

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1071 Fifth Avenue

☐ not for publication

city or town New York

☐ vicinity

state New York

code NY

county New York

code 061

zip code 10128

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☒ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date 3/25/05

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5/19/05

Guggenheim Museum

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof concrete

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York County, New York

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is located at 1071 Fifth Avenue on the upper east side of Manhattan. The building occupies an entire rectangular block front (201 feet by 120 feet) on the east side of the street between East 88th and East 89th Street. The museum is oriented west, toward Central Park, which is directly across the street, and is surrounded by late nineteenth and twentieth century multi-story buildings, generally of brick, stone and/or concrete construction. Buildings on the side streets are primarily four to ten story buildings, while those lining Fifth Avenue north and south of the museum are larger in scale. Residential use predominates in the neighborhood; however, this particular stretch of Fifth Avenue is known as "Museum Mile" because, in addition to the Guggenheim, several other notable cultural institutions, including the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Jewish Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, are located within a twenty-block radius. Distinguished by its modern aesthetic and dramatic sculptural qualities, the Guggenheim presents a striking contrast to its neighbors. The building was completed in 1959 to the design of internationally recognized American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The complex also includes a non-historic ten-story annex constructed in 1992. This addition, a deep, narrow, rectangular building, sits behind the museum and is oriented to East 89th Street. The annex is connected to the museum by a stainless steel and glass fronted lobby and it incorporates framing from a four-story annex constructed on the same site in 1968.

The Guggenheim is constructed of reinforced concrete and characterized by a seamless integration of form and materials. The museum can be divided into four principal components: the enormous spiral-shared gallery (or rotunda), which anchors the building at the southwest corner of the site; the smaller circular-form wing (known as the monitor), which occupies the northwest corner, the sweeping horizontal cantilevered bridge, which wraps around the south, west, and north sides of the building at the second story level, and the annex, at the northeast corner. As was typical of Wright's work, the entire design of the building was premised on basic geometric modules. For this composition, the primary modules were circles, triangles, and lozenges; however, variations of these, including half-circles and cones, were also employed (as were squares and rectangles). These motifs

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carry the design from the ground level to the dome. They determine the form and structure and are visible on features such as sidewalks, terrazzo floors, fountains, planters, stairways, and screens. Also typical of Wright's designs, the composition of the building is based on interlocking forms. The large circular form gallery is composed of two interlocking spirals (the smaller one intersects the ramp on the north side and is visible on the interior) and is anchored by a triangular-shaped shaft, which encloses the stair and elevator and penetrates the northeast side of the spiral. Similarly, the circular monitor is engaged with a lozenge-shaped stair.

The rotunda, the dominant feature of the museum, takes the form of a giant spring, rising from the ground floor and coiling five times around an open rotunda to a sky-lit dome, or oculus, ninety-five feet above. In Wright's conception of the building, the spiral was a pure cantilever, one continuous piece from top to bottom, with the ramp integral with the exterior wall and the interior balcony wall. This was modified somewhat in construction, primarily in response to the concerns of building inspectors, with the addition of twelve narrow reinforced concrete partitions, or "fins," which pierce the spiral and serve as stiffeners.

The ramp was constructed of poured reinforced concrete, while the outer wall was created by spraying layers of concrete through steel reinforcement against plywood forms. The exterior was finished with an ivory colored vinyl plastic coating and sprayed with Gunite, a mixture of sand and concrete. The twelve fins are eight inches thick and of graduated depth to a maximum of twenty-four feet deep at the top. These structural partitions are set at thirty-degree intervals and divide the gallery into seventy individual niches. The ramp is one-quarter mile long and rises at a grade of five percent; it is twenty-five-feet wide at the bottom but increases in depth to thirty-two feet as it climbs. The gallery walls are 9'6" tall and slope slightly toward the exterior (ninety-seven degrees from the floor). Designed to hold paintings, the tilt of the gallery walls replicated the slope of an easel.

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Although Wright's design for the interior walls specified a soft ivory colored paint, they were originally painted a stark white. Several years after the museum opened, the walls were repainted off white, and in 1992 they were repainted in a shade similar to Wright's original specification. The gallery is lit by a narrow band of skylights, set between the coils of the spiral. The lights are recessed and feature rectangular frosted glass lenses. The twelve-sided dome is formed of ribs that are extensions of the structural partitions; the top of the dome, supported by the ribs, is circular. The dome is glazed in panes of various geometric shapes. Interior features and finishes include plastered and painted gallery walls, terrazzo floors with inlaid metal circles, lozenge and circular planters, triangular light fixtures, a semi-circular oak information desk, and a telephone alcove.

The triangular-shaped service core, which contains one elevator and a stair, serves as a structural anchor to the spiral and provides an alternative circulation system. As Wright conceived the building, the visitor would take an elevator to the top and then descend through the gallery via the ramp. However, the addition of the stair and elevator allows the visitor the choice of entering and exiting at any level and thus changing the order in which sections of the gallery are viewed. There is also a triangular gallery above the stair.

The monitor, originally an administrative wing, is also premised on circular modules; however, it is much smaller in scale and less singular in form. On the exterior, each of the four levels is slightly different in form and materials; however, each has the same radius and together they define a cylinder. The ground floor and second level are enclosed within rounded concrete forms, while the third and fourth levels are multi-faceted and almost completely glazed. A large square concrete terrace, which serves the fourth level, features walls that slope out, forming a rectangle. These rectilinear forms bisect the cylinder horizontally, separating the two glass enclosed levels and providing additional geometric complexity. The monitor features a wide fascia with a decorative pattern based on lozenges and it is surmounted by a hexagonal aluminum dome. The lozenge-shaped

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stair tower interrupts the circular form of the monitor and provides a vertical anchor for this feature. Interior lozenge-shaped columns also provide support.

The interior of the monitor was originally intended to accommodate work spaces, offices, a library, and an apartment; however, Wright eliminated the apartment before the final design stage. In 1965 the second floor of the monitor was converted from a library to gallery space (Thannhauser gallery), with an opening cut through to connect it to the main exhibition space. In 1980 a portion of the fourth floor of the monitor was also converted for the same use. As part of the 1992 alterations, the ground level of the monitor was incorporated into the museum's main lobby, while the second, third and fourth levels are now open, connected to the rotunda and entirely devoted to gallery space.

The rotunda and monitor are connected by the sweeping bridge that encloses and unifies the entire composition. This feature, which serves as the second level of the building, is generally rectangular with rounded corners and a deep semi-circular projection at the southwest corner. The bridge is accessible from both the gallery and the monitor and features garden spaces; the surface is also interrupted by skylights lighting the lobby.

The bridge also shelters the main entrance, which is on the west side of the building at ground level and is lit by recessed lighting in the soffit of the bridge. The building was constructed with an entrance drive that passed between the rotunda and the monitor. Traffic entered from Fifth Avenue, approached recessed entrances to the rotunda and monitor and continued to the left, past a sculpture garden, before exiting on East 89th Street. In 1978 the drive-through was enclosed, eliminating the sculpture garden and allowing the creation of a new entrance in the space between the two sections of the building. The entrance is now defined by a recessed glass wall within an aluminum frame and three single glass doors. On the interior, the enclosed space now contains the bookstore and provides access to the original circular museum entrance. Its floor is detailed with concentric

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metal rings. The rest of the exterior at ground level is defined by low concrete walls that define planting beds (some of which are sunken gardens). Original metal railings atop these walls have been removed. The sidewalk in the forecourt is marked with inlaid metal circles. The museum's name stretches across the bottom edge of the bridge in large Frank Lloyd Wright signature letters. To the south of the entrance, a ramp winds around the bottom of the spiral to an emergency exit for the basement, which contains a theater. Semicircular windows at ground level light the theater.

The southeast corner of the building, facing East 88th Street, is defined by a large two-story rectangular block, which shelters space for a café on the ground level and a double-height gallery (known as the High Gallery) above it. The only openings are a row of small circular windows and an aluminum gate with circular motif that protects a service entrance. The café, part of Wright's original scheme, was not developed until the 1992 alterations. The other major interior space is the basement theater, which includes a mezzanine with coatroom and curved balcony and a theater space defined by circular piers. The theater features a floor that curves upward at the sides like the bottom of a boat and a circular, coved ceiling with recessed light fixtures.

The fourth component of the building is the ten-story limestone-clad annex, completed in 1992, at the northeast corner of the site. Wright's 1951 design for the museum included a ten-story annex to be sited at the northeast corner of the site and used for offices and studio apartments. Wright's proposed annex was a rectangular slab, with its broad side elevation parallel to Fifth Avenue and its narrow, end elevation oriented to East 89th Street. Both the north and south walls featured open porches on each floor. Although the building was not constructed according to Wright's design, a four-story annex (actually two double-height floors) in the same location was constructed in 1968 to accommodate offices, a library and storage relocated from the monitor when the Thannhauser gallery was installed. The 1968 annex, constructed of concrete and embellished with octagons and squares in low relief, was designed by William Wesley Peters of Taliesin Associated Architects based on

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Wright's 1951 drawings. In anticipation of completing Wright's original scheme, the Peters building was constructed with a foundation capable of supporting ten stories.

The 1992 addition, designed by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates and conceived as an extension of the Peters building, occupies the same footprint and incorporates the foundation and framing of the earlier annex. The new annex (32 feet wide by 135 feet tall) was constructed by removing the walls of the earlier building, extending the framing to support six additional stories and re-facing the entire building with limestone detailed with a grid motif. A stainless steel and glass fronted lobby was constructed to connect the monitor with the annex. As enlarged, the annex contains four floors of exhibition space (three of which are double height), as well as additional office, storage, a library and space for building infrastructure. The new exhibition space is connected to the main gallery behind the triangular stair tower at the fourth, fifth and seventh floors.

In addition to the alterations described above, the original skylights were cleaned and put back into operation in 1992. At the same time, mechanical systems were updated and the ground floor cafeteria was installed. In 1996 the building's lower level was restored according to Wright's original specifications. In 2001 former office space in the building's lower level was redesigned by Gwathmey Siegel and renovated into an educational facility housing state-of-the-art classrooms, a new media theater, a resource center and offices.

The Guggenheim Museum retains an outstanding level of integrity to its period of construction. The most significant change, the 1992 annex, is similar in massing and form to a feature proposed by Wright and occupies its intended site. It also serves as a backdrop for the museum and screens the view of adjacent buildings, thus performing the intended visual function of the annex proposed by Wright. Changes made since 1992 include the restoration of original Wright-designed features, the addition of Wright-designed elements that were not executed when the building was constructed, and changes that complement the Wright design.

Guggenheim Museum

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

8 Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☒ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

architectureart**Period of Significance**1959**Significant Dates**1959**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

na**Cultural Affiliation**na**Architect/Builder**Frank Lloyd Wright, architectGeorge Cohen, builder**Primary location of additional data**

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

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The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is exceptionally significant as a masterpiece of modern architecture designed by internationally renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW). One of the seminal works of the architect's last period, the Guggenheim embodies ideas that Wright had been developing for more than sixty years into an exceptionally coherent and unified whole. Characterized by its dramatic sculptural qualities, the reinforced concrete design is a seamless integration of program, form, structure, and materials and an outstanding illustration of Wright's principles of organic architecture. The building was commissioned in 1943 by philanthropist Solomon R. Guggenheim (SRG) to house his collection of European Non-Objective paintings and designed and constructed between 1943 and 1959. Wright specifically intended to provide an appropriate environment for the appreciation of Guggenheim's collection and to create a building that would be a visible symbol of the unity of art and architecture. The primary component of the design is the enormous spiral-shaped rotunda, which serves as the main gallery and expresses both the form and function of the building. The entire design of the rotunda was conceived for one purpose: viewing paintings. Structurally, it is a single form - an enormous cantilevered coil enclosing an open well. The continuous, spiraling interior ramp, which serves as the primary exhibition space, is integral with the exterior and interior walls. The gallery was designed so that the visitor could relate to the art on a personal level. The low ceiling and narrow walkway along the ramp reduce the enormous structure to a human scale and the exterior wall serves as an easel lit by natural light emanating from the narrow band of windows ("laylights") set within the coils. This layout permits the visitor to share the same perspective as the artist and completes the link between program, form, structure, and materials.

The building was designed and built in the last decade of Wright's life and opened in October 1959, three months after his death. The museum is the architect's largest and most significant commission in New York City and one of his few executed urban designs. It has been widely recognized as a masterpiece since its completion and has achieved iconic status as one of the most distinctive and recognizable of Wright's works. Occupying an entire block front across from Central Park, the museum is also a dramatic component of the Fifth Avenue skyline and one of New York's most well-known buildings.

☐ See continuation sheet

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The Guggenheim is also significant as one of the three most important twentieth-century museums in New York City devoted to the collection of Modern and contemporary art. Along with the Whitney Museum of American Art (1914) and the Museum of Modern Art (1929), the Guggenheim (originally the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 1939) was important in introducing Modern art to America. Of the three, the Guggenheim was unique for its exclusive collection of European art and its emphasis on a single aesthetic philosophy. Its collection of avant garde European paintings was assembled by Hilla Rebay, a German artist who emigrated to America in the 1920s and became Guggenheim's advisor and, later, the first curator of the museum. In addition to developing the collection, Rebay was directly involved in founding the museum, hiring Wright, and working with him to establish the design program. Although the Guggenheim broadened its acquisition policy after Rebay resigned in 1952, its early collection of Non-Objective paintings introduced Americans to an important genre of Modern art, including the works of influential artists, such as Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy and others, who were not otherwise represented in American museums of the period.

Non-Objective Art

The history of the Guggenheim is closely tied to the history of its collection. "Non-Objective" art refers to a specific genre of non-representational painting that developed in Europe during the 1910s. Non-Objective artists aspired to represent a spiritual reality rather than a temporal one. These artists, primarily Russian and German painters, were influenced by Rudolf Steiner, a German philosopher who believed that art was a vehicle to understand the spiritual.¹ Literally, the term Non-Objective was intended to describe art without an object, a description that conveys its disciples' alienation from the material world and reflects their underlying doubt about its reality. Their unease with the visual world extended even to nature, which they perceived as unbearably chaotic; and they held that the only way to establish any sort of control over such an uncertain or chaotic world was to shed materiality for a purely spiritual state. Thus, Non-Objective painters attempted to embody spirituality using imagery that was not derived from anything found in nature. As Hilla Rebay described it, Non-

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Objective painting “represents no object or subject known to us on earth.”² In this these painters differed from Abstract Expressionists, who used images that were abstractions or interpretations of natural forms.

Without imagery derived from the visual world, Non-Objective artists were left with the task of creating art that embodied universal laws using only patterns originating in their own minds. Their paintings relied on colorful combinations of shapes and patterns in which identifiable subjects disappeared and formal qualities were meaningful only as they represented the artist’s feelings. In working out a way to represent their spiritual lives visually, these artists drew upon the theories of Gestalt psychologists, who postured that that shape, color, and spatial organization could produce specific effects, suggesting that meaning may be intrinsic to forms themselves, independent of their context.³ Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944), one of the most important Non-Objective artists, compared colors to musical tones and shapes to emotional states.⁴ As he explained in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912), “painters can revive the inner spirit and give it some objective representation by utilizing the natural association between colors and spiritual states. Colors suggest sounds, order and moods. Some...are rough and sticky, others are smooth and uniform.”⁵ The idea of trying to give form to the “purest” spiritual reality suggests a quest for the absolute. Their rhetoric implies that these artists saw themselves as mediums through which an all-embracing spiritual energy could be transmitted. In this they also distinguished themselves from Abstract Expressionists, whose work relied on the expression of a personal relationship with higher powers (the sublime). In addition to Kandinsky, the most well-known Non-Objective artists included Rudolf Brauer, Robert Delaunay, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy.

¹ Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Visual Arts: A History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1986), 597.

² In *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Guggenheim Correspondence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press), 28.

³ Honour and Fleming, 597.

⁴ Thomas Krens, “The Genesis of a Museum: A History of the Guggenheim,” in *Art of the Century: The Guggenheim Museum and Its Collections* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1993), 8.

⁵ In Honour and Fleming, 597.

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Non-Objective art was introduced to the United States by Hilla Rebay (1890-1967), a German artist and curator who moved to America in 1927. Rebay had been strongly influenced by Non-Objective artists, in particular Kandinsky and Bauer. She had exhibited her own paintings in Europe as early as 1917 and had her first American show in 1927. Rebay embraced Non-Objective art as both a style and an aesthetic philosophy and, upon moving to the United States, she devoted herself to promoting an appreciation of the genre in America.⁶ Rebay coined the term Non-Objective, which was a loose translation of the German word “gegenstandlos,” or object-less, in 1936 in a catalog for a traveling exhibit of the collection she had assembled for Solomon R. Guggenheim. It was an attempt to find a permanent home for Guggenheim’s collection in the late 1930s that culminated in the construction of a museum entirely devoted to Non-Objective art.

Guggenheim Museum – Collection

The Guggenheim was one of three important museums devoted exclusively to Modern art that opened in New York during the first decades of the twentieth century. All three were established through the interest and support of wealthy patrons, and each was slightly different in focus. The Whitney Museum of American Art, the earliest of the three, grew out of the collections of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who began to acquire the work of contemporary American artists in 1908. Whitney opened her first gallery in 1914 and the collection outgrew several spaces before the Whitney Museum, designed by Marcel Breuer, was constructed on Madison Avenue in 1963.⁷ The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was founded in 1929 by a group led by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss, and Mary Sullivan. Unlike the Whitney, MoMA’s collection was not limited to American artists and it included a full range of visual arts, including painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, prints, books, and films. Rockefeller donated a large portion of her personal collection of Modern art to MoMA, and the Rockefeller family subsequently endowed the museum with a substantial purchase fund. MoMA also moved

⁶ Krens, 7.

⁷ The Whitney Museum was determined eligible for National Register listing in 1986.

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several times to accommodate expanding collections until 1939, when it acquired its current home on West 53rd Street in a building designed by Philip Johnson (remodeled and expanded by Yoshio Taniguchi in 2004).

Although the Guggenheim considerably broadened its collection after Rebay's tenure as curator ended in the early 1950s, the museum was distinctive as an institution premised on a single aesthetic philosophy and in its collection of exclusively European art. The singular nature of the museum's collection reflected the influence of Rebay, whose passion for Non-Objective art was based on her belief in its power to advance civilization. Rebay, who had studied with Steiner, described the progression from objective to Non-Objective art as a "step forward from the materialistic to the spiritual" and called Non-Objectivity the "religion of the future."⁸ To promote a social transformation of this scale, Rebay envisioned a home for Guggenheim's collection that would be more than a gallery. She described the commission as a "museum-temple," a building in which there would be space both to exhibit art (galleries) and to create it (studios).⁹ Her concept for the museum also included a library, a movie theater, and a shop to sell educational materials and reproductions, all to a constant soundtrack of classical music.¹⁰ Rebay's ideas about the building program evidently influenced her patron's goals for the project. SRG embraced the idea that they were creating something completely new, telling Wright when they met in 1943 that "no such building as is now customary for museums could be appropriate for this one."¹¹

As the Guggenheim's founder and first director, Rebay exercised rigid control over the growth of the collection, the development of exhibits, and the design of exhibition space. This was natural, given her intimate role in the development of SRG's collection. However, Guggenheim's death in 1949 coincided with a movement to expand the museum's program led by artists and critics who failed to appreciate the transformative powers of Non-

⁸ In Krens, 7; quoted in Brendan Gill, *Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 43.

⁹ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Designation Report," 1989, 6.

¹⁰ Gill, 432.

¹¹ Frank Lloyd Wright to Harry Guggenheim, 14 May 1952, in *Guggenheim Correspondence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1986), 169.

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Objective art and saw its singular aesthetic as limited and retardataire. Aline Louchheim, art critic for the *New York Times*, dubbed the museum an “esoteric, occult place in which a mystic language was spoken.”¹² Harry Guggenheim, SRG’s nephew and the new president of the Samuel R. Guggenheim Foundation (which had been created by SRG in 1937 to administer the collection) responded with the announcement that programming would henceforth also include examples of objective art.¹³ However, the change in administration was not enough to shift the institutional culture that had flourished so long under Rebay’s influence, and in 1952 she was replaced by James Johnson Sweeney.

Sweeney, a dedicated Modernist, immediately set about to overhaul the staff and expand the collection. He replaced a number of the staff assembled under Rebay’s direction and added works by a wide range of Modern artists, including a number of important works of Abstract Expressionism and sculpture, and he exhibited works from Guggenheim’s collection that had been placed in long-term storage because they did not fit within Rebay’s narrow definition of the museum’s program.¹⁴ In dismissing Non-Objective art, he also dismissed the “spiritual” function of the museum building itself, a position that was to affect the execution of Frank Lloyd Wright’s design.

The Sweeney era marked the beginning of the Guggenheim’s redefinition as an important repository of pre-Modern, Modern, and contemporary art. In c1959, Sweeney was succeeded by H.H. Arnason, who served temporarily until 1961 and continued Sweeney’s acquisition program. In his short tenure, Arnason was noted for mounting the first survey of Abstract Expressionism in a New York museum.¹⁵ Thomas M. Messer, director from 1961 to 1988, furthered the effort to develop a modern facility and a professional staff. In addition to expanding its collection of Modern art, Messer steered the museum to the work of contemporary artists like

¹² In Krens, 11.

¹³ In Krens, 11.

¹⁴ Krens, 11-12.

¹⁵ Krens, 19.

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Francis Bacon, Robert Rauschenberg and David Smith, as well as works by Latin American and Eastern European artists. In 1963, the acquisition of the Justin K. Thannhauser Collection gave the Guggenheim a number of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modern French masterpieces, as well as works by Picasso and other artists whose work predated the examples of early Modern art that formed the core of the museum's collection. More recently, in 1992, with the gift of the Robert Mapplethorpe Collection, the museum acquired its first collection of twentieth-century photography.

Guggenheim Museum - Building History

Solomon R. Guggenheim (1861-1949) was a member of a Swiss family that made its fortune investing in silver, copper, and gold mines in the American west. The family emigrated to America in 1847 and moved to New York in 1889. Solomon Guggenheim studied in Zurich and was given charge of the family's Mexican operations in the 1890s. Guggenheim married Irene Rothschild, and the couple participated in many philanthropic endeavors involving the arts. The Guggenheims also became avid patrons and collectors. Their interest in Non-Objective art was kindled by Hilla Rebay. Irene Rothschild Guggenheim had become friendly with Rebay after purchasing some works from her first American show. In 1927, Rebay painted Solomon Guggenheim's picture; subsequently, she became his principal advisor and, later, curator of his collection. Rebay accompanied the Guggenheims on trips to Europe, where she introduced them to the school of experimental painters whose work she championed. There Guggenheim made many important purchases, including, in 1929, the first of more than one hundred works by Kandinsky that he eventually acquired. Other early acquisitions include works by Bauer, Chagall, Delaunay, Leger, Modigliani, Moholy-Nagy, and Mondrian. These paintings became the nucleus of a private collection that quickly outgrew its owners' ability to store it. By 1933, Guggenheim was seeking permanent housing for the collection, considering such sites as a proposed extension of Rockefeller Center and a pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair.¹⁶ By 1937, when he created the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for the

¹⁶ Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: Monacelli Press, Inc., 1995), 808.

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“promotion and encouragement and education in art and the enlightenment of the public, SRG was contemplating constructing a museum specifically devoted to his collection.”¹⁷ In 1939, Rebay curated an exhibition in a temporary gallery, which opened as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, in a building on East 54th Street. For this initial public showing, Rebay chose only what she considered to be the purest examples of Non-Objective art from Guggenheim’s collection.¹⁸ The success of this gallery, as well as that of several traveling exhibitions of the collection in the late 1930s, encouraged the foundation to pursue construction of a permanent museum.

As she helped Guggenheim to assemble his collection, Rebay had put considerable thought into the choice of an architect for what she described as a “temple of Non-Objective art.” She discussed such a project with important European artists and architects, including Kandinsky, LeCorbusier, Gropius, and Breuer, and she had been impressed with German architect Frederick Kiesler, whose work incorporated organic forms and who had conceived a theoretical design for a fourteen-story windowless museum. In America, Nelson Rockefeller had also expressed an interest in the project, proposing that a museum designed by Wallace K. Harrison be constructed adjacent to MoMA. The latter idea apparently fell through when appropriate land could not be acquired.¹⁹ Finally, in May 1943, as serious planning for the museum began in earnest, Rebay asked Moholy-Nagy for a suggestion. The latter responded with a list that, in addition to himself, included LeCorbusier, Neutra, Keck, Aalto, and Lescaze.²⁰

Although arguably a German architect might had been the most appropriate choice for a museum largely devoted to a collection of European avant garde paintings, Rebay, a German citizen, was dissuaded from further

¹⁷ In Krens, 8.

¹⁸ Krens, 8.

¹⁹ Gill, 432-433.

²⁰ Gill, 432-433.

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consideration of this distinguished group of European Modernists by the advent of World War II.²¹ Apparently acting on a suggestion from the Guggenheim family, Rebay turned her attention to American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who she had admired since viewing an exhibition of his work in Germany in 1910. In June 1943, Rebay wrote to Wright, requesting that he “come to New York and discuss with me a building for our collection of Non-Objective paintings.” In her letter, Rebay discussed the nature of the collection and her ideas for the building. She appealed both to the architect’s ego and to his spiritual side, telling him that she needed a “lover of space, an originator, a tester and a wise man” and that she wanted “a temple of spirit, a monument.”²² Wright’s response expressed both his interest in the project and his appreciation for the opportunity, and by the end of the month he had met with Rebay and Guggenheim in New York and signed a contract for \$750,000 (not including purchase of the site).²³

Although Wright began to conceptualize a design immediately, he was hampered by the fact that Guggenheim had not yet acquired a site for the building. Over the next few months Wright participated in the site selection process, touring New York with Robert Moses and discussing the project with John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Although the architect pressed for consideration of an expansive eight-acre site on the Henry Hudson Parkway offered by Moses, the client’s preference for a mid-town location led FLW to consider a number of sites on 54th Street, Park Avenue, and Madison Avenue. None of these proved satisfactory and Wright was especially vocal in his objection to sites that were tightly enclosed within the streetscape.²⁴ However, the client’s wishes, along with the high cost of land in mid-town Manhattan, motivated Wright to re-conceive his design concept for a more compact site in a densely built-up area, and at the end of 1943, he wrote to SRG that he could “see a tall

²¹ Gill, 433.

²² Hilda Rebay to Frank Lloyd Wright, 1 June 1943, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 4.

²³ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 10 June 1943; Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation to Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 29 June 1943, both in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 4-5; 8-9.

²⁴ Stern, 809.

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building of a new type perfectly appropriate to our purpose, having monumental dignity and great beauty, requiring about half the ground area we have been looking for.”²⁵

Even before the site had been selected, Wright’s correspondence reflects the fact that he was also considering a design in terms of the building’s specific function of housing Non-Objective art, and that he viewed his task as to create an optimal environment in which to appreciate the collection. In a letter to Rebay, he wrote that “if Non-Objective art is to have any great future it must be related to environment....and to flat background of various tonalities suited to the paintings. The less texture in the background the better. A museum should have above all a clear atmosphere of light and sympathetic surface. Frames were always an expedient that segregated and masked the paintings off from their [their] environment to its [sic] own loss of relationship and proportion.”²⁶ Wright referred the museum as an “Archeseum,” a “building in which to see the highest.”²⁷ The phrase was reminiscent of Rebay’s “museum temple,” suggesting that the architect shared Rebay’s belief that space could inspire a spiritual experience.

In March 1944, Guggenheim acquired a vacant site on Fifth Avenue at the southeast corner of East 89th Street. Although this was still too far uptown for Rebay, FLW was struck by the possibilities offered by its location across from Central Park, “...which ensures light, fresh air, and advantages in every way but one... congestion.”²⁸ In fact, Wright was so enthused that he told Rebay that the design as he conceived it “suits the plot even better than the imaginary one.”²⁹ In reassuring Rebay, FLW also appealed to her idea about the building’s higher purpose, telling her that “one seeker of significant truth who has the desire to find it is better for us than any amount of merely curious hoi-polloi only seeking sensation....”³⁰

²⁵ Stern 809; Frank Lloyd Wright to Solomon R. Guggenheim, 31 December 1943, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 25.

²⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 20 January 1944, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 40.

²⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright to James Johnson Sweeney, 5 October 1955, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 215.

²⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 13 March 1944, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 44-45.

²⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 23 March 1944, in Stern, 809.

³⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 13 March 1944, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 44-45.

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By July 1944 SGR had approved FLW's preliminary sketches and advanced the architect \$21,000 to initiate design work.³¹ As Wright later recalled, his client was more than satisfied with what he saw, tearing up and saying "Mr. Wright, I knew you would do it. This is it."³² With this vote of confidence, Wright went ahead with preparing working drawings. The following year [1945], SRG purchased an additional thirty-foot lot on Fifth Avenue, permitting the architect to stretch out the horizontal elements of the design, and on 7 September 1945, the first twenty-nine sheets and thirteen structural drawings were signed.³³ By the time he presented a design to Guggenheim, Wright had made sketches and drawings for several different versions of the museum. These show variations in the choice of geometric forms, the arrangement of components, the use of color, and the choice of material; however, there were several consistent elements, including a design based on sculptural forms, the use of geometric modules and interlocking design elements, a large open volume with enclosing galleries, and light from indirect sources. Although all of these elements characterize the building as constructed, the design process was far from complete in 1945. Rather, as the project inched toward construction over the next fourteen years, the proposed shape, color, materials, and structural system of the building changed, the size of the lot and the siting of the building shifted, and the building program was affected by a significant turnover in the museum administration, a change in its philosophy, and the death of both client and architect.

In the first eighteen months after preliminary approval, many design changes were made to accommodate Rebay's more expansive thinking about the museum's design and program. Wright added a separate high-ceilinged space in which to display the museum's permanent collection, a theater to show Non-Objective films, and a restaurant. He also altered details of the design in response to her objections, removing a roof garden because Rebay thought New York's air too dirty and changing the exterior palette because she objected to the

³¹ Solomon R. Guggenheim to Frank Lloyd Wright, 27 July 1944, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 49.

³² Frank Lloyd Wright to Harry Guggenheim, 14 May 1952, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 169.

³³ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, "A Temple of the Spirit," in *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1995), 21.

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color red.³⁴ However, Rebay also expressed reservations about more essential components of the design, including the proposals for sloping walls in the main gallery and indirect lighting, and by 1947, she had begun to question the choice of Wright himself as the most appropriate architect, accusing him of building “a great monument to yourself” and confessing that she could not “visualize how much (or how little) it will do for the paintings.” She took the opportunity to remind the architect that “a monument to painting...is our main interest.”³⁵

The roots of the conflict between architect and curator reflect a struggle over which of them had the authority to interpret the program. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that Wright and Rebay would come into conflict. Each had a strong personality, a deep commitment to the project, and passionate ideas about art; however, their philosophical orientations were in direct opposition. Where Rebay, as a Non-Objectivist, sought an ideal truth, Wright sought an individual one. The Non-Objectivists’ belief that nature could not provide a model for an ideal harmony between humans and their environment contradicted Wright’s life-long effort to translate natural ideas of harmony into ornament and form. And to those who claimed a direct association between colors and spiritual states, Wright declared that he “despise[d] Symbolism,” scoffing that “there is no bad color. No one color is better than another in itself, except as bad use is made of it or the quality of the color is itself poor.”³⁶ Perhaps most important, despite the attempt of Non-Objectivists to distinguish themselves from Abstract Expressionism, it is hard not to think of their ultimate reliance on the authenticity of their individual feelings as the essence of Romanticism. With each holding such strong personal convictions about truth, it is not surprising that Rebay and Wright could have developed entirely different and conflicting visions of the “temple of spirit.”

³⁴ Hilla Rebay to Frank Lloyd Wright, 19 June 1945, in Gill, 439.

³⁵ Hilla Rebay to Frank Lloyd Wright, 22 October 1949, in Stern, 811.

³⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 2 August 1945, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 67.

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While the design evolved and the debate between architect and curator continued, the client put the project on hold through 1947 and 1948 because the budget exceeded the \$1 million he had allocated to it. During this time the Guggenheim Foundation proposed moving the Museum of Non-Objective Painting from its leased space on East 54th Street to a temporary building it intended to construct on East 88th Street. To counter what he may have perceived as a threat to his commission, Wright proposed construction of a temporary building on a portion of the lot and prepared preliminary sketches for a design. Referring to this narrow structure as the "Annex," FLW suggested that it could eventually be attached to the larger building and adapted to serve as offices and living space for the curator. Although the temporary museum building was not constructed, the idea served as the inspiration for the ten-story building that Wright later added to the design.³⁷ Instead of moving into a Wright-designed annex, the museum relocated to a nearby townhouse at 1071 Fifth Avenue. In 1947-48, the latter building was acquired, gutted, and converted to a temporary museum by William Muschenheim, who had assisted Rebay with the design of the 54th Street gallery.³⁸

Despite this apparent setback, SRG remained committed to the Wright design, assuring the architect's anxious wife that "The House of Guggenheim never goes back on its word -- the museum will be built."³⁹ Unfortunately, Guggenheim died on 3 November 1949 without having put similarly unambiguous language in his will. Following its benefactor's death, the museum was renamed the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in his honor; however, the lack of specific written instructions from SRG emboldened some of the museum's trustees and staff who were unhappy with both Wright's design and Hilla Rebay's direction to use this opportunity to dismiss them both. The project was further threatened by the Fifth Avenue Association's decision to object to the Wright design in 1950.⁴⁰ However, FLW's design won the support of the new foundation president, Harry G. Guggenheim, the client's nephew, as well as that of SRG's daughter and son-in-law, prompting Wright to

³⁷ Stern, 811.

³⁸ Stern, 812.

³⁹ In Stern, 812.

⁴⁰ Stern, 812.

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request that an additional parcel of land on Fifth Avenue be acquired, enlarging the site to include the entire blockfront between 88th and 89th Streets. This purchase was completed in 1951 and SRG's estate was settled in 1952, thus allowing the release of funds for the building's construction.

In 1951, Wright revised the design yet again, reversing the placement of the rotunda and monitor to take advantage of the newly enlarged lot (which had now reached its final size). The 1951 perspective showed a large spiral-shaped gallery on the south end of the site and a smaller circular wing on the north; behind them, a tall rectangular slab provided a neutral backdrop for the more dramatic circular forms and eliminated the view of adjacent buildings on East 89th Street. With this perspective, the basic sizes, shapes, and organization of components had been established; however, details about the building's plan and finishes continued to evolve. New drawings were completed in 1952. That year also marked the resignation of Hilla Rebay and her replacement with James Johnson Sweeney. Although Rebay was apparently suffering from ill health, her resignation had been requested by the trustees after repeated conflicts with Harry Guggenheim, who wanted to diversify the collection and effect a major change in the museum's program. While Wright and Rebay had had their differences over the execution of the building program, their collaboration had begun with a shared purpose, to create a sacred space that would enhance appreciation of the art it housed. Both envisioned a museum that would reflect the unity of art and architecture. FLW expressed this poetically in a letter to Harry Guggenheim, referring to "the building and the painting as an uninterrupted symphony such as never existed in the world of Art before."⁴¹

Wright and Sweeney established no such rapport. As a museum professional, Sweeney viewed the art of the building as subservient to that of the collection. His goal was to construct a museum that would provide a perfect physical environment for paintings rather than a spiritual context for their appreciation. Sweeney's ideal museum was more clinic than church, and he insisted that the design be changed to accommodate additional

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curatorial and administrative services, places in which to record and care for the collection. Although FLW altered the interior plan to include the functional spaces demanded by Sweeney, the two reached an impasse over the design of the main gallery space in the rotunda, which both viewed as the heart of the building. Sweeney's Modernist sensibilities also dictated a different concept of art appreciation than that of the Non-Objectivists. He saw paintings as self-explanatory aesthetic objects and designed installations based on their formal or visual qualities, not on their subjective or thematic associations.⁴² Similarly, he was not interested in creating a relationship between painting and viewer and even advocated removing explanatory labels. In his redesign of the temporary museum space at 1071 Fifth Avenue, Sweeney had replaced Muschenheim and Rebay's dark tones and plush fabrics with clean white surfaces. He advocated similar finishes for the rotunda of the new museum, stark white walls and artificially controlled lighting that would create a neutral environment, pragmatic rather than atmospheric, and proposed adding support rods to the sloping rotunda walls so that the paintings could "float" free from the building and parallel to the floor.⁴³ In a way, Sweeney choose an arbitrary relationship between painting and building over a subjective one between painting and viewer.

Wright's interior design for the gallery had been premised on providing a contemplative space in which to encourage the visitor to relate personally to the art. In a statement opposing Sweeney's preference for stable, controlled environments, the architect told the curator that "any painting in a fixed light is only a 'fixed' picture." He went on to equate something fixed in an ideal state with death.⁴⁴ As Wright designed it, the form of the gallery, with its narrow ramp and low ceilings, created a public space that was human in scale. The partitions that were later added to the design for structural reasons enhanced the sense of intimacy by dividing the spiraling ramp into "rooms" or niches. Wright also wanted to create a "space in which to view the painter's creation

⁴¹ Frank Lloyd Wright to Harry Guggenheim, 15 July 1958, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 270.

⁴² Krens, 11-19.

⁴³ Krens, 19.

⁴⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright to James Johnson Sweeney, 5 October 1955, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 214-215.

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truthfully...in the varying light as seen by the painter and in which it was born to be seen.”⁴⁵ As such he planned the gallery so that natural lighting would flow from above the paintings (dome, or “oculus”) and from behind them (narrow window bands, or “laylights”). The walls were to be painted soft colors, which Wright viewed as sympathetic to the art rather than competitive, and the sloping walls were intended to replicate the angle of an easel.⁴⁶ The latter gave the viewer the same perspective as the artist, almost as if in viewing the painting, the museum-goer were him or herself engaged in the act of creating it.

In 1958, Wright prepared a series of perspectives showing how he envisioned the installation of a variety of sample exhibits for different types of paintings. These show not only the paintings as he hoped they would be mounted but the way that visitors might position themselves to view them. People, alone or in small groups, are depicted studying the paintings from different spots, as well as leisurely contemplating them from hassocks and benches. Nearly all of them are looking at the paintings rather than each other, and their poses suggest that they are engaged in a relaxed and thoughtful activity. Although Wright worked until his death to change Sweeney’s mind, the curator was unyielding, and the museum opened with stark white walls and paintings installed in the “detached” arrangement that Sweeney preferred. Wright was vindicated only a few years later, however, when Sweeney’s successor, H.H. Aranson, had the gallery repainted off-white.⁴⁷

While this dispute raged on, preparation for construction went forward. During this time, FLW continued to work on revising and improving the design. Features and motifs were subtly changed to reflect the architect’s continuing refinement of the design concept. Several alterations to the plan were requested by Sweeney, while other changes were made to keep the building within budget. Still other design revisions were made in response to concerns raised by the New York City Department of Buildings. Upon its first review of the proposal in 1952, the department found objections to thirty-two building regulations. Arthur Holden, of Holden, McLaughlin &

⁴⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright to James Johnson Sweeney, 5 October 1955, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 215.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of Wright’s discussion of color see Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 248.

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Associates, was assigned the task of working with municipal authorities on building code issues. After resolving as many issues as possible, the architects forwarded the plans to the Board of Standards and Appeals to obtain needed variances for the others.⁴⁸ Among the most serious obstacles to construction was the city building department's uneasiness with Wright's proposal for a coiled concrete cantilever. In response, FLW and structural engineer Jacob Feld worked out a solution (c1954) in which twelve slender vertical structural partitions were inserted into the spiral to serve as stiffeners.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1953, a notable event drew the public's attention to the site, the architect, and the proposed museum. A traveling exhibition of Wright's work, "Sixty Years of Living Architecture," was installed in a temporary pavilion constructed on the site of the new museum, adjacent to the collection's temporary home at 1071 Fifth Avenue. The display included drawings, models, photos, murals, furniture, and decorative objects representing Wright's vast oeuvre. Sponsored by Gimball's Department Store, the exhibition had opened in Philadelphia in 1951 and toured Europe before returning to New York, where it ran from the end of October to the end of November, 1953. Unique to the New York installation was the construction of a full-size model of one of Wright's Usonian houses, which had been specifically designed for the exhibit and built by David Henkin, a Taliesin fellow. The Usonian house was the central element in Wright's Broadacre City plan, his conception of a radically rearranged American city premised on the individual, and its appearance here suggests that Wright was using this forum to make a statement about the city. In the midst of a densely developed affluent neighborhood in the world's largest metropolis, Wright had constructed a small single-family house intended for the middle-class market. Was this a subversive attempt to plant the seeds of a reformed America in Manhattan? Or was he simply establishing an authoritative hold on the site, claiming his right to build on it what he thought was most appropriate.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As part of the 1992 rehabilitation, the gallery was repainted in a scheme similar to the one FLW originally specified.

⁴⁸ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Designation Report," 1989, 9.

⁴⁹ Stern, 814.

⁵⁰ After the exhibition closed, the pavilion was demolished and the Usonian was dismantled and reportedly put into storage.

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In 1954, when construction seemed imminent, FLW established a New York City office headed by Taliesin architect William Wesley Peters. Later the same year, the architect himself took up residence in the Plaza Hotel into order to supervise construction personally. However, once construction began, Wright appointed William Short, of Holder, McLaughlin & Associates (the firm that had shepherded the design through the city building department) to provide day to day supervision. In 1955, after receiving five bids for construction, Wright selected builder George Cohen of the Euclid Construction Company, and the building permit was issued on 23 May 1956. Ground was broken three months later, on 15 August 1956. During the construction period, the temporary museum at 1071 Fifth Avenue was moved to a building on East 72nd Street. Construction continued through 1957 and the building was topped out in May 1958.

The last days of construction were anxious ones for critics and designers. During late 1956 and 1957, numerous prominent critics and artists, including Hilton Kramer, Lewis Mumford, Milton Avery, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and others, were outspoken in their criticism of both the building itself and the galleries. One group of twenty-one artists (primarily Abstract Expressionists from the New York school) went so far as to file a formal objection with the museum trustees and administration.⁵¹ Offering an alternate point of view, the *New York Times* published an article by Aline B. Saarinen (formerly Louchheim) in which she reported that the uncompleted building had already acquired a large public following and was particularly popular with students, who frequented the site hoping "to get a glimpse of...the world's best-known living architect."⁵² Saarinen also reported on a tour of the building led by Wright himself during which the architect celebrated the museum's design and siting, particularly its relationship to Central Park. Wright boasted that the museum was the only building on Fifth Avenue that sees the park.⁵³

⁵¹ Stern, 815.

⁵² In Stern, 815.

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In his last written comment on the design (May 1958), Wright described the building as “a unique quiet retreat where the collection of the ‘Non-Objective’...art...could be greatly expanded.” The architect was confident that he had fulfilled Guggenheim’s mandate and that the latter had “envisioned a museum pretty much as it stands. Unique, a genuine intelligent experiment in museum-culture where pictures could be better seen with less discomfort in an atmosphere peculiarly belonging to the free form of art [Guggenheim] loved for itself...”⁵⁴ Although Wright succeeded in guiding his vision virtually to completion, he did not live to see the museum’s opening day. He made his last visit to New York City in January 1959 and died three months later, on 9 April 1959. The opening of the museum was celebrated with an elaborate event on 20 October 1959, and the public was admitted to the building the next day. The building aroused tremendous interest and crowds gathered in long lines. Newspapers reported an opening day attendance of three thousand.⁵⁵

In the years after the museum opened, a number of modifications were undertaken to accommodate the growing collection. These included the conversion of space on the second floor of the monitor building to house the Thannhauser Galley, the enclosure of the ground floor drive-through to provide more usable building space, and the addition of a four-story annex on East 89th Street. The latter was designed by William Wesley Peters and completed in 1968. The Peters building occupied the site that Wright had designated for an annex and was similar in form and massing. In anticipation that this building might one day be enlarged in accordance with Wright’s plan, the annex was constructed on a foundation that could support a ten-story building. The latter proved useful during the Guggenheim’s 1992 expansion and restoration, when the 1968 building was enlarged to ten stories. This was achieved by removing its exterior walls, adding framing for six additional stories, and re-facing the enlarged building with limestone. Although the new design is significantly different from the Peters design, the architects (Gwathmey Siegel) intended the gridded exterior walls to harmonize with Wright’s design for the museum.

⁵³ In Stern, 815.

⁵⁴ In Stern, 815.

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Interior modifications since 1959 have included rehabilitation of the entire monitor as galley space and creating connections between the rotunda and the new exhibit space in the annex. Other changes involved restoring original features such as the oculus and basement theater, and executing features of Wright's design that had never been built. These include creation of a cafeteria under the High Gallery and repainting the gallery walls in the soft shade that Wright had fought for. The most significant changes to the original design are the loss of the original drive-through and entrance and the integration of the rotunda and annex spaces.

Frank Lloyd Wright

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) is regarded as one of America's greatest architects. Born just after the Civil War, Wright's long life nearly coincided with the second century of the country's history and spanned the period in which the United States moved from a pre-industrial agrarian society with an open frontier to a fully industrialized one in which large segments of the population were crowded into urban areas. Wright was raised as a Unitarian, a religion founded on the basis of pluralism, and he inherited an idealized vision of American democracy and a heroic image of its founders. Influenced by the Jeffersonian idea of a decentralized society and raised in the Midwest, Wright's concept of the free and autonomous individual was intimately linked to the values he believed to be inherent in an agrarian land-holding society. Like others in this period of rapid social change, Wright was concerned with the threat to individualism posed by centralization and cultural unity.

Wright's artistic philosophy was grounded in Romantic ideas about individualism and emotional authenticity. Romanticism developed in response to the social upheavals that marked the end of the eighteenth century. Events such as the failure of the French Revolution posed a threat to the rational principles of the Enlightenment. In questioning reason as the source of a single external truth, Romantics looked inward to their own subjective feelings and perceptions, and the resulting acknowledgment of multiple truths both legitimized the self as the ultimate authority and led to a new artistic freedom.

⁵⁵ Krens, 19.

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Embracing Romanticism allowed FLW to filter the threads of individualism through the idea of an enlightened democratic society in which the individual was free to reinvent him or herself. He equated the intellectual and spatial freedom of the American continent with the possibility and choice inherent in American society. As long as there was wilderness left to conquer, the individual was free to move on and stake out a new life. As an artist who undertook providing shelter for the citizen as his mission, Wright believed that he could embody democracy in architecture by giving form to his concept of the sovereign self. Over a long career he worked to integrate man, nature, and society in an architectural form that offered a fully developed model of the place of an individual in a democracy, while attempting to resolve the inherent conflict between the individual and society. Wright looked to nature to provide a system of order, a framework for personal expression. He developed the idea of an organic architecture based on the perception and expression of natural rhythm, pattern, structure, and growth toward a "clear direct expression of the ... nature of the thing itself."⁵⁶ As a Romantic artist, he assumed the authority to learn the secrets of diversity and unity for himself so that he could use them to give form to essential ideas about structure and shelter, the diverse needs of each individual, and a society premised on the autonomous individual.

Deeply inspired by his farm upbringing, Wright drew his major inspiration from the American landscape. He was captivated by the broad horizontal line of the American prairie (though his home state of Wisconsin was characterized by gently rolling hills), which he equated with endless freedom, diversity, and choice. As such, the prairie became one of the most important reference points in his entire body of work, an endless horizontal line that found expression in the design of ornament, the siting, form, and massing of buildings, and the planning of cities. Despite his preference for the horizontal, Wright also explored the vertical form, most dramatically in the proposal for a Mile High Skyscraper (1956) but also in a number of other projects, including the 1929 proposal for three residential towers surrounding St. Mark's in the Bowery in Manhattan. Although the latter project was

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unrealized, the design reappeared in 1956, when it was used for the Price Tower in Bartlesville, OK, where the nineteen-story building dominated the skyline of the small city and was visible for miles across the broad, flat country that surrounded it. FLW referred to the Price Tower as “the tower that escaped the crowded forest,” as if to suggest that although the building was intended for an urban setting, its “flight” had gained it a certain freedom and autonomy.

Although Wright was anti-urban in the sense that he believed that the modern city denied the citizen the opportunity for growth, an essential freedom, he was also captivated by cities and designed numerous works – theoretical, unbuilt and built – for urban environments. He was keenly interested in creating models for individuals to live autonomously and cooperatively in groups. Perhaps his most significant comment on urbanism was his conceptual plan for Broadacre City, which both acknowledged the city and challenged it. Developed in the early 1930s, Broadacre City represented a radical re-conception of the city as a decentralized, theoretically endless horizontal expanse. The plan incorporated the form and symbolism of the prairie, especially its references to infinite freedom, diversity and choice. Broadacre City was premised on allocating each citizen [or family] an individual one-acre lot, on which he/she would construct a single-family house. Although the plan included all sorts of civic, commercial, and utilitarian features, these were dispersed throughout the landscape rather than concentrated in “centers.” Instead, Wright reversed the usual hierarchy by allocating the largest number of lots to single-family homes and by platting these lots in the choicest, center section of the plan. Wright believed that with their status as the central element in society thus affirmed, the citizens of Broadacre City would regain control of their lives, thus correcting the central flaw in the contemporary urban experience. Wright envisioned a utopia of human scale with home in the center.

Wright established the design ideas that were the basis of his organic architecture early in his career and spent the rest of his life refining them in an almost endless variety of forms. Above all he advocated simplicity and

⁵⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (New York: Horizon Press, 1932), 336.

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integrity, often citing the wildflower as an example of something that exhibited a perfect unity of form, structure and aesthetics with nothing extraneous. More specifically, organic architecture was characterized by plasticity, an expressive flow of continuous space, and by continuity, in which form and function, aesthetics and structure are one. His work was grounded in an appreciation of the variety in nature and the need for each building to relate to its environment, and he welcomed technology and new materials because they allowed for a greater expression of continuity. Wright held that buildings should appear to grow from their sites, expand the horizontal line, harmonize with their surroundings, reveal the nature of their materials, and employ natural ornamentation.

In the first period of his career (c1893-c1920), Wright used these principles to develop a style of domestic architecture that re-conceptualized the idea of siting and broke up the traditional arrangement and distribution of components in residential design. These so-called Prairie houses extended planar surfaces to create a more intimate and organic relationship with the ground, embodied long low forms that conformed to the architect's image of the landscape, integrated siting and materials, were characterized by visual and functional openness (using open plans for the free flow of space), and employed ornamental motifs derived from nature.

Beginning in the 1930s and continuing to the end of his life, FLW concentrated on giving form to his idea of a reformed American society built around the American citizen (Broadacre City) and creating a distinctive house type (the Usonian) that glorified freedom. The Usonian house was an extreme abstraction of the ideas about shelter he had been working with since the 1890s. In expressing a harmony of idea and object, Wright eliminated everything extraneous: attics and basements, visible roofs and garages, plaster, paint, trim, radiators, light fixtures. The Usonian grew intrinsically from site, extended the horizontal line dramatically, embodied continuity of pattern, material and design, and was characterized by an expansive flow of continuous space inside and out. In the last period of his life, FLW was preoccupied with the Usonian house, designing approximately ninety Usonians (although these were intended to be of moderate cost, they were not, due to the materials and

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craftsmanship required), as well as five planned cooperative communities that embodied on a small scale his visionary architectural and social ideas.

However, during the same period (c1930s-1950s), Wright also gave form to a group of monumental buildings, all but one public and urban, that embody his ideas about architecture and design to an exceptional degree. These buildings, which include Fallingwater (Bear Run, PA, 1935), S.C. Johnson Wax Company Buildings (Racine, WI, 1936; 1944), Unitarian Church (Shorewood WI, 1947), Beth Shalom Synagogue (Elkins Park, PA, 1954), and the Guggenheim Museum, are among his most well-known and highly regarded works. These commissions gave him the opportunity to realize on a grand scale and in a public forum his ideas about program, form, structure, and materials. They are also major works of art in that they were canvases upon which he realized his Romantic vision of self. If the Usonian house was Wright's most concise statement about the individual citizen, these were his most concise statements about himself as an artist.

Guggenheim Museum - Design

Wright conceived the Guggenheim Museum as a complete entity and described it as a "unique building...so symphonic in character that the least discord at any point echoes throughout the entire structure."⁵⁷ The actual design evolved throughout the last decade of Wright's career, assuming its final form only just before it was constructed. A study of Wright's drawings for the museum executed between 1943 and 1957 illustrates the liberation of his aesthetic imagination as he abstracted and synthesized the formal idea of the museum. The delicate spiraling form of the museum's final design emerges gradually from within the more awkward rectangular forms of the earliest designs, much like a sculpture chiseled from a block of marble. From the beginning, the overall form suggests the general style and massing of the piece but barely hints at the nuances that the artist will develop as the work evolves.

