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### **Observational Study The New York Hall of Science and the Queens Museum**

I visited two different types of institutions that serve very different types of purposes. On 11<sup>th</sup> March, I took the Q58 bus from my home in Queens and travelled to Flushing Meadows Park which is located in Corona Queens. I wrote the majority of my observations while in the buildings of the institution, outside in the park, and, on the way home.

#### **The New York Hall of Science**

On the outskirts of the park and next to the entrance of the Hall of Science is a giant replica of a rocket ship, a science inspired playground with climbing nets and slides, and a large sculpture of an astrolabe. My inner child was impressed, and I was not surprised to see a group of children on a school trip after I paid for my \$13 student general admissions ticket. The featured exhibition ticket was \$7 extra for adults and \$5 for children. Although I didn't go this time, after seeing what the science museum has to offer, I'm intrigued in *Survival: The Exhibition*. What can I learn from the exhibition about using science to survive in different climates? What can science teach me about being prepared?

I began walking to the first room, following the directions the ticket clerk informed. On my right was the entrance to the main exhibits and on my left was an empty café and an empty gift shop with lots of items on display. I went through a brightly painted yellow hallway with old photographs showing the latest technology that was invented in various World Fair's, such as the Morse Telegraph of 1853 and the first live television broadcast of a news event from 1939. I was the only one that gazed at all the photographs and even read the description behind the images, that are all courtesy of the Peter M. Warner World's Fair

Collection. No one stopped to look at the photographs because well, they were right next to the toilets and the children weren't interested in this large body of text and small descriptive annotations. There is even a huge bin covering bit of two of the photographs in a corner before the entrance of the main exhibits. The photographs are also way too high for a child to be able to reach let alone read. These serve more for the purpose of waiting around for someone to come out the toilet or maybe waiting for your child to come out of the museum's playground.

I finally entered the first exhibit in the Hall of Science, and it was pretty chaotic from there. All of the exhibitions were permanent or semi- permanent and had greasy fingerprints on every screen. Separated by categories, there were halls dedicated to various scientific concept of study, like, space, mathematics, light and color. Everything that put up images or videos on screens was made into an amusing installation with bright colors. "Yes" and "No" response buttons lit up screens to show the viewer if they were right about their scientific guess. You can press buttons to watch a video that looked like it was taken in the 90s of children in a classroom with a staff member of the museum taking about life on earth. I noticed that more children when left to their own device wanted to play with the instruments in these spaces rather than read about them, but a teacher or parent was there explaining the concepts as well. There was a couple of videos playing that had a metal revolver and a stool in front of the screen, the metal revolver let people rewind and fast forward the video playing. I found that helpful since I dislike watching informative concepts from the middle of a video, but it was also technically very clever. There were stools at each installation for children who weren't tall enough to use it and for adults who are too tall to bend down and use it. Every hall was interactive. Apart from tasting stuff, all of my senses were used throughout my visit, yes even smelling stuff.

There was one room that I assume is a semi-permanent exhibit because it was different to the rest of the exhibits. It is an exhibition called Connecting Worlds. It had large vinyl lettering of logos commercial companies that are generous supporters of the exhibit like, Google and the water company Xylem Inc. The exhibition was a collaboration curated and developed by Design I/O LLC, Center for International Earth and Science Network at Columbia University, Games for Learning Institute at New York University, Dr. David Rand at Yale University, and, the technology was provided by the Panasonic electronics.

It was impressive, from an art installation perspective, it had a brilliant rigging system of high resolution, large lumen-count projectors and motion sensor detectors. The space had a soundtrack playing of really calming music. The projectors projected a videogame like forest. You through the space and the motion detectors sense the hands and you can drop leaves on the ground that aid the natural cycle of the forest and drop bits of food to the animals living in the forest. Humans can also move these pillow-like boxes that are meant to be logs near a river on the ground to change the flow of the projected waterfall. The motion detector senses the pillow-like boxes that are meant to be logs and the projector is the covered in that area so the image on the floor of the water flowing splits into two streams of water flowing. The production of this exhibit was highly technical. Even though this installation seemed to have



*Connected Worlds Exhibit, New York Hall of Science*

a lot of work puts into it, there was no one there except some staff working at the museum who happily explained the concepts to us from a scientist's view. I didn't see anyone actually reading through the description of the book next to the giant screens explaining the concepts.

At the entrance of the first exhibit you can either view the exhibit for take the staircase into the other exhibits at the museum. There isn't a defined methodology to how to start looking at each exhibit at the museum. Perhaps some signage around to start up the staircase and finish downstairs is needed. Because if you start at the beginning its likely you're going to get tired of walking around and probably have information overload. I also noticed that there were some pieces of information on the walls stuck on with painters' tape! Even though the exhibits are mainly permanent, the museum is still working on maintaining these exhibitions. There is also a small theatre dedicated to screening films to the large majority of children that visit the museum.

### **Queens Museum**

The Queens Museum was vastly different than the Hall of science. The admissions desk stopped me before I started walking into the museum. I asked if there was a fee for the exhibitions but there weren't any paid exhibitions on at the moment. The staff member informed me that they open the rest of the rooms of the museum in April, when they finish installing. They told me entrance fee was only on donation to the museum. I gave \$2, even though it wasn't required. There was construction happening on a sculpture in the main hall and curators and the artist from London walking around. There wasn't anyone in the museum, except a young couple I saw walking out.

I started at one exhibition they have on at the back. It was a history of glass-making lamps by Louis C. Tiffany. There were large images of workers from the 1930s working on making pressing glass to make these lamps. It also gave some information on the science behind iridescent glass and how it is made. There was a short "How it Works" video on

blowing glassmakers. However, the audio was very low. The second exhibition was a bit more interesting. It was upstairs and pieces of poetry were stuck on to pillars and white walls of the space and corridor. One of the walls were the works by people in the Free Verse artists program. An initiative started in 2012 that works with people in the NYC Department of Probation waiting rooms. These were shocking to read and upsetting to see the injustices of the criminal justice system. The impactful poetry space was where I saw most people standing and reading. A mother explained to her child an example of a piece of poetry written in braille. It was also a pensive space to put poetry in, since you can gaze out the windows and look at skateboarders practicing under the Globe across the museum.

After reading the poetry I went through a small corridor that had the administrative offices like the education office on the side. I entered into a small room with glass cabinets containing memorabilia from the 1930 World Fair which was held in Flushing Meadows Park. The glass cabinet exhibit felt like looking at a time capsule. In the middle of the glass cabinets was a large screen that flicked through digitized photographs from 1939 but the photos. A young couple was sitting on the bench opposite the screen watching the photos. The third space was a giant panoramic architectural model of the five boroughs of NYC. Made in 1969 and altered since then, the map still had the Twin Towers on it. It was also color coded, for example the red buildings indicated subsidized housing projects.

I gained more personal experiences of people living in New York City and a small history of industrialization in New York City at the Queens Museum. The whole space was free moving. There wasn't anyone explaining the exhibits to you at the Queens Museum, you could start wherever you wanted.



*The Panorama of the City of New York*