

NEWS RELEASE Abu Dhabi to Inaugurate the First Exhibition
in the Middle East of Masterpieces from the Permanent
Collection of the Guggenheim Museum

The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum is the Premiere Exhibition Organized by TDIC in Collaboration with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Leading up to the Opening of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum

(ABU DHABI, UAE and NEW YORK, NY – November 16, 2009) – More than fifty masterful paintings from the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, representing the work of over forty of the most important artists of the twentieth century, will be on view in Abu Dhabi from November 17, 2009, to February 4, 2010 in the exhibition *The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum*. The exhibition is presented under the patronage of His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum will be on view in Gallery One at the Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi. Key works from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's collection featured in the exhibition will include Paul Cézanne's *Bend in the Road Through the Forest* (1873–75), Willem de Kooning's *Composition* (1955), Vasily Kandinsky's *Decisive Rose* (1932), Paul Klee's *New Harmony* (1936), Piet Mondrian's *Composition 8* (1914), Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 110* (1971), and Jackson Pollock's *Untitled (Green Silver)* (ca. 1949).

“This exhibition is an important opportunity to share these legendary works with the people of the UAE, and to provide a flavor of the experience visitors will have at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum, which will feature the finest examples of modern and contemporary works from around the world,” said His Excellency Sheikh Sultan bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, Chairman of Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC). “*The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum* is an important chapter of Abu Dhabi's ongoing cultural program supporting Abu Dhabi's long-term vision of establishing the capital of the UAE as an international hub for arts and culture.”

The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum is the first exhibition to be organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in collaboration with (TDIC) as part of a program of art and cultural development leading up to the opening of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

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Museum. Accompanying the exhibition will be a full program of educational presentations.

“The presentation of this exhibition is truly an exceptional event that marks an important historic milestone and looks forward to the future,” said Richard Armstrong, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Museum. “We celebrate the past, because this exhibition marks the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, but we also look ahead toward the opening of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum. This exhibition is one of the first fruits of the Guggenheim’s exciting collaboration with Abu Dhabi and a sign of the tremendous potential of this partnership.”

A rich roster of educational programming accompanies the exhibition, including the panel discussion *From Private to Public: Patronage and the Museum in the Modern Era*, moderated by Richard Armstrong, and featuring international art world leaders.

Additional programs include: a lecture on the early history of the Guggenheim Museum with Karole Vail, Assistant Curator, Guggenheim Museum; a conversation with *The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum* co-curators Susan Davidson, Senior Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, Guggenheim Museum, and Valerie Hillings, Associate Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, Abu Dhabi Project, Guggenheim Foundation. Also the program will feature a film screening and lecture on the topic of Abstraction in Motion with John G. Hanhardt, Curator, Nam Jun Paik Archive and Consulting Curator of Film and Media Arts, Smithsonian Museum of American Art; a forum and workshop on museum-school partnerships; and a number of programs for children and families.

The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which will open in 2013 as part of Abu Dhabi’s Saadiyat Island Cultural District, is being founded to fulfill an educational mission centered on the art of today. The museum will be housed in a distinctive building designed by Frank Gehry, one of the world’s most renowned contemporary architects. Like the Guggenheim in New York, