

**...and What Makes a Good Museum Anyway?  
The Issue of the Dichotomized Typology**  
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Perhaps critics will never conclude the seemingly perpetual debate of the art museum typology. Beyond the most basic notion of a receptacle for the public display of artwork, the gallery museum as an idea of type appears fated to ricochet between two diametrically opposed architectures. At one end sits the art museum as a neutral white box providing an impartial backdrop and quiet presence suited to an ever-changing array of art. At the other, the museum asserts itself as a work of art in its own right, an integral part of an engaging gallery experience where spaces are best suited to a particular kind of art. Three indisputably significant instances where art display spaces themselves became part of the art are the Art of This Century gallery by Frederick Kiesler, the Guggenheim Museum by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the art installations of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. These examples proffer a platform of renowned and extensively criticized work from which the design of Elusive Projections for the 2005 Peepshow Competition emerged. The typology of the art museum as work of art was pertinent when responding to the design challenge for a temporary Artcity pavilion in the city of Calgary that would “create a dialogue among designer, artist, and viewer, encouraging discourse into the fine art and the urban relationships that evolve around them.”<sup>1</sup> If one of art’s greatest values is seen as the instigation of discourse, then the ultimate success or failure of these highly innovative and controversial examples lie in their generation of public discussion on the very nature and role of art in our time. This dialogue, which itself forms part of the creative construct of the art and architecture in each case, ensures a continued resonance in the collective cultural mind. Henceforth, they become points of reference in the ongoing debate of a gallery museum apotheosis.

The notion of a typology in reference to a specific building type would seem clear. “The works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it...The typology argument today asserts that despite the diversity of our culture there are still roots of this kind which allow us to speak of the idea of a

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<sup>1</sup> Art City Competition Brief. <http://www.art-city.ca/>

library, a museum, a city hall or a house.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the mention of an art museum most often conjures up images of large, unassuming white spaces strung together in an orderly procession through which the visitor experiences the collection as one would work through an encyclopedia.<sup>3</sup> As repositories for works of art, these neutral spaces are infinitely flexible. The museum designed by Mies van der Rohe for the Architectural Forum in 1942 in this highly adaptable fashion was heralded as a museum director’s dream: “it is a large, open space, practically without columns, and so utterly anonymous in character...The paintings and the sculpture were King. Nothing in the architecture was permitted to impinge upon the experiencing of the works of art displayed.”<sup>4</sup> Traditionally understood as the most expedient solution to a gallery space, this paradigmatic museum type applies to such esteemed examples as the Louvre, the Museum of Modern Art New York, and the Whitney. (Illustration 1)



1. Typical gallery space at MoMA, New York.

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<sup>2</sup> The Harvard Architectural Review. Volume 5. Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent. John E. Hancock.

<sup>3</sup> Progressive Architecture. Volume 73, No. 10, October 1992. “Breaking the Institutional Envelope.” Joseph Giovannini. p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Architectural Forum. Volume 111, 1959. “The Guggenheim: Museum or Monument?” Peter Blake. p. 89.

In order to dramatize and vaunt the artwork, which is certainly the main function of any museum, the architecture of these buildings responds by receding into the background. This assumes to show the pieces most advantageously and to their full impact, rendering a relationship solely focused between the viewer and the artwork. To understand the divergent form of this typology it is necessary to first appreciate the nature of this relationship.

Art is a lens for self-reflection. Each individual interprets a work of art in their own way, and when provoked by their understanding of the meaning of the work, they may take from it something entirely different than another viewer. The deepest meaning of art might only be understood by a few, yet “the process seems to be that these [few] interpret it to a few more who pass it on to the rest of the world who unconsciously incorporate it in their lives. A Raphael is not a painting in the National Gallery – it is an active force in our lives.”<sup>5</sup> This is the inherently didactic nature of art. Christo believes in the dialectic exchange between the individual and the artwork, but also stresses that the specificity of the moment of creation and appreciation is crucial. “No matter if it is a contemporary work or a Renaissance work it is related to a very specific social, economical, and political moment when it is done. We’re not capable to appreciate any art, as it should be, without this specific knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> He subsequently labels this the ‘prime time’ of a piece of work.<sup>7</sup> Christo emphasizes that art value is a dynamic situation consisting of the relationship of the object to its own time and the interaction between the public and the artist’s work. The two are reciprocal. When art is relevant to contemporary events and current emergent issues, the discourse will be particularly engaging. Today, “we live in an essentially economic, social, and political world. Our society is directed to social concerns of our fellow human beings...That, of course, is the issue of our

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<sup>5</sup> Guggenheim, Peggy. “Art of This Century.” New York: Publishers Printing Company, 1942. p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> Fineberg, Jonathan. “Christo and Jeanne-Claude: On the Way to the Gates, Central Park, New York City.” New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004. p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> Fineberg. p. 135.

time.”<sup>8</sup> It follows, then, that the manner in which the art is displayed and experienced is an intrinsic part of dialogue between time, art, and individual.

With the introduction of Abstract, Non-Objective, and Surrealist artwork to mainstream culture, a new kind of gallery space transpired at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century out of a growing debate on how to best view this modern art. This artwork was seen as “an advanced form of painting wherein line, color and form are a language in themselves...independent of representation of objects animate or inanimate...[which] has seldom been presented in other than the incongruous rooms of the old static architecture.”<sup>9</sup> A new unity between beholder, art, and architecture was sought. The challenge was to extend the experience and meaning of the artwork beyond the actual piece and into the space it inhabited - the gallery.<sup>10</sup> A fundamental concept was that there should be no interruption between the piece of work and its environment. Framing a work of art was now seen as a symbolic obstruction hindering the freedom of dialogue among viewer, environment, and image, a “plastic barrier across which man looks from the world he inhabits to the alien world in which the work of art has its being.”<sup>11</sup> Freed from the tyranny of frames, works became harmonious with the space that contained and presented them, the new framing being the relationship of the work to its architectural environment.<sup>12</sup> Extreme specificity of purpose for galleries in lieu of neutral receptacles for art was based on the premise that “not all art works in all spaces.”<sup>13</sup> Potentially, the building itself could act on the viewer’s experience, much like the art. The risk was in developing an art museum architecture remarkable enough to surpass the works of art as the main focus. The museum

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<sup>8</sup> Fineberg, p. 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. “The Guggenheim Museum, Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright.” New York: The Foundation and Horizon Press, 1960. p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> De Salvo, Donna. “Staging Surrealism.” Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1997. p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Tacou-Rumney, Laurence. “Peggy Guggenheim: A Collector’s Album.” Paris: Flammarion, 1996. p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. p. 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> Giovannini. p. 116.

gallery typology thus diverged into two ostensibly disparate types where the choice became one between art or architecture.<sup>14</sup>

Although not entirely unanticipated, the Art of This Century gallery in New York, designed by Frederick Kiesler, was revolutionary. Peggy Guggenheim approached Kiesler in 1942 to design a contemporary space for her breathtaking collection of artwork, and he in turn prophesized that the gallery would come to be known for his design and not her art.<sup>15</sup> Peggy's amalgamation consisted of over 170 works spanning a period of 30 years and included works by such prominent artists as Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, and Alexander Calder, among many others of the time. For the museum, the collection was divided into four categories to be displayed in four uniquely and specifically designed spaces: The Surrealist gallery, The Kinetic gallery, The Daylight gallery, and the Abstract/Cubist gallery. Each space was meant to be a statement of "design correlation used to break down the physical and mental barriers which separate people from the art they live with..."<sup>16</sup> The environment and the art would interact in a way that no other gallery had yet accomplished. Kiesler incorporated innovative concepts for the Art of This Century gallery because he felt it was "incumbent upon contemporary architects to develop techniques which would once again make patent the original unity."<sup>17</sup> The unity that he is referring to is of man, art, and space. He worked in almost absolute secrecy until the unveiling of what he felt was a "demonstration of a changing world."<sup>18</sup>

The Art of This Century gallery closed its doors for the last time in 1947 when Peggy Guggenheim moved herself and her collection permanently to Europe. Her uncle, Solomon R. Guggenheim, had already begun plans for his

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<sup>14</sup> Giovannini. p. 116.

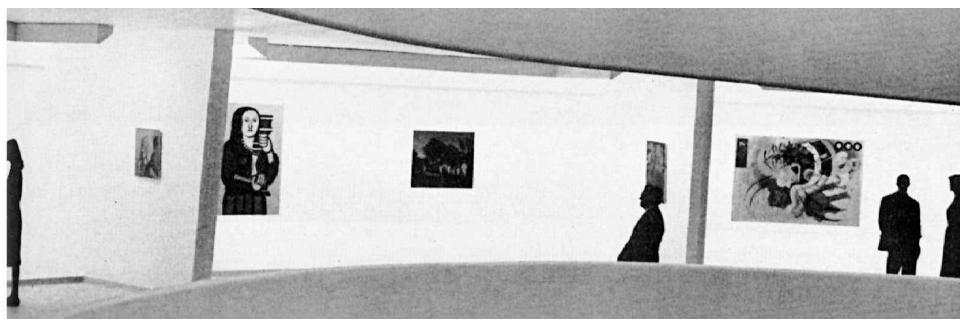
<sup>15</sup> Weld, Jacqueline Bograd. "Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim." New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986. p. 285.

<sup>16</sup> Weld. p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> Tacou-Rumney. p. 121-122.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Museum of Non-Objective Painting in New York to make his collection of over 700 works of art available to the public. The curator of his collection, Hilla Rebay, approached the architect Frank Lloyd Wright about the design for the museum in 1943, shortly after the successful opening of Peggy and Kiesler's revolutionary gallery. It would take sixteen years for the design and construction of what eventually was named the Guggenheim Museum, a project bedeviled with conflict and one which neither Solomon nor Wright lived to see completed. No one could have anticipated the iconic stature that the building, as both a piece of architecture and as a museum, would ultimately reach. Akin to the aspirations of Kiesler, Wright "strode to create a unity between the building and the paintings, a unity in which the painted images, which often consist of free-floating lines and patches of color in a limitless spatial context, would float like apparitions along the spiraling, light-saturated path. In short, the infinite nature of the paintings would be matched by the infinite qualities of the museum space."<sup>19</sup> (Illustration 2)



2. Artwork floating like apparitions along continuous spiraling ramp at Guggenheim Museum.

Continuous harmony between audience, artwork, and museum building was an essential aspect of Wright's design intent for the Guggenheim.<sup>20</sup> Having been given a program to design permanent spaces for a certain catalogue of artwork, Wright and Kiesler were able to focus on the execution of appropriate environments in which this specific art could most advantageously be

<sup>19</sup> The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Volume 52, No. 4, December 1993. "Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: A Historian's Report." Jack Quinan. p. 478.

<sup>20</sup> Arts Magazine. Volume 52, No. 8, April 1978. "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Guggenheim Museum: A New Perspective." William J. Hennessey. p. 130.

appreciated. Through experimentation of the notion of complete unity, they both designed arrangements that consciously changed the traditional perception of how art is displayed and experienced.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, a husband and wife team of artists, create art at an architectural scale. Their projects stem from their desire to broaden and question the very notion of art.<sup>21</sup> Around the world, the completion of their more infamous large scale temporary projects take anywhere from a year, as in *Wrapped Coast*, Sydney, 1969, to 26 years, as with *The Gates*, New York, 1979-2005. The actual works of art are temporary and generally exist for no more than fourteen days before they are entirely dismantled and recycled, but the total process can span decades. In fact, Christo maintains that their artwork is inherently eternal because “even after the physical project is removed, the project continues to exist in the minds of everyone who experienced it in the site, and it forever changes the relationship those individuals have to the site.”<sup>22</sup> It is precisely this indissoluble relationship between the work of art and its location that imparts such immense impact on their work. The artwork exists only as the fulfillment of a balance between the site and the idea, “you cannot separate that object formally like it exists in a pristine situation...It's not like a Brancusi sculpture that can be put in an absolute vacuum.”<sup>23 24</sup> The sites vary from a vast landscape like the hills of Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, in *Running Fence*, 1972-76, to something at an urban scale as in *The Pont Neuf Wrapped*, Paris, 1975-85. As Christo explains, “The work of art benefits from its space which is not in a museum or gallery but is space with tremendous order.”<sup>25</sup> It is not only the site enriching the project, but the combination of the properties of the place and the situation in which the work is carried out.<sup>26</sup> By this, he is of course

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<sup>21</sup> Architectural Design. Volume 65, No. 3-4, March-April 1995. “Wrapping the Reichstag.” Christo and Jeanne-Claude. p. xix.

<sup>22</sup> Fineberg. p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Domus. No. 790, February 1997. “Christo E Jeanne-Claude: The Great Veil of Wonder.” Pierre Restany. p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> Fineberg. p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude. p. xviii.

<sup>26</sup> Fineberg. p. 132.

referring to his theory of a prime time for art. The impact is both a visual and a cultural experience: “The epiphany for viewers in all the Christo and Jeanne-Claude projects has everything to do with not only the dynamically changing cultural construction of experience but also the individual’s mental evolution in relation to cultural constructions, our own internal parameters, and the dynamic environment of events. These works wake us up to the very life we’re living.”<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, this relates into a deeply involved and interactive unity among viewer, artwork, and environment.

With *Art of This Century*, Kiesler attained what is perhaps the most innovatively interactive environment for the museum-goer. Worlds apart from the galleries that exhibited their gilt-framed paintings in hushed somber rooms, visitors could not only touch the paintings, but also handle them, move around them, and adjust them to their liking.<sup>28</sup> Kiesler tirelessly detailed every aspect of the museum to ensure nothing would vitiate his inventive design for Peggy’s gallery. Amoeboid furniture became *objects d’art*: chairs that could be fashioned in eighteen positions to become sculpture pedestals, coffee tables, lecterns, hat racks, or even sofas stacked side by side. His proposed method of “spatial-exhibition”<sup>29</sup> in the cavernous Surrealist gallery incorporated unframed pictures protruding from curved walls on adjustable arms. (Illustration 3) “The installation afforded the opportunity to extend the ‘poetics of the marvelous’ into actual space, thereby transforming a mundane setting into a Surrealist one.”<sup>30</sup> To enhance this transmogrification of a dilapidated loft into a magical space, Kiesler reverberated the recorded roar of an approaching train through the room, accompanied by a pulsating light show. For the Kinetic gallery, he fashioned such gadgets as a peepshow mechanism, a shadow box, and a paternoster bringing paintings to view on a conveyor belt. Visitors to the Daylight room sat on custom designed chairs seeing a parade of paintings on rolling pyramidal

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<sup>27</sup> Fineberg. p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Weld. p. 290.

<sup>29</sup> Tacou-Rumney. p.121.

<sup>30</sup> Kachur, Lewis. “Displaying the Marvelous.” Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001. p. 216.

easels, or leafing through paintings in portable plywood bins. Finally, the Abstract/Cubist gallery, with movable blue canvas partitions, turquoise floors, and paintings mounted on floor to ceiling rope pulleys appearing to float in space, “had the effect of being like a large cubistic painting.”<sup>31</sup> The outcome was that people crowded to the gallery not only to see the collection of artwork, but also to experience this inventive form of modern museum. “The gallery was a huge success. It was delightful, it was controversial, it was the beginning of an artistic and architectural revolution in America.”<sup>32</sup>



3. Surrealist gallery at Art of This Century with amoeboid furniture.

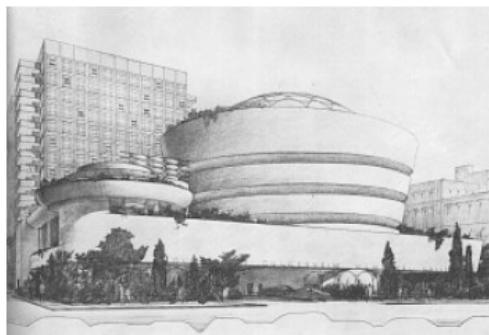
Shortly after the beginning of this revolution, the Guggenheim museum pushed the same boundaries that had been pushed with Art of This Century. Frank Lloyd Wright presented his design for this non-objective art museum as one without precedent. Indeed, “For the first time in the history of architecture a true logarithmic spiral has been worked out as a complete plastic building: a building in which there is but one continuous floor surface...one single, grand,

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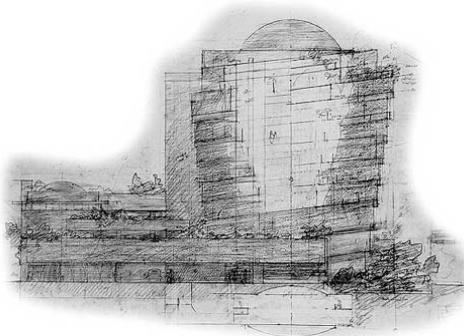
<sup>31</sup> Weld. p. 288.

<sup>32</sup> Architectural Record. Volume 191, Issue 9, September 2003. “Kiesler’s Unforgettable Interior: The Art of This Century Gallery.” Ingrid Whitehead. p. 103.

slow wide ramp...a pure plastic development of organic structure."<sup>33</sup> (Illustration 4) The exhibition space consists of a spiraling rotunda with niches of artwork formed by small web walls along a continuous ramped gallery open to the domed atrium. (Illustration 5)



4. Early perspective sketch of Guggenheim Museum.



5. Section through Guggenheim Museum.

He stressed that the form of the building was intrinsic to the appreciation of art with limitless spatial context because of the powerful connotations of movement in the spiral form along which paintings would float like apparitions.<sup>34</sup> Inspired by the content of the non-objective works, Wright envisioned the giant spiral as a new unity of beholder, painting, and architecture where the viewer would drift

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<sup>33</sup> The Journal of Architecture. Volume 5, Summer 2000. "Between Icon and Institution: The Vacillating Significance of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum." Samiran Chanchani. p. 174.

