



NEW YORK

5 - 14 April 2024

Greta & Mike Fitchett



Day 1: Friday 5 April 2024



New York is still standing and we've seen no damage on our modest excursions today following the 4.7 magnitude earthquake which made the apartment shake for maybe 10 to 15 seconds at 10.23 local time. At 11.06 whilst walking down Lexington Avenue we got an emergency buzz and message on our mobiles advising New Yorkers to stay indoors! It was a bit late by then – we wondered if the message took a while to reach our UK phones. At 11.46 we were in Grand Central and another message came, we could tell that other people were getting it but no-one appeared to take any notice. It was a follow up about aftershocks. And we actually felt one, around 18.00 local time. Meanwhile life just carried on here as normal as far as we could tell.

Today we saw a picture on the BBC News page of lightning homing on the Statue of Liberty. A spectacular storm but we'd not landed here by then. It is said things happen in threes and as natural phenomena go we're due another – a solar eclipse will reach 89% coverage of the sun's disc here in the city at 15.25 on Monday 8 April.

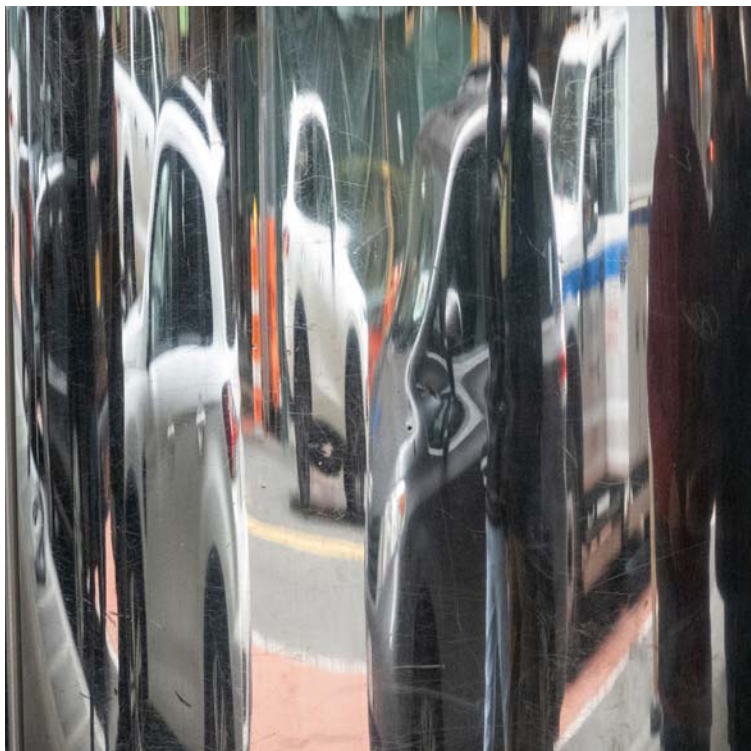
Headed downtown to look at City Hall this afternoon, glimpsed the Brooklyn Bridge and saw the Woolworth Building (no tourists permitted inside), combining a bit of a Subway exploration too.



Pictures this page, top & centre: Meeting Under The Clock - we glimpsed our Brasso polished reflection in the door panels of the information kiosk on Grand Central Concourse; bottom: Mirror Magic – big vehicles are squished in their reflection on a shiny pillar at street level.

Opposite page, top: W 41st Street cuts a deep notch in the skyscrapers viewed from Bryant Park; centre left: City Hall, Tribeca; centre right: Art Deco doorway on 5th Avenue; bottom left: Wonder of Woolies - nothing inexpensive about this 1913 skyscraper in Tribeca; bottom right: Big Fiddle on the Subway – a double bass and its owner heading for Midtown.

“Tribeca” = TRaingle BElow CANal (Street) - name of the district at the SW tip of Manhattan Island.





Day 2: Saturday 6 April 2024

Architecture presents patterns, particularly noticeable in a big city such as this. Teasing out and isolating some of those patterns for photos makes exploring the city rewarding.

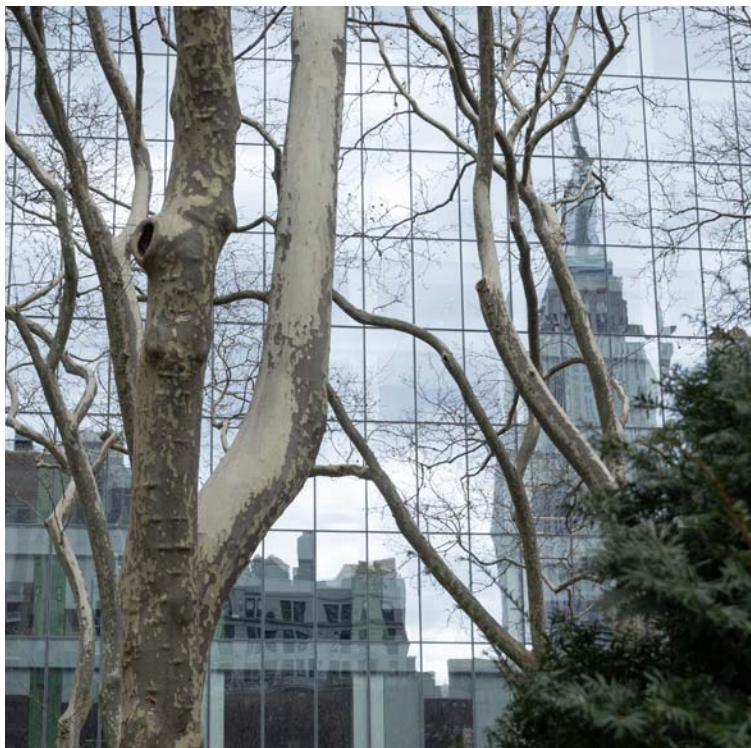
New York has, of necessity, pioneered a method of building skyscrapers on a site no larger than their own footprint. Over a century later here's a great deal of skyscraper building, and refurbishing, still going on. Sidewalks are protected by scaffolding passages whilst above, cranes and lifts haul pre-finished parts to position, all delivered on site to a rigorously timetabled programme. The core of the building rises first, around which structure and cladding are added in stepped layers.

Among the structures caught in reflections was the Empire State Building. Today it was not the only Empire State Building in town, as we discovered it had a miniature replica formed of Walkers Shortbread Biscuits on display outside the Algonquin Hotel. The biscuit maker's token to Tartan Day, as we were to discover when we saw the parade on 6th Avenue.

Later we explored Times Square, where the bright animated advertising panels definitely lit up the shadows and brightened an overcast day. Nearby a building under refurbishment and shorn of its façade made an interesting pattern in its own right.

Pictures this page, above: Reconstruction on 5th Avenue; below: Reflection of the Empire State Building glimpsed from Bryant Park.

Opposite page, top: Traffic waiting at the lights as we cross Park Avenue; centre: Shortbread Empire State and the Tartan Day Parade; bottom left: Times Square; bottom right: Rebuilding on W 42nd Street.



