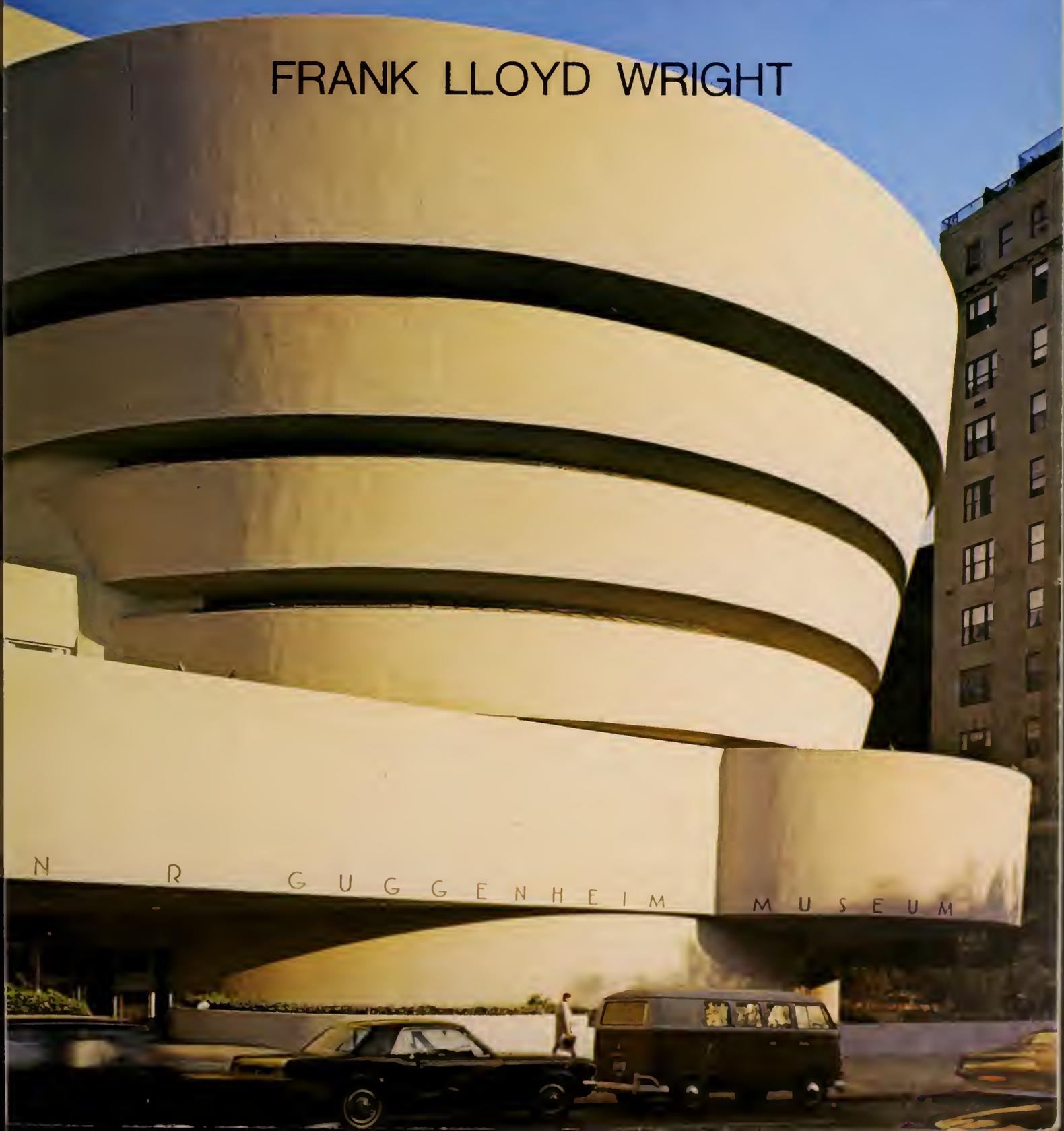


THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT



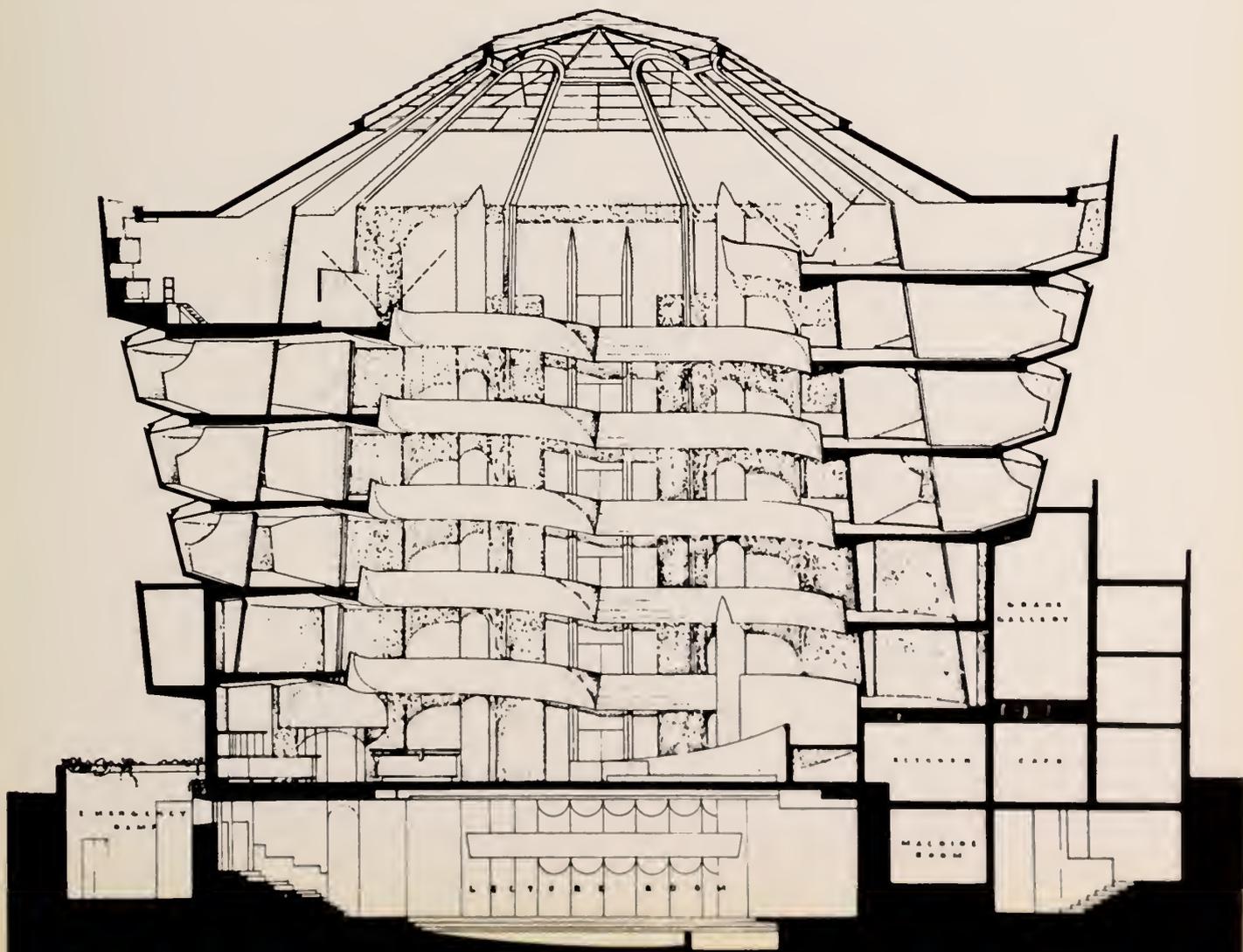


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Metropolitan New York Library Council - METRO

<http://archive.org/details/solomonrg00wrig>

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New York

Frank Lloyd Wright Architect



Quotations from Frank Lloyd Wright
on pages 13 and 22 are by
permission of Horizon Press, New York.