<sup>34</sup> Quinan. p. 475 and 478.

gracefully down the ramp from piece to piece.<sup>35</sup> “The Guggenheim, like the abstract expressionism with which its design was contemporary, is action art.”<sup>36</sup> The works of art themselves were meant to yield to the great sweep of movement created by the massive curving forms and were thus detached from the slanted walls to float on projecting steel arms. The effect was one of totally frameless pictures suspended in a brilliantly lit space. The only framing of the work that Wright envisaged was the relationship of the painting to its environment, where the freshly liberated pieces would be exhilarated as masters of their own space, harmonious with architectural contiguity.<sup>37</sup> “...It is not to subjugate the paintings to the building that I conceived this plan. On the contrary, it was to make the building and the painting an uninterrupted, beautiful symphony such as never existed in the World of Art before.”<sup>38</sup> However contiguous he foresaw the final result, the iconic architecture of the Guggenheim museum acts on the viewer experientially to such a degree that it is often named “the most valuable piece in the Guggenheim collection,” and is frequently the main reason people visit.<sup>39</sup>

Christo and Jeanne-Claude deviate from the typology of the traditionally neutral art display space through the very nature of their work. They continuously seek to create a unity of art, site, and audience. Their installations alter the site in such a way that common understandings and uses can be emphasized or suppressed. The *Wrapped Reichstag* project, 1971-1995, covered the entire Reichstag building with a high-strength shiny silver fabric. The Wrapping of the Reichstag in Berlin took twenty-four years from inception to completion, but will forever continue to affect the perception of the German Parliament as a piece of architecture and as a symbol. Rife with issues of German national identity, the artists were drawn to the Reichstag because “it was closer to the German soul than other projects had been to the host nations and

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<sup>35</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Architectural Record. Volume 174, Issue 3, March 1986. “Leaving Wright Enough Alone.” Michael Sorkin. p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Chanchani. p. 179.

would engage an entire nation. We are borrowing not only the Reichstag but a very rich space.”<sup>40</sup> After the reunification of Germany in 1990, it would not be long before parliament would re-inhabit the building and wrapping it would become impossible. Christo’s notion of an artwork’s prime time is epitomized in this particular piece of work. The project could only exist at the precise moment in time that it was finally realized, when the historicism of the site and the creative force of the artists culminated in a fourteen-day art installation. The entire building was covered in a synthetic silver fabric that brilliantly reflected light. The folds of the fabric were designed to visibly alter the proportion and increase the presence of the volume, while catching the wind to appear as a living and breathing entity. (Illustration 6)



6. *Wrapped Reichstag* project.

Fabric is a dominant theme in the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude who are drawn to the sensual and inviting qualities of the material because “fabric moves dynamically...thus the nomadic quality of [a] project will be translated, which is

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<sup>40</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude, p. xix.

important.”<sup>41</sup> The temporality of their work lends a certain urgency to each project. It is impossible to separate the art from the space it inhabits from the experience of the viewer, and it is the prevalence of this unity in their work that gives permanence to such ostensible impermanence.

These revolutionary examples of the art museum typology have all been met with considerable controversy. Despite becoming “one of the most important and most heralded art-display spaces ever created,” the interactive exhibitions at the Art of This Century gallery were dubbed by some critics as a kind of artistic Coney Island.<sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> The involvement of the visitor in the experiencing of each individual piece was such as had never been seen before. The previously delineated boundary between the viewer and the piece they were viewing was now blurred, inciting one critic to suggest, “In this rebel arrangement art moves out into the open. Sometimes, thus liberated, it looks faintly menacing-as if in the end it might prove that the spectator would be fixed to the wall and the art would stroll around making comments.”<sup>44</sup> Peggy’s Art of This Century museum was ardently talked about and criticized as an unprecedented display experience for modern works of art.

The Guggenheim was beset with criticism from the outset, questioning the very functionality of the building as an art museum. Art critic Hilton Kramer wrote “Here is a building totally irrelevant to its purposes...Virtuosic in its formal inventiveness, dazzling and unnecessary in its singularity, it is completely and unassailably self-concerned...[it is] a kind of monstrous *object d’art* which doubles as a warehouse in which paintings can be stored but not really looked at.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, in 1957, Wright was forced to defend his design against a petition from twenty-one prominent artists who claimed that the form of the curved,

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<sup>41</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude. p. xix.

