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Module Code: ADDA4023

Ways of Perceiving – Imagined Display Space

Word count: 1638

New York – Aspects of a City

New York – Aspects of the City is an exhibition that takes a selection of art pieces that represent the architecture and the built environment of New York and places them together to evoke the city for the visitor. As the Smithsonian Guide to Exhibit Development (2024) identifies, visitors “learn in different ways and are drawn to different types of content”. In considering this the pieces in the exhibition are displayed in a variety ways to create the opportunity for the visitor to interact with the work in different ways.

Recognising, as advocated by Hoffding, Rung and Roald (2019) that the ‘phenomenology of aesthetic experience’ can be one of the key outcomes of exhibition engagement for the visitor, and that exhibitions need to be curated creatively to encourage the possibility of this, specific design choices have been made in the curation of this exhibition to actively prompt individual engagement with the artworks through the ways the visitor interacts with the pieces – physically, sensorily and intellectually - in the gallery space and beyond.

The exhibition will be held in gallery, somewhere between 9th and 10th avenue, in the neighbourhood of Chelsea. The exhibition itself takes place on the ground floor in a gallery space and the adjacent garden. The space is divided up into three indoor spaces that have been designed to create a throughflow from the first section through to the end of the exhibition in the garden. Although there is a slight guidance to the direction of movement through the venue, there is no specific order to view the pieces in the second space, allowing the visitor to partially curate their own experience of the pieces through the order

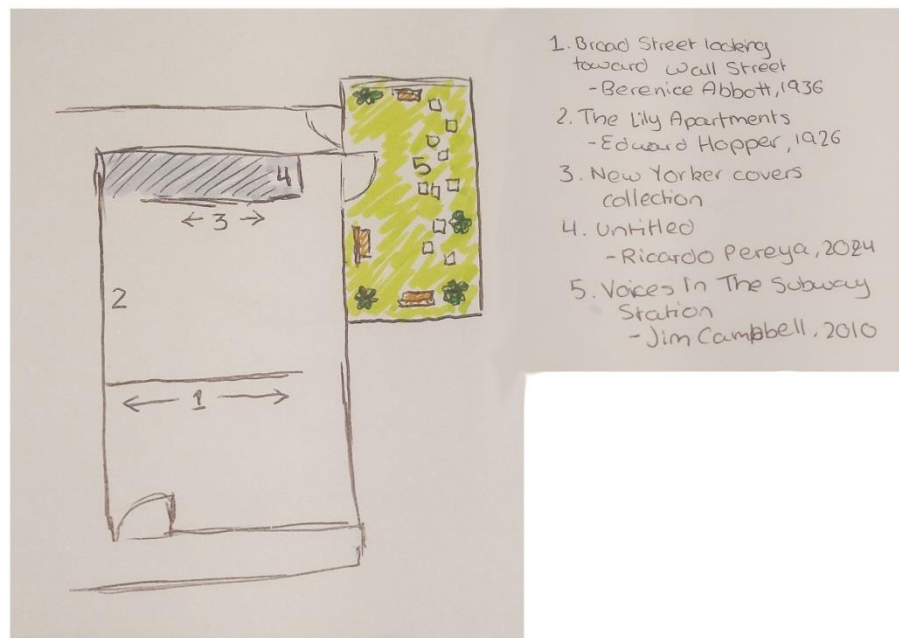


Figure 1 Exhibition Floor Plan

they choose to view them in. The neighbourhood of Chelsea is known for being the art district in Manhattan as it houses many galleries. It is also a cultural hub for the city. This means that there is a fairly high footfall in the area, however it is not full of tourist attractions, like the area around Times Square. As a result there is a fairly constant ambient sound that comes from the surrounding traffic and sounds of the city which one will hear when in the garden.

Instead of reading about each piece through writing on the wall next to them, visitors will be able to gain information about each piece in a folded up guide, which they will receive upon entering. This guide will give insight into the work displayed, the concept of the exhibition as well as including a map of the city on the back with specific locations marked on it showing where the pieces in the exhibition were photographed, or used as inspiration in the painted or drawn versions. This map will give the visitor the opportunity to engage with the exhibition and its ideas beyond the confines of the gallery space.



Figure 2 Map showing the locations depicted in the pieces in the exhibition around New York City - to be included in the exhibition guide



Figure 3 Broad Street looking towards Wall Street, Berenice Abbott, 1936

Upon entering the exhibition, the visitor will be presented with a reproduction of Berenice Abbott's *Broad Street looking towards Wall Street*, 1936 that has been blown up to cover the facing wall from the floor to the 4m high ceiling.