*Photographic credits
black and white*

Courtesy Horizon Press, New York: Frontispiece
Robert E. Mates, New York: p. 8
Robert E. Mates and Mary Donlon, New York: p. 47
William H. Short: pp. 4, 12

ektachromes

Liberto Perugi, Firenze

10,000 copies of this book, designed by
Liberto Perugi, have been printed
by Officine Grafiche Firenze
in October 1975 for the Trustees of
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

All rights reserved.
No part of the contents of this book
may be reproduced without
the written permission of the publishers
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation,
New York, 1975.

Printed in Italy

Millions of visitors, young and old, from all parts of the world and from all walks of life, have been through this building and have experienced its changing programs since the doors were opened more than fifteen years ago. Largely forgotten now are the anguished outcries that accompanied the Museum's first presentation when its novelty and its radical deviation from the accustomed norm overshadowed the qualities of serenity and harmony for which the structure is liked and admired today. A threefold accord between architecture, art and people has, over these years, given distinction to the great retrospectives that have made telling contributions to public awareness of modern art. Kandinsky and Klee, Munch and Schiele, Giacometti and Ernst, Calder and Smith, Dubuffet and Lichtenstein, among many others, have unfolded down the ramps and into the level spaces of the High Gallery and the monumental Central Court — always in relation to the architecture's masses and voids, always peopled and enlivened by throngs of viewers. The photographs and the descriptive passages in this publication may, we hope, convey some of the building's attributes to those as yet unfamiliar with it and serve as a souvenir for those who have visited and enjoyed it. Incidentally and inevitably, the booklet also celebrates the achievement of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect, and the vision of Solomon R. Guggenheim, the founder.

*Peter Lawson-Johnston, President
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation*

*Thomas M. Messer, Director
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*

The ramp under construction, August 1957.



The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Solomon R. Guggenheim was the fourth of the seven Guggenheim brothers of the remarkable family which, upon arrival in the United States from Switzerland in the nineteenth century, had created a financial empire in mining. In the gentlemanly tradition of empire builders, Solomon R. Guggenheim began to collect works by Old Masters. But in the mid-twenties, circumstances changed the course of his collecting. In 1926 he met and commissioned a young German artist, Baroness Hilla Rebay von Ehrenweisen, to paint his portrait. Attractive, talented and dynamic, she had exhibited with avant-garde groups in Germany from 1914 to 1920, particularly the *Secession* group in Munich (1914-15) and Berlin (1915). In 1917 she exhibited at *Der Sturm* Gallery in Berlin. Here, probably through Herwarth Walden, she met other artists who exhibited in his gallery: Delaunay, Gleizes, Léger, Chagall, Kandinsky and Bauer. Her major hero was Kandinsky, later overshadowed by intense admiration for Rudolf Bauer. As their friendship developed, she introduced Mr. Guggenheim into this circle. Converted by her enthusiasm and expertise to champion this avant-garde art, he began to buy, steadily and in increasing quantities, until the walls of his apartment at the Plaza were crowded. As the fame of the collection grew, Solomon Guggenheim opened his apartment at intervals to the art world and began to lend to exhibitions. The inevitable step of converting the collection into a foundation occurred in 1937 when the Foundation was incorporated and empowered to operate a museum. When the new museum opened, with Miss Rebay as Director, as The Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings, in rented quarters at 24 East 54th Street on June 1, 1939, the public discovered handsome rooms of modern design and pure screened areas on which silver and gold-framed Kandinskys, Bauers and Delaunays were aesthetically spaced. Exhibitions of American painting followed, as Hilla Rebay attracted a circle of abstract American artists and student converts to her increasingly passionate enthusiasm for « non-objective painting ».

Between 1947 and 1951, land was secured on Fifth Avenue between eighth-eighth

and eighty-ninth streets for the building of the radically new museum structure, commissioned from Frank Lloyd Wright in 1943. During the interim, in 1948, the collection moved to a six-story mansion on the site at 1071 Fifth Avenue. Here, on gray fabric-covered walls, with music by Bach piped into the galleries, Kandinskys, Bauers and the works of young non-objective artists were shown in successive exhibitions. Retrospective loan shows were also mounted, the most important being the Kandinsky Memorial Exhibition of 1945 and the Moholy-Nagy retrospective in 1947.

