

Desperately Seeking Culture...In Manhattan!

By Karen Amster-Young

I have a date next week. It is in my calendar in big, bold, permanent letters. I will not postpone this date regardless of what comes up; I know what I want to wear and I may even get my hair blown-out for the occasion. It has been a long time since I have done this. In fact, it feels strange. I refuse to cancel it. For my sanity and survival I must go on this date; I *want* to go on this date. If I do not go, I may as well move to the 'burbs, continue with my endless errands and other day-to-day activities and just drive a nice, comfortable car around instead of taking mass transit and cabs everywhere to get things done and go anywhere. I am sure you will agree that before most "good" dates there is a feeling of giddy anticipation (well, at least until about age 28); however, once you get older you learn to manage expectations. So I am not unrealistically excited about this engagement. I simply am looking forward to it; however, just keeping this date is the challenge; no matter what happens I am making a promise to myself not to get distracted and pulled in another direction. I have a date with culture.

Possible interruptions to actually leaving the apartment for this date include but are not limited to:

- The electrician, plumber, contractor stopping by to finish off any aspect of my recently "completed" renovation. "Oh, Mrs. Young, can you just show me where the (insert anything you can think of) is?" "Oh, Mrs. Young, this is why the (insert anything) does not work yet."
- Talking on my cell phone incessantly to get things done or simply to catch-up with someone who does not stop talking. If they want to talk they can come with me on my date;
- My Mom calling to tell me that I really need to calm down and that "there are so many wonderful things to do in the city."
- Googling, e-mailing, staring at my to-do list or making a to-do list;
- Cleaning, food shopping and chatting with the deli man again
- Fantasizing about taking a nap or actually taking one while my daughter is in school;
- Drinking my 5th decaf for the day as I *read* about all the wonderful things there are to do in New York City.

Next Friday, on November 16th, I am going to actually *experience* one of the many exhibits only blocks away from where I drop my 1st grader off each and every day.

Currently at the Whitney Museum is a Karen Walker exhibit featuring the artist's work from the last decade. Her theme is about race. *The New York Times* calls her work magnetic. Walker's work is about race and the how she expresses the chaos of contradictory ideas and emotions. And there is a long-running

exhibition on the fifth floor entitled *Modernisms* that features the work of great artists from the first half of the 20th century, including Georgia O'Keefe, George Bellows, Thomas Hart Benton, Paul Cadmus, Charles Sheeler, and John Sloan, among others.

If I have time I may enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art because I have literally stood behind it every Thursday afternoon watching my kid play soccer. I have seen it from every angle since her first game but have yet to go in this season. So my date will continue there where I will see any one of the great current critically praised exhibitions such as *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor*, *Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary*, *The Age of Rembrandt*, and *Abstract Expressionism and Other Modern Works*.

Look, this is just a first date. If it goes well and I don't go into shock from actually doing something cultural, I will make another date. It could be a great comedy show (Mario Cantone is performing next week; yes, Charlotte's hysterically funny friend from from Sex and the City!). Carolines Comedy Club has a great line-up for November and December. If I make it to the third date I may just sneak into the Angelika Theater downtown one day after a great espresso (decaf!) or glass of chardonnay. I used to go there. It is a great theater with great independent films. You won't find Seinfeld's new *Bee Movie* playing there (not that there's anything wrong with that movie!).

I think if I make it to the third date I just may get in a routine with culture. The kind of routine you settle into in a real relationship. It won't take a lot of effort anymore; it will just become part of the natural rhythm of my week and my life. I won't have to make a date with Culture anymore because we will be in a relationship. Of course, once the relationship goes on for a while, I will have to make a date with C again; you know the drill: once you are actually in a relationship you have to go back to making dates after a year or two; its inevitable: you start taking each other for granted and get caught up with the contractor, errands and drinking decaf at Starbucks all over again. It takes work to stay in a relationship once you are successfully in one. But hey, that's another column.

See you at the Met.

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