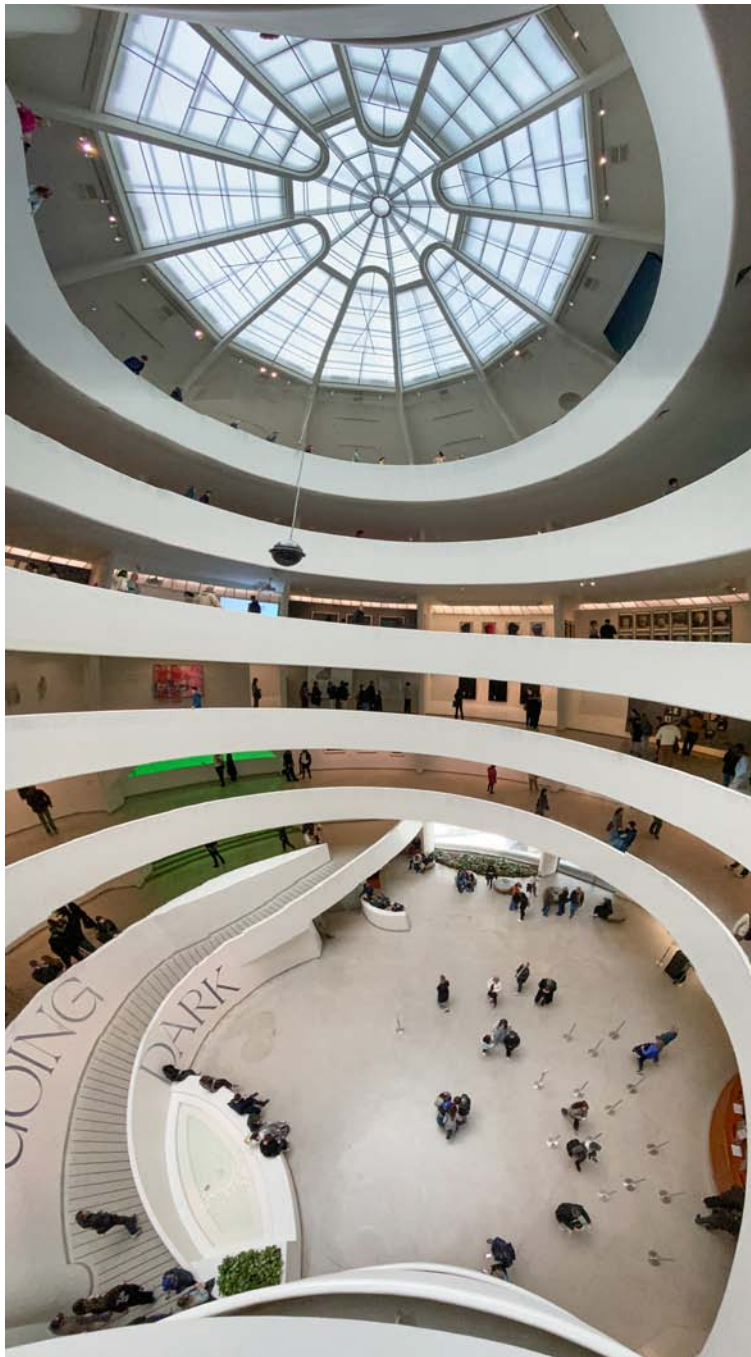


Day 3: Sunday 7 April 2024

I first became aware of the Guggenheim Museum when, in the early 1970s the agency where I worked as a Technical Illustrator was contracted to produce “cutaway” drawings for a book entitled *Anatomy of Architecture*. 50 years on I get to see the landmark for myself. It didn't disappoint. The spiral slope of the interior rotunda galleries gave an unsettling, disorienting, sensation. Most of the art on display was about as far from technical illustration as could be imagined and intriguing in a very different way from the building. The technology in our pockets would have been thought impossible in the '70s. Our iPhones enabled us to photograph a panorama of the interior in a bid to capture the dizzying vertigo.

Central Park provided the spectacle of joggers beneath sparkling cherry blossom and kids playing baseball on “The Lawn”. Parting clouds let brilliant sunshine through to spotlight the city and edge the temperature up from the 9 degrees that had chilled us for the past 2 days.

Pictures this page, above: Guggenheim Rotunda; below left: iPad sketch from Central Park Engineers Gate; below right: Sunday morning joggers on Central Park. Opposite page, above: Central Park at Blossom Time; Below left: Crosswalk Echoes Architecture; below right: St Patrick's Cathedral, 5th Avenue.





Day 4: Monday 8 April 2024

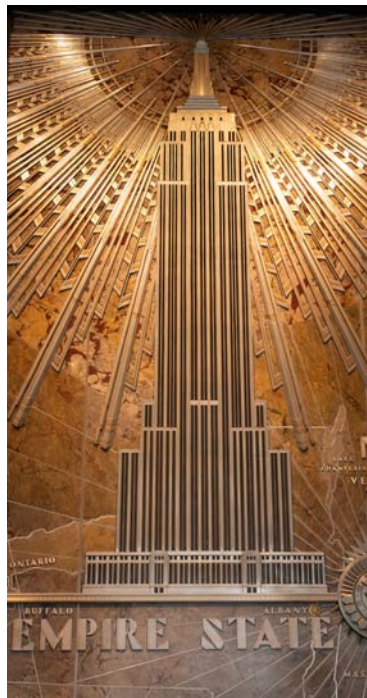
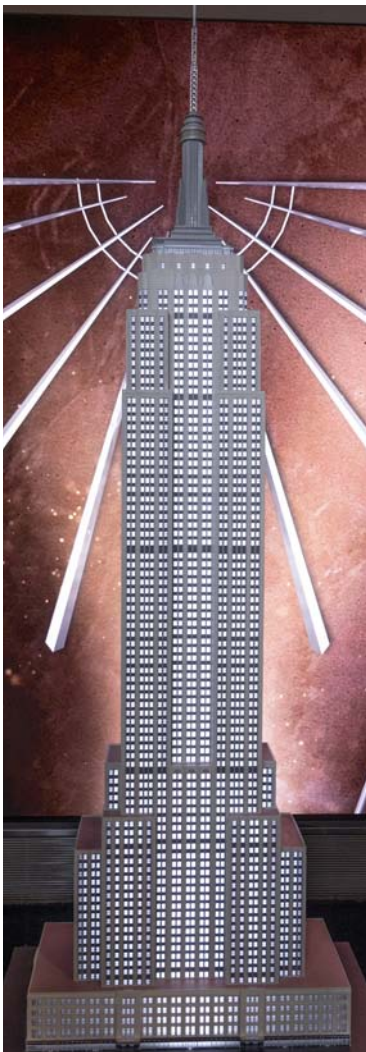
There's far too much to see in a lifetime in all major world cities. None more so than here, where an excursion skywards confirms the fact. From the viewing gallery outside on the 86th floor of the Empire State Building something else becomes obvious - size is everything. Here, with another 16 floors to go before reaching the very top, we see distant skyscrapers competing for the crown of highest, standing upon a carpet of city that spreads hungrily in all directions.

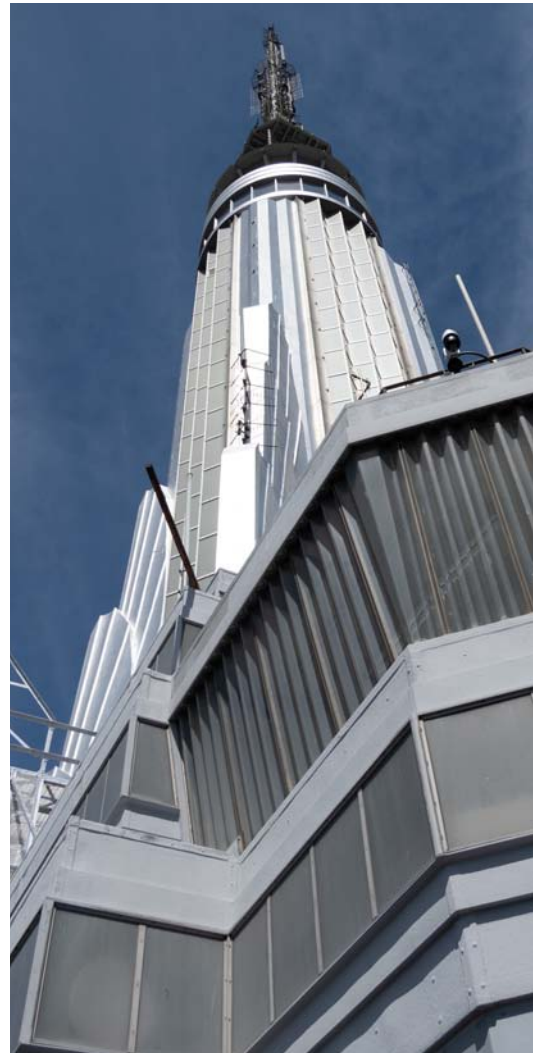
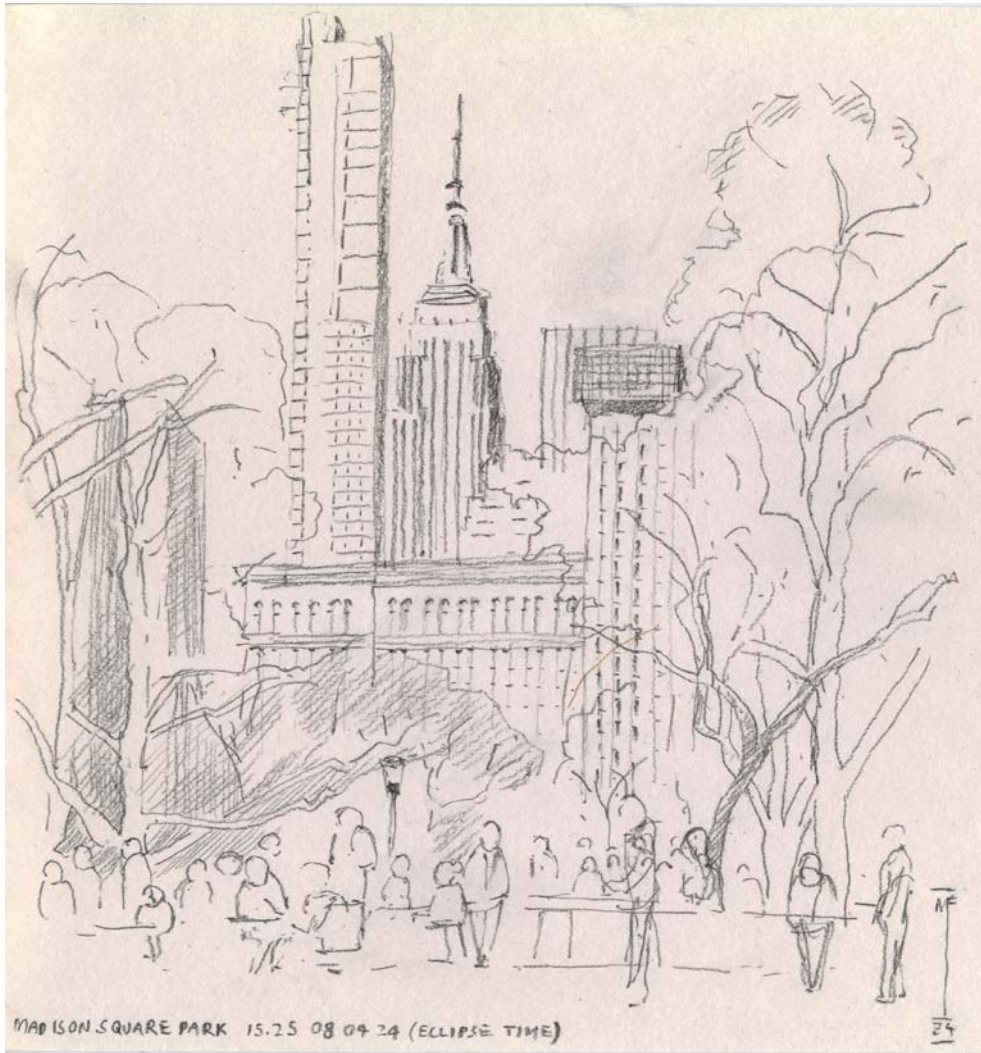
Today was the day of the Great American Eclipse, about which the media has gushed endlessly for the last few days. Having no eye protection ourselves, and having seen eclipses before, we just sat and watched everyone else. We had chosen Madison Square Park for our afternoon excursion, mainly for a look at the Flatiron Building. That was disappointing as it turned out to be shrouded in scaffolding. Instead I sketched the Empire State with a nearby tower still under construction - not actually taller - just nearer to my viewpoint.

I'd read that a second visit to the Empire State may be made on the same ticket after dark on the same day. That seemed too good to be true. I was sure there was a catch, but a very helpful member of staff there confirmed it, and advised us to return by 7pm as they closed at 8. We were in good time – 6.30 – and discovered that we'd been told wrong. Night readmission officially started at 8.30. We abandoned the visit.

Pictures this page, above: The presence of the Empire State looms shadowy over W 34th Street and Herald Square; left and below: interior decorations.

Opposite page, above: View south-west; below left: Sketch view from Madison Square; below right: pinnacle from the viewing balcony.







Day 5: Tuesday 9 April 2024

Had I stumbled across a local Urban Sketching group? It's happened before on our travels (even in Tokyo!) but no, these were students, sitting on benches in a pocket handkerchief public open space just behind the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Greta and I selected a bench with a viewpoint and I began to draw, whilst the students also observed and recorded. Presently their professor "did the rounds" so I asked him if he might assess my work too. He declined, explaining "they're writing. This is an Observational Writing

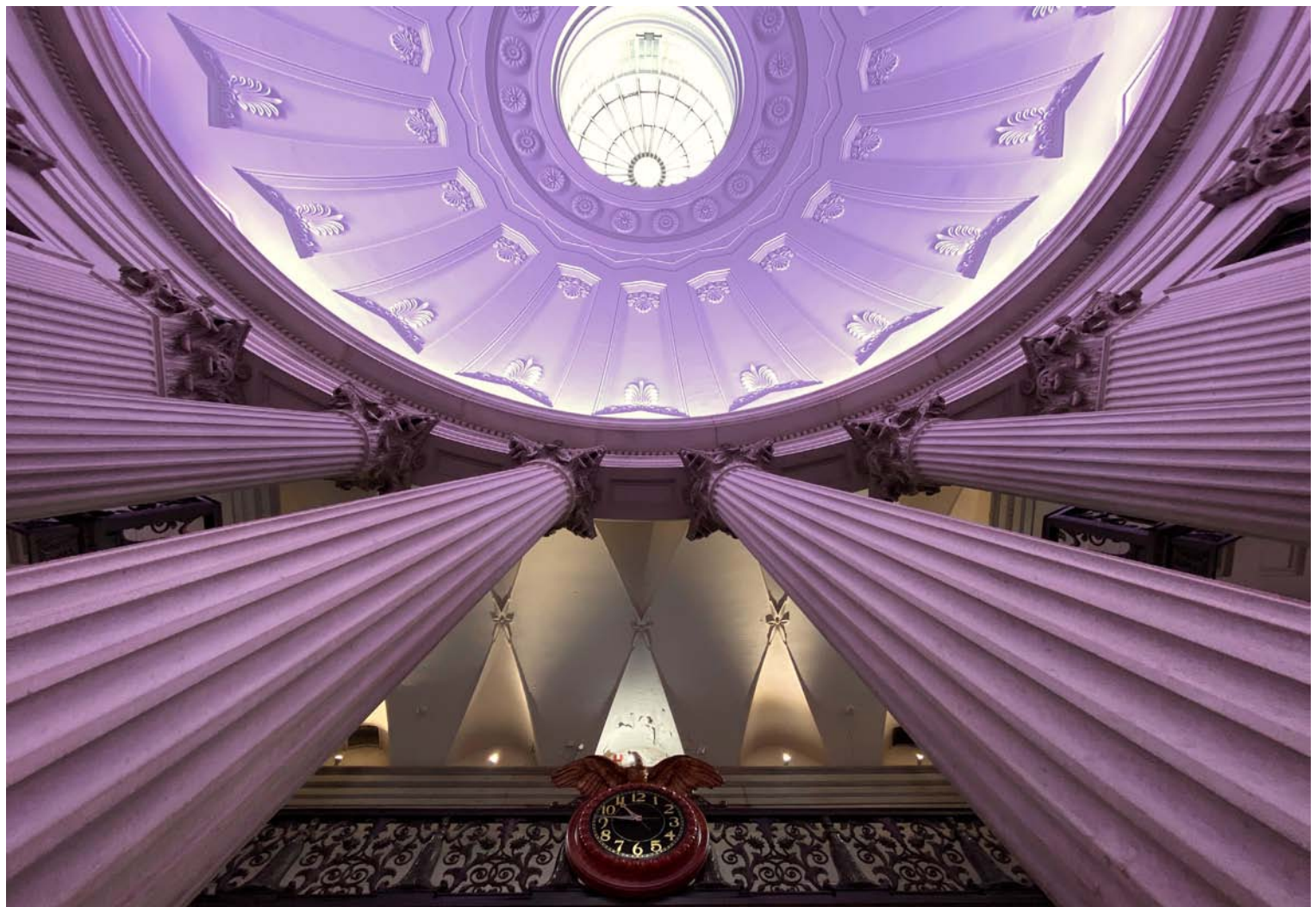
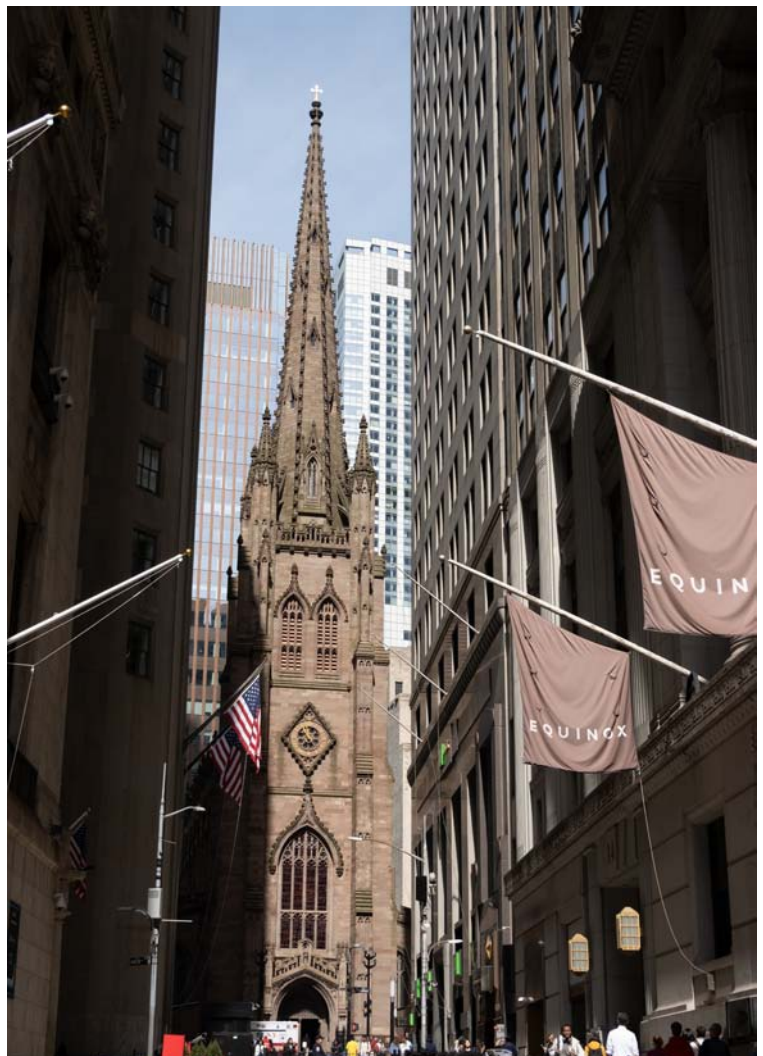
group. I'm not qualified to assess drawing." He did seem pleased to see my sketch though.

My sketchy sketch done as much as it was ever going to be, we headed off. Up Liberty Street and past the heavily rusticated limestone edifice of the aforementioned bank, built in the style of a Florentine bank or Palazzo, complete with turreted top stories. We turned down Nassau Street and found our way into the old Federal Hall. This one-time City Hall, Custom House and Treasury was where Congress convened when New York became the nations capital in 1785, and where

George Washington took the oath of presidency. Subsequently used by the FBI, Passport Office and other government departments, it might be fairly regarded as the heart of the USA. And at its heart is a magnificent rotunda – centre to the Greek Revival rebuild of 1842.

Opposite page: Sketch of the writing group working beneath an abstract sculpture by Lousie Nevelson. sc.

This page, right: Trinity Church from Wall Street; bottom: The Rotunda, Federal Hall.





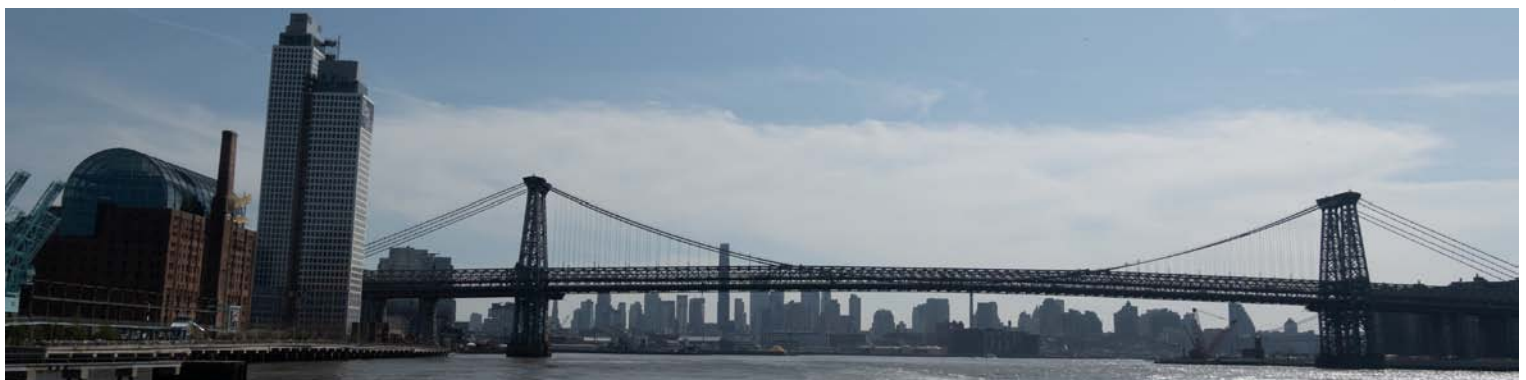
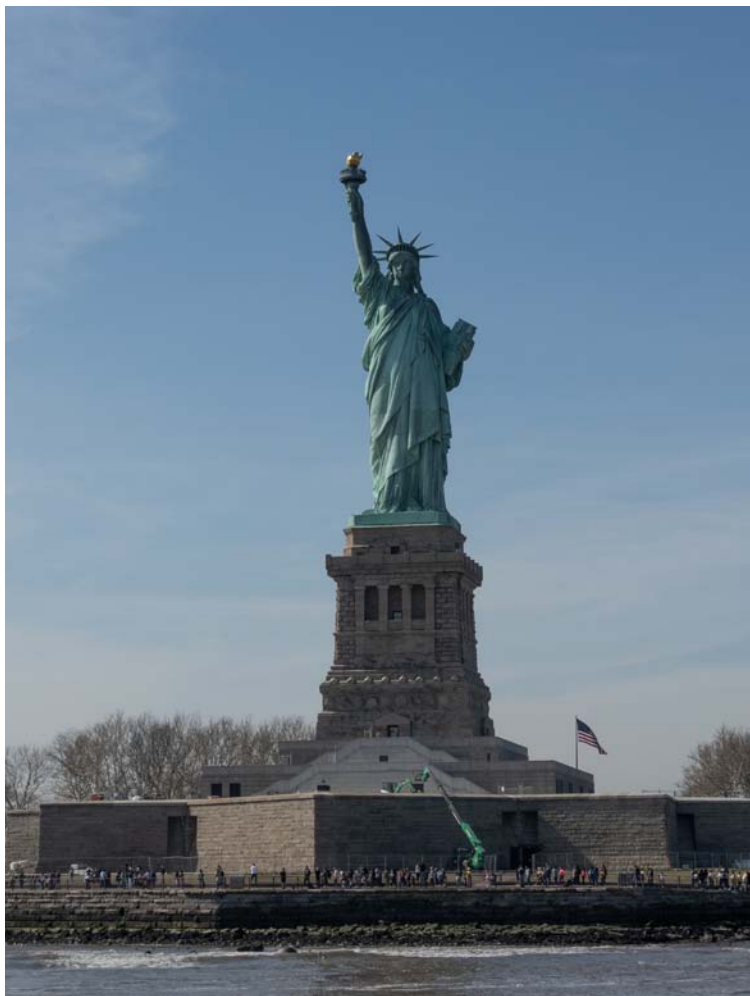
Tuesday 9 April 2024 continued

From the height of yesterdays vista we experienced the breadth of the Harbour vista, taking in views of New Jersey, Ellis, Liberty, Governors and Long Island, and Washington, Verrazano, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges. Gleaming glass, honey and sandy stone skyscrapers stood confident and assured, as if unconcerned that their heritage had its roots in that comparatively modest sized hall three-quarters buried and half forgotten amongst the overbearing towers of Wall Street.

I began our boat excursion with a sketch prior to departure from Pier 83, then managed a few sketchy thumbnails when under way. But the camera took over – it had to – after all this was the only way to get a proper record of the sights that came so fast, one after another after another.....

Pictures this page, above: Skyline from Pier 83; left: Liberty Island; below: Williamsburg Bridge.

Opposite page, above: Manhattan from the Hudson River; below: Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges.





Day 6: Wednesday 10 April 2024



Every place is as much about the people as the landmarks, but that's easy to forget when enveloped in such a vast built environment as New York. For ourselves, we are at the same time tourists and temporary residents, with our own kitchen which seems strange to be cooking in just 30 minutes walk from the Broadway Theatres. But it also means we can save a few dollars and buy fruit and vegetables from a friendly supplier on the nearest street corner.



Like the tourists we actually are, our walk to the local Subway station is punctuated with stops to take photos. Today, a few photo stops on, we settle in Bryant Park, thankful that the forecast rain has not materialised and I can draw. We're in an outdoor public space shared with hundreds of people in intimate family or friend groups, each with their own particular agenda. In the indoor public space of the New York Public Library a family appears to have happily made themselves at home beside a mural in the McGraw Rotunda.

Our apartment is in a business district – as we return at midday we dodge hurrying office workers carrying covered bowls and paper bags that doubtless contain takeaway lunches to be consumed at desks. Later, heading for the Theatre we stumble on the big city's attempt at combatting the perennial problem of car parking, where for a bargain 49 dollars your car can be “shelved” for 12 hours. Then we enter a world that is far from everyday for us.

It's not as easy to casually “take in a show” as we imagine it once was. Nor as cheap. We booked to see Moulin Rouge weeks before our trip. All the main places we visit, not just there theatre, require pre-booking. I won't spoil the story of Moulin Rouge for anyone thinking of going (it's also running in London), suffice to say that it was spectacular. A great afternoon out (yes, in our old age we opted for a matinee) which was definitely a memorable one for all the right reasons. Few people seem to dress up for a theatre visit these days, but we glimpsed one in the lobby who appeared to think it worthwhile for the occasion.



Top: Friendly fruit stallholder; above: In the Public Library; left: Al Hirschfeld Theatre Lobby.

Opposite page, top: Sketch of Bryant Park Hotel and Empire State Building; below: Multi-storey parking; Awaiting curtain-up.





Day 7: Thursday 11 April 2024

When We Were Very Young – we all had a curiosity about our world, yet little knowledge. And in a strange sort of way, childhood perceptions were recalled by me today. Take skyscrapers for instance. Why were they called that, I enquired at an early age. To me a scraper was something parents used to strip wallpaper. I was somewhat baffled that buildings might be made so tall so as to be used to redecorate the sky. But today it was the sky scraping the buildings. Cloud had descended, if only to demonstrate the sheer height of many New York towers. And of course to upset tourists who had booked their high viewpoint visits.

And something else. Why do aeroplanes go into hangars? I had a childhood imagining of them actually flying in and somehow getting hooked so that they literally hung inside.

Hangar 1, and Hangar 2. So it is marked on the aircraft carrier INTREPID. We're looking at her, moored permanently at Pier 86 on the shore of the Hudson River. And she has hangars – below decks. Intrepid is now the main attraction at the eponymous museum. Tethered with metal staircases and lift shafts to the pier, and with two large sheds added to her decks, she looks set to remain alongside for some time yet.

Inside her cavernous hangars, we forget that we are actually afloat. Preserved aircraft glisten. We climb to the flight deck and head aft, where under cover and dramatically lit, is displayed hardware of space exploration - prompting memories from my teen years of splashdowns and grainy images of the moon landings on TV – now all consigned to history. I wonder how many visitors and staff were around in the days of Sputnik, Gemini, Apollo, or even the Space Shuttle. And we recall something else from years ago: "Sitting in a tin can/high above the world". David Bowie - Space Oddity. We're by a space capsule from the early 1960s. A mere tin can, with ribbed sides, as if it were for canned tomatoes. Conical, hardly bigger than the spaceman who occupied it and looking bewilderingly fragile.

Intrepid is still used as an aircraft carrier but now



it carries a historic collection. Among them, set against the grey vista of Manhattan is one that might be just the shadow of a shark. Equipped for sensitive information gathering whilst flying at three times the speed of sound, could this enigmatic surveillance jet with its radar absorbing coating be the very last word in reconnaissance? No. This Lockheed A-12 flew missions over North Vietnam in the late 1960s. Now it's a museum piece. No-one, least of all me, would have been aware of such an aircraft when operational.

From the same pier we board GROWLER, a nuclear armed submarine with diesel engines that was in service during the Cold War from 1958 to 1964. The chilling destructive power of her armaments are frightening even today. Few people, even many of the crew, were unaware of her whereabouts when on deterrent missions near the coast of the USSR.

Aside from the memories, incomplete and hazy from years past, we consider the amount of ingenuity the human race has used to defend itself from itself. And comment on how that job seems never to be done. And, unknown to us until recently, we collectively have another threat – that we should be preserving our planet – our only home – from ourselves rather than just preserving ourselves from ourselves.



Opposite page from top: Low cloud; On the Hangar Deck of Intrepid; Space Shuttle “Enterprise”; Apollo Capsule. This page, top: Lockheed A12; Above: Aft Torpedo Room on USS Growler; Below: Flight Deck of aircraft carrier Intrepid.

