

## This Day in History... October 21, 1959

# The Guggenheim Opens to the Public

On October 21, 1959, one of the world's most renowned museums, the Guggenheim, opened in New York City.

Born into a wealthy mining family, Solomon R. Guggenheim founded the Yukon Gold Company in Alaska. He took an interest in art and started collecting it in the 1890s. Finding it to be his passion, Guggenheim retired from his business to dedicate his time to collecting art. He then met artist Hilla Rebay, who helped him to manage and expand his collection, including a trip to Wassily Kandinsky's studio in Germany. In 1930, Guggenheim began inviting the public to his New York City apartment at the Plaza Hotel to view his impressive collection.

As his collection grew, Guggenheim realized the need for a larger space to display his art, so he opened his first venue in 1939 – the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. However, as he continued to acquire more art, that space too became too small. In 1943, Guggenheim and Rebay hired renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design not just a museum, but a “temple of spirit” where people could experience art like they never had before.



*Wright was unable to see his greatest achievement completed, as he died six months before the museum opened.*

Wright poured his energy into the project. Over the course of 12 years, he made six different designs for the museum, totaling 749 drawings. The project was frequently delayed due to the changing designs, increased cost of building materials following World War II, and Guggenheim's death in 1949. The name was also changed from the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in his honor.

Construction finally began in 1956, and was completed three years later. Before he died, Guggenheim selected the site for its close proximity to Central Park to give visitors a break from the loud, busy city. On October 21, 1959, thousands of people filled New York's Fifth Avenue to visit the Guggenheim on its opening day. Considered a work of art itself, the museum features a long ramp that spiraled up for a quarter mile with a domed glass ceiling. The 50,000 meter shape resembles a nautilus sea shell. While some believe the building doesn't complement the artwork, it's often considered groundbreaking, and one of Wright's most famous designs. It's a museum where the building and art come together as an experience for the viewer.

Over the years, the museum was expanded and renovated to create more gallery space. It's also housed works by some of the world's most famous artists, including Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Edouard Manet, Camille Pissarro, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Jackson Pollock.

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*An inside view of the museum's ramp from the central rotunda.*



*The museum features around 8,000 pieces of modern and contemporary art.*

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