

Learning Places Summer 2016

SITE REPORT #2

New York Public Library



Keriann Lin

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INTRODUCTION

On our visit to the New York Public Library, also known as the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, we spent about 20-30 minutes outside sketching and getting an broad scope of the exterior. We then went on a guided audio tour of the interior that lasted about an hour. We made some technical

discoveries, such as the names of certain architectural structures, and we also learned about the history and uses of the various library rooms. By going at our own pace with the guided audio tour, we were able to explore the library at our leisure and choose what to explore more deeply.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches/notes)



New York Public Library entrance. The NYPL entrance is one of the most important parts of the library. The building, designed by Carrere & Hastings, was created in a typical Beaux Arts style with its Corinthian column and acanthus leaves atop the columns' capitals (the top part of the columns). We learned that the fluting on the columns most likely comes from the style of women's dresses in

ancient Roman times. It is a grand building which shows solidarity in its lengthy structure and upon further inspection of the building, we can tell that the pieces were cut perfectly from large slabs of marble. The long stairs open the front of the library up for the public to use, as shown by the people sitting on the steps. Not shown in this picture but just as important are is the balustrade that surrounds the library. It acts as a border between the streets and the actual library, creating a terrace for people to stroll along which is typical in European cities.



Truth. This statue that is to the right of the NYPL entrance shows “Truth” depicted as an elderly man on top of a water fountain, inside a niche, flanked by fruits and harvest (a cornucopia). A cornucopia means abundance and in this case, it would be referring to the wealth of knowledge. The inscription above the cyma reveals a quote: “But above all things/Truth/bearth away/the victory.” This ties to the belief that seeking understanding and awareness is the way of life. This is fitting for a library, which is where one goes to research and look for information. We can also see that there are turtles holding up the basin of water, which we learned might have some relation to Turtle Pond behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This statue evokes a sense of elderly wisdom and tranquility yet youthfulness through seeking knowledge.



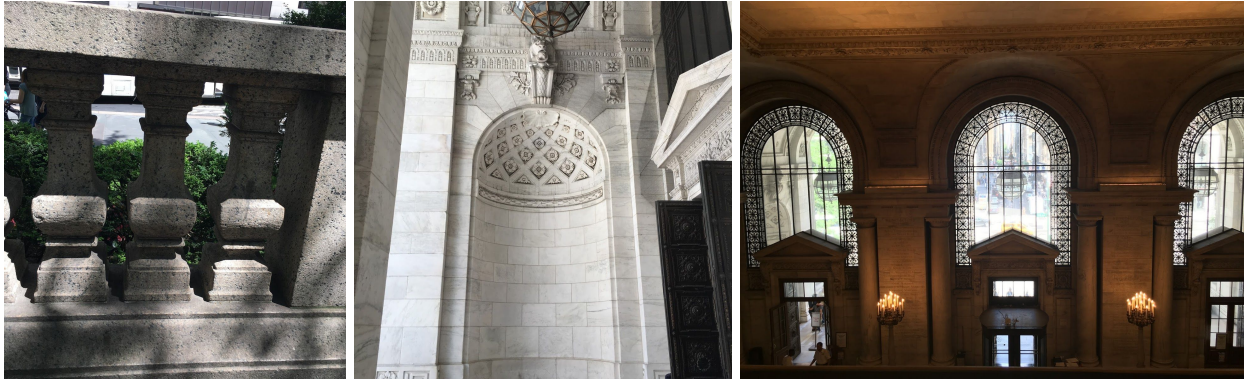
McGraw Rotunda. McGraw Rotunda is at the topmost level of the library (third floor). Its walls are made of rich Corinthian walnut and the floors are made of marble. In this room, there are many paintings along the wall that tell the story of literature and learning in human history. The four paintings are of Moses with the Ten Commandments inscribed in stone, a monk carefully handwriting a copy of a book, Gutenberg presenting the printed bible, Ottmar Mergenthaler with his revolutionary machine that advanced the printing press. The ceiling, which can just barely be made out in this photo, is beautifully ornamented with vibrant colors, a variety of shapes, and the thermal windows that allow natural light into the room is reminiscent of the windows at Grand Central Terminal. The Edna Barnes Salomon Room 316, as shown on the left of this photo, is also used for events. Although it was closed off in preparation for an event, I was able to take a quick glance inside and noted paintings of John Milton reading *Paradise Lost* and a portrait of Truman Capote, author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.