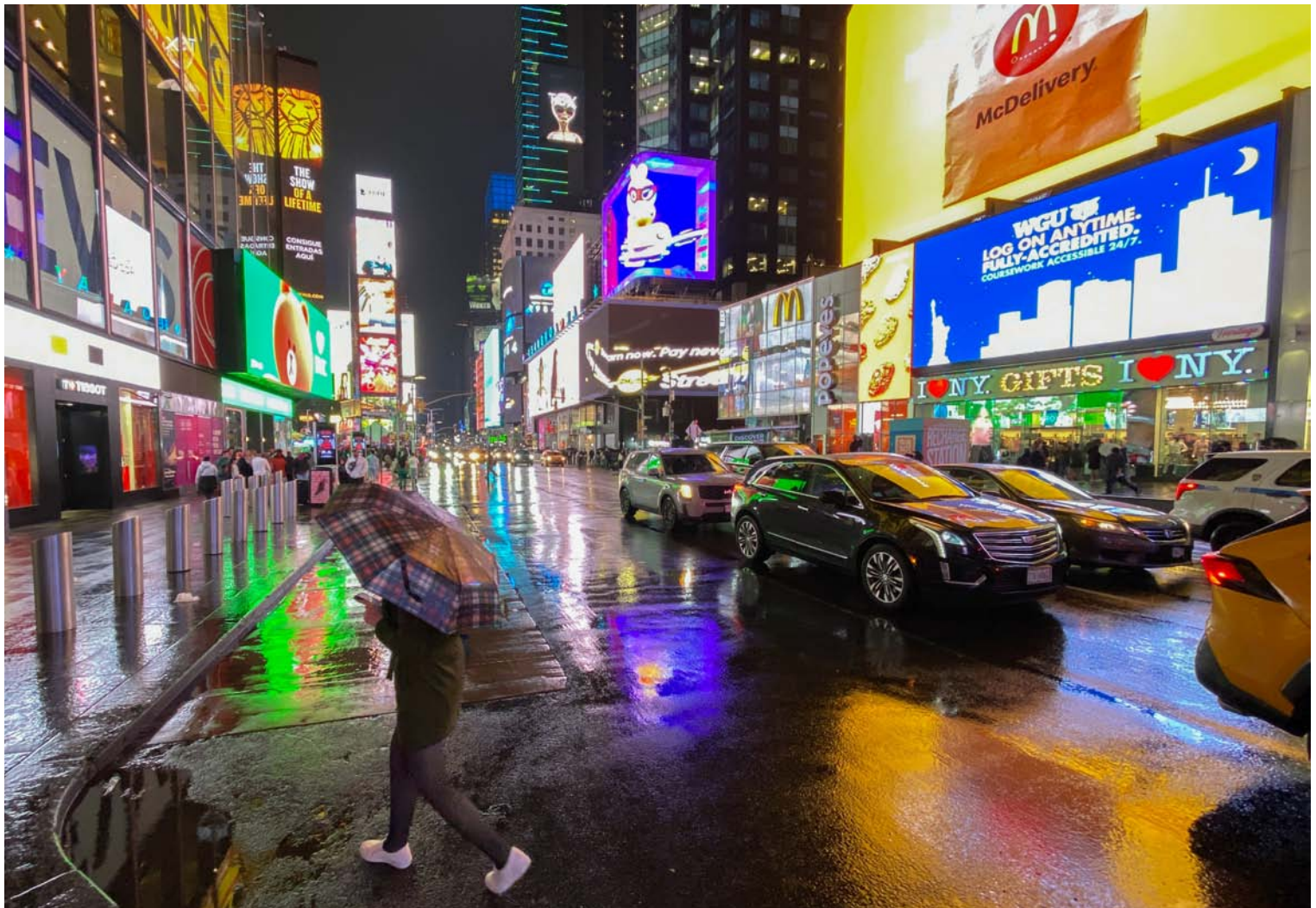
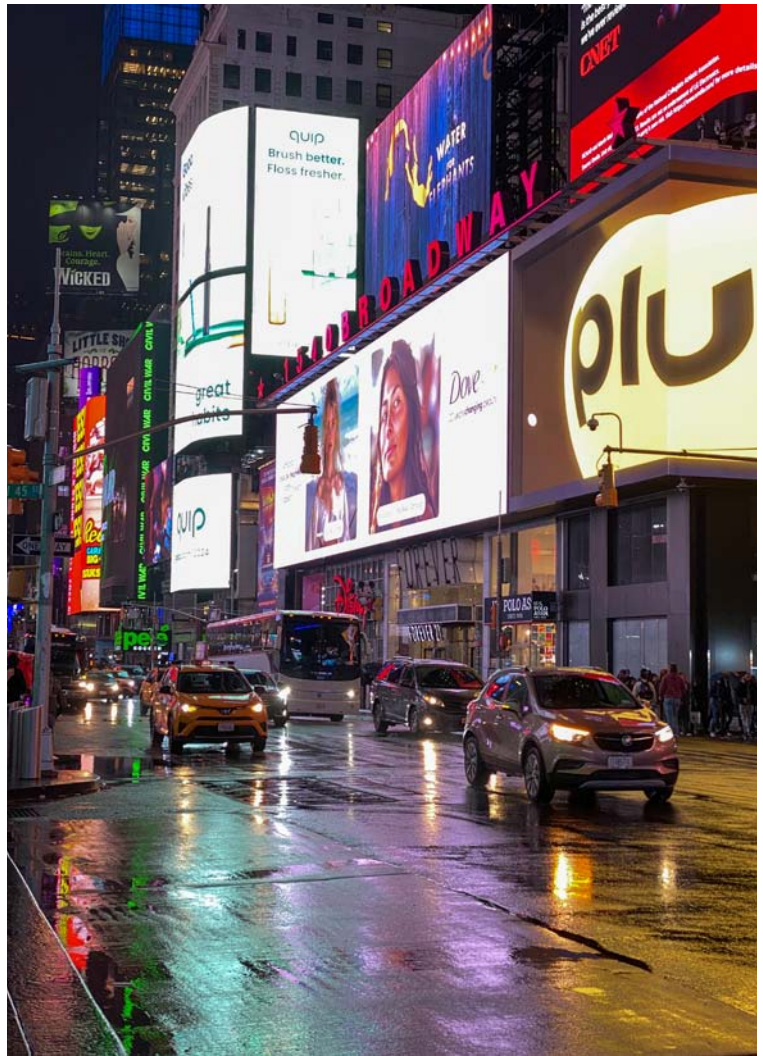
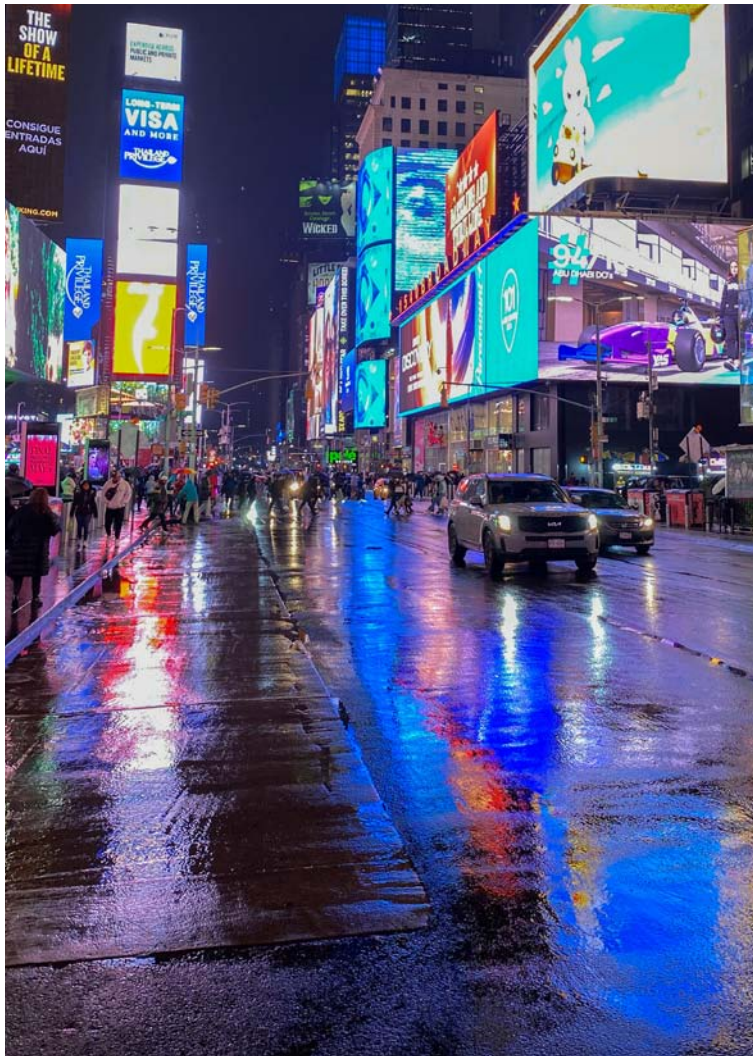




Thursday 11 April 2024 continued

The low clouds and later rain today was perfect weather for us – we would get reflections. So after dark we took the E subway to Times Square for the photo opportunity we did not want to miss. We take it for granted that our phones are capable of recording the kind of night images that would have been impossible with a hand-held film camera when we first went travelling. Provided we take care to keep hold of them and protect them from the sudden downpours.

Times Square is where Broadway intersects 42nd Street close to 7th Avenue. It is not actually square in shape but is a square in the sense of being at the hub of Theatreland. It is so named from being the one-time location of the New York Times premises.



Day 8: Friday 12 April 2024

How We See Our World

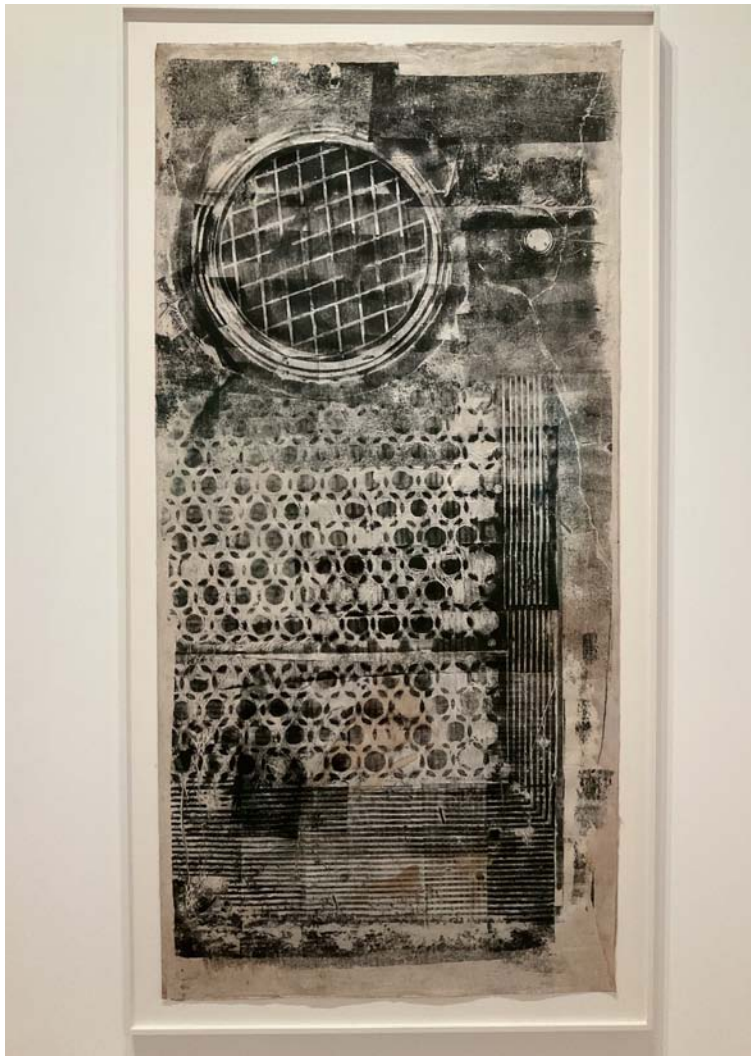
We head for a museum today. My perception of Museum is a bit out of date. Particularly here, where art of any sort might be displayed not in a gallery, but a museum. Misty clouds threaten rain, their dampness moist on the ground. It has rained hard in the night, we hear. 27 mm has fallen in 24 hours.

