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The Miami Book Fair's popular street fair returns this November. / Courtesy of Miami Book Fair

## The 35th-Annual Miami Book Fair: From the Pope of Trash to Children's Alley

**LIZ TRACY** | OCTOBER 3, 2019 | 9:00AM

Steeped in the warm waters of the Caribbean, Miami's blend of cultures and languages deeply flavors the creative work crafted here. The Miami Book Fair serves this particular mix at the annual literary event to audiences hungry for the Magic City's unique stories, voices, and vision.

In its 35th year, the Book Fair, which is presented by Miami Dade College and the independent bookseller Books & Books, offers not only nearly 600 authors from around the globe but also music and activations that entice youths to read and the community to interact in new ways with the written word. "We're doing things more that I call literary entertainment," director of programming Lissette Mendez says. "They tie back to the book; they bring the stories that we're all familiar with but are more accessible."

Two programs specializing in literary entertainment at the Book Fair are the multidisciplinary performance and lounge space the Porch and Children's Alley. Melissa Messulam is the programmer for both activations. "To me, Miami Book Fair has always been about building community," she says. "The vision behind both programs is to create experiences where children can get excited about reading and writing and where we can all meet, exchange ideas, and celebrate our local artists through activities that cater to all ages, are reflective of Miami, and make us proud to come together as one community."

Children's Alley presents commissioned pop-up performances by street theater groups to engage families. "We have bilingual theater pieces that really simplify how important it is to celebrate creativity and imagination," Messulam says. Some activations are hands-on and STEM-based, including air-propelled rockets and virtual-reality goggles. It's about, she says, "putting discovery in the hands of young people."

The talents of musicians will also be highlighted this year for all age groups. Children can watch their peers perform in orchestras and in the Homestead-Miami Mariachi Conservatory, an after-school program that teaches the Mexican musical style to the children of local farmworkers. This year, the Book Fair will also introduce the Busk Stop to showcase stories through song in street performances at an actual bus stop on First Avenue. "Busking gets related to adults, but I said, 'Let's take it to the kids,'" Messulam explains. The Latin Grammy-nominated band Colectivo Animal is one of this year's busking acts. She says the group will present "really beautiful songs about life as seen through ancient animal legends inspired by an indigenous worldview."

Kids can also learn how to breakdance or DJ with an interactive hip-hop experience provided by the Miami nonprofit PATH (Preserving, Archiving & Teaching Hip-Hop). Though at night the Porch caters to an adult crowd, during the day Friday, November 22, it will be a platform for talented teenagers, including those engaged with Miami Dade College's new Little Havana-based teen spoken-word program, Speak Up.



Inez Barlatier performed at the Porch during the 2017 Miami Book Fair. / **Courtesy of Miami Book Fair**

The Porch will be open for business as usual once the sun sets. Expect outdoor games, a lounge area, live local musicians, and a bar serving beer from Biscayne Bay Brewery. Things will get competitive during the annual comedic-reading-turned-game-show Literary Death Match and the new event Lucha Libro, pitting masked scribes against each other in a story match.

Messulam also recommends the photography exhibition of works by the late Andy Sweet, who documented the elderly Jewish community of old South Beach, and its adjoining panel at 1 p.m. Sunday, November 24. Sweet's work was featured in journalist and cofounder of the nonprofit publishing house **Letter16 Press** Brett Sokol's book *Shtetl in the Sun: Andy Sweet's South Beach 1977-1980* and the documentary *The Last Resort*.

Mendez notes that this year, the Evening With series will offer a tight lineup of strong writers. “We’ve had to get very lean and mean,” she jokes. The fair will also present some big names in music, including photographer Glen E. Friedman, who documented and published books of his photos of the Washington, D.C. hardcore act Fugazi and the classic skate film *Dogtown and Z-Boys*. And famed singer of the New Wave band Blondie – Debbie Harry – will promote her memoir, *Face It*. “It’s kind of a thing I never imagined would happen!” Mendez says of Harry. “I have nothing but admiration for her.”

Also this year, guests can get a naughty education from the "Pope of Trash," John Waters, who's on the road promoting *Mr. Know-It-All: The Tarnished Wisdom of a Filthy Elder*. Other authors making appearances include Teá Obrecht, who penned the Obama-recommended novel *Inland*; T.C. Boyle, who wrote an upcoming novel about LSD, *Outside Looking*; the great Joyce Carol Oates, who is promoting the novel *My Life as a Rat* and a picture book, *The New Cat*; and the award-winning Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, who will return to the fair to speak about *Everything Inside* and *My Mommy Medicine*.

Attendees should expect to hear from diverse perspectives this year. Mendez suggests catching the appearance by Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Anti-Racist*. “He’s shifting the way we think about [racism] to say, 'It doesn’t matter if you are or are not a racist; it’s important to be an anti-racist,’” she explains. “I have the greatest hope for his particular message because it’s being delivered in a way that anybody can understand it easily.”

She notes the fair is avoiding hate-spewers and focusing on creating a space for dialogue. "I know that sometimes things are very polarized between the left and the right, and we need somewhere to go to have those opinions, even if they are unpopular," she says. "[I want] everyone to feel that the Miami Book Fair belongs to them."

**Miami Book Fair.** *November 17 through 24 at Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus, 600 Biscayne Blvd., Miami; [miamibookfair.com](http://miamibookfair.com). Children's Alley is open November 22 through 24.*

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