map free city

summer 2026



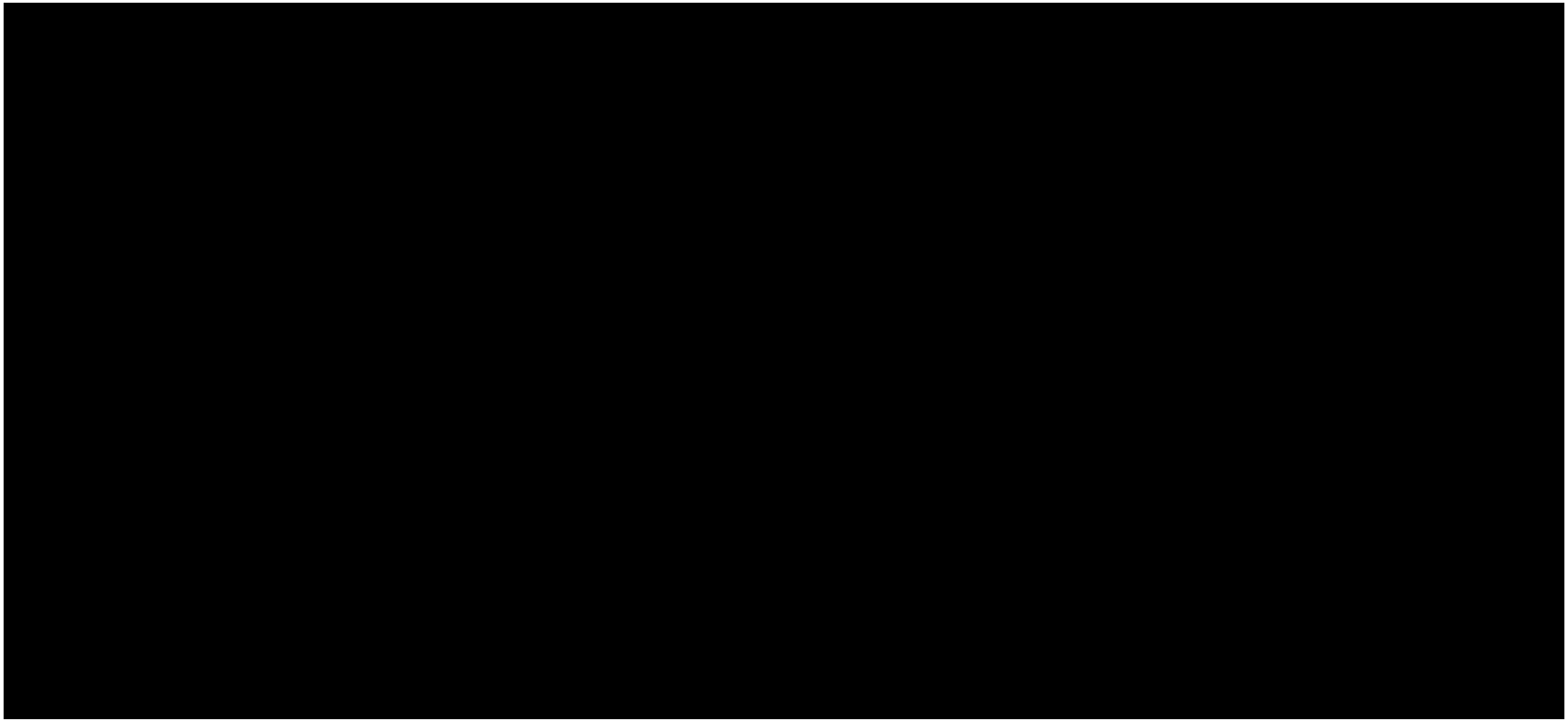
20 students 18 high schools

- 12 days 4 weeks
- 8 museums 5 boroughs
- 5 galleries 2 neighborhoods
- 3 speakers 1 guest




WE ARE MAP FREE CITY

National Museum of the American Indian - Lower Manhattan



National Museum of the American Indian - Lower Manhattan

The first museum of the month and we started off strong! In this exhibit, we explored artifacts from different Native tribes and even came across a game that would simulate how trading across tribes would go as well as the involvement of Dutch settlers.