<sup>42</sup> Whitehead. p. 103.

<sup>43</sup> Kachur. p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> Weld. p. 290.

<sup>45</sup> Chanchani. p. 179.

slanted walls and clerestory lighting were inappropriate for the proper exhibition of paintings.<sup>46</sup> The criticism seemed focused on the difficulty of displaying paintings along the ramp. To begin with, the viewer was forced to stand on an incline, with the walls sloping away at a different angle. Furthermore, the absence of any horizontality or verticality in the structure would give the impression that none of the paintings were hung straight.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the finer points of exhibiting the art, the Guggenheim was essentially designed to hold a permanent display of a certain type of art. The building as designed by Wright did not accommodate for the flexibility of an expanding or circulating collection. An expansion was introduced in 1985 as unquestionably necessary, a kind of “museological manifest destiny.”<sup>48</sup> Met with vociferous debate, the alterations were carried out in 1992 by Gwathmey Siegel Architects. The expansion continues to be a highly contentious topic to this day. The undisputed architecturally iconic status of the Guggenheim naturally meant that any changes to the building would bring past issues once again to the forefront, continuing the discussion of its most basic dilemma: an unrelenting antagonism between the architecture and the art that it was intended to accommodate.<sup>49</sup>

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are no strangers to criticism surrounding their sometimes highly controversial projects. The immense scale, cost, and process of their art has often raised the questions “Is it art? What is art?”<sup>50</sup> For them, the very fact that people are questioning the nature of art in their work gives a project its legitimacy. It is the process and the ensuing discourse of the piece that interests them the most. The *Running Fence* project saw the construction of a 39.4 km nylon fabric fence winding through Sonoma and Marin Counties in Northern California, eventually terminating in the Pacific Ocean. (Illustration 7)

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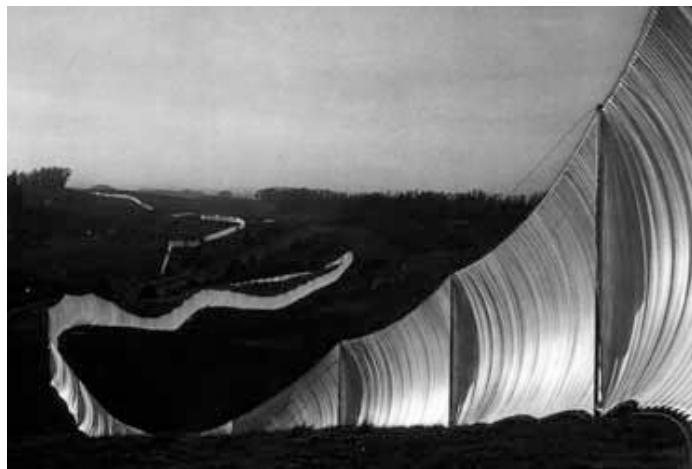
<sup>46</sup> Quinan. p. 469.

<sup>47</sup> Blake. p. 89.

<sup>48</sup> Sorkin. p. 79.

<sup>49</sup> Chanchani. p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> The Architectural Review. Volume 198, Issue 1182, August 1995. “Wrapping the Reichstag.” Layla Dawson. p. 11.



7. *Running Fence* project.

One of the most thrilling aspects for the *Running Fence* project was that even the checkout ladies at the local supermarket were debating the meaning of art.<sup>51</sup> “Such arguments about the definition of art have been fundamental to almost all the opposition that Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s projects have engendered, because in that challenge to conventional definitions lies a metaphor for the loosening of other hierarchies as well.”<sup>52</sup> *Running Fence* took four years of negotiations with fifty-nine private ranchers for use of their land and prompted eighteen public hearings, three sessions of the Superior Court of California, and totalled \$3.2 million.<sup>53</sup> Despite the high costs and strenuous opposition to the project, including an unsuccessful attempt to issue a restraining order preventing the unfurling of the fabric, Christo and Jeanne-Claude maintain that the negative aspects ultimately contributed to the creative process and made the project worthwhile for everyone involved. “I don’t think any of the museum exhibitions have touched so profoundly three hundred people (as our ranchers), or three hundred thousand cars who visited *Running Fence*, in a way that half a million people in Sonoma and Marin Counties were engaged with the making of the work of art for three and a half years...we caused a big discussion in which everyone

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<sup>51</sup> Fineberg, p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Fineberg, p. 34.

was discussing what is a work of art and the making of the work of art.”<sup>54</sup> For this team of artists, the situation in which it is carried out and the ensuing dialogue enriches each project.