In 1948 the collection was enlarged with over seven hundred items by the purchase in its entirety of the estate of Karl Nierendorf, a well-known New York dealer in German painting. Into the collection came an historic Kokoschka, eighteen additional Kandinskys, raising the total to one hundred and eighty, one hundred and ten Klees, six Chagalls, twenty-four Feiningers, fifty-four Kirchner watercolors and prints, as well as works by lesser-known Europeans and Americans.

James Johnson Sweeney, internationally known art critic and former Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, succeeded Hilla Rebay as Director in 1952 and was encouraged to reorganize the museum along more professional lines. Draperies were taken down, walls were painted a pristine white, heavy gold frames were removed in favor of no frames at all, and the paintings were catalogued and conserved. The name of the museum was changed from The Museum of Non-Objective Painting to The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

When in the mid-fifties preparations began for building the long-planned Frank Lloyd Wright structure, the Museum was housed in temporary quarters at 7 East 72 Street while the Wright building was being constructed.

The opening of the new museum in October 1959 brought the Guggenheim world-wide recognition for which it was only partly prepared. The transition from the temporary quarters on East 72 Street with a limited staff into the huge structure where lines of spectators waited patiently for admission, strained the Museum's resources in every respect. It became the task of Thomas M. Messer, appointed

Director in 1961, to build a professional staff that would be equal to the increased public demands and to adjust the exhibition and acquisition programs to an unprecedented situation.

A major development since The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum moved into the Wright building is the installation of the Justin K. Thannhauser collection. This modern art treasure is on permanent display in specially designed quarters on the second floor. Justin K. Thannhauser has generously designated it as a bequest to the Guggenheim Museum. Consisting of seventy-five paintings, works on paper and sculptures, in part antedating the Museum's original collecting scope, it serves as an historical background for the collection as a whole.

Another important addition to the Museum's collection is the Hilla von Rebay Collection acquired in 1971 by settlement with her Estate.

Measures have also been taken to bring about the most recent enrichment of the Museum's holdings through the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which, together with the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni on the Grand Canal, is about to be transferred to The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation's ownership with the proviso that it will continue to be administered in Venice in Peggy Guggenheim's name.

The Museum's collection, seen as a whole, still bears the distinct mark of its founder, Solomon R. Guggenheim, whose original intentions are safeguarded in policies formulated by succeeding presidents — by Harry F. Guggenheim during the crucial years from 1957 to 1969, and by Peter O. Lawson-Johnston, the founder's grandson, at present. Born of the maturing convictions and tastes of a private collector, the Museum's treasures were increased in the founder's lifetime by his continual contributions, and at his death by the remainder of the collection gathered by him and by succeeding directors who have acquired through purchase and donations, a unique assembly of sculpture and painting which today is essential for a full understanding of twentieth-century art.

Louise Averill Svendsen
Curator

The museum seen from eighty-ninth street before the annex was constructed.



The building is cast-in-place concrete, its spiral shape formed by a grand cantilevered ramp, over one-quarter of a mile long, that curves unbroken from the ground to the heights of the dome, almost one hundred feet above. This circular form is repeated in the elevator shaft, the skylight and the auditorium below the main floor and in decorative motives such as the circles of the terrazzo floor and the outside pavement, the grills, windows and even flower beds.

The ground floor provides a multipurpose space useful for the display of large paintings and sculptures and is ideal for special events. The High Gallery supplies additional space for sculpture and monumental pictures and is in marked contrast to the seventy-four niche-like bays that compose the primary display areas.

Adjacent to the exhibition wing, and linked to it by the Justin K. Thannhauser galleries above and the new bookstore below, is the Administration building which houses the offices of the museum staff. It is circular in plan, with a light-well surrounding the utility core which extends from the ground to a skylight above.

The following photographs were taken in the fall of 1969, during the exhibition Roy Lichtenstein.





SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSE

Frank Lloyd Wright on the museum's top ramp during construction.



