

Geographically, the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library and The Brooklyn Museum and the are a mere 1500 feet apart. They both serve as iconic architectural landmarks of Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza neighborhood. The Central Library, in its current architectural iteration, opened in 1941 in stunning Art Deco form complete with radiant bronze gilded inset carvings on its fifty-foot limestone pylons and an attractive inward turned curved Art-Moderne façade.

Continuing this structural conversation down the majesty of Eastern Parkway and serving as a gateway to Crown Heights; a historically African-American and Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, and the continuing expanses of the largely underprivileged Eastern Brooklyn environs, The Brooklyn Museum stands at an important cultural crossroads. Featuring a neoclassical Beaux-Arts facade complete with Greek Ionic columns and a 2004 added Post-Modern glass pavilion and lobby, The Brooklyn Museum's entranceway is no slouch and it and its art-object contents contend with the great museums of America. As far as institutional similarities, grandiosity of appearance is perhaps where these two giants of Brooklyn shake hands, soon to depart. Let us first explore the user experience of Brooklyn's Central Library in order to contrast it to that of the Brooklyn Museum's.

While museums and libraries are both memory institutions, they serve different purposes and thus there will be major differences in any comparative observational report. Historically, the library serves as a point for research and study. Increasingly in America's inner cities the library has become a place for children to be shepherded after school and the rare public space where the homeless and poor are allowed to congregate without risk of expulsion. The Central Library, while beautiful and historic, holds the unmistakable air of being a depot for homeless people. While it is a moral positivism to allow a total populism in the library, regardless of class,

perhaps a larger critique of New York City's homelessness epidemic could follow from the experience of walking in the library and feeling a tad bit uneasy by the sights of often presumably mentally unstable men and women resting in the lobby of the library.

I entered the Library at 3 PM on a sunny Saturday afternoon and spent 90 minutes in the library. Upon entrance, the library's foyer area features a number of amenities such as a passport renewal office, a cell phone charging station, an ATM, and a change machine. There is also a very prominent NYPD office in the entrance area of the lobby. Large panel LCD screens serve as the welcoming committee, offering suggestions for upcoming events and library hours. Upon further entrance into the grand lobby one passes a compartment which is entitled "INFORMATION CENTER" which has a number of ephemeral informational pamphlets relating to the library.

A short stroll from the foyer area takes one to the grand lobby. The grand lobby used to hold rows of card catalogs, but is now a community gathering space. In the grand lobby is a series of small round tables. Many of which are featuring people who simply wish for a pressure free place to sit. There are a number of presumably homeless people resting in this area, some with pushcarts with their belongings sitting beside them. Also in the grand lobby is a moderately priced café, Four & Twenty Blackbirds, with snacks, warm food, drinks, and according to them, Brooklyn's best pie. The furthest recess of the first floor is the Shelby White and Leon Levy Information Commons. In this section, there are printers and scanners, computer workstations with advanced design software open to the public and private glass shielded conference rooms which were all full at the time. The computer workstation areas were heavily populated and this area of the library seems to be the most vibrant and heavily used at the time of my visit.

On the first floor is also the youth wing, which was heavily populated with children, mostly African-American working on computers at desks with short children sized chairs. The other section on this floor is the Languages Literature, and Fiction section. This section was heavily populated by people studying on laptops and there was also an element of presumably homeless and underprivileged folks passing time and resting in these safe confines. There was an interesting intersection of cultures in this area of the library which was nice to see.

In general, most people in the library were either sitting and studying, simply sitting to pass the time, or spending time at computer workstations. I did not witness a substantial amount of people browsing for books or interacting with displays or using various public services available. There was a heavy NYPD security presence in the building in all areas visited. Subtracting the children in the youth wing, the mean age was somewhere around 35 years old. There were a handful of European tourists, but most people seemed to be from Brooklyn. Lastly, there was a clearly communicated cell-phone policy which is that one should take calls outside and not bother patrons with conversation. There was a polite hushed tone in general at the library besides a lone mentally disturbed man who was yelling loudly in one of the stairwells.