Without the provocation of discourse, these esteemed examples of a divergent art museum typology would not be as culturally resonant. Despite having existed for only five years, the unforgettable curved-wall gallery of Art of This Century remains the best-known Surrealist space of the period.<sup>55</sup> This avant-garde space incorporated concepts on the viewing of modern art that no other gallery had yet even risked attempting. The impact of Peggy’s gallery could not be diminished by the criticism it received. The originality of the design for this art-display space ventured so far from the ubiquitous white-box museums that had hitherto dominated the art world, that the instigation of significant consideration on the idea of what a museum is and what it should be was inevitable. In that context, the outcome of such a venture could only be a successful one, because the intention of art is always to question. The legacy of the Art of This Century gallery “carries on to this day, as the bold Guggenheim brand continues to mark museums around the world.”<sup>56</sup>

Wright’s Guggenheim design constitutes the identity of the Guggenheim institution so fully that it has become the benchmark against which all other Guggenheim museums must measure. In 1959, Peter Blake predicted in an article for Architectural Forum: “It will be remembered and debated long after its more efficient contemporaries have been forgotten. It is, undoubtedly, the most valuable piece in the Guggenheim collection. And it will be a constant admonition to all those who see it...that creation is, among other things, a constant process of challenging and questioning accepted notions,

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<sup>54</sup> Fineberg, p. 130.

<sup>55</sup> Kachur, p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> Whitehead, p. 103.

everywhere.”<sup>57</sup> It appears that he couldn’t have been more prescient. The building and the controversy surrounding it initiated a discussion about an architecture that acts as a foretaste to the art.<sup>58</sup> Subsequent Guggenheim designs for Bilbao, Venice, Las Vegas, and Berlin had a tall order to meet the expectations set out by Wright: to distinguish each location by establishing a unique viewing experience notable enough to become a destination in itself without competing with the art.<sup>59</sup> Each piece of the dispersed Guggenheim institution “ventures into new museological territory – which engages the old MoMA versus Guggenheim argument with a fresh view about the relativity of the art object in varying, ‘interpretive’ environments.”<sup>60</sup> As the culminating piece of work in his distinguished career, Wright left a legacy that continues to push the envelope for contemporary art museums around the world.

In her criticism of the *Wrapped Reichstag* project by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Layla Dawson challenges the significance of the project, claiming “a brief transformation of Paul Wallot’s otherwise undistinguished 1894 building, (the Reichstag), proved that Andy Warhol’s prophesy of 15 minutes’ fame holds for buildings as well as people.”<sup>61</sup> What she fails to acknowledge is that the Reichstag, like all of the Christo and Jeanne-Claude projects, consists of much more than the short interlude of time when the installation takes place. In a press release, Christo unequivocally attributes the success of the project to years of teamwork with people from all social structures in Germany and states “the communal energy is an important part of the dialogue that has become vital for the Reichstag project.”<sup>62</sup> In this light, their projects achieve precisely that which they intend: “forcing the viewer to look twice, to grasp nature and the reality surrounding the project in a fresh way...That momentary and disarming

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<sup>57</sup> Blake. p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> Giovannini. p. 117.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Dawson. p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Art and Design. Volume 6, No. 2-3, April 1990. “Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin, 1986.” Christo. p. 74.

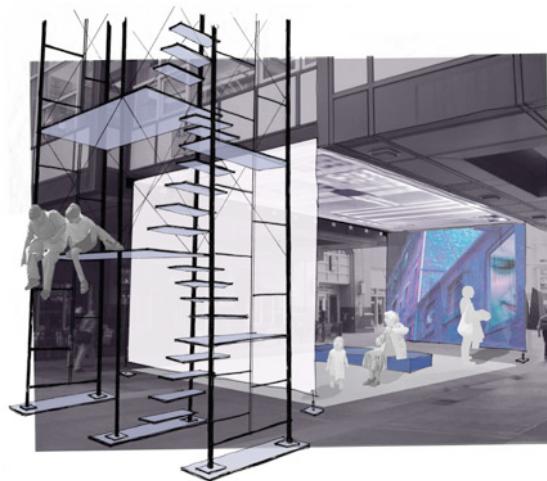
uncertainty is, of course, the point...[they] deliberately foster the interpenetration of art with ‘real life,’ and what they do literally becomes a part of the permanent reality of the place.”<sup>63</sup> The public sees not just the work of art, but they consequently look at the space of the work in an extraordinarily different way. Their art is the life of the expedition of the project throughout the years, and the reality is that the works live on in the memory, interactions, and ideas long after the project is removed.