To understand the situation as it exists in the scheme for the Guggenheim Memorial all you have to do is imagine clean beautiful surfaces throughout the building, all beautifully proportioned to human scale. These surfaces are all lighted from above with any degree of daylight (or artificial light from the same source) that the curator or the artist himself may happen to desire. The atmosphere of great harmonious simplicity wherein human proportions are maintained in relation to the picture is characteristic of your building. Opportunities for individual taste in presentation are so varied and so advantageous that were I to make a specific model for you you should tell me in detail how you feel about the picture to be shown... how important you regard the picture to be shown... how important you regard the picture as a feature of the exhibition or perhaps the building itself, etc., etc. I assure you that anything you desired to happen could happen. Background space could be apportioned and light slanted, strengthened or dimmed to any desired degree. Frames and glass would only be necessary evils because of perfect air-conditioning, etc. But if you liked them for certain designs which may have been painted with them in mind — you could have them, as a matter of course. The basis for all picture-presentation in your memorial-building is to provide perfect plasticity of presentation. Adaptability and wide range for the individual taste of the exhibitor whoever he or she might be is perfectly provided for and established by the architecture itself. All this has been so carefully considered in this building that the whole interior would add up to a reposeful place in which the paintings would be seen to better advantage than they have ever been seen.

Frank Lloyd Wright
Letter to Solomon R. Guggenheim, August 14, 1946



The Guggenheim Museum was conceived to be as adventurous in its architecture as in its collections. The building is the culmination of the efforts and vision of two men: Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect, and Solomon R. Guggenheim, the patron and client. Solomon Guggenheim took the bold step of asking Wright to design his museum in 1943, and it was he who immediately grasped and appreciated the concept behind the plans as they were initially presented. At the time, it was not possible to foresee that Guggenheim himself would die before construction even began or that the architect would not survive to see its official opening. But to this day the spirit of both men persists in the unique structure.

Fifteen years were consumed in realizing the completion of the building. The story of these years is complex, but it ultimately conveys the triumph of an aesthetic idea over circumstantial concerns and limitations.

After a search for an appropriate site — one in which the possibilities considered ranged from a hilltop in the western Bronx overlooking the Hudson river, to placement of the museum in Central Park — the block fronting on Fifth Avenue and the park, between eighty-eighth and eighty-ninth streets, was decided upon by 1944. The first plans for this location were submitted within the same year and all subsequent designs are merely ramifications and modifications of the original presentation. The final profile of the structure began to emerge in 1948 and had crystallized by 1949 when the relative positions of the exhibition gallery and admin-

istration wings were exchanged, placing the large mass of the main spiral on the eighty-eighth street corner.

The war and rising post-war costs prevented immediate construction of the museum following the preparation of drawings in 1944. Solomon Guggenheim's death in 1949 caused a further postponement until his estate was settled, and thus, it was only in 1952 that a building permit was requested from the City of New York. The conservatism and skepticism of various city building departments forced four more years of delay until argument and the introduction of numerous changes in the design and engineering of the structure finally satisfied the officials involved.

In 1949 Solomon's role as client was assumed by his nephew, Harry Frank Guggenheim, a powerful and dynamic figure. As Chairman of the Board and later President of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, his task was to find and maintain a balance among the professional prerequisites of the museum, financial realities, bureaucratic flats and the architect's need for freedom of action, in the hope of producing the building without harmful compromise. In addition to restrictions imposed by the building code, an even more crucial factor increasingly influenced the final form of the building project. In the years between 1943 and its opening in 1959, only months after Wright's death at the age of ninety, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum gradually evolved from a private collection with strong memorial overtones into an active and provocative center of twentieth-century art, which required large

areas for office space, photography studios, conservation workshops shipping and receiving facilities and storage rooms. Since the day of its opening, the Museum has continued to expand its range of activities and exhibitions, constantly demanding more and more from the simple idea that Frank Lloyd Wright originally had for a pavilion in the park, a "reposeful place in which paintings could be seen to better advantage than they have ever been seen."

