

## **EXAMPLE SHORT INFORMATIVE THEME**

**Prompt:** Choose a building, a monument, or some other man-made structure, and write an informative theme about it, based on your research. Make sure that you have at least five paragraphs and include a reference list and in-text citations as needed. Use the APA style.

TITLE OF PAPER: Can a Building be a Work of Art?

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### Can a Building be a Work of Art?

The Guggenheim Museum in New York City was designed for philanthropist and artist Solomon Guggenheim, a prominent art owner who is the founder of many Guggenheim museums located around the world today. When choosing an architect to design the museum, Solomon and his adviser, Hilla von Rebay, decided that because Solomon's art was a new style of art, it should be seen in a wholly new kind of space. In June 1943, Frank Lloyd Wright received a letter from Rebay asking the architect to design a new building to house Guggenheim's four-year-old Museum of Non-Objective Painting (Drutt, 2005). Wright was chosen by Solomon not only because he was a prominent architect at the time, but because he was well known for his unusual and unique buildings which had spaces that fit the purpose of the structures. This claim was proved by Wright when he designed one of his best works, which is now widely known as "The Guggenheim." The location, interior design, and exterior design of the Guggenheim combine to form a beautiful work of art that, combined with the displayed artwork, creates a very pleasing experience for viewers.

With regard to its location, Guggenheim wanted his museum to be in New York City. Although Wright did not think New York City was the ideal place for the museum because Manhattan was overpopulated and, in his mind, lacked architectural interest, he proceeded with his client's wishes. He found a location for the museum on Fifth Avenue, between 88th and 89th Streets. As it turns out, Wright picked this location mainly because it was located across the street from Central Park. He wanted nature to provide a place where the museum could exist and not be disturbed by traffic noise and city congestion. He hoped that the park would provide a peaceful break from New York's distractions. The location was also on a corner. This location ensures that the building can be easily viewed by and set on display for approaching pedestrians.

Nature not only provided the Guggenheim Museum with a peaceful setting but also inspired several of the interior design ideas. The Guggenheim Museum is a compilation of Wright's attempts to use organic forms in architecture. The building contains natural elements of geometry, such as triangles, ovals, arcs, circles, squares, and the spiral. Triangles can be found on the window panes of the skylight; the columns are oval-shaped; the skylight and rotunda are circles; and, of course, the gallery is a vertical spiral. Although Wright had never before used the spiral in any of his buildings, he had always wanted to do so because of its natural form, beauty, and circulation possibilities. Indeed, the spiraling design perfectly eliminated the problems that conventional approaches to museum design were demonstrating at that time. One problem that modern museums typically encountered was a pathway which led visitors through a series of interconnected rooms and forced them to retrace their steps before exiting. Other problems in the museums at that time were that they were very large, people easily lost their way and missed seeing one or more galleries, and there was no intended circulation path that viewers should follow.

Wright's spiraling interior design for the Guggenheim eliminates these problems. Upon entering the museum, viewers are immediately taken to the top of the building via elevator, and then they slowly follow a path downward on the gentle slope of a continuous spiraling ramp until they reach the entrance again. This spiraling ramp is attached to the outside wall of the building with an open rotunda in the center, which is another unique part of the design. The spiraling ramp allows the museum staff to place paintings in a logical viewing order in which they wish them to be viewed, because paintings cannot be skipped or overlooked on the way down. The open rotunda provides viewers with the unique possibility of seeing several pieces of work on different levels simultaneously as they look over the railing of the spiraling ramp.

As for the exterior of the building, Wright envisioned a building that broke the square grid of Manhattan in a variety of creative ways. Clearly, he accomplished this by creating one of the only circular buildings on the island. There are also no windows on the vertical sides of the building, keeping the light from creating harmful damage to the paintings. In the main gallery, natural light comes through both the overhead skylight which is directly above the rotunda and through the clerestory windows on the outside walls of the spiral. This natural light does not hit the paintings, however; because of Wright's ingenious use of the spiral, the paintings are hidden away underneath the above walkway from the light. Interestingly, as he had been instructed by Hilla von Rebay, he conceived of the building's curving, continuous space as a "temple of spirit" ("Solomon...", 2014) where viewers would be able to look at art as they had never previously been able to do.

Named the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in honor of its founder, the building opened in 1959 (Drutt, 2005), drawing huge crowds and stirring considerable controversy. It has never lost its power to excite and provoke, standing today as one of the great works of architecture produced in the twentieth century. On the one hand, some people, especially artists, have criticized Wright for creating a museum environment that might overpower the art inside it (Wikipedia, 2007). On the other hand, one might argue that that was not Wright's intent; instead, he created the building in such a way that viewers could go on an uninterrupted stroll through the museum so that they could fully appreciate the nature of the artwork. Because of this intention, Wright was able to create a building which has a geometric design and natural shape that is not only beautiful by itself but that creates a circulation path that makes viewing the art in the gallery more enjoyable. For this reason, the Guggenheim is arguably Wright's most eloquent design and certainly the most important building created during the later years of his career.

## References

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