John Hancock asserts “the esteemed examples which have established their identity and assured their continued cultural resonance, constitute an established line of inquiry in which new work may be effectively grounded.”<sup>64</sup> As examples of an art museum type, the Art of This Century Gallery, the Guggenheim Museum, and the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude constitute one side of the dichotomized museum typology. Elusive Projections for the Artcity Peepshow competition strives to emulate the principles of an interactive art experience of these three cases have illustrated. The theme of the 2005 competition is the idea of TRANSarchitecture defined as an art pavilion. The medium of digital art was chosen because of its inherent potential to focus investigation on social issues of our fellow human beings, what Christo named as the contemporary issue in art. The premise of the Elusive Projections design is to create an environment where the lines between art and viewer are blurred. The influence of the visitor to the manner in which the pieces of art in the Art of This Century gallery were experienced inspired a similar relationship here. The actual display space for an artists’ work is located under the +15 walkway on Stephen Avenue Mall, a popular pedestrian area in downtown Calgary. (Illustration 8)

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<sup>63</sup> Fineberg, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> The Harvard Architectural Review. Volume 5. Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent. John E. Hancock.



8. Projection Gallery of Elusive Projections

As the public is appreciating the artwork in the Projection Gallery, the space is simultaneously being projected onto the large Urban Canvas screens facing either side of the pedestrian mall. The images are not meant to be a surveillance of the Projection Gallery space, but rather a filtered representation to be deciphered differently by each individual. The constructions behind the screens provide a backdrop behind the screens. People are meant to explore and inhabit this space, with their silhouettes adding yet another layer of texture to the Urban Canvas. (Illustration 9)



9. Urban Canvas of Elusive Projections

Artists can choose to incorporate this interplay between viewer and artwork into their projects or to disregard it, allowing the viewer to act as the artist in the creation of this public art. The use and effects of free-flowing fabric architecture in the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude have here instigated a desire to distort projected images with natural forces by using canvas as the dominant material. The temporal nature of scaffolding as a construction material, and the ephemeral qualities of the fabric specifically address the notion of a TRANSarchitecture. As the Guggenheim was designed specifically for the art it was contemporary with, so the design for the Elusive Projections pavilion emerges from the nature of the art form it is meant to house.

Typologically, the assertion of only one type of art museum is perhaps impossible to define. The ongoing debate over a paradigmatic repository for art is divided. Although the idea of museum as a monolithic collection of neutral white spaces has been dominant, the cogency of a museum integrating content, viewer, and environment is irrefutable. Kiesler's Art of This Century gallery, Wright's Guggenheim and the large-scale installations of Christo and Jeanne-Claude argue for an art display architecture that is forceful and compelling. The discourse into the nature of art and art-space that they have triggered and repeatedly fueled has garnered them an eternal prominence. They will continue to serve as cultural points of reference permanently etched in the line of inquiry in which new architecture is formed.

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### Illustrations

1. Typical gallery space at MoMA, New York.

[http://www.youngna.com/youngna/041120\\_004.htm](http://www.youngna.com/youngna/041120_004.htm)

2. Artwork floating like apparitions along continuous spiraling ramp at Guggenheim Museum.  
The Journal of Architecture. Volume 5, Summer 2000. “Between Icon and Institution: The Vacillating Significance of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum.” Samiran Chanchani. p. 178.

3. Surrealist gallery at Art of This Century with amoeboid furniture.

<http://www.arch.mcgill.ca/prof/mellin/arch671/winter2001/dkouba/drm/kiesler.htm>

4. Early perspective sketch of Guggenheim Museum.

<http://www.delmars.com/wright/flw6a.htm>

5. Section through Guggenheim Musuem

[http://pbsvideodb.pbs.org/resources/flwright/primary/ps\\_06.html](http://pbsvideodb.pbs.org/resources/flwright/primary/ps_06.html)

6. *Wrapped Reichstag* project

<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2002/christo/74fs.htm>

7. *Running Fence* project

<http://www.marin.cc.ca.us/art107/EarthworksStudyImages.htm>

8. Projection Gallery of Elusive Projections

Image by Author and Katrina Touw

9. Urban Canvas of Elusive Projections

Image by Author and Katrina Touw