

HEAD: 'Night in the Library' sparks connection in Brooklyn community
DECK: 10th annual event challenges Brooklynites to connect, encounter the sublime

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PROSPECT HEIGHTS — While New York City is revered for its vibrant nightlife, 6,000 Brooklyn residents had an unconventional plan for their late-night endeavors on Saturday, March 8.

Brooklynites flocked to Brooklyn Public Library–Central Branch (BPL), located at Flatbush Ave. and Eastern Pkwy., on Saturday night and into Sunday morning for the 10th annual [Night in the Library](#) event. Attendees registered for free for a seven-and-a-half-hour party that included music, dancing, sewing, lectures, discussions, screenings and more.

The slew of activities centered on the theme “The Sky Above Brooklyn: The Philosophy of the Sublime.” The library was crowded all night with Brooklynites ready to encounter the “sublime.”

Experiences like stargazing, tarot readings and dream yoga allowed attendees to choose activities according to their interests, and everyone encountered the theme of the sublime in a unique way.

For event organizers at BPL, face-to-face connection helps facilitate encounters with the sublime, according to BPL Press Officer Fritz Bodenheimer. The library is a place for people to discover knowledge and have access to information, and Night in the Library is the climax of the heart of BPL’s day-to-day.

“We chose the theme as a way to get people thinking about the world that we live in and to get them thinking about each other, not their screens,” Bodenheimer said.

The event wouldn't have been complete without the vast choices of activities to encourage the free exchange of ideas and thoughts. Tied into the theme of the sublime and face-to-face connection is community.

"In every neighborhood in Brooklyn, there's a building and it's a place where people can come together to do their homework, to do work, to use our free Wi-Fi [and] to meet their neighbors," Bodenheimer said. "This is sort of like that, but on the biggest possible scale."

The evening kicked off at 6:30 p.m. with a greeting by therapy dogs from The Good Dog Foundation. Furry friends met attendees at the entrance, and dog owners stuck around until 9:30 p.m. allowing plenty of playtime with the pups. Carly Goteiner, the director of community engagement for The Good Dog Foundation, said having therapy dogs at the event correlated with the theme of connection.

"Dogs are non-judgmental. They're not going to be condescending," Goteiner said. "They're here because they love people [and] I think that's a lesson we can take from them."

While dogs flooded the entrance, the [Amateur Astronomers Club](#) set up camp on the steps of the library. People lined up behind telescopes to get a view of visible planets and stars. Amateur Astronomers Club member Rori Baldari set up her telescope to show Jupiter and some of its moons as she admitted, laughing, that New York was likely the worst city in the world for stargazing. Baldari said the telescopes right in front of the entrance caused attendees to consider their place in the world.

"I like to remind people that with so much going on, we walk around with blinders [on]," Baldari said. "I think it's really important to stop and realize that in the midst of all of this, we live in a larger, vast and mysterious universe."

Viewing celestial objects, Baldari said, reminds people of an intrinsic aspect of human nature: Everyone wants to know where they came from and what

their purpose is, and astronomy draws those questions out of people, starting new conversations and forming connections.

“When I connect with people on that level, it energizes me,” Baldari said. “It makes me feel like I’m doing something worthwhile.”

The evening also featured big names like multimedia artist [Laurie Anderson](#), whose musical composition opened the event joined by a dance by [Baye and Asa](#). Anderson’s art covers a variety of mediums, from poetry to music to photography. Her work as a composer has landed in films by Wim Wenders, Jonathan Demme, National Public Radio and the BBC.

The program also featured authors Edwidge Danticat, Darryl Pinckney, Alissa Quart, Edwin Frank, Sarah Lewis and Molly Crabapple, vocal accompanist Michael Brofman and artist Katie Merz. As attendees moved from room to room, Merz was in the lobby drawing on 100 feet of roofing paper. Pieces were cut off the roll and sold on a “pay-what-you-can” basis.

Merz said she wanted to be generous with her art. “The library gives away and offers out knowledge and I think art should be the same thing — not exclusive or precious, so it fits in with the public library where there’s knowledge being shared.”

Merz interpreted the theme of the sublime as something similar to the unknown. She sat on the floor of the library with paper and chalk and drew for hours Saturday night. The improvisational quality of her drawing, changed and influenced by those watching, reminded her of the night’s theme.

“This event makes [the unknown] more celebrated,” Merz said. “It feels like we’re creating a new culture and I think it’s really important.”

The turnout from the Brooklyn community was in part due to the big names on the program, but many residents also came hoping to connect with others. Brooklyn residents Sonia Uthuph and Akhil Jonnalagadda said they

were drawn to the event because of names like Laurie Anderson and Fred Moten, but they enjoyed being in a space with others with similar interests.

“It feels like the whole community came through,” Jonnalagadda said. “I really love the theme, and I love the way that they elaborated on the theme in so many ways.”

Brooklyn residents Natalia Mesa and Peter Johnson moved to Brooklyn recently and came to the event to become more involved in the community. Mesa noted that everyone in attendance had something that piqued their interest.

“The people around you are there to experience the same thing or talk about the same things that you are, so just being in that space is really cool and special.”

The 10th annual Night in the Library concluded Sunday morning at 2 a.m. with a screening of Walon Green’s “The Secret Life of Plants” as the clocks moved from 1:59 a.m. to 3 a.m. for the end of Daylight Saving Time. Bodenheimer said she hoped attendees left with a new perspective on their place in the world and renewed attention.