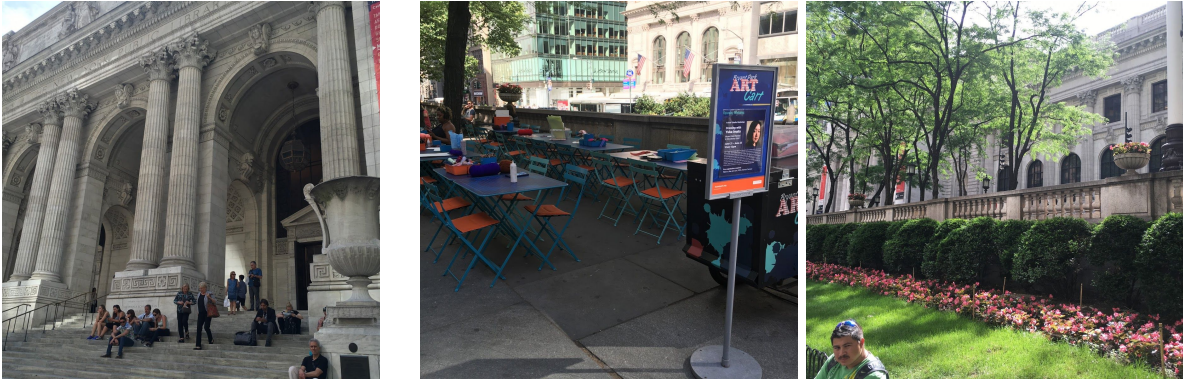
McGraw Rotunda Ceiling Mural. This mural on the ceiling of the McGraw Rotunda tells the Greek mythological story of when Prometheus stole fire from the gods and brought it, along with other godly knowledge, down to the humans. This is a perfect mural to have in a library. As insinuated from the story, humans are the only beings that are closest to being gods. We were given the knowledge of the gods and so it is in our nature to continue to thirst for more of this knowledge.



Gutenberg Presenting the Bible. As mentioned earlier, there are many paintings in the McGraw Rotunda hall that display literature in human history. This particular painting is of Johannes Gutenberg and his printing press, a significant moment in publishing history. Gutenberg created the first printing press and what he is showing here is the bible, which is the first book Gutenberg printed. The library actually has an original copy of that printed bible and sometimes has it on display in the hall. Unfortunately, it was not on display when I had visited.



The photos above show three important architectural structures we learned about during our trip. The photo on the far left is a *balustrade*, a collection of balusters (short columns that are typically rounded at the bottom) that hold up a long horizontal rail. These particular balusters are rectangular, not rounded. As mentioned earlier, the balustrade encircle the library, creating a border that separates the library from the common streets of New York. The second photo is a *niche* which we learned is a recess in the wall that is accompanied by a half dome at the top. These are typically created to hold important statues, like in the case of the statue *Truth* discussed earlier. The third photo is of the three arched windows that can be seen clearly from the front of the library and from the second floor Jill Kupin Rose Gallery. These three arches are meant to be welcoming and their large size allow natural light to flood into the library. The three arches can be directly compared to the arched windows at Grand Central Terminal, a building that we know is also in the style of Beaux Arts.



Community. The many stairs that invites the public to sit, the free art supplies that accompany the chairs and tables, and the spacious terrace outside the NYC prove how this building is meant for the community. Not only is this a library for researchers but it's also meant to bring people from all over the city (and the world) to mingle and enjoy themselves.

DISCOVERIES

Some discoveries I made of the NYPL were learned from the self-guided audio tour, Professor Montgomery, and my own observations. Aside from learning architectural terms such as Corinthian columns, capitals, niche, and balustrade (as mentioned throughout the site report), I learned the actual names of the lion statues that guard the library--they are named Patience and Fortitude.

Along with the mural of Prometheus and the paintings that cover the walls of McGraw Rotunda, the audio tour enlightened me to the history of the DeWitt Wallace Periodical Room and the murals inside. First, the room was named after the creator of *Reader's Digest*, a magazine I'm somewhat familiar with but never considered the history of. The murals show many newspaper and publishing houses, fitting for a room named after the founder of a magazine. Some murals with names that I recognize are the *The Evening Post* building, *Reader's Digest* building, and *The New York Times* offices.

I was also impressed by how many primary sources the New York Public Library carries. As mentioned earlier, the library carries an original copy of Gutenberg's printed bible. The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division room carries an assortment of maps and books on maps. Imagine, a whole room dedicated solely to maps! What caught my attention was that this room holds maps that generals have actually used in war.

I've visited the New York Public Library numerous times in the past and have spent many days studying there but I never took the time to explore the meanings behind the rooms, paintings, and murals throughout the library. I'm very appreciative of this opportunity to visit the library and believe I gained a lot of insight through the professor, my classmates, and the audio-based tour.

KEYWORDS

Acanthus Leaves

Baluster

Balustrade

Beaux Arts

Capital

Carrere & Hastings

Corinthian Column

Cornice

Cornucopia

Cyma

Flutes

Johannes Gutenberg

Lions (Patience and Fortitude)

McGraw Rotunda

Niche