The most memorable set of artifacts for me however, was the series of various pipes that were used to smoke tobacco dating back to nearly 2000 years ago. According to the description, smoking tobacco and sharing pipes was a ritual with connotation of community as it affirms peaceful relations. With this in mind, I think of the stark contrast that smoking in general has today, with the action being frowned upon rather than a community building event.



Astrid Pierre

Brooklyn Museum - Iris Van Herpen: Sculpting the Senses

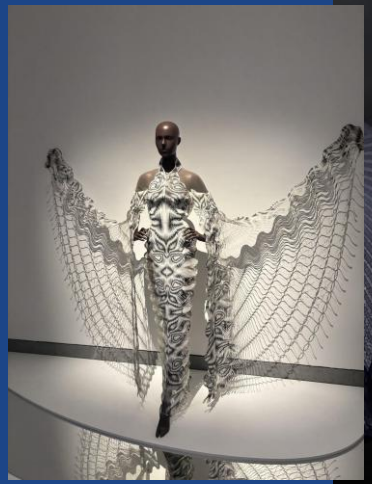


Brooklyn Museum - Iris Van Herpen: Sculpting the Senses

Sculpting the Senses is what I would call the most glamorous of the locations we've been to in Map Free City. From glittering gems sewed onto couture to walls of colorful artifacts all curated by designer Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen.

Herpen is known for incorporating technology into traditional haute couture in each of her pieces as well as taking inspiration from nature and curates her interpretation of invisible forces in her designs

The Sensory Seas dress created in 2020 was my favorite piece as it uses laser cut curves and textures in the fabric to replicate the fluid movements of a jellyfish in a way that still delivers the intention even when the dress remains stationary.



Skeleton Dress (2011-2012)
w/ Isaie Bloch



Sensory Seas Dress (2020)

Astrid Pierre

MoMA PS1 - Greater NY -Isla Rhodes

In an age of rapid gentrification across NYC the Greater New York exhibition at the MoMA PS1 reflects that minorities and oppressed groups are still present in our city. This exhibition acts as an outlet to amplify voices that tend to get lost in the noise of systems actively silencing underrepresented groups. The MoMA PS1 is a completely free and accessible art gallery to all New Yorkers located in Queens. The entrance process at the front desk was remarkably simple, all that is required of you is to share your zip code and then swiftly after enter through the courtyard. Initially, I had made the assumption that this exhibition would surround the history and architecture embedded within New York; to my surprise it was so much more than I could have imagined, each artist painted their own world to be stepped into, showcasing that New York is home to a variety of complex, unique, and individual cultures, social scenes, stories, and lifestyles. I believe this is a valuable exhibit for all New Yorkers across every burrow primarily due to our current political climate and the detriment it has caused many communities which isn't being displayed in mainstream media.

MoMA PS1 - Greater NY



Red Canary Song: Touch the Heart

The Red Canary Song is a grassroots collective led by Asian migrant massage and sex workers, the group formed as a result of a police shooting against migrant massage worker Yang Song. The group's primary aim is to prevent criminalization and violence against Asian Massage and sex workers. This display explores the fetishsization and objectification of Asians women, in Media and everyday life whilst contrasting with this social group's humanity. The theme of objectification and fetishization is expressed through the breasts and money stacks reflecting these workers as merely products to be bought and objects to be used for their services. On the other hand, the imagery of dumpling steamers conveys cultural identity and the humanity of these workers. These two themes inherently oppose one another and provoke thought whilst the scene altogether works to unsettle and draw the audience in.

New Museum - New Humans

The New Museum exhibition forces people to confront their technological decisions as well as what role technology will have in shaping humanity and shaping our future. Located in lower Manhattan, the exhibition zooms in on technological changes across the twentieth and twenty first century reshape and mimic human interactions. I think as we continue to become more and more reliant on artificial technology, it's easy for us to become unaware of the dangers it presents to society. One of the pieces of artwork that really stood out to me was the Mechanical Kurds video by Hito Steyerl. This video explores the hidden human labor behind artificial intelligence. The early twentieth century saw the rise of automated factory labor, along with the emergence of mechanized warfare. This phenomenon is still echoed in the present day in this video.





