programs for young people offered by A.C.T., please call (212) 316-7530 or visit www.actprograms.org.

ACT Day Camps

ACT offers kids and families new friends and a place to enjoy their days away from school and home. Join us for a fascinating and fun time at a variety of day camps! Registration is on a first-come first-served basis. Enrollment is limited.

Children’s Quest Fund

Help us to invite children from many countries, religions and economic levels under the shadow of the beloved Cathedral. While any amount will help, $1,000 enables a child from a low-income family to participate in a premier summer camp experience. Please send donations to the Cathedral, designated A.C.T.’s Children’s Quest Fund.*

Divine Children’s Party Packages


CATHEDRAL COMMUNITY CARES (CCC)

All programs meet in the CCC office, the Soup Kitchen or the Cathedral A.C.T. gym unless otherwise specified. Please visit stjohndivine.org for more information on CCC programs.

Nutrition, Health and Clothing Center

The Center hosts monthly HIV testing (in partnership with Care for the Homeless), as well as blood pressure, heart health, diabetes, and other screenings throughout the course of the year. Please visit our website for upcoming screening dates.

Contact: Lauren Phillips, Acting Director, (212) 316-7581.

Clothing Closet

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 am–2 pm

Contact: Lauren Phillips, Acting Director, (212) 316-7581

Sunday Soup Kitchen

Every Sunday in the A.C.T. gym. Breakfast, 10 am; Lunch, 12:30 pm

Contact: Thomas Perry, Food Program Manager (212) 316-7579 (T/W/Th after 12 noon)

SNAP/Food Stamps Program

In partnership with the Human Resources Administration, The Food Bank for New York City, New York City Coalition Against Hunger, and Columbia University-SHOUT! Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (by appointment only)

Pre-screening and, if eligible, help with online applications and recertification is available. Contact: Lauren Phillips, Acting Director, (212) 316-7581.

ONLINE PROGRAMS, TOURS, WORKSHOPS

The 18th annual Cathedral craft fair presents exquisite, one-of-a-kind offerings from a wide array of far-flung artisans. For hours and more information, visit cathedraltstjohn.com.

Bishop Suffragan Convention

Saturday, December 7, beginning at 8:30 am

Visit suffragan.episcopalny.org for information on the election of a bishop. Access to the Cathedral will be limited until the convention adjourns (around 4 pm).

Nightwatch Dusk and Dawn

Friday, December 13, 7 pm

Nightwatch Dusk and Dawn is designed for adults seeking time away from their busy lives for soul renewal and spiritual direction. This Friday evening of meditation, reflection and chanting will be led by The Reverend Canon Patti Welch and Ambika Cooper. Tickets are $15. To register, visit stjohndivine.org.

I Love New York: Spotlight on the City

Saturday, December 14, 10 am–3:30 pm

Celebrate New York City and its indomitable spirit with a special tour of the Cathedral. Learn how the Cathedral and City serve as places of diversity, tolerance, and human achievement. Hear stories of New York’s immigrants, investors, and artists who have helped shape the City and the world.

Visit the Fire Fighters’ Memorial and see New York City’s skyline in sculpture. Led by Senior Cathedral Guide John Simko.

Medieval Arts Children’s Workshop

Saturday, December 14, 10 am–Noon

In this signature workshop, children carve a block of limestone, create medieval illuminated letters, design gargoyles, weave, and more! Recommended for ages 4 and up. $6 per child, with accompanying adult. Meet at Visitor Center.

Cathedral Christmas Concert

Saturday, December 14, 7 pm

Ottino Rospigliosi’s delightful Laud to the Nativity will be the centerpiece of this festive concert, together with Renaissance motets, and carols with which the audience is invited to join in. Visit stjohndivine.org for tickets and more information.