The reconciliation of an architect's design with a client's needs and aspirations often becomes a tug-of-war which may, as in the case of the Guggenheim, result in that major and rarely realized accomplishment of a significant and innovative structure that fulfills the purpose for which it was created. The original museum concept underwent many changes and adaptations but it was never transformed. Wright's statement quoted above underscores this point: in poetic and architectural terms he describes the building's unique spatial ambience and scale which remains unaffected by subsequent modifications and he justly emphasizes the versatility and adaptability of the building. He presents a vision of what was, for the time, a bold new idea — pictures without frames, freed from the constraints of traditional presentation through the technical marvels of the modern age.

When the building opened to the public it evoked strong criticism, extending from charges that it resembled nothing so much as an overgrown oatmeal bowl to assertions that a great architect had committed the folly of designing an overwhelming monument and memorial to





himself, rather than an environment in which one could appreciate works of art. The years, however, have witnessed the growing appreciation of the magnitude of Wright's achievement until, today, the museum is widely recognized as one of the most satisfactory exhibition spaces in the world. Regardless of how the original plans have continued to evolve and despite some admitted operational difficulties, the building stands as a milestone in museum architecture. Measured and articulated to present a coherent, well-scaled succession of viewing areas, it responds, not to the circumstances of any particular vogue or installation scheme, but rather to an architectural idea of spatial volume, proportion, surface and movement which is equally valid for works of art of almost any description.

The vitality of Wright's museum is demonstrated by the fact that it has been extended and modified and yet has preserved its personality; it has continued to absorb more and more activity without its essential character being diluted.

According to the original concept, the building was to house a permanent display of Solomon Guggenheim's collection, and Wright intended to fix these pictures flat against the outwardly angled walls. Today, works are hung vertically and appear to float free of the wall behind them, with the selection on display changing with the five to twelve exhibitions held each year. The library, originally located on the bridge over the driveway, has given way to the exhibition galleries created for the important Justin K. Thannhauser Bequest; it was, in turn, rehous-

ed, in the southeastern extension on the ground floor where the cafeteria once stood. In 1968, William Wesley Peters, who succeeded to Wright's practice, completed an annex to house the conservation laboratory and the permanent collection storage vault, and the spaces formerly preempted for these activities on the top ramp of the gallery spiral have as a result become useable for exhibition purposes. In 1974 the driveway under the building, by then obsolete and dark, was partially enclosed and a new restaurant and bookstore created to serve the public, with the help of funds from the Harry F. Guggenheim Foundation. The auditorium beneath the main gallery floor was designed for lectures and concerts but has increasingly been used with notable success for dance programs and elaborate theatrical performances.

Throughout the years Wright's initial architectural idea has been proven valid again and again. The surfaces are pure, the light abundant, and the scale particularly human. Pictures and sculpture are presented in varying arrangements, each work commanding its own space, yet each existing in harmony within a unified exhibition. Seen from the many different vistas across the great void of the interior, or weighed from one ramp to another, the impact and interrelationship of the objects on display are always evident. This experience greatly adds to the appreciation of individual works. Moreover, the continuity of the gallery sequence establishes a progression of works which not only clarifies the development of inherent aesthetic ideas but also removes the principal cause of museum fatigue — visitor confusion as to where to turn

next. As one walks down the ramp, each work of art is presented in the neutral space created by the simple painted concrete surfaces of the building's interior. Each work inhabits its own discrete space and makes an unqualified claim on our attention. Passing from one bay to the next, or turning around, the visitor is taken away from the object and oriented in the wider context of the whole museum with views of other visitors and works of art interacting in the distance; the result is an orchestration of periods of intense aesthetic involvement and more distanced reflection and evaluation.

Henry Berg
Deputy Director

Architecture, may it please the court, is the welding of imagination and common sense into a restraint upon specialists, codes and fools. Also, it is an enlargement of their imaginations. Architecture therefore should make it easier to conceive the infinite variety of specific instances which lie unrealized by man in the heart of Nature.











ROY LICHTENSTEIN











COMPOSITIONS





















THE SOLOMON R













*Bookstore and restaurant, fall 1974.
Restaurant, fall 1974.*