⁵⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright to Hilla Rebay, 12 May 1945, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 60.

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In Wright's first drawings, from 1943, the rotunda is angular in character; in one perspective it takes a hexagonal shape. Corners are prominent; the building has jagged edges. In perspectives and elevations completed in 1944, the form has been softened and the spiral appears; however, it is balanced with strong rectangular shapes on the north and east ends and a very strong bridge. In the model of 1946, rounded forms are more pronounced but they emerge from a large rectangular base that competes with the more distinctive components above. Not until the early 1950s does the composition begin to show an overall smoothness and singularity. These details were gradually refined, and in the final design, that continuity was extended to the smallest details. Wright described the final appearance of the Guggenheim as an "unbroken wave - no meeting of the eye with angular or abrupt changes of form. All is one...." ⁵⁸

The final design expresses a harmony born of the balanced integration of simple forms and the exploitation of natural patterns. The preponderance of circular and ovoid shapes without beginnings or ends, the delicacy and seamlessness of the cast concrete shell, and the bold cantilevers all communicate an internal continuity of form and structure. From the earliest stage of his career, Wright experimented with combinations of non-rectilinear shapes, from asymmetrically related rectangles to triangles, hexagons, spirals and circles. As Wright moved closer to synthesizing the tenets of his belief in organic unity, he appeared to settle on the circle as its most appropriate symbol. His designs of the late 1940s and 50s, in particular, are characterized by integrated spiraling and circular forms. Wright also employed circles in his planned communities, where they defined individual lots as well as providing modules for individual house designs. Indeed, near the end of his life, Wright stated that "there is no square in nature - nature knows only circular forms." ⁵⁹

The subtle asymmetrical balance of the rotunda and monitor -- the larger holding the smaller one in place -- and the relationship of both to the triangular service core that anchors the entire building convey the impression of

⁵⁸ In "Frank Lloyd Wright's Masterwork," *Architectural Forum* (April 1952) reprint.

⁵⁹ In Twombly, 321.

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natural growth in harmony with nature. The integration of the circular rotunda and the triangular service core is a concept that Wright developed in one of his earliest designs, the 1896 "Romeo and Juliet" windmill, which is composed of an interlocking octagon and diamond, each of which is necessary to the structural integrity of the building. A similar concept was used for the Price Tower, in which the plan is formed around the intersection of a larger square and a smaller rectangle. Both Romeo and Juliet and the Price Tower relied on what Wright called "Taproot" construction. The windmill is anchored by a deep wooden post where the two sections intersect, while the structure of the Price Tower is defined by a deep steel reinforced concrete shaft with cantilevered floors. In both of these buildings the architect combined form and structure into a unified design. The design of the Guggenheim expressed an even more refined concept, as Wright intended the rotunda to take the form of a single cantilevered spiral with "no inside independent of the outside structure as one flows into and is of the other."⁶⁰ Like the wildflower, the Guggenheim combined form, structure and materials into a seamless whole.

The spiral is a form of the circle that implies movement. One of the first commissions in which FLW employed a spiral was the Gordon Strong Automobile Objective (1925, not built), essentially a folly that was defined by a road spiraling around a mountain to a planetarium at the top. The spiral can also be likened to the serpentine, the so-called line of nature, which had been used to represent diversity since the eighteenth century (see Jefferson's garden walls at the University of Virginia). At the Guggenheim, Wright's use of the spiral may have been his attempt to refit the endless, expansive line of the prairie to the small urban lot, capturing the expansive horizontal flow of continuous movement in the spiraling and rising rotunda.

The spiral also serves as the main gallery space. Wright intended the building to provide an environment in which patrons could experience art on a personal level, and thus decisions about the size, shape, and scale of the gallery, the way patrons would move through it, the surfaces on which the paintings would be hung, how they would be lighted, and where the patron would view them were made almost as if Wright himself were the visitor.

⁶⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright to Harry Guggenheim, 17 March 1958, in *Guggenheim Correspondence*, 263-264.

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The ramp itself is narrow and low. The exterior walls of the building are slightly tilted to the angle of an easel to accommodate paintings, which were intended to be illuminated by natural light from a narrow band of skylights.

Among the most important tenets of Wright's organic architecture was the relationship of the building to its environment. One of the most challenging aspects of the project was how to integrate what Wright considered the city's first example of organic architecture into a densely developed urban context based on an arbitrary grid. Wright accomplished this by fitting the building comfortably within its urban lot without compromising the essential characteristics of its form. Despite its dramatically different appearance, the museum makes no attempt to overpower its neighbors. Its form is entirely contained within its site, and the height and setback are consistent with the neighboring buildings, maintaining an even street wall along Fifth Avenue. However, like Marcel Breuer in his design for the Whitney (1963), Wright also made no attempt to harmonize his design with those of adjacent buildings, especially on the side streets. On East 88th Street, the museum terminates abruptly at its neighbor's wall; on East 89th the museum (as originally built) floated free and was separated by distance, a garden and a low wall. In his later designs, Wright added a ten-story annex in this space. This tall, broad and flat building provided a backdrop for the more unusual sculptural forms of the rotunda and monitor and prevented a view of the adjacent, dissimilar townhouses. The building's location on Central Park was a decided advantage because it allowed the architect to appropriate the park landscape as an appropriate natural setting. The expansive naturalistic landscape that unfolds across the street, with its serpentine contours and sculpted plantings, offers a context for the organic forms of the building, while both park and building are characterized by a painterly arrangement of visual components.

The Critical Response

The Guggenheim Museum has attracted the attention of critics and scholars since its design was first revealed in the mid 1940s. A 1945 article in the *New York Times* noted Wright's announcement of the design and his claim

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that it was “the first time that a true logarithmic spiral has been worked out as a separate building.” The article went on to note that the architect displayed preliminary sketches of the building and “its radical features.”⁶¹ During the prolonged process of design approval and construction, debate on the building’s merits intensified, culminating in an open letter of protest to the foundation from twenty-one artists criticizing virtually every aspect of the building.⁶² The group, which included George L.K. Morris, Milton Avery, Herbert Ferber, Adolph Gottlieb, Jack Tworkov, Willem De Kooning, Philip Guston, Franz Lines and Robert Motherwell, concluded that the building “was not suitable for a sympathetic display of painting and sculpture.”⁶³

Contemporary Criticism

Upon the building’s long-awaited opening in 1959, museum directors, architects, and critics swarmed to the site to gather first-hand observations so that they could add their voices to the contentious discourse. As Sanka Knox, who covered the opening for the *New York Times*, observed, “the most controversial building ever to rise in New York...lived up to all expectations of continuing controversy when it was opened to artists in a preview....” Knox reported that some artists had “bitter, caustic verdict[s], while others (in the minority, the reporter noted) found the building “exciting or different.”⁶⁴ The *Times*’s architecture critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, noted that its “unveiling has only added fuel to the fiery debate and the argument promises to grow hotter on all fronts.”⁶⁵ Among twenty-five museum professionals, architects, reporters, and critics who wrote about or commented on the design shortly after the museum’s opening, many shared at least one immediate reaction: they were awed or overwhelmed by building’s interior. Philip Johnson called it “one of the greatest rooms in the twentieth century,” while Edward Durrell Stone found it “one of the most exciting interiors in all of architecture.”⁶⁶ Peter Blake

⁶¹ “Museum Building to Rise as a Spiral,” *New York Times*, 10 July 1945.

⁶² Stern, 815.

⁶³ Quoted in John Taylor, “Born Again: The New Guggenheim,” *New York Magazine*, 1 June 1992.

⁶⁴ Sanka Knox, “New Art Museum Opens On 5th Avenue,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1959.

⁶⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable, “That Museum: Wright or Wrong,” *New York Times*, 25 October 1959.

⁶⁶ Johnson and Stone quoted in Robert Alden, “Art Experts Laud Wright’s Design,” *New York Times*, 22 October 1959.

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proclaimed the great circular enclosed room “one of those spaces no one will ever forget,” and Frank Getlein (*New Republic*) observed that “it gives you the sheer elation that comes from looking at, being in, and moving through large amounts of enclosed space.”⁶⁷ While Bill Roeder (*New York World-Telegram*) seemed startled to discover that “indoors it’s as big as all outdoors....It’s all one room, six stories high but without any floors,” an editorial writer in the *New York Daily News* spoke with perhaps the least pretension when he termed it “one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s most joyous monstrosities....a building that should be put in a museum to show how mad the twentieth century was.”⁶⁸

The contemporary commentary suggests that new museum was immediately acknowledged as a work of great architecture, even by those who otherwise disapproved of the building. For example, Robert M. Coates (*New Yorker*) noted that the question was not “Is it not art,” which he agreed that it was before going on to express great reservations about how the building would fulfill its mission to house art.⁶⁹ Many offered unqualified praise for the design: Phillip Johnson hailed it as “Mr. Wright’s greatest building, New York’s greatest building.” Katherine Coffey, director of the Newark Museum, called it “one of the great buildings of the city and of the country”; Emily Genauer, art critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, proclaimed it “the most beautiful building in America,” and Lloyd Goodrich, director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, professed that it was “one of the greatest buildings of the city and of the country.”⁷⁰ Russell Lynes (*Harper’s Magazine*) embraced it as a “work of originality, vision and undisputable grandeur of concept...” and Walter McQuade (*The Nation*) hailed it as “a brilliant success.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Peter Blake, “The Guggenheim: Museum or Monument?” *Architectural Forum* 3 (December 1959); Getlein quoted in Blake..

⁶⁸ Roeder and *New York Daily News* quoted in Blake, “The Guggenheim.”

⁶⁹ Coates quoted in Blake, “The Guggenheim.”

⁷⁰ Johnson, Coffey, Genauer and Goodrich quoted in Alden.

⁷¹ Lynes and McQuade quoted in Blake, “The Guggenheim.”

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The opening was also covered in the European press and writers' responses echoed those of their American colleagues. Writing in the London *Observer*, Patrick O'Donovan hailed it as unforgettable and noted that the building itself "was probably a major work of art."⁷² A French critic was also impressed with the interior space but raised questions about its ability to function as a museum.⁷³

Although they were generous in their praise of the building itself, professionals representing some of New York's most important museums either expressed reservations about how it would fare as a museum or were reluctant to express them publicly. The director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, James J. Rorimer, called the Guggenheim "exciting, thrilling, venturesome," but noted that "it's far too early to judge the success of what they've tried." While Rene d'Harnoncourt, director of MoMA, asserted that the "city should be proud to have a...Frank Lloyd Wright of such quality," he also reserved judgment on its success as a museum, observing that it contained "such a vast number of new ideas that [he wanted] to study it more." Lloyd Goodrich of the Whitney agreed that whether it fulfills the function of "showing works of art to best advantage is another question." Franklin M. Biebel, director of the Frick Collection, acknowledged that the building had many advantages for the display of contemporary art but he didn't know how it would serve over the long period, adding "only time will tell."⁷⁴

The judgment of art critics was perhaps the harshest, and two of America's preeminent art critics found little to recommend in the building. Nevertheless, their lengthy articles attested to the museum's importance as a subject of debate. In an article called "Wright Vs. Painting," John Canaday of the *New York Times* compared the museum to "a war between architecture and painting in which both come out badly maimed." Canaday dismissed Wright's intentions toward the works to be displayed, even suggesting that the architect "deliberately designed

⁷² O'Donovan quoted in Blake, "The Guggenheim."