Early Music New York: A Bohemian Christmas

Sunday, December 15, Sunday, December 22, and Wednesday, December 25 at 2 pm; Wednesday, December 25 at 7:30 PM

Cathedral Artists in Residence Early Music New York and Frederick Renz celebrate another joyous holiday season. Visit earlymusicny.org for tickets and more information.

Paul Winter’s 34th Annual Winter Solstice Celebration

Thursday, December 19 and Friday, December 20, 8 pm; Saturday, December 21, 2 pm and 7:30 pm


Cathedral School Peace Tree Ceremony

Friday, December 20, 11 am

Students of the Cathedral School celebrate the season with song and poetry.

A Season of Lights: A Winter Solstice Workshop

Saturday, December 21, 10 am–Noon

In this special workshop, children and their families brighten up their winter with a reading of Nancy Luenn’s Celebrations of Light, learning about winter festivities from around the world. After exploring the many sources of light in the Cathedral, including stained glass windows, families are then off to the workshop. Activities include rolling beeswax candles; cutting Chinese and Taiwanese paper lanterns; sculpting clay candidates inspired by Hindu floating lamps, Jewish menorahs, and Kwanzaa kinaras; and more! Recommended for ages 4 and up. $8 per child, with accompanying adult.
JANUARY

SELECTED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Camels and Kings: A Gift Giving Workshop
Saturday, January 4, 10 am–Noon
Children and their families gather to explore the story surrounding the famous journey of the three wise men, celebrated around the world. The two-hour workshop begins with a story and then children make gift boxes, costumes and more! Recommended for ages 4 and up. $6 per child, with accompanying adult. Meet at Visitor Center.

In the Walls: Exploring Hidden Spaces
Saturday, January 4, 10:30 am–Noon
This extended tour features "behind-the-scenes" climbs in both the eastern and western sections of St. John the Divine. In the East, descend into the unfinished crypt and then ascend Rafael Guastavino’s beautiful spiral staircase to incredible views high above the altar. The western climb presents an amazing view down the entire length of the world’s largest cathedral. Led by Senior Cathedral Guide Tom Fedorek. $20 per person, $15 per student/senior. All participants must be 12 years of age and older and reservations are recommended. Meet at Visitor Center.

The Cathedral in Context: Spotlight on Morningside Heights
Saturday, January 4, 2 pm–4 pm
The Cathedral spurred the growth of Morningside Heights into one of Manhattan’s most unique neighborhoods. Go back in time on an illustrated walking tour of the neighborhood and its historic architecture and institutions, and learn about its development into the “Acropolis of Manhattan.” The tour begins at the Cathedral and ends at Riverside Church. Led by Cathedral Guide Bill Schneberger. $15 per adult, $12 per student/senior. All participants must be 12 years of age or older and reservations are recommended. This tour requires extensive outdoor walking and use of stairs.

Signs and Symbols: Spotlight on Symbolism
Sunday, January 5, 1 pm–2:30 pm
Explore the signs and symbols in the Cathedral and discover the unique attributes that characterize saints. Learn what role animals and Greek letters play in the iconography of the paintings, glass and stone, and how these legends have inspired artists through the centuries. Led by Senior Cathedral Guide Becca Earley.

Nightwatch Crossroads: Christian
Friday, January 10, 6 pm
This Friday evening and overnight experience for high schoolers and their chaperones explores Christian faith traditions. Visit stjohndivine.org for more information and to register.

Medieval Arts Children’s Workshop
Saturday, January 11, 10 am–Noon
In this signature workshop, children carve a block of limestone, create medieval illuminated letters, design gargoyles, weave, and more! Recommended for ages 4 and up. $6 per child, with accompanying adult. Meet at Visitor Center.

