

Learning Places Summer 2016

SITE REPORT #2

The New York Public Library



Aniqa Qayyum

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INTRODUCTION

The heart of a busy metropolitan area comes to a conclusive standstill when the monolith of libraries comes into view. Rushing up the stairs in between the lions gating the entrance to the New York Public Library for Site Visit II took my breath away. Chalice of knowledge quite literally gated the

stairs to the entrance, and as a class we drunk in the moment, basking in the seasoned glory of the NYPL. Thus began our endearment of the library that changed New York City from just a metropolitan city, to one with knowledge imbibed within its streets, and architecture that rooted the city.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches/notes)



Right off the entrance to the NYPL stands a monumental statue of Truth sitting atop a fountain that pours water into a bath. The fountain caught my attention almost immediately and to me felt as though the library beckoned me, elusively revealing to come within its walls where knowledge and truth shall be poured out as though a fountain of knowledge pertains within the walls. The underlying message of fountain of knowledge seemed appropriate to me at the NYPL, because it is the place

where one would gravitate towards for knowledge and truth, and this particular statute exemplified it robustly, which led me to believe that perhaps it was placed there specifically for that reason.

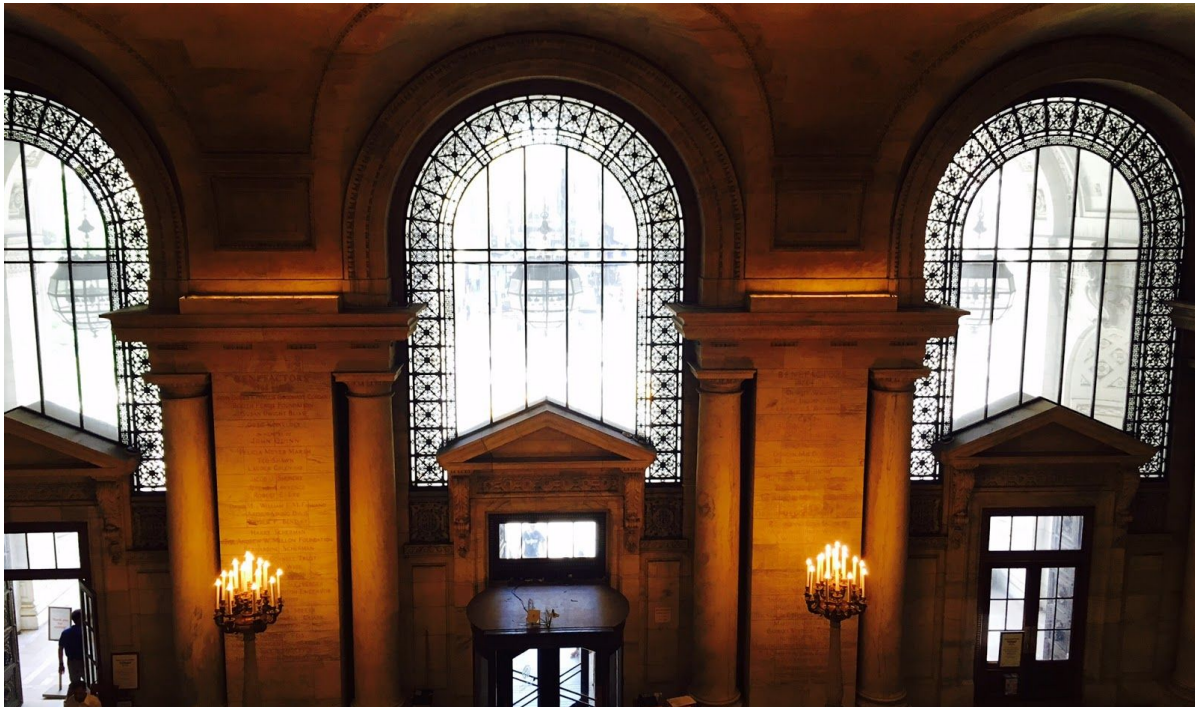


The entrance of the library reminded me strongly of old decrepit tomb entrances. The detailing of the entrance and the height with the arches gave me the feeling of entering an exclusive old religious sanctuary. There was a solemnity to the air around the entrance as though I was actually entering old halls filled with the knowledge of our ancestors, that were being passed down. The white marbled columns and arches, and the stone carvings gave the entrance a look of opulent grandeur, yet also stately pronounced that these halls are meant to endure Time.



Upon entering the foyer of the NYPL the first thing you notice are the immense columns with the arches. The entryway into the library is a hushed solemn affair. The electric lamps bring an illumination to the inscribed marble that dedicates the library to all those who seek knowledge, which I thought was a warm welcome to students entering for scholarly support. While entering the Astor hall arch, it strongly impressed upon me how it would feel to enter great halls full of wisdom in the ages to come. This particular moment in time impressed a sense of awe and grandeur, but then I grew up in the time where books and physical

data still held weight, and I wonder whether generations following ours will feel the same way about the grandness and the weight of scholarly knowledge of the NYPL that I did.



The second floor balcony overlooks the entrances into the NYPL with three grand windows that pours light into the hallways below. This picture really brings out the architectural flair of the building, yet it also harmonizes the the aesthetic beauty of the building, to the purpose of the library. Specifically in this picture I can see the grand windows with cast iron moldings, and then in between those windows are pillars with inscribed marble that is illuminated by the warm glow of electric lamps. For me, looking at this picture brings a sense of architectural beauty with purpose; the halls are lit with illumination of knowledge. It brings to mind the story of how God gave man fire, and how man is the greatest of all species because God has given man wisdom. The light from both the windows and the lamps signifies illumination of wisdom, which would certainly be fitting for a library- especially the crown jewel of libraries in NY.



One of the unexpected pieces of the NYPL that I discovered was the Children's Room on the first level of the library. I know of other NYPL branches having great children's sections and really amazing workshops for children of different ages, but did not expect the main branch to have such a spectacular one; I assumed that there would be more focus on scholarly academia meant for adults who were pursuing great literary breakthroughs. I was blown away by the fact that the original stuffed animal Pooh was an artifact of the library (unfortunately not on display because of

restoration), and that the Adventures of Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin were based off the actual bear! On display in the Children's Room were the two library lions (the same ones that gate the front of the building) Patience and Fortitude made entirely of lego blocks! It was quite amazing to see such solemn lion-esque pieces in actual lego pieces; such symbolism of patience (creating such a piece with such small miniscule objects with great attention to detail) with such fortitude (the ability to have such mental and emotional strength to undergo such replication in detailed precision!) through the use of children's lego blocks! It was certainly a wondrous spectacle to behold, and I really appreciated the symbolism.



The DeWitt Wallace Periodical room (first two images), and the antechamber within it called the Dorot Jewish Division are breathtaking places solely for the purpose of quiet reserved research. With its bright impressive lights and dark interior it gives the space a grand studious air with great lighting!



The third floor of the NYPL can be viewed from the landing between the second and third floor, as

great stairs (image 1) lead up to an enormous hall filled with breathtaking murals. The magnificent ceiling of the McGraw Rotunda encaptures the eye almost immediately since it is adorned with Prometheus bringing mankind fire and knowledge stolen from the gods, which I found out through the NYPL walking tour guide (image 2). The third image sits on the right side of the (currently closed for renovations) Solomon Room and depicts the Gutenberg press, which I found extremely captivating since it was because of the press that allowed books to be printed, which eventually led libraries to become part of society.

DISCOVERIES

Visiting the NYPL on Fifth Avenue was very nostalgic to me. In an era where society relies so heavily on digital information, and quite literally lives in the cloud, the essence of books and libraries seem to have been lost somewhere. To me an actual physical book is like having a comforting friend, whose story I can peruse and take into context wherever I go. To most of my classmates (and the public), the architectural significance of the building, with the beaux-art style is what really captivates their attention. To me it is the moment of being there, in a place where so many literary pieces were conceived, and brought into life through the penmanship of their authors that truly captivated me during the visit.

I really enjoyed the scale and magnitude of the building, and yes- found the architectural designing of such a magnificent piece of historical building incredible and awe inspiring. But the real joy to me was the incredibly minute things that perhaps were overlooked by others. The quiet symbolism of Truth pouring out the fountain of wisdom, the chalices of knowledge beckoning its scholars to fill their cups with knowledge, the halls filled with illuminating electric light symbolising both the attainment of wisdom and the electrical feat of light, and the swish and rustle of books and

keys whizzing knowledge to and from the scholars.

One of the things that really saddened me was the lengths to which the NYPL had converted itself in terms of technology. I have always viewed libraries in the context of physical books, and to me the main NYPL has always been this image of great books, and wealths of knowledge. I understand the intellect behind updating the library to cater to the growing usage of the internet for a generation that relies so exclusively on it- yet a part of me wonders how it would have been to experience the NYPL before these updates were instilled within these halls. How did scholars before me walk into those halls and create worlds and characters without the instant tap of a button? When did we as a people leave behind the world of physical, tangible persona into one which is based off of clouds and the internet? To me the turning of a page, the warm ink on a sheet of clean paper, and the smell of musty old books will always be priceless. In the words of William Lyon Phelps, "I divide all readers into two classes; those who read to remember and those who read to forget." There might be a lot of people able to easily forget the meaning behind such a grand and exquisite building, but there will always be those who will remember that through all the grandness and the opulence, stands a place where knowledge is safeguarded, and perhaps through our own vigilance, we will be able to hand down the fire of knowledge to generations to come.

KEYWORDS

Niche: A small particular piece or part of a greater object (can also be used in terms of time- a niche in time).

Balustrade: an ornamental railing with support by balusters (Oxford English Dictionary)

Urn: A type of large ornamental vase with a curved neck and handles on the side.

Recess: A hollow space or grooved indentation of a column

Cyma: a cornice molding or wavy molding (Oxford English Dictionary)

Cornucopia: a vessel filled with fruits and nuts that symbolize wealth and prosperity.

Capital: the top most point of a building or structure.