⁷³ "Art D'Aujourd'hui, Musee De Demain," *L'Oeil* 60 (December 1959).

⁷⁴ Rorimer, d'Harnoncourt, Goodrich, and Biedel quoted in Arden.

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an interior to annihilate painting as expressive art and to reduce it to an architectural accessory....” Even so, Canaday grudgingly acknowledged that, perhaps, “stripped of its pictures,” the design might have great merit.⁷⁵ But if Canaday refrained from completely dismissing the building, Hilton Kramer did not hesitate to proclaim it an “architectural tragedy that [Wright] was allowed to build here what is probably his most useless edifice....” In a particularly vitriolic review in *Arts Magazine*, Kramer dismissed Wright’s design as a “cultural horror,” Sweeney’s installation as having “very little sympathy for the integrity of painting,” and even contemporary art itself, asserting that “...most of the paintings are trash.” Kramer seemed to imply that the building and the paintings deserved each other, finding it a “sizable joke...that this building emulates in so many ways the motives often imputed to the paintings it was designed to bury,” and condemned it (and by inference its collection) as “completely and unassailably self-concerned.” In the end, however, the critic threw his sympathies with the paintings, observing that “even the worst paintings do not deserve a fate like this.” However, even Kramer had to admit that the Guggenheim “[had] now become a part of history: *our* history.”⁷⁶

Architecture critics Ada Louise Huxtable, Peter Blake, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and Lewis Mumford all addressed the question of whether the building was a museum or a monument to the architect. In “That Museum: Wright or Wrong?” Huxtable took the architect to task for his claim that a museum was an organic building that would express a “new unity between beholder, painting and architecture.” Although she agreed that FLW had delivered the “luminous, soaring, unified space” he promised, it was at the expense of overpowering the paintings. Huxtable argued that because the Guggenheim, “like all Wright’s buildings, is an artistic whole that demands undivided attention, a visual and sensuous experience that fills the eye and the mind completely,” it is at odds with what she perceived as its functional goal as a museum, which was “primarily to be a background...a setting created to serve other forms of art.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ John Canaday, “Wright Vs. Painting,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1959.

⁷⁶ Hilton Kramer, “Month in Review,” *Arts Magazine* 34 (December 1959).

⁷⁷ Huxtable, “That Museum.”

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Peter Blake, editor of *Architectural Forum*, addressed the same issue in one of the most insightful contemporary pieces about the museum ("The Guggenheim: Museum or Monument?").⁷⁸ Blake understood the design of the Guggenheim as the culmination of Wright's theory and practice. Recalling Wright's ideas about structure inherent in the Romeo and Juliet Windmill, the Larkin Building, Unity Temple, and the Johnson Wax Building, Blake concluded that the architect had achieved in his final work the "complete marriage of fluid structure and fluid space," a manifestation of the idea that the "flow of space... could take place in three and four dimensions." Blake felt that the spiral, a three-dimensional circle that allowed people to experience space in motion, marked the architect's final break with what he had once termed "the box," the architecture of traditional forms and spaces that he began to challenge almost in his first designs.

Blake also assessed the building's function. Unlike Huxtable, Blake maintained that the purpose of a museum was to glorify and dramatize art. In this sense, he argued that the Guggenheim's powerful design overwhelmed only those works of painting and sculpture that themselves lacked power. Calling the rotunda "one of the most beautiful spaces created in this century," Blake deemed the building "undoubtedly the most valuable piece in the Guggenheim's collection" and concluded that the interior was "a space of such grandeur that all of the many, justifiable criticisms of the building as a museum seem to become insignificant by comparison."⁷⁹

Like Blake, Edgar Kaufman, Jr., himself an architect, Taliesin fellow, and owner of one of Wright's masterpieces (Fallingwater), saw the architect's mastery of space as the most significant aspect of his final work. Kaufmann, who noted that Wright had been experimenting with "ways to vary the planes enclosing space... throughout his career," called the Guggenheim the "...clearest and most powerful statement of architectural and artistic liberation yet made by Frank Lloyd Wright."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Blake was also an architect and, later, the author of *The Master Builders*; a study of FLW, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.

⁷⁹ Blake, "The Guggenheim."

⁸⁰ Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "The Form of Space for Art: Wright's Guggenheim Museum," *Art in America* 46, no. 4 (Winter 1958-59).

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Lewis Mumford, one of America's greatest twentieth-century critics, devoted his column in the *New Yorker* to a substantial analysis of the building. Although he agreed with Blake that Wright's work represented a "defiant break with the past," Mumford criticized the Guggenheim as "nothing but a display of Wright's virtuosity," asserting that the exterior and interior are lost to "power and ego," respectively. Mumford regretted that the architect who championed organicism had produced "a shell whose form had no relation to its function." Mumford's conclusion echoed that of many others, finding the building "sublime in its own right but ridiculous as a museum of art."⁸¹ However, it was Marvin D. Schwartz who may have summarized the contemporary assessment of the building best when he wrote that "the new quarters may not be practical but they are important as the fruit of Wright's genius and most suitable as a memorial to a revolutionary collector whose spirit continues to thrive in the museum he founded."⁸²

Retrospective Criticism

Although the building's merits as a museum are still being debated today, in the decades following Wright's death, numerous prominent architectural historians and critics have judged the Guggenheim to be one of the architect's seminal works. Among them, the American Institute of Architects designated the Guggenheim as one of the seventeen buildings designed by Wright that are most worthy of preservation. Although many scholars have agreed with the assessment that the building did not serve the museum program particularly well, most also agreed that it was an architectural masterpiece, citing its structural achievement, sculptural beauty, and embodiment of Wright's organic philosophy. As Whiffen and Koeper expressed it; "the dynamic interior of the Guggenheim is, for some, too competitive for the display of art, but no one disputes that it is one of the memorable spaces in all of architecture."⁸³ William J.R. Curtis called it "the apotheosis of Wright's organic philosophy," noting that "perhaps only a spiral in concrete could have embodied his intentions, for this form

⁸¹ Lewis Mumford, "What Wright Hath Wrought," *New Yorker* 5 December 1959.

⁸² Marvin D. Schwartz, "New and Views from New York," *Apollo* 70 (December 1959).

⁸³ Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper, *American Architecture 1607-1976* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 369.

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combined centrality and procession, equilibrium and movement, and an inherent sense of growth and aspiration.”

⁸⁴ Likewise, in his book on Wright, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe (*The Master Builders*), Peter Blake expanded on the points expressed in his initial review, calling the Guggenheim “the only completed work of uncompromising plasticity and continuity achieved by Wright...”⁸⁵ Biographer Robert Twombly concurred, stating that “of all the buildings Wright designed, the Guggenheim Museum in New York may come closest to reaching the goals of organic architecture.”⁸⁶

Kenneth Frampton asserted that the museum “must be regarded as the climax of Wright’s late career since it combines the structural and spatial principles of Fallingwater with the top-lit containment of Johnson Wax.”⁸⁷ An entry on Wright in the *Encyclopedia of 20th Century Modernism* observed that the museum’s predominant form, the spiral, was the final realization of a theme Wright had been exploring since 1925.⁸⁸ Henry-Russell Hitchcock also focused on form, describing the museum as a “remarkable helical concrete building.”⁸⁹ Leland Roth noted that Wright had been exploring “the mysteries of the helix” since 1925 and termed the Guggenheim “a masterwork, a dream realized of unified space and purpose [and] a fitting end to Wright’s long individualistic career,” while Spiro Kostof termed it a “gift of pure architecture.”⁹⁰ Writing in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architecture*, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. concluded that “...Wright’s Guggenheim Museum stands as one of the irrefutably grand achievements of modern architecture.”⁹¹

⁸⁴ William J.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Limited, 1982), 270.

⁸⁵ Peter Blake, *The Master Builders: LeCorbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 400.

⁸⁶ Robert C. Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Life and His Architecture* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979), 316.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1985), 190.

⁸⁸ Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, ed. *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 368.

⁸⁹ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 450.

⁹⁰ Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980), 294; Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 740.

⁹¹ Edgar Kaufmann, “Frank Lloyd Wright,” *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architecture*, ed. by Adolf K. Placzek (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 446.

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Critic Herbert Muschamp, who called the Guggenheim “Frank Lloyd Wright’s most famous building and one of New York’s most distinguished landmarks,” also argued for the building’s importance in a philosophical context. He contended that “...the primary value of [Wright’s New York City work] lies...in illustrating the impact on American architecture of the Romantic tradition in art, an influence that...has been underestimated in surveys of the Modern period.”⁹² If, as Muschamp put it, “the avowed aim of Modernism was to reform architecture in conformity with democratic ideals, the achieved objective of the Modern era was to establish architecture as an autonomous art form, to place the architect on the same creative footing as the painter, the composer, the poet.” This provides one explanation of how Wright, who “credited himself with creating the first truly democratic expression of our democracy in Architecture,” came to describe the Guggenheim Museum as though it were the masterpiece of the collection of paintings and sculptures it was designed to display.”⁹³

Conclusion

The Guggenheim is both a grandiose example of individual artistic expression and a building that expresses its program with the utmost economy of form and materials. At the end of his life and after sixty years of reflection and practice, Frank Lloyd Wright was able to take advantage of modern materials and construction techniques to create a building that distilled his principles of organic architecture to a single form. The museum is among the most personal and the most public of Wright’s designs and, as such, it is of exceptional value in representing Wright’s contribution to American architecture.

⁹² Herbert Muschamp, *Man About Town: Frank Lloyd Wright in New York City* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1983), 5.

⁹³ Muschamp, 153.

Guggenheim Museum

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

10. Geographical DataAcreage of property less than one acre**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	587803	4514963
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

☐ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Kathleen LaFrank, Program Analystorganization New York State Historic Preservation Officedate October 2004street & number Peebles Island State Park, Box 189telephone 518-237-8643 x 3261city or town Waterfordstate New York zip code 12188**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York County, New York

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

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New York County, New York

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Section number 9 Page 2

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☐ See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
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New York County, New York

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Section number 9 Page 3

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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New York County, New York

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 4

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☐ See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York County, New York

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the original property associated with this property.

