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Spectacular art and experimental entertainment to spark all five se By Joni Sweet



Top: Skulls sculpted from Legos at Art of the Brick Above: Blue Man Group

IN THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS.

the diversity of activities alone can be enough to take your breath away. Theater, museums, nightlife—you name it, it's here, which is why we've created the ultimate guide to blowing your mind, chock-full of must-see places for a uniquely New York sensory overload. Don't say we didn't warn you.

For all of history, humans have been fascinated by this spinning green planet and the residents who call it home. The American Museum of Natural History (Central Park West, at W. 79th St., 212.769.5100) pays tribute to this universal obsession in Mysteries of the Unseen World (thru Jul. 6). Using cuttingedge technology, including electron microscopy and time-lapse photography, the trippy IMAX film estranges viewers from the otherwise familiar aspects of this world—from the too-slowto-notice (the decaying process of

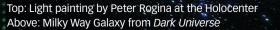
plants) to the faster-than-the-human-eye (a corn kernel exploding into popcorn). The film also touches on the hair-raising qualities of lightning and the aspirational goal of building an elevator to space. The museum continues its planetary exploration, this time to the stars, at the Rose Center for Earth and Space, where astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson's brawny voice explains the Big Bang, black holes and cosmic expansion on an interstellar

journey through the Milky Way Galaxy and beyond in Dark Universe. The Hayden Planetarium's fifth space show offers dynamic views of the cosmos, twinkling and swirling overhead.

When you gaze out from the viewing platforms of the Empire State Building, Top of the Rock or another skyscraper (or are struggling to find your way amid the crowds of Times Square), New York City itself can seem like a small planet. Visitors can get even more personal with this massive city by getting a bird's-eye view at the Panorama of the City of New York, the "jewel in the crown of the collection" at the Queens Museum (New York City Building, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens, 718.592.9700). Originally created for the 1964 World's Fair, the "world's largest scale model" contained less than 1 percent of error in its depiction of every single street, park, landmark and 895,000 buildings constructed in the city's five boroughs prior to 1992, the most recent year it was com-

pletely updated. The 10,000-square-foot, three-dimensional structure offers unrivaled detail and scope.

Like Earth and space, the body is truly mesmerizing, taking a central role at several NYC attractions. Some of the 200 specimens that comprise Body Worlds: Pulse have literally had their minds blown—and put on display—at





Discovery Times Square (226 W. 44th St., 866.987.9692). The multimedia exhibition showcases the organs, muscles, veins and bodies—some stripped of skin and sculpted into graceful poses—of more than 1,100 deceased donors through Plastination, a process of anatomical preservation that replaces water and fat with plastics. You may never look at your body the same way after seeing the flesh and blood of this exhibition.

After learning what the body is made of, discover how it was made at the Museum of Sex (233 Fifth Ave., 212.689.6337), a space dedicated to the history, evolution and culture surrounding sexuality. The engaging (and possibly blush-inducing) exhibitions on porn stars, adult toys, erotic art and even the sex lives of animals present an alluring take on an aspect of our species that binds us all together in one way or another. Don't miss the rhinestoneencrusted sex garb on display in windows visible from the street!

The human body can do some pretty amazing things. Cirque du Soleil has long inspired awe with its performers' death-defying feats. The company's newest production, Varekai, opening Jul. 30 at Barclays Center (620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, 917.618.6700), brings together Georgian dancers, acrobats twirling on canes, juggling virtuosos and aerialists in an otherworldy setting. If Varekai is anything like Cirque's recent show, Amaluna,

your jaw will re-

main dropped

throughout the entire bewildering performance.

Open-minded visitors should catch Queen of the Night (Paramount Hotel, 235 W. 46th St., 212.706.7344), which gives circus acts the salacious treatment. Dress your best and show some skin at the Diamond Horsehoe nightclub, host of this sexy dinner party, where performers break the fourth wall by touching, caressing and even seducing visitors into secret rooms for some sensual fun.

Not only does NYC have award-winning shows

GRAND SPECTACLE

Muscles make up "The

Rearing Horse With Rider" at Body Worlds: Pulse.

and renowned collections of artistic artifacts, it also hosts a near constant selection of experimental performances and indie exhibitions. Discovery Times Square's Art of the Brick showcases the striking sculptures of Nathan Sawaya, an artist who quit

> take his childhood obsession to the next level. Using tens of thousands of mini bricks, he builds Lego versions of masterpieces, including Vincent van Gogh's "Starry Night," along with original works that explore what it means to be human. Who knew tiny blocks could hold so much meaning?

his job as an attorney to

Another installation flaunts tantalizing art that harnesses an unlikely medium: light. The Holocenter's summer residence on Governors Island (House 4B, Nolan Park, holocenter.org) displays eyepopping holograms (three-dimensional images made with lasers) that are mystifying. The upstairs gallery rotates projected works every weekend, while the main space hosts 3-D photography and holographic pieces, such as one from Ray Park's Coexistence series featuring a cylindrical hologram of a ghostly banana rising from a real peel.

With majestic Beaux Arts aesthetics, Grand Central Terminal (87 E. 42nd St., 212.340.2583) is, arguably, one of NYC's most mind-blowing structures. But what makes the century-old transportation hub really intriguing are the secrets within, particularly the Whispering Gallery (between the Main Concourse and Vanderbilt Hall). No one knows if the acoustical chamber was intended to carry sound across its 2,000 square feet, but the effect amuses the ears of countless visitors.

New York's theater scene enchants beyond Broadway with other spectacular shows. The Blue Man Group rocks the Astor Place Theatre (434 Lafayette St., 212.254.4371) with a visually stunning, comedic show that's full of interactive surprises. And while some productions are all about the performers, the environment stars in others, such as *Sleep* No More (530 W. 27th St., 866.811.4111), a choose-yourown-adventure in which guests wander through a 100,000square-foot luxury hotel, eavesdropping on characters. Similarly, postmodern theater producer Fuerza Bruta has kicked off its newest show Wayra at the Daryl Roth Theatre (101 E. 15th St., 212.375.1110). The audience becomes part of this unconventional performance, with its fast-paced music, aerial displays and absolutely no seating.

So ... is your mind blown yet?