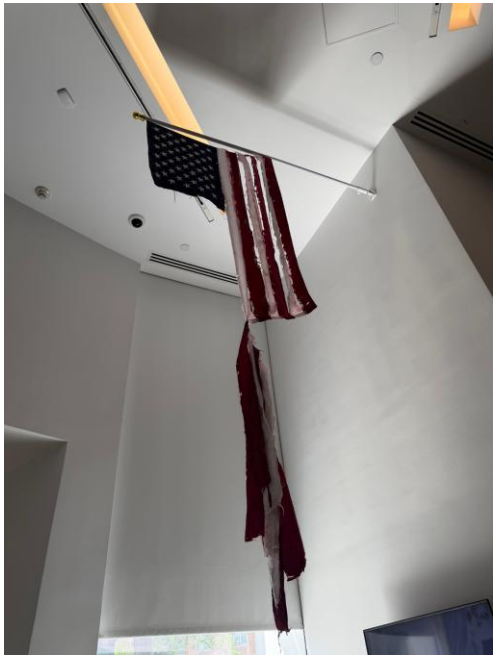


Bronx Museum of Art - 7th AIM Biennial

The Bronx Museum highlights the work of smaller, local artists, whose work reflects their heritage and personal inspirations. The work expressed in the Bronx Museum represents a sense of modernization through the various connections and materials used. The museum is located along a busy stretch of buildings in the Bronx, forcing it to be easily overlooked. The chaos occurring outside of the building drives the museum to blend in with its neighborhood. However, once visitors step inside, the environment completely changes from an active, busy neighborhood to a slowed down, and focused setting. This environmental change allowed me to engage with the artwork on a deeper level, in which I found myself relating to the stories being expressed by the artists and found a greater sense of appreciation to the work around me.

The Bronx museum explores the various perspectives that artists have and the meaning behind each piece. The broken flag at the entrance of the museum was a piece that stood out to me because I saw this piece as a reflection of the American economic and political system. However, the meaning behind this piece by the artist, Asia Stewart, stems from inspiration being drawn from The Gillette Company's growth through its role in WW1. Stewart created this piece, *The Money Is In The Blades,* to depict the connection between businesses and their involvement with the United States. This perspective and meaning behind an art piece is extremely eye-opening to viewers because we realize that art is not limited to one perspective, and that the meaning from the artist can deepen our understanding of the artist's perspective in understanding the artist and how they think. Overall, viewers learn that art can form from various stories, and that each piece has its own hidden message and representation.

Olivia Divinagracia



The Money Is In The Blades

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

History about the Met: The Met is a Museum located on 5th ave and 81st street. Research shows the idea for the Met came out in 1866 in Paris. The idea they came up with was to bring art to the American people as well as art education. The main person who had this idea was John Jay. He found investors and they built The Met. They added many rooms over the years and now the Met has 17 different departments and has over 1.5 million art pieces.

Marble Statue of a Lion, Greek 400 - 390 BC: This was a Greek work of art that was taken to Rome during the Roman Empire (27 BC - 395 AD). Statues of lions were used as grave markers or as guardians placed by a tomb. The symbol of a Lion represents power and strength so it scares off evil spirits. It also represents heroes who are great courageous men linked to powerful lions. The lion is linked to how rich a person is because only rich people could afford a lion in front of their grave.



Chelsea Galleries

With a combination of the common design principles, the Chelsea Galleries were able to depict emotion in many ways. Whether that be through rough texture or vibrant colors, the art on display connects to the viewer. Commonly found in these collections of galleries were surreal patterns. Most notably being *River Mirror,* by artist **Firelei Báez** in 2026.

Firelei Báez repeats an image of of these stand alone glass models of hands. These hands were placed all over this piece, offering speculations and questions on what it is and how it connects to the message the piece is trying to convey. Patterns in art prompt the viewer to think beyond what the art is showing and consider what the art is trying to tell. **Firelei Báez** also incorporates color perfectly into this piece as the brighter the color, the closer your eye will draw attention towards the center. This is a technique used by many designers as this creates multiple focal points throughout the piece.