On returning to New York in 1929, Abbott observed that "Old New York is fast disappearing... This dynamic quality should be caught and recorded in a documentary interpretation of New York City." (MoMA, 2014). In response she set about capturing the changing city throughout the 30s. This photograph is one of many taken as a result of this observation and shows the

style of building that could be found in the financial district with the style of cars parked on the street taking the viewer back in time to the 30s.

This entrance space of the exhibition is relatively narrow for standing space meaning that the visitor will have to tilt their head back to take in the full scope of the image, almost as if the street is actually there in front of them. This motion is a physical reminder of what one experiences when craning one's neck to look up at the tall buildings in the city.

The curve of the road going into the back right of the image directs the visitor round behind the right side to continue into the rest of the exhibition.



Figure 4 The Lily Apartments, Edward Hopper, 1926

Edward Hopper was an American painter who used the city of New York where he lived as the inspiration behind many of his paintings. In his work “Hopper’s New York was a product of his personal experiences in the city throughout his lifetime, of the particular ways that he engaged with the sites and sensations around him” (Conaty, 2022, pg. 12). With this painting, Hopper depicts only the tops of buildings which can be viewed from the side of the Manhattan Bridge. This composition in the piece draws one’s attention to the detailing that can be found in the architecture of many of the buildings in the city which is often not noticed by the passerby as they are moving from one place to another. There is a stillness in this piece created through the limited details depicted due to the nature of his painting style compared to the photography pieces in the exhibition.

In this exhibition, this painting will stay as the original piece to allow the visitor to take in the beauty of the watercolour brushstrokes and to create a break between the almost overwhelming nature of the large Abbott image, the business of the New Yorker covers and the sensory experience of viewing Ricardo Pereyra’s photograph in the dark.



Figure 5 Collection of New Yorker covers depicting different aspects of New York City

The New Yorker is a publication that has been around since 1925 and is one of New York's "most famous magazines" (Hughes, 2016). Although it is not read by everyone, the cover of the magazine is recognisable and an integral part of the appeal of the publication. Each cover has a different image that takes up the whole page, often depicting part of a story that can be found in that week's edition. As it was started in, and is still based out of New York City, there is a selection of back issue covers which represent the city through visual representation. The covers that are being displayed in this exhibition have been chosen due to this representation of different aspects of the city in a variety of art styles. As all the

covers are from separate issues, they can be looked at up close as individual pieces of art.

However when placed together in a grid layout a relationship is created between the pieces where they work in combination with each other to evoke the feeling of being in New York.

The diverse imagery will help the visitor make links between what they see represented in front of them and what they've seen in the city, or it will make them engage with the map provided in the exhibition guide to find the places depicted or remember the pieces from the exhibition when seen out and about.



Figure 6 Untitled, Ricardo Pereyra, 2023

This photograph will be in the dark room at the back left of the exhibition space. It will be on the end wall of the space displayed on a screen giving a backlight to the piece. The light of this image will be the only source of light in the small room which will draw the visitor in closer to look at the details in the image. From a distance the light of the neon signs and car lights will be visible, however to see the full subject matter from the light reflections on the wet road to the people in the photo one will need to go up close. The narrow nature of the room only allows for two people to stand next to each other to look at the piece, allowing them to create an up close intimate connection with the photo. Being a single image in this small, dark space also helps with this connection as it feeds into the visitor experience of the exhibition as the room is a direct contrast to all the other gallery spaces in the exhibition. The darkness of the room reflects the night time in the image. In comparison to the Abbott's

photo at the beginning this photo brings the visitor into the present due to the current technology of the building signs and the style of bus and car photographed.



Figure 7 *Voices In The Subway System, Jim Campbell, 2010 – as seen installed in Madison Square Park*

The final piece in this exhibition can be found in the outdoor garden. *Voices In The Subway Station* by Jim Campbell is a collection of 18 light up tablets placed over the ground which change their display to “move in sync with the sounds of the subway” (Dreimann, 2016). The subway system is an integral part of the city, although unseen above ground, as it connects everything together.

This piece brings this hidden integral part of the city to the surface whilst not being a literal image of the subway system it focuses on peoples interactions with the mode of transport.

“The light pulses emanating from each tablet rhythmically modulate to represent the voices of individual travellers as recorded in conversation on a subway platform, combining to create a visual symphony rendered in light.” (Campbell, 2010)

In contrast to the other pieces included in the exhibition, this installation uses the movement of light to represent its subject matter without it being obvious as to what is being shown at first glance. Being outside in a space of its own allows the visitor to have time to take in the piece whilst being surrounded by the stillness of nature in the garden with the sounds of the city being present in the back of their mind. Having this piece at the end of the exhibition also gives the visitor a chance to pause and reflect on the works they have just seen before going back out into the world to carry on with their lives.

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