New Year’s Eve Concert for Peace
Tuesday, December 31, 7 pm
The entire Diocese of New York is invited to gather for a Festival Eucharist at 10:30 am commemorating the life and witness of Absalom Jones, the first African American ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

NEW YEAR’S EVE CONCERT FOR PEACE
Tuesday, December 31, 7 pm
Founded by Leonard Bernstein in 1984, the annual New Year’s Eve Concert for Peace is a signature Cathedral event, gathering old friends and new for over a quarter of a century. The music, the candles, and the spirit of peace send audiences out into the chill January night feeling connected, uplifted, and ready to communicate and uphold that spirit. Tickets available at stjohndivine.org.

CELEBRATING THE SEASON: SERVICES

Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols
Tuesday, December 24, 4 pm

Christmas Eve Festal Eucharist of Christmas
Tuesday, December 24, 10:30 pm with 10 pm Prelude

Christmas Day Choral Eucharist
Wednesday, December 25, 10:30 am (only service of the day)

New Year’s Eve Watchnight Service
Tuesday, December 31, 11 pm

New Year’s Day Eucharist
Wednesday, January 1, 10:30 am (only service of the day)

FEBRUARY

SELECTED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Weaving Stories: A Textile Workshop
Saturday, February 1, 10 am–Noon
Exploring the Cathedral’s tapestries and the stories they tell, children will learn about the Medieval craft of weaving. Families will then weave on looms they have crafted from cardboard and paper before taking home their own textile creations. Recommended for ages 4 and up. $8 per child, with accompanying adult. Meet at Visitor Center.

Nightwatch Crossroads: Christian
Friday, February 7, 6 pm
This Friday evening and overnight experience for high schoolers and their chaperones explores practices and beliefs from many spiritual traditions. Visit stjohndivine.org for more information and to register.

Absalom Jones Festival Eucharist
Saturday, February 8, 10:30 am
The entire Diocese of New York is invited to gather for a Festival Eucharist at 10:30 am commemorating the life and witness of Absalom Jones, the first African American ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

Signs and Symbols: Spotlight on Symbolism
Sunday, February 9, 1 pm–2:30 pm
Please see description for January 5. Led by Senior Cathedral Guide Becca Earley.

Great Music in a Great Space: Ornament of the World
Wednesday, February 19, 7 and 9 pm
Continuing the exploration of music from around the world, The Cathedral Choir and Rose of the Compass, an instrumental ensemble featuring recorder virtuoso Nina Stern, present music from the Spanish Renaissance. Stern and Rose of the Compass have been described by The New York Times as having "...an impeccable early and world-music credentials." This concert will be performed in one of the Cathedral's seven Chapels of the Tongues, the Chapel of Saint James, patron of Spain.

Medieval 2.0: Spotlight on Traditions Transformed
Saturday, February 22, 7 and 9 pm
What does New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine share with the great medieval cathedrals of Europe? How does it depart from that tradition? Join Senior Cathedral Guide John Simko for a tour of architecture and stained glass that focuses on St. John’s unique blend of modern New York and medieval Europe.

Unfinished Symphony: Spotlight on Architecture
Saturday, February 22, 2 pm–3 pm
Please see description for January 10.

The Cathedral In Context: Spotlight on Morningside Heights
Sunday, February 23, 1 pm–3 pm

The Cathedral In Context: Spotlight on Morningside Heights
Sunday, February 23, 1 pm–3 pm

Medieval Arts Children’s Workshop
Saturday, February 22, 10 am–Noon
In this signature workshop, children carve a block of limestone, create medieval illuminated letters, design gargoyles, weave, and more! Recommended for ages 4 and up. $6 per child, with accompanying adult. Meet at Visitor Center.

Nightwatch Crossroads: Christian
Friday, February 28, 6 pm
Please see description for January 10.

Photo: Cathedral Archive

stjohndivine.org Winter 2013–14
The Approach of Winter

The half-stripped trees
struck by a wind together,
bending all,
the leaves flutter drily
and refuse to let go
or driven like hail
stream bitterly out to one side
and fall
where the salvias, hard carmine,—
like no leaf that ever was
—edge the bare garden

Winter Trees

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!
A liquid moon
moves gently among the long branches.
Thus having prepared their beds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) was inducted into the American Poets Corner in 1992.