-Spencer



River Mirror | 2026

Chelsea Galleries - Lehmann Maupin

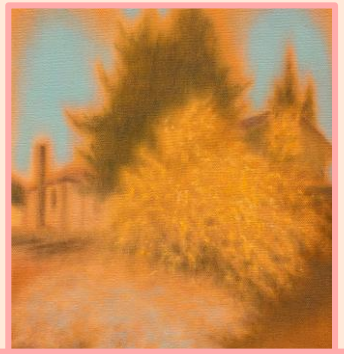
On July 29th, 2026, Map Free City went to various galleries in the Chelsea district, with one of those galleries being Lehmann Maupin. Guimi You's exhibition "When The Sun Shines Again" was on view, featuring paintings that reminded me of the European impressionism style (even though the artist is from South Korea). You's exhibition focused on light and shadow- with light symbolizing the renewal of hope and shadow obscuring what lies ahead (the unknown, figuratively and literally).

I felt moved by this theme, because prior to MFC, I was feeling burned out from creating art due to the demands of school and the stressful college application process- "...a tribute to those who have returned to creating after time away" - museum blurb

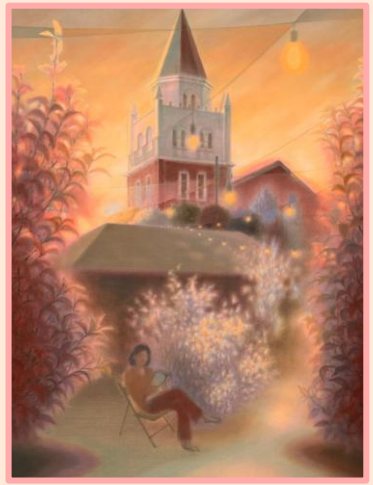
While it is hard to tell from these images, I love how the colors blend together and appear fuzzy-like, like the glow of sunlight when it filters through a window and the yellow ring around the trees. You's paintings make the ordinary feel special and full of hope, making it easier to connect to the artist's work. Her work makes me feel cozy and calm overall!

