

Seeing What Is Up in Manhattan

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Abstract

Photo essay.

How can we see what's up? Particularly in a dense metropolis such as Manhattan, crowded with skyscrapers, with every square footage swallowed whole by edifices, some still standing from a past century next to those that are newer, sleek, and formidable? Many of Manhattan's structures are so hard to see. We pass them by, seeing parts, never fully seeing them in all of their glory. The camera can't always capture the whole image, can't begin to construct the actual dimension of a structure. We rely these days on google maps, drone images, and vistas from special vantage points—rooms with a view. How does the everyday citizen see?

To position oneself in a location that affords a timeless look at the city, one should be willing to trespass. The mentality is not unlike the graffiti artist who seeks a city scape under cover of darkness, or the surfer crossing uncertain terrain to discover a secret beach with cresting waves. Locate yourself. Be still, and look for a timeless moment.



Fig. 1. Roosevelt Island Tram, May 2015. I took this shot from the Roosevelt Island Tram traveling in the opposite direction. The tram sways within, among, and above tall buildings of Manhattan. This is one way to get close, without trespassing. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 2. Manhattan Bridge, October 2018. Down under the Manhattan Bridge on the Brooklyn side there are numerous footpaths and tidal Marshes along a path named John Street. During a driving nor'easter, I left the safety of the path and faced the tower. The conditions provided density that complements the magnificence of this 1901 structure. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 3. Construction site for 528 West 28th street, Zaha Hadid, June 2015. View from the High Line, Chelsea. With the opening of the High Line, New York City re-zoned West Chelsea in 2015, commencing in a high-end real estate boom. This photo witnesses the birth of the fabulous condominium complex designed by the late architect at 528 West 28th Street. Photo Credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 4. Freedom Tower, June 2018. When scanning the Manhattan skyline most of us can find the top of this tower. From the street it is hard to see the entire structure. This photo was taken from the terrace of the W Hotel, located in the Financial district. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 5. Views of the Women's March, January 2017, crossing 42nd Street, Manhattan. How does one manage to find the vertical vantage point to witness a horizontal event? Grand Central Station offers an elevated street, which connects to Pershing Bridge. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 6. Views of the Women's March, January 2017, crossing 42nd Street, Manhattan. Again, how does one manage to find the vertical vantage point to witness a horizontal event? By climbing ever-present scaffolds, constantly in use all over the city, year in and year out, to platforms for the maintenance of the city's skyscrapers and buildings. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 7. Our Lady of Pompeii Church, Carmine Street Greenwich Village, September 2015. The church, a safe haven for Italian immigrants, was founded in 1892 and the building constructed in 1928. This perspective of only the three-story bell tower atop the church promotes its stature and dignity, as it stands guard over the lower buildings of the Village. The entire church can be seen from the corner of Carmine and Bleecker, but this perspective can only be seen from the entrance to Minetta Lane Triangle, bordering Bleecker Street and Sixth Avenue. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 8. The Swan (untitled), Matt Johnson, the High Line, September 2017. The High Line, a former elevated railroad has been transformed into one of Manhattan's most unique public parks, combining nature and art. The horizontal path begins in the 30's and meanders downtown, to 12th street, along the way straddling fabulous new architectural structures and providing vantage points for stunning views to factories that once were. Matt Johnson's untitled doodle whimsically breaks the horizontal path and the vertical skyline. It is constructed from a rail found on the original site. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 9. Washington Square Arch and Holiday Tree, December 2018. Most photos of the arch depict the arch as squat and square, given its low height. This photo imbues the arch with height, framed by the vertical tree to the right, and the shadows reflected in the lights illuminating the side of the arch. To take this view, I trespassed into the garden bordering the north side of the park. Photo credit: Denice Martone.



Fig. 10. View of Washington Square Park, November 2018. This view of the park taken after a dusting of snow is from NYU's Kimmel Center Building, 9th Floor. From this vantage, circular paths seem to resist the verticality of looming nearby structures. Photo credit: Denice Martone.

About the author

Denice Martone is the Associate Director of the Expository Writing Program at New York University where she is a Clinical Professor, teaching first year writing to international students. She has lost a fair number of eye glasses while looking up to compose a photo. In her spare time she is a teaching assistant at The International Center of Photography where she works with students on wet process and dark room printing techniques.