William Carlos Williams was born in Rutherford, New Jersey. He began writing poetry as a teenager, and decided then to become both a writer and a doctor. He received his MD from the University of Pennsylvania, and throughout his life practiced both professions. Williams, associated with both the Imagist and the American Modernist Movement in literature, famously described his poetic method in the phrase “No ideas but in things.”

One of the Cathedral’s great resources is its dedicated band of artists (and poets and photographers) in residence. You see their names in these pages over and over: new projects, new performances, eloquent readings. But some Cathedral artists work more quietly. Chris Pelletieri, graduate of the Cathedral’s stone carving apprenticeship, and sculptor of the fountain in the Biblical garden as well as the four 20th century figures on the Cathedral’s Historical Parapet, is one of these.

Pelletieri grew up at the Cathedral, attending The Cathedral School for 8 years and singing in the Cathedral choir. He went on to get a math degree from NYU and work in construction before returning to join the apprenticeship program, then in its last years. The program, running from 1978–1994, trained and employed neighborhood youth, propelling many into a career working with stone; added 50 feet to the South Tower; and, with its commercial arm, did stone work for the Jewish Museum, the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian church and Rockefeller Center.

Pelletieri fell under the spell of stone carving and began to look at the familiar Cathedral with new eyes, focusing on the angels, saints and other carved figures that adorn the façade and interior. Twenty years later, Pelletieri is still working on Cathedral grounds, with inspiration always at hand. He has spent his life as an artisan in stone, a trade that requires dedication and a willingness to accept uncertainty. He uses both of the traditional techniques for stone carving; direct carving of the stone, and the pointing method, where a clay model is made first. Either way, the intimacy of working with stone is paramount. Pelletieri is convinced that if more people were exposed to the deep satisfaction of stone carving, it would be as popular as other handcrafts.

In 2008 and again in 2013, Pelletieri offered stone carving workshops at the Cathedral, organized by the department of Public Education and Visitor Services. Students learned basic techniques and used the tools—hammers, mallets, and chisels—that stone carvers have used for centuries (although the chisels are today made of high grade steel). His enthusiasm and love for his craft created a supportive, communal spirit, and Pelletieri plans to offer more workshops in the future.

Pelletieri has carved a limestone staircase outside a Fifth Avenue mansion, fireplaces and mantel reliefs, fountains and cemetery ornaments, including one for The Right Reverend Paul Moore (Bishop of New York, 1972–1989).
On a recent afternoon, staff at the Textile Conservation Lab were working on a Chinese rug, a Brussels tapestry, an 18th century Japanese temple wall hanging, and Chinese civil service rank badges, circa late 19th century. The last two items come from the Staten Island Museum, which is moving into a larger building in Snug Harbor and is taking the opportunity to have many objects that were in storage cleaned and repaired for their inaugural exhibit "Treasure Box of World Art" in fall 2014.

"This is an exceptionally beautiful piece," said Textile Conservation Lab Director Marlene Soll. "We're working on the edge of the rug, which is in particularly bad shape. We've already cleaned the back of the rug, which is in much better condition than the front."

The blue and gold Chinese rug, an impressive 27’ by 16’, was probably woven for a palace in the late 1700s. It came to the Lab needing cleaning, new green border. The blue and gold Chinese rug, an impressive 27’ by 16’, was probably woven for a palace in the late 1700s. It came to the Lab needing cleaning, new pile, and repair of a large hole (about 14” square) as a result of a pot left on the rug. The damp eventually rotted the fibers.

"It took Ania Szalecki, TCL conservator, nearly two years to finish," said Marlene. "Ania did a remarkable job!"

