

Meet the local artist hosting pay-what-you-can fund-raisers in the Public Garden

By Arushi Jacob. Published October 10, 2024.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/10/10/arts/boston-public-garden-talia-connelly>

Every few weeks, Talia Connelly rides the [MBTA](#) from Medford to downtown Boston, pulling along a suitcase she found on Craigslist. Inside are the 29-year-old artist's essential supplies: a Strathmore 400 sketchbook of 18-by-24-inch drawing sheets, paints, a repurposed kimchi jar for water, two paint brushes, a set of soft pastels, and a travel easel.

Her destination? Just past the "[Make Way for Ducklings](#)" statues by the River Street entrance to the [Boston Public Garden](#), she plants her easel in the grass and sets up her supplies. Passersby can stop by for a quick portrait, all proceeds going to a charity of Connelly's choosing. Connelly operates on a pay-what-you-can basis, receiving \$3 up to \$200 per painting. (She accepts payments by credit card, cash, and Venmo.)

"I feel like it's not my decree to say, 'This is how much you should be able to pay for you to have this experience,'" Connelly said of her charity pop-ups, in an interview with the Globe. She said that she views the act as a privilege: "I do this because I can ... it's something that I really enjoy."

Beginning in October of 2022, Connelly has held eight fund-raisers at the Public Garden and one at the ICA Boston. Her next event is Oct. 12; proceeds will be donated to the to [The Sentencing Project](#) and [Transformational Prison Project](#).

The artist said she has been drawing and painting since childhood, and knew she wanted to pursue a career in the creative field. Connelly graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2017, with a bachelor of fine arts and focus in textiles, and now works as a freelance footwear designer. In between contract work and her Public Garden fund-raisers, Connelly conducts [drawing workshops](#) in South Medford and Cambridge.

In the 3½-hour workshops, Connelly teaches attendees the fundamentals of drawing such as lineweight, proportion, value, and perspective, before introducing color and panache in the latter half of the class. Prices start at \$45, the workshops are open to all experience levels and include all the materials needed.

"There were times where I felt like I want to do something that feels more local to the community," said Connelly. The Seattle native explained that she grew up in a family that prioritized giving back to the community, inspiring the same spirit of public service in her. "There are other ways that I can use this discipline that I've honed, to serve a purpose outside of commercial product."

When picking which organizations the fund-raiser proceeds go to, there's no exact science, just research and word-of-mouth from Connelly's friends. She tries to host two fund-raisers each month but hopes to have a fixed schedule in the future. As the temperatures drop, Connelly is considering an indoor location.

Connelly said she paints 20 to 22 portraits throughout a fund-raiser day, spending approximately seven minutes on individuals or pairs, and 10 to 15 minutes on groups, which she says are trickier to capture.

“It’s dependent on how many people are waiting and how much detail you want to convey,” said Connelly, recalling dedicating time to paint the fuzzy bear faces on a young subject’s jeans.

While Connelly said she loves her design work, she hopes to pursue more community-centered opportunities.

“That would be part of the dream.”

TALIA CONNELLY PUBLIC GARDEN FUND-RAISER

At the Boston Public Garden, near the “Make Way for Ducklings” statues. Oct. 12, 2-6 p.m. Pay what you can. taliaconnelly.com