☐ See continuation sheet



SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM 1071 Fifth Avenue
Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book (1989-90), pl. 114

National Register boundary = heavy line

$$1'' = 100'$$

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Guggenheim, Solomon R., Museum
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, New York

DATE RECEIVED: 4/05/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/11/05
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/26/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/19/05
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 05000443

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ACCEPT___RETURN___REJECT___DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Nationally significant masterwork of
internationally acclaimed architect Frank Lloyd Wright.
Commissioned in 1943 and constructed between
1943 and 1959, the museum is also significant
for its collection of modern and contemporary art.*

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A4C

REVIEWER Savage

DISCIPLINE Architectural History

TELEPHONE _____

DATE 5/19/05

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the
nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York, New York County, NY
photo: David Heald, 1994
neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave

View: aerial view looking
southeast

#1



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York New York Co. NY
photo: David Heald, 1994
neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave
View: looking southeast

#2



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

New York, New York County, NY

photo: David Heald, 1994

neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave

view: facade, looking east

#3



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York, New York Co. NY
photo: David Heald 1994
neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave
View: looking south from
2nd floor terrace

#4



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York, New York County NY
photo: David Heald, 1994

neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave

View: rotunda, looking
up to skylight

#5



Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York, New York Co., NY
photo: David Heald 1994
neg: Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave

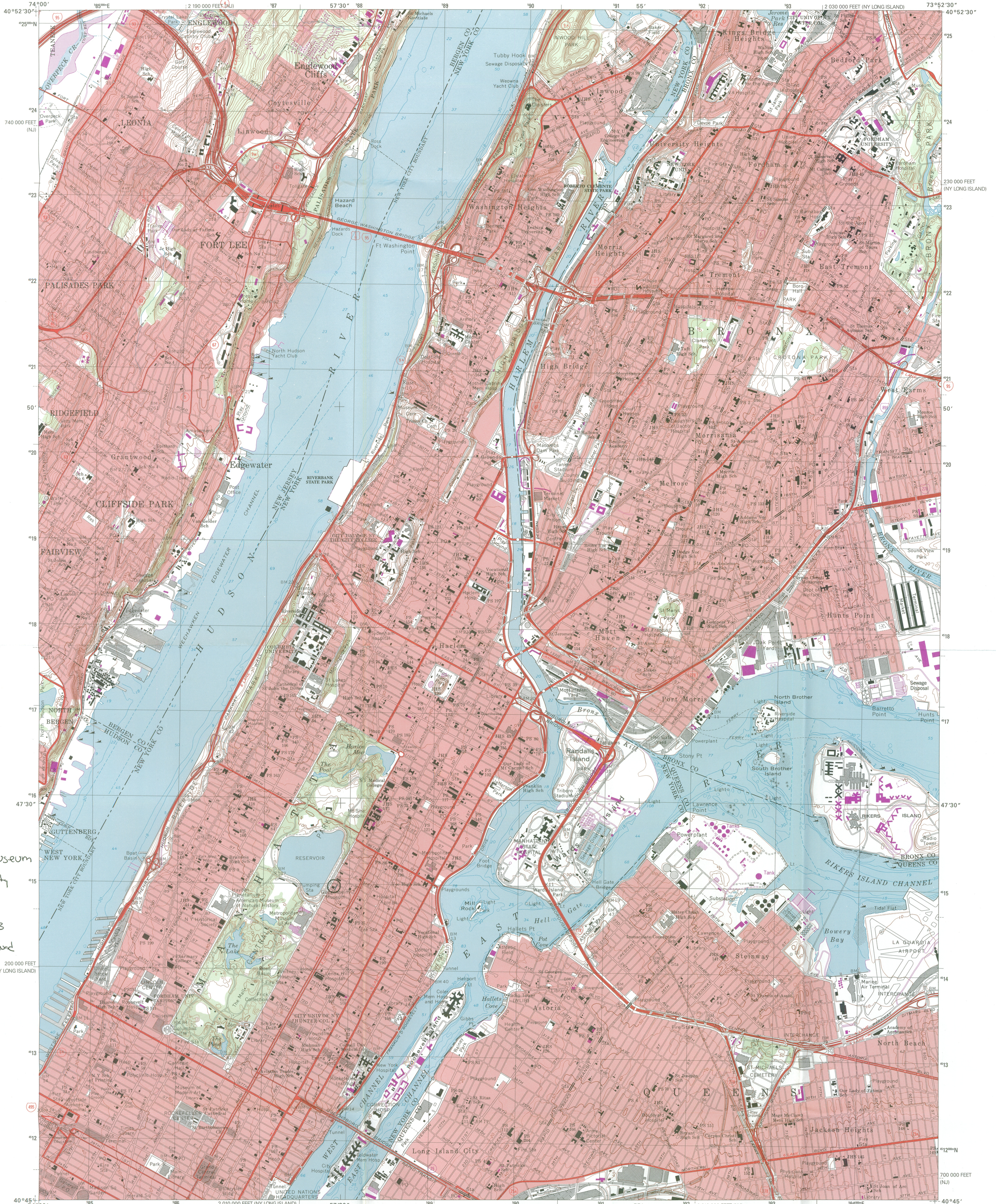
view: interior, top level
of rotunda
#6



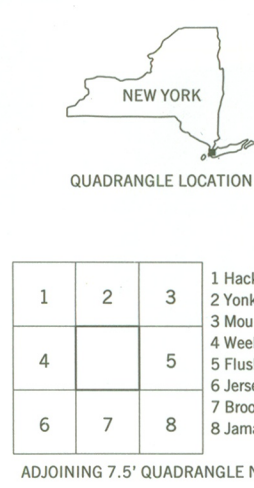
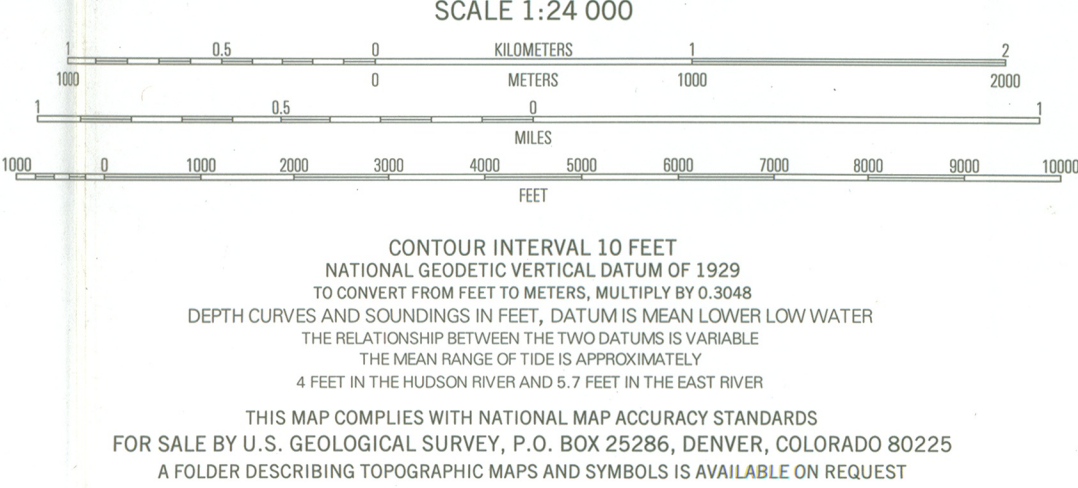
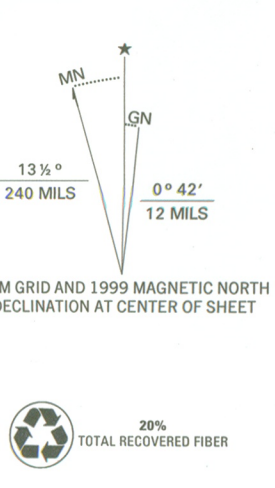
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



CENTRAL PARK QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Topography compiled 1966. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Photorevised using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1966. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999. Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 226, 274, 745, 746, and 747 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes. North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27).
Projection: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone (transverse Mercator).
10 000-foot ticks: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone and New Jersey coordinate system.
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18.
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map. Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours.



ROAD CLASSIFICATION			ROAD CLASSIFICATION		
Primary highway	hard surface	.....	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface	.....	.....
Secondary highway	hard surface	.....	Unimproved road	.....	.....
Interstate Route	.....	.....	U.S. Route	.....	.....
State Route	.....	.....			

1	2	3	1 Hackensack
4	5	6	2 Yonkers
6	7	8	3 Mount Vernon
			4 Westchester
			5 Flushing
			6 Jersey City
			7 Brooklyn
			8 Jamaica

CENTRAL PARK, NY-NJ
1995
NIMA 6265 IV SW-SERIES V821



March 8, 2005

Commissioner Bernadette Castro
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza
Agency Building 1
Albany, NY 12238

Dear Commissioner Castro:

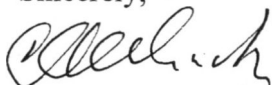
On behalf on the Board of Trustees of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, I am writing to endorse the application submitted to your office for state and national designation of our Frank Lloyd Wright building as a historic landmark.

A designation will help us continue to tell the remarkable story of this building and garner support for its long-term upkeep. The timing couldn't be more suitable, as we embark upon a project to restore the building's exterior to ensure its viability as a public cultural and educational resource well into the future.

I understand that the staff of the Field Services Bureau, in particular, Kathleen LaFrank, has been enormously helpful in preparing our application. For that, the trustees and I would like to express our sincere appreciation.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our designation request.

Sincerely,



William Mack
Chairman
Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

GUGGENHEIM, SOLOMON R., MUSEUM

(Resource Name)

NEW YORK

(County)

05000443

(Reference Number[s])

NEW YORK

(State)

07 / 27 / 2016

(Date form completed)

WACC

(Completed by)

STATUS:

1. MISSING ____ 2. REMOVED/ DEMOLISHED ____ 3. NHL **X** 4. TR ____ 5. MRA ____ 6. OVER-SIZED ____ 7. NPS - UNDOCUMENTED ____ 8. DOE - OWNER OBJECTION ____ 9. RESTRICTED ____

EXPLANATION:

1. Missing Status: Entire Folder (); Nomination (); Map(s) (); Photos ()
Available on: Microfiche (); Optical Disk ()

2. _____
(Cause for removal)

____ / ____ / ____
(Date Removed)

3. _____
(NHL Name, if different than NRHP Name)

10 / 06 / 2008
(Date Designated)

4. _____
(If multi-state/county TR, state/county where filed and location)

(TR or MRA Name)

5. _____
(If multi-state/county MRA, state/county where filed and location)

6. _____
(Location of oversize file)

7. _____
(Current source of partial documentation)

____ / ____ / ____
(Target Date)

COMMENTS:

(Where found, or source of replacement)

____ / ____ / ____
(Date Found/Replaced)