I entered the Brooklyn Museum on Sunday at 3:30 PM and stayed for 2 hours. The museum was very busy as it was the weekend and the new David Bowie exhibit had just opened a few weeks earlier. The Bowie exhibit has an extra admission price of \$10-\$2500, depending on if you are a child or if you sought an elite solo private screening of the exhibition. The museum was flooded with stylish young upwardly mobile couples, frequently wearing David Bowie tribute outfits. In general, the clientele at the museum was extremely varied both local and international patrons.

Upon entering the glass and steel 2004 renovated Rubin Pavilion, is a casual resting area with a café cart and gift shop. This area was heavily populated with people simply sitting and chatting etc. A further walk into the main lobby presents a museum goer with the admissions counter, a coat check, and beyond that a choice of going into the permanent collection to the left or into the newly renovated café and restaurant area. Their new restaurant, The Norm, features fancy fusion foods complete with craft beer and cocktail selections. Behind the restaurant is their official casual lunch counter Café which has been there for a long time, but has recently been rehabbed. I sat in the hallway for about 15 minutes observing how people interacted with both the restaurant and café. Many people checked out the Menu of The Norm and a fair number walked in and sat down for a meal. The café was packed with people eating and drinking at nearby tables. The food corridor was bustling with action.

The main area which I did my formal observational study at the museum was at the temporary exhibition *Mecca Journeys* featuring photography and moving image material by artist Ahmed Mater. Particular attention was paid to a completely darkened corridor which featured four large projected screens. People stood a respectful distance away as to not block the projection or the view for other patrons. People spent a fair amount of time standing and watching the projections, often many minutes at a time for each screen. There were audio speakers mounted above the screens and high definition projectors strategically positioned for ideal viewing angles. This was well designed installation and it clearly captivated the museum goers. The rest of the exhibit features large high-resolution photographs in the normal exhibition spaces and side rooms with other video projections with one large bench in the center of the room. These side video projection rooms were not as popular as the video corridor and were

sparsely populated. There was a general pathway to follow in this exhibition, but due to the large space the exhibit was housed in, patrons could generally make their own path as they chose.

The only interactive touch screen based exhibit I encountered was in their highly innovative long-term installation *Visible Storage – Study Center* which simulates a museum storeroom and gives museum goers a glimpse into collections management curation work that goes on behind the scenes at museums. They have a number of iPads which describe the storeroom-like presentation of the installation and patrons can scroll through the available collection to learn more about the art objects related to the in installation. I did see one patron interacting with the interactive touch screen interface, she did not however, spend much time as frankly the iPads were old and a bit laggy.

Security was tight and very much present around the museum. On the 5<sup>th</sup> floor where the Bowie exhibit was housed was a significant line of hundreds of people waiting for their chance to see some of the Thin White Duke's most iconic duds. These loyal Bowie fanatics were, unfortunately, obscuring the Pacific Northwestern Native American exhibit simply by standing in bulk in the center of this permanent exhibition. Perhaps the museum could have more neatly fenced these people in as not to disturb the permanent collection. Considering that it was housing religious artifacts, it would have been a nice gesture towards the tribes from which these artifacts were received.

At one point, I attempted to enter a room that said had a sign which read NO ACCESS. However, I was sincerely confused that perhaps this was an exhibit entitled NO ACCESS and was shunned by a stressed-out security guard at what appeared to be the end of the Bowie exhibit. He responded as if I were insane to try to walk in, but I simply sincerely confused. That

being said, the security was well trained and aside from the overly curt response I received from my attempted bewildered stumbling into this corded off room.

In conclusion, these institutions serve different needs for the community and have very different moods and clientele. At the Brooklyn Library, I observed a mostly local, African-American patronage with a strong presence of homelessness. To be truly anthropological, there were many instances of very foul stench hanging in the air at the library. This is not to make judgement, but simply to make a truthful observation about the experience and to counter it to the more middle-class and upper-middle class international patronage of the Brooklyn Museum. The Brooklyn Museum is clearly trying to up its class ante with its new fine dining option. The contrast between the local homeless at the library congregating around the Four & Twenty Blackbirds café and the jet-set fine dining option, The Norm, at the Brooklyn Museum is the most poetic encapsulation of this contradiction of class patronage. The library and the museum may be a mere 1500 feet away, but for better or worse, they are worlds apart in terms of class disparity.