MoMA, or The Museum of Modern Art for short, is a building as hard to understand as some of its artwork within. It is an art in itself trying to fathom one's way around. Maybe that's the idea. Each gallery space, and the pieces they contain, are a revealing discovery. Or an elusive enigma.

Modern Art. How might it be defined? We pause to examine a large work on paper. It's monochrome print. It turns out to be a rubbing, just as we might rub in pencil on paper over a coin. But this is a pavement rubbing with the image revealed by rollers and black ink as used in woodcut printing. What engages us is the level of detail, with even a crack in the slabs showing. The shapes are what would be familiar to any New Yorker who has noticed the ground they are walking on, with the impression of glass blocks set into the surface to give daylight to basements. Soho Sidewalk by Sari Dienes is a little bit of reality from our everyday world.

The concept of the everyday becoming a piece of art is the purpose behind another seminal work – Campbell's Soup Cans by Andy Warhol. 32 canvasses, deliberately and painstakingly identical to accentuate the mass produced theme, having just the individual flavours as their differences. Warhol considered it radical and daring for art on a mundane subject to be considered collectible.

The everyday. Found and repurposed materials. We see artworks using these, then, grand statement of all, Jackson Pollock's One, Number 31. It might be hard to believe that this canvas is now 74 years old. It exudes the energy expended to create it, yet shows great skill and restraint in the technique. It is much more than mere "drips". Pollock said of himself and his fellow Abstract Expressionists "we



changed painting forever”. True. And the result is absorbing and mesmerising.

There’s a small group of art students in a restaurant area near the lobby of MoMA. Like us, they are having a break-out time. All girls, they occupy floor and chairs, reclining with easy self-assurance. They chatter. Some are distracted by their phones. But one is drawing. She’s lying on her back, head raised just enough to be able to see, and somewhat uncomfortably draw quick confident pen strokes representing the people around us – brief, almost abstract sketches. Filling a page, she quickly turns over and restarts. Just one person, observing and inspired by her surroundings.

Early this evening we were on a Subway train. It was on an elevated (E1) section of the J line running above the streets of Brooklyn. We had walked, in a very strong wind that had chased away the mist, high over the East River on the Brooklyn Bridge. Now we were on the elevated train and the sun was shining at last, vividly sharpening the building colours and textures. This was a view I had long wanted to experience. Every fleeting detail, as it flicked past the smeary train window, was a frame to try and capture on the filmstrip of memory.

Beside me is someone, young male, I presume, otherwise anonymous under hoodie and shiny puffa coat whilst bent double, engrossed in a phone. The window slideshow continued, both sides of the train. I recalled work by Edward Hopper of the almost voyeuristic views from elevated railways seemingly inches from bedrooms. Hunchback next to me was oblivious to any kind of view. Presently the skyline of Manhattan unfolded – only a hint at first then the gleaming mast on the Empire State could be glimpsed. Behind us the towers of Brooklyn and The Heights were silhouetted monoliths. Ahead the formidable array of Manhattan skyscrapers glinted in the low sunlight. Completely lost on the guy next to me. Seen it all before? Perhaps. We rumble across the Williamsburg Bridge, reassuring girders easing between us and the view, then over traffic far below on the FDR East River Drive and descended to the depths of Delancey & Essex Streets Station.



How do we see our world?

We might define Modern Art as evolving from the time when artists were no longer merely at the bidding of their patrons – the wealthy aristocracy or the church. Instead artists had the chance to respond to the world in their own way, through realism, abstraction, and everything in between. And for some of us, our world is the real world – the visible one, out there, beyond the train window. Everywhere. To be observed and remembered, and from which the fountain of creativity flows.

Pictures, opposite page top: Soho Sidewalk by Sari Dienes; bottom: One, Number 31 by Jackson Pollock. This page top: Campbell's Soup Cans by Andy Warhol; above: Brooklyn Bridge traffic.

Day 9: Saturday 13 April 2024

Grand Central Heating

Not far from our apartment, steam rises. In the street. From a funnel. It seems improbable, but there it is, placed awkwardly at a crossroads. As if unconcerned about any inconvenience to the traffic, this orange chimney just stands and steams. There are more, here and there on street corners, contentedly puffing away, a lazy feather of steam rising and swirling. There are also grilles with slots emitting steam. What's going on?

Well, in New York, everything is big, and that goes for the central heating system. It's really just like the pipes we're familiar with in our homes, but being New York it has to be on a grand scale. And it's efficient. 105 miles of pipes pump steam at around 450 degrees Fahrenheit to some 1,500 buildings including some of the largest, including the Empire State and Grand Central Station. It's old too, dating from 1882, and now has several steam plants around the city, even with a pipe under the East River to connect a plant in Brooklyn. The street stacks are there to protect people and vehicles if there is any small leak that is being worked on and fixed.

We would have appreciated a bit more of that steam outside today. We headed for the High Line, an old elevated railway that is now shorn off in the old Meat Packing district by the Hudson River. The railway was left to rest and rust until someone thought it would make a perfect public park and nature reserve. Birch trees and many other flora sprout lush and verdant from what remains of the tracks, and a concrete path keeps footsteps from the areas nature has reclaimed. It's a great green idea. But today it was cold, grey and windy. The High Line was virtually deserted, and we deserted it too after walking just two blocks length. We headed back to the subway for a warmer railway environment.

Yesterday we endured a cold windswept walk over the Brooklyn Bridge then a train ride over the Williamsburg. We decided to do a third bridge, so took a D over the Manhattan. There's a lot of view from these bridges, but not so much from a train.



A huge amount of girders get in the way, as do passing trains. But it's well worth the ride. And you can *just* see the other two bridges.

We're familiar with the London Underground, we've navigated similar in Paris, Barcelona, Tokyo, Kyoto and Kobe. So how does the New York Subway compare? Pretty well. The trains are long, large and clean. People offer us oldies their seat. There are plenty of stations close by in Manhattan. But there are steps. Many lines are not laid at deep level as in London, so thankfully it's not too far up or down. And on most lines you can, with a cross-platform change, opt for an express for part of your journey and go thundering satisfyingly through intermediate stations on the centre tracks. And when we leave we'll miss the recording of the helpful man who chimes "stand clear of the closing doors, please!"

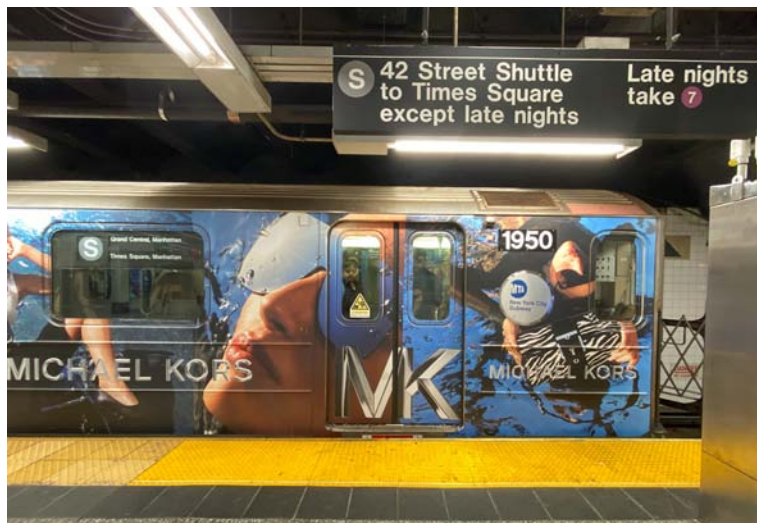
And when we leave. That's tomorrow. This has been one of our more epic trips, and we've no plans in place for another just yet.