At time of writing, the Lab was preparing for its autumn Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) class in carpet structure with Valerie Soil, TCL conservator. Every year, the Lab participates in a hands-on course for second year textile conservation graduate students, teaching dye-to-match techniques and tapestry conservation. The students have five class sessions at the Lab, and also work with conservators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Many of our interns have come out of the program," said Marlene. "We've had some gifted interns."

The Cathedral Invites You to Take A Pause to Consider Climate Change

"I don’t think there is anything as powerful as an active heart. And the activists I know possess this powerful beating heart of change. They do not fear the wisdom of emotion, but embody it. They know how to listen. They are polite when they need to be and unyielding when necessary. They do not shy away from what is difficult. They refuse to accept the unacceptable. The most effective activists I know are in love with the world.”

Terry Tempest Williams

Writer and activist Terry Tempest Williams contributed to the 2012 Value of Water exhibition and has visited the Cathedral many times.
The Spirit of the Season

The holidays remind us to be grateful for all that we have been given, from the strength to do our jobs and follow our dreams to the Earth that sustains us. It’s a time for celebration with family and friends—a time to look at children’s faces and remember that pure expectancy and wonder. It’s also important to remember those who don’t have enough food, clothing, social services, after-school activities, cultural outings, or companionship. The Cathedral works year round to enrich the lives of both the haves and the have-nots: clergy, staff, volunteers and the many artists and activists who speak or perform at the Cathedral are all part of our embrace of the larger community. It’s a challenge, especially in difficult economic times. When this issue went to press, Congress had proposed cuts of 4 billion dollars from the SNAP program (food stamps), which directly affects the Morningside Heights neighborhood. Unemployment among vulnerable populations is high. Everyone works harder just to pay the rent than was necessary a generation ago—and this affects the time available for volunteering, making art, social action and much else. Another challenge is the maintenance and repair of this architectural landmark.

Many of you concentrate your charitable contributions at the end of the year. Please take a moment to think about Cathedral Community Cares (CCC) Soup Kitchen and Clothing Closet, which also offers social and medical services; Adults and Children in Trust (ACT) with its myriad of summer, pre-school and after-school programs; Friends of Music, which supports the Cathedral choral and organ concerts; the American Poets Corner, celebrating the best in our nation’s literature; the Textile Conservation Lab, conserving precious textiles, including Cathedral tapestries damaged in the 2001 fire; and our beautiful gardens, managed by the Cathedral Gardens Conservancy. Join us in supporting the Cathedral’s Annual Fund and make a gift by December 31! An envelope is enclosed for your convenience. For further information, please contact the Development Department at (212) 316-7488 or support@stjohndivine.org.

Of course, there are many ways to give that go beyond money. New and unused children’s toys may be donated to CCC to make the holidays a little brighter for kids in need. Please make your contribution by December 15; contact Lauren Phillips, Acting Program Manager, at (212) 316-7581 or lphillips@stjohndivine.org with any questions. The Cathedral also always needs volunteers, for assistance with the liturgy, pitching in at ACT, CCC and The Cathedral School, leading guided visits and working in the garden. Whatever your interests and skills, there is room and a warm welcome for you here. Also consider joining the Society of Regents, an association of men and women who provide annual unrestricted leadership gifts of $1,000 or more to support the preservation and maintenance of the Cathedral architecture, as well as its educational, outreach and artistic programs. Members of the Society of Regents are invited to special events throughout the year.

Close Friends

Kalie Kamara, who interned at the Cathedral for three summers, is now working with CCC as Interim Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. It’s a pleasure to have Kalie back.

John McKay joined us as Capital Projects Manager, expanding his important role at the Cathedral.

Stephanie Weichsel is our new intern at CCC. Stephanie has an MBA from Columbia Business School, a BA from the United States Naval Academy, and served five years as an officer in the Marines. She will be analyzing CCC from a business perspective and will be an enormous help.

Please Be In Touch

We welcome your suggestions and comments on the newsletter. Please write us at editor@stjohndivine.org.