- ***Gina***



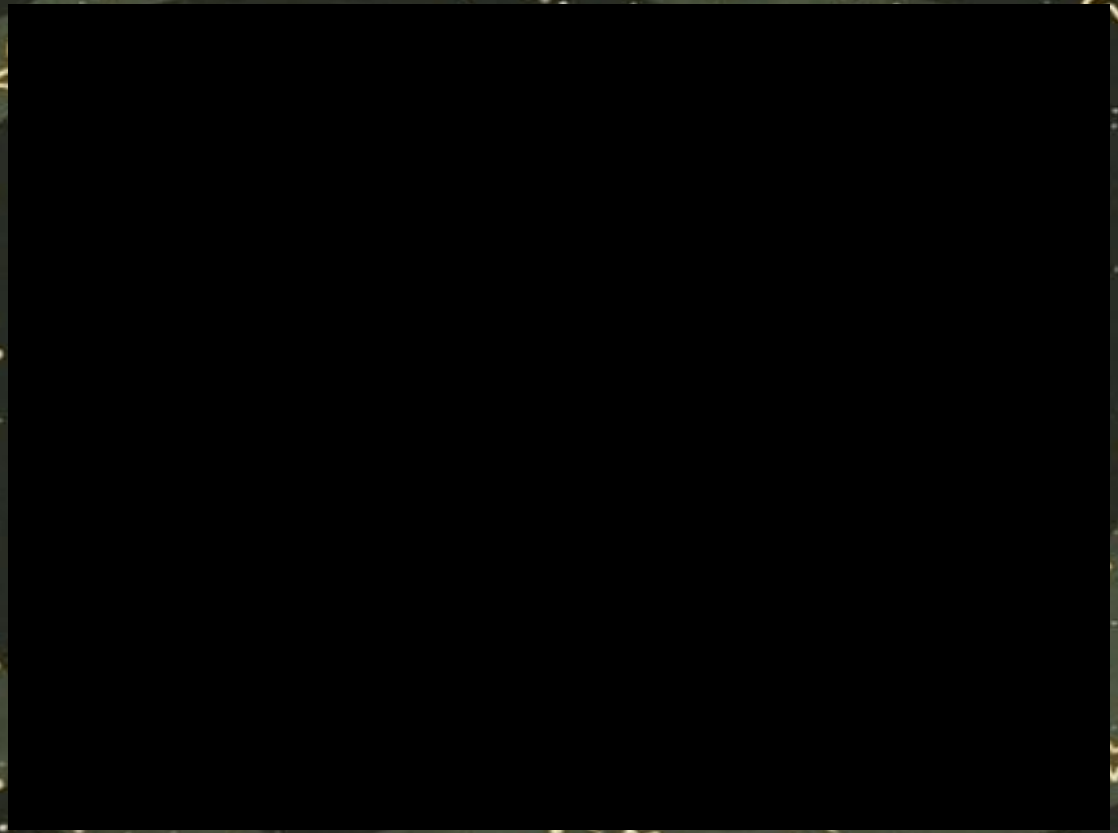








What connects humanity with art? - Henry



Humans Connection To Art - Sofia

Humans use art as a way to express themselves. Through art, people can express emotions, discuss and bring awareness to important issues in our world, help others feel seen as well as bring beauty to the world. Art brings people together, For example, during on our trips to the many museums and galleries we experienced art as a group, learning about both the past and present. Art is personal to an individual and can be interpreted in many ways which makes its impact even stronger. Some pieces of art that really spoke out to me were:



The Center for Cuban Studies opened in May 1972. It was founded as a non-profit educational and cultural organization to provide information about what was ongoing in Cuba. Later on they created a gallery dedicated to Cuban art. I'm part cuban and seeing all the art from my culture was really inspiring especially because I didn't know much about it



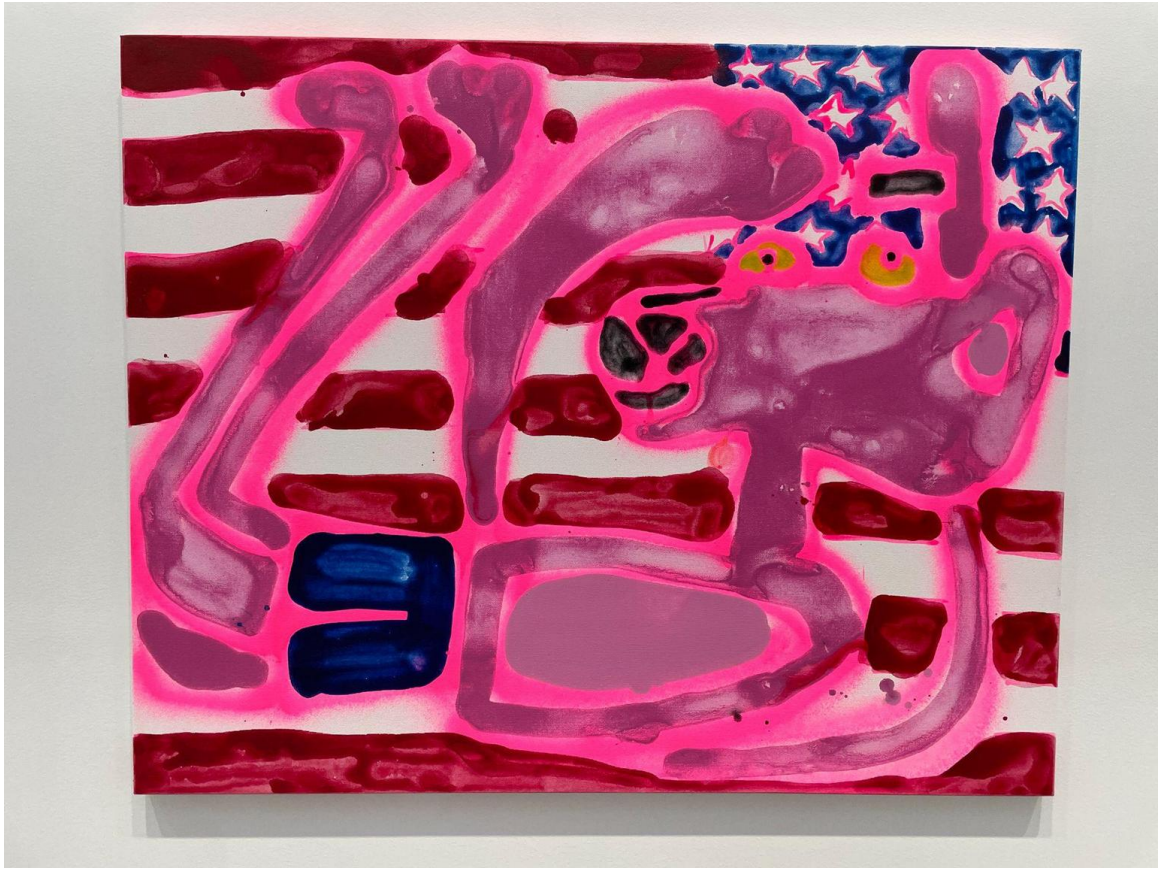
The Brooklyn Museum opened in 1823. This was one of my favorite pieces because I loved the positive message it wrote about, especially with everything going on in the world.