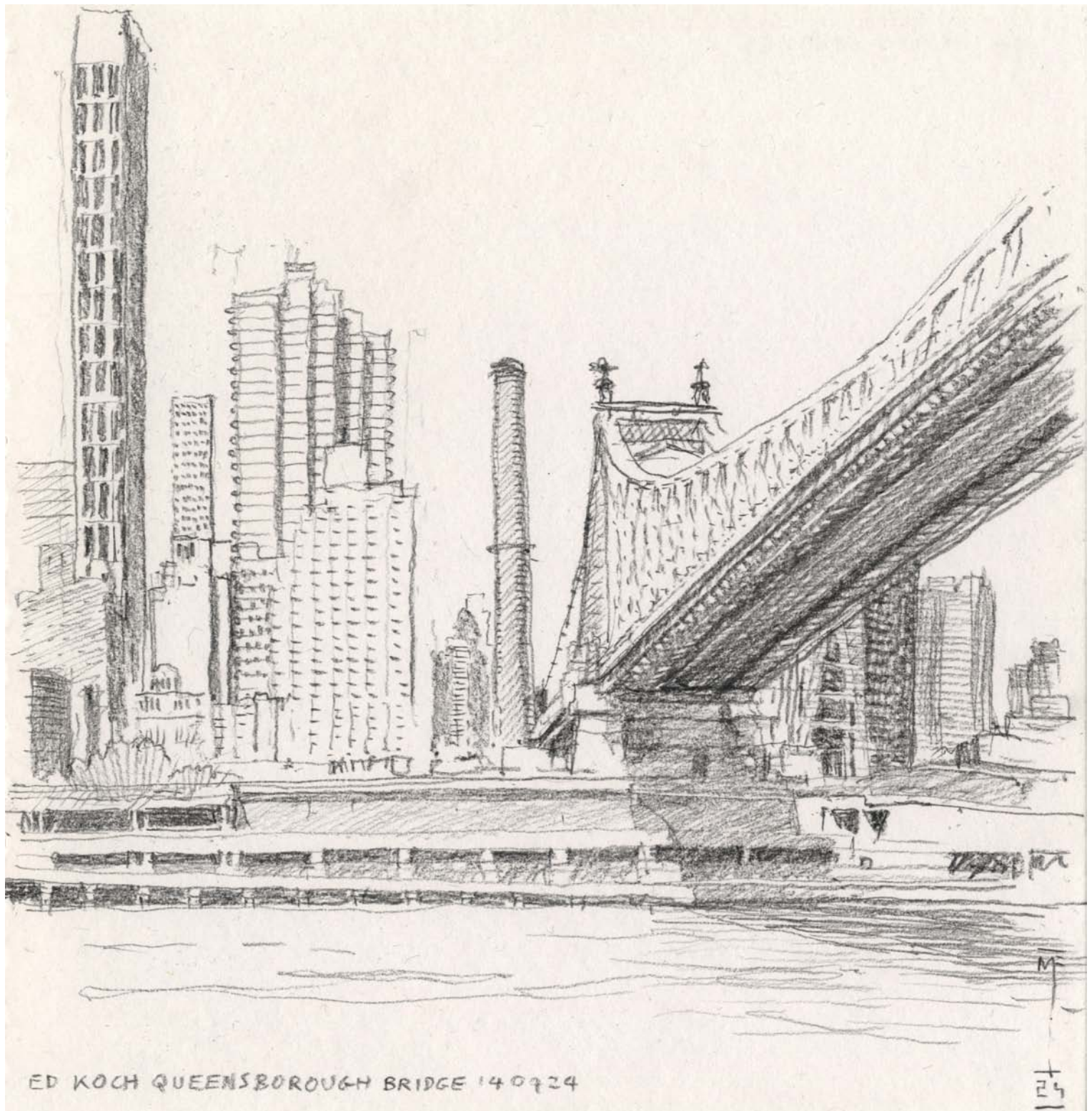
This has been our first visit to North America and New York was the city we both wanted to see most. It hasn't disappointed. We won't miss the queues though, particularly the 2 hours we had to stand after landing to clear immigration. There were "lines" even at places where we had timed tickets. Honeypots like MoMA are full of jostling people hardly looking at anything, and adding to the stress of wayfinding. Nor will we miss the freezing wind that has quite literally sent us hurrying back to the apartment, me with sketches not done. The cost is high too. Having an apartment really paid off, as we have cooked for ourselves and eaten pretty much as we would at home, though been wary of overspending even at the supermarket.

But we've seen and done great things. It has been, in a word, memorable.

Pictures, opposite page "Getting Up Steam".

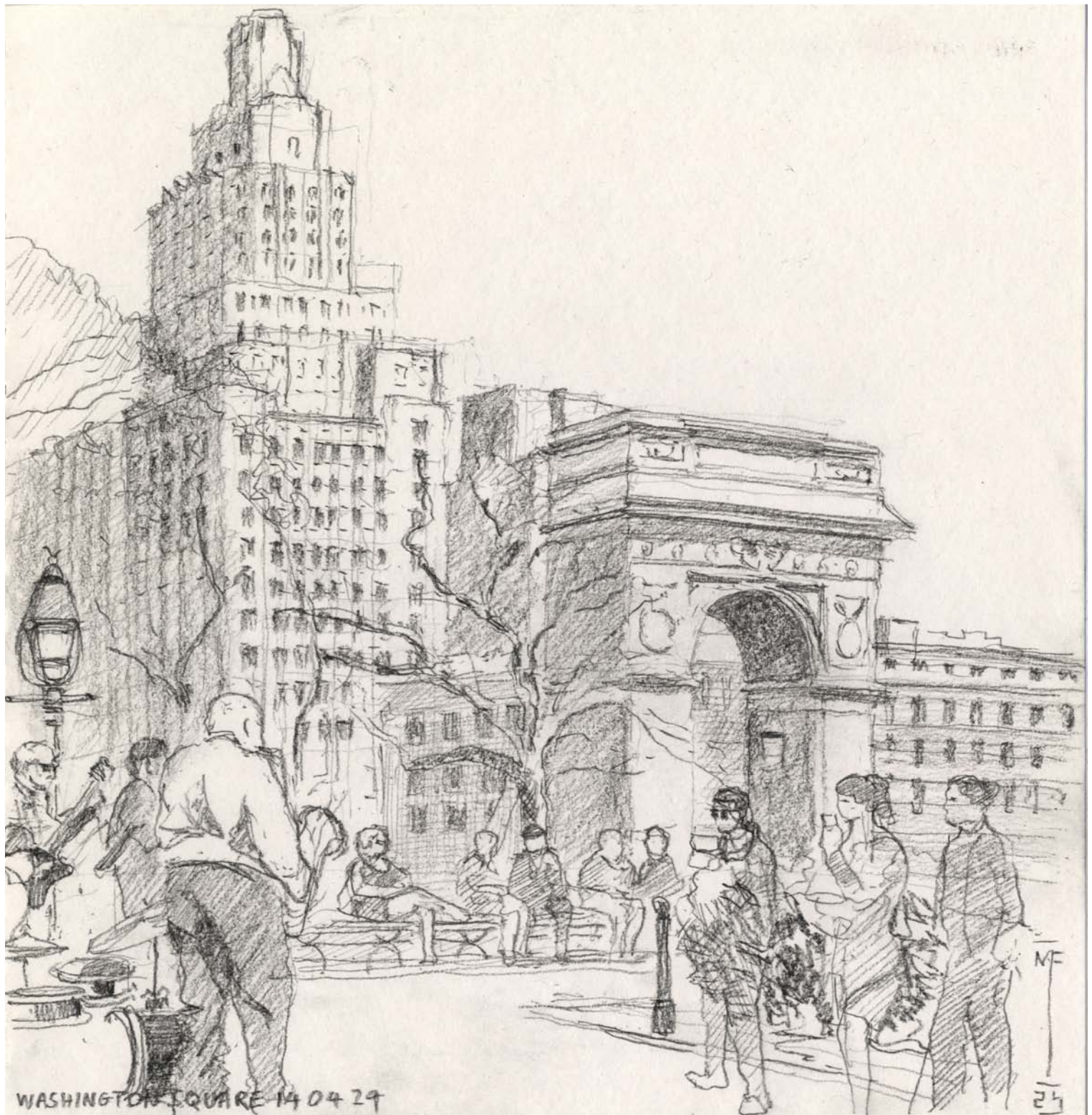
This page: Subway stations and examples of tiled decoration.





Day 10: Sunday 14 April 2024

Our bags were packed shortly after 09.00, and we did not need to head for JFK until 17.00, so managed a full day sightseeing and me sketching. First was a ride on the Tram, actually a cable car alongside the Ed Koch Queensborough Bridge to Roosevelt Island. We then took the E Subway to Washington Square, where we were unexpectedly rained on which interrupted my drawing and the nearby Jazz band. Thence via Astor Place and Copper square before commencing our homeward journey. Great sketching weather too - mostly!



Pictures, opposite page: Ed Koch Bridge. This page, above: Eric Paulins Band play Open Air Sunday Lunchtime in Washington Square; below: Manhattan from Roosevelt Island.





**Sunday 14 April
2024 continued**

*Pictures, this page, above:
Sketch at Copper Square;
left: garments being
wheeled along Washington
Square North. Opposite
page, above left: Sunday
artwork sale, Washington
Square; above right and
below: "Tramway" to
Rossevelt Island.*



