Sleek vs. stately: a comparison of the commercial practices employed by the metropolitan and Guggenheim museums

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Description:
Thesis (M.A.L.S.)--Georgetown University, 2009.; Includes bibliographical references. The commercialization of non-profit organizations through marketing mechanisms has recently taken center stage as one of the pivotal policy issues facing this sector in the United States. American museums have long been at the forefront of this trend with the operation of retail activities in the form of stores, catalogs and franchised satellite museums. As two of the most prominent museums in the New York art world, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim (The Guggenheim) are routinely described as possessing distinct and opposing marketing models as they relate to commercial practices. The Met insists on the need to demonstrate clear and discernable differences between art and entertainment, and a sharper contrast between the role of the museum and the commercial world.; Conversely, the Guggenheim has consistently straddled the line between art and commerce, offering spectacles like Art of the Motorcycle and Jazz Fridays which frequently draw larger crowds than many scholarly exhibitions. Both of these models demonstrate an attempt on the part of each museum to build a relationship between the museum and the public.; The primary purpose of this thesis is to investigate, using the Met and the Guggenheim as comparators, the costs and benefits of commercialism in contemporary museum marketing operations, and whether or not there is evidence to suggest the public trust is weakened by increased marketing, advertising, and promotional practices. A secondary goal of this thesis is to survey the theoretical research on this topic to learn whether art and commerce are compatible, and whether there is reason to believe the public would derive greater benefit from museums without shops, restaurants, and blockbuster art exhibitions, or if to the contrary, they are now crucial ingredients to the museum experience.

Permanent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/10822/553337

Date Published:
2009

Subject:
Art History; Architecture

Type:
thesis

Collections:
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Metadata:
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The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, often referred to as The Guggenheim, is an art museum located at 1071 Fifth Avenue on the corner of East 89th Street in the Upper East Side neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City. It is the permanent home of a continuously expanding collection of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, early Modern and contemporary art and also features special exhibitions throughout the year. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 by wealthy American businessmen and artists of the time with the sole purpose to create a museum bringing art and education from around the world to the citizens of America. The original central pavilion was designed by Richard Hunt, with the newer Lehman, Sackler, American, Rockefeller, Wallace and Kravis wing's designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Upon first glance at the Guggenheim Museum, one is both impressed and intrigued by its design (pictures 1-4). It is an organic form that derives its source from Central Park located just opposite. The new museum Frank O. Gehry, the architect of the Guggenheim Bilbao is preparing for the revitalization of the New York docks (Eakin 2000; Campbell 2000), the plans for the museum in Sao Paolo and the fact that five Italian cities, South Africa and Australia have already bid for their Guggenheim museum (Binney 2000) is the most obvious proof of that. This will be followed by another section focusing on the art of the museum and its impact on the public and the local artists. Different strategies are employed to serve this scope, namely residential development of redundant industrial buildings, new forms of retailing and development of the nightlife economy (ibid.).