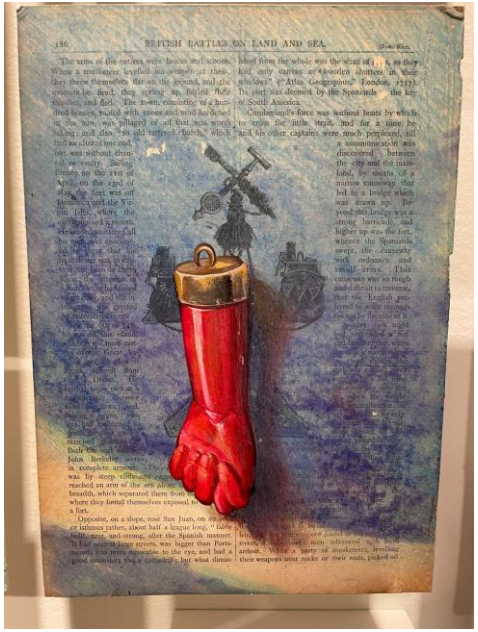


The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of my favorite museums because it has so much to offer. Every Gallery is full of amazing artifacts, paintings, and sculptures from different times in history. When our program first started, we were asked, "What is the greatest work of art?" Instead, I realized that finding the "greatest" work of art is much more personal than I expected.



One of the pictures I took is of a decorated piano with a painting inside the lid. I liked how it was both a musical instrument and a piece of art. My other picture is of a large bronze statue in the museum. The statue is very detailed, and seeing it in such a big room made it look even more impressive. This resonated with me because ever since I was young I've played the piano. I still haven't found what I think is the greatest work of art, but that's okay. I hope that one day I will find a piece that really stands out to me. Until then, I will keep visiting museums and enjoying the different kinds of art they have.







These three artworks engaged me the most, for different reasons. Kathryn Bernhard's work challenged my perception as well as my tastes. FIrelei Báez made me examine details, and peel away the layers. Saba Qizilbash astonished me with her commentary on cultural appropriation, for its ferociousness and, like Báez's art, for the weight of history it is revealing, unveiling. - bmac

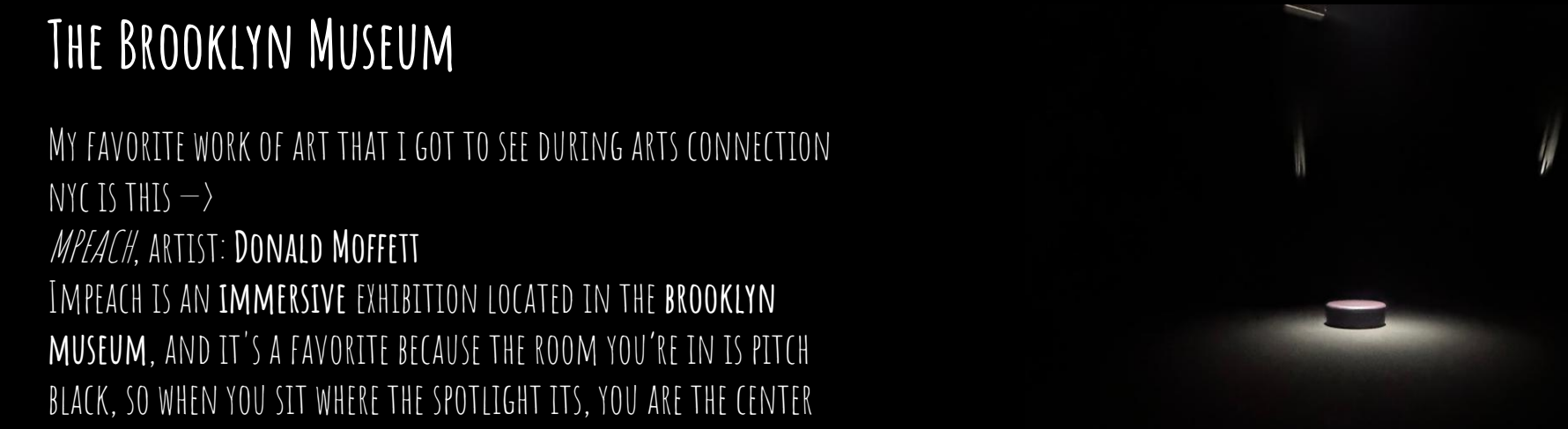
The Brooklyn Museum

My favorite work of art that I got to see during arts connection nyc is this —›

MPEACH, artist: **Donald Moffett**

Impeach is an **immersive** exhibition located in the **brooklyn museum**, and it's a favorite because the room you're in is pitch black, so when you sit where the spotlight its, you are the center of attention in a way. Around you are speakers that play a speech by **John Lewis**. He talks about surviving a storm and bringing together a divided nation.





Emely (Emilia) Duran

My experience

During my visit to the Bronx Museum through the Arts Connection summer program, one artwork that stayed with me was an installation made of stacked CRT televisions wrapped with bright red cables. At first, I was drawn to the bold colors. The orange wall, blue television screens, and red cords created a strong contrast that immediately caught my eye. I decided to create a watercolor painting inspired by this piece instead of simply taking another photograph. Leaving my face without features made the artwork feel more like a memory than a realistic portrait. The old televisions also reminded me that technology changes so quickly. Something that was once new can become outdated within a few years, yet it still holds memories and stories. The tangled cables also made me think about how connected our lives are to technology, even when it becomes messy or overwhelming. Contemporary art is not always about finding one correct meaning. Sometimes it is about slowing down, observing carefully, and creating your own interpretation.











Za museum that stood out to me was the

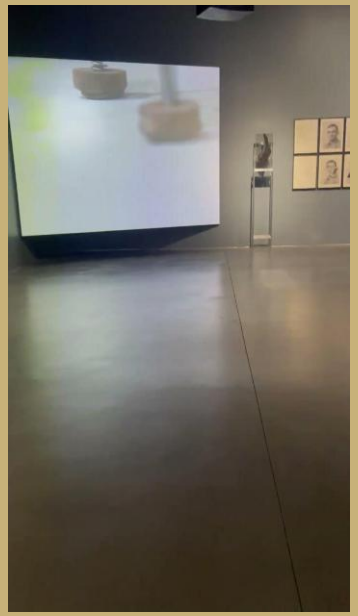






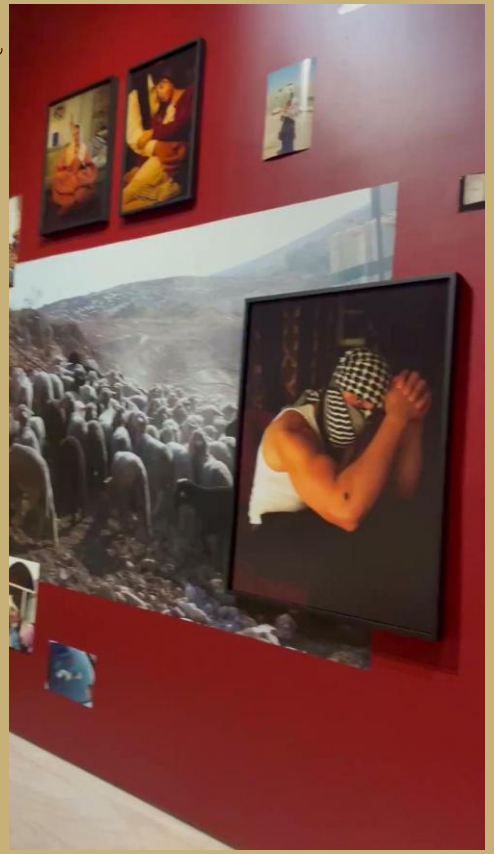
How sound affected my experience viewing art – Veronica

Many of the pieces I especially enjoyed or felt drawn to were in the same room as pieces with sound playing, so as you were looking at a piece there was effectively a soundtrack to that experience. The best example of this was at the MoMA PS1 where Dean Majd's photo series *Separation* and *Birthmark* were displayed in the same room as Esteban Jefferson's pieces which included a video that played on a small TV on the floor. I stayed in the room looking at the photos for a long time, and after going through more of the museum I doubled back and looked at the photos again. The photos are very beautiful and tell a pretty clear story about the similarities and differences between the lives of Palestinians and members of the Palestinian diaspora, but I don't know if I would've been as captivated if the environment of the room was quiet and was just a set of photographs in a room. Similarly, at the New Museum, Henrik Olesen's collage series *"A.T.,"* was displayed next to a large screen that played a video by a separate artist loudly which made the contradictions of the British government's treatment of Alan Turing, the subject of the series, especially provoke my emotions, so I felt drawn in, and the emotional depth of the piece was more pronounced.



"A.T.," (2012) by Henrik Olesen





Separation (2018) and *Birthmark* (2022-present) by Dean Majd

Two Museums

In my time at Map Free City two museums stand out to me the most. These are the Bronx Museum and the Poster House. Both Museums were on the smaller side, with different themes and purposes. However, In general, I would say that the Poster House was far more impressive to me than the Bronx Museum. There are multiple reasons for my assessment, from aesthetic reasons to quality of the pieces on display.

The poster house, despite being a similar size, was far better at telling a story through their artwork. Their story of the representation of Black people in film and media were clearly visible as you walked through the gallery. It was like a slideshow that you could watch without any descriptions. By contrast, the Bronx Museum did not tell a unified story. While they had a wider range of objections, they did not feel like they were meant to be together. There was video artwork right next to a ground sculpture of shovels, and a bench right across a charcoal drawing. It all felt nonsensical and out of place. The main problem was that it was trying to do too much at once. The exhibit tried to “map interactions and oppositions, isolation, and belonging,” but the result was more like a jumbled mess. In its attempts to tell so many different stories at once, it failed to convey a single one, as any tale was lost in the cacophony of dozens of other narratives.

In addition, the poster house was far better when it came to exhibit design. While I do respect the Bronx museum's attitude to modern artists, the way they designed their exhibit just felt strange. None of the pieces felt like they were meant to go together, and it all just felt strange. I get that the Bronx museum is trying to take a different attitude towards museums and try and make it more engaging the public, but they way they did it needs work.

The Poster House, by contrast, just worked. Everything from the color of the wall, to the lighting, and the location the objects just worked. It all in all created a comprehensive and aesthetically pleasing exhibit.

Despite my preference for the Poster House, however, there is one facet of the Bronx Museum that makes it stand out. Due to its limited collection, you really were forced to reflect and analyze each piece in greater detail. That made it an all around more memorable experience. For the Poster House, I can recall certain posters, yet not almost every single piece like I can for the Bronx Museum. Also, I have to give it some slack as it was under construction, which definitely limited the amount of objects that could be viewed.