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### American Folk Art Museum and the Brooklyn Public Library: Same, but Different

When I think of art institutions in Manhattan, I think of an affluent demographic group that are art enthusiasts, and who would be doing yoga at the MoMA. In acknowledging my own bias, and preconceiving of what type of patrons would attend the American Folk Art Museum, I was prepared to see this demographic being white middle/upper class, mainly because of its location. Yet, in thinking of the demographic for public libraries, more specifically the Brooklyn Public Library, I thought patrons would be a variety of demographic groups. Therefore, I decided to juxtapose the American Folk Art Museum and the Brooklyn Public Library. I thought that these two cultural institutions would be more different than similar. The only similarity that I knew existed was that both spaces are free and were open to the public 7 days a week. In terms of methodology, I decided to take notes as I observed, would sit in an area and observe, and use a stopwatch to inconspicuously time patrons in how long they interacted with the material.

The American Folk Art Museum is located in the Upper Westside of Manhattan, at the Lincoln Center, whereas Brooklyn Public Library is next to Prospect Park. The cost of living around the library isn't considered affordable housing, but when compared to the Upper Westside of Manhattan, there is a huge difference in cost of living. The Lincoln Center is a popular landmark among tourists, so I thought that this museum would be busy all the time, even

on Super Bowl Sunday, around 4pm. On the other hand, Brooklyn Public Library is not a tourist attraction, in comparison to the Lincoln Center. If given the choice, tourists would be more likely to visit the New York City Public Library than the Brooklyn Public Library because it's an iconic landmark of the city. With this in mind, I figured that the Brooklyn Public Library would be busy at any given day and time of the week, so I went on a Wednesday around 11am.

The first site I visited was the museum. I was surprised how small it is. The museum measures about 5,000 sq. feet, whereas the Brooklyn Public Library measures over 60,000 sq. feet. As patrons enter the facility, the gift shop is to the right, and the shop functions as a hallway that leads into the gallery. There is a 'No Photography' sign at the entrance of the gallery, whereas the library does not have a sign up prohibiting patrons from taking pictures. For the first twenty minutes that I was in the museum, I had noted about eight people in the museum, excluding the staff, and by the time I finished my observation, there were about 20 people or so throughout the time I was there. The museum did have pamphlets as you walk towards the gallery. They had a variety of flyers with information about the collection, and special events that are educational based.

On the other hand, the Brooklyn Public Library is a massive building. As you enter the building you are able to go to the left or the right, which will lead you to reading rooms, or access the upstairs floor. Also, as you enter, patrons can apply for a state identification card. In addition, the entrance leads you into a big open space with a cafe, the drop box to return books, and the checkout stand. The first floor also has an information desk, computers for patrons to browse/search their catalog. The first floor also has multiple study rooms, and several of them appeared to be classrooms. Just like the museum, the library also has pamphlets with information

on educational events, community events, and uses its' space for educational purposes, just like those study rooms.

I had a preconceived notion of what type of patrons would be at these institutions. The museum did not have any people of color, except the two security guards who were black, a female and a male. The patrons were white, English speakers, but I did hear a couple speak a language that was not English, which I could not identify, therefore I imagined that they were tourists. From my observation, and my biases, the patrons all appeared to be an affluent demographic. I say this because of the type of clothes, shoes and accessories they wore, and because of the environment, I would considered them to be an affluent demographic. On the other hand, the library had more diversity in not only their patrons, but the staff as well. It appeared to be a mixture of different nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds, which could be partially because it's a public library and the location is not what I would consider to be like the Upper West Side.

Moreover, the majority of people at the museum were in pairs or in a group. I did observed a white woman in her 50s that was there by herself, and stayed after I had left. I had noticed her since she was not moving quickly, in comparison to other patrons, from one object to another. So, I decided to time her in how long she interacted with each painting. I noted that she was looking at paintings for about 90 seconds, some longer than others. She read everything, or at least it appeared as she stood in front of each painting's text. She would either get really close to objects, about a foot or so, or would stand back with her hands behind her. She never appeared to acknowledge people around her. There was also more women than men at the museum and I varied in age, from late 20s to early 60s.

On the other hand, the library had people there by themselves, in pairs or in big groups. The ages also ranged from infant, to people in their late 70s. As I did a walk through the library, I noticed only three patrons actively browsing/searching the bookshelves. One of the patrons I observed appeared was black and looked to be in his 40s, browsed through a book for about 37 seconds. I am unsure if he was looking for a certain book, but he was in a section for a while, so he must have been interested in finding something among that selection. The second patron I observed, was a white woman in her late 30s, had a physical notecard in her hand that she kept glancing at, then glanced at the books on the shelf to compare her card to the books. She selected a book and was examining it if it was the book she was looking for. The third patron was a white male in his 30s, was slowly glancing at the books on a shelves. I read his body language as if he was browsing rather than searching. Being such a huge space, I noticed how few patrons were actually browsing book shelves, and there were more patrons at the tables either reading or on their laptops, or sitting at the cafe. The patrons at the desk were not in constant motion. They tended to stay at their desks while I was observing, but it gave the illusion that they were there for a while.

In conclusion, this observation highlighted not only my biases, but how these two institutions are really the same. They are the same in the respect that both places symbolize spaces that are not associated with art that are housed in places like the Louvre, MET or even the MoMA. The American Folk Art Museum celebrates American artists that are self taught, making them, to a certain extent, a marginalized community within the art world. With this in mind, the Brooklyn Public Library caters to a community outside of the Upper West Side. In other words, both institutions incorporate this outsidersness that I associate with affluent communities. But, the American Folk Art Museum attracts art enthusiasts, that know of this art, and is not accessible to

certain communities. Since, most public schools would lecture on art that are housed at the Louvre, MET or the MoMA. The American Folk Art Museum is an extension of that affluent community. It's difficult to make a strong argument in one short visit, but in not seeing people of color at the museum, makes me curious to know what percentage of patrons are people of color. These two institutions reside on the outsideness of the art world and highlight the differences between the Upper West side and Brooklyn. The sameness reflects this outsideness quality that they both have, but also reflect the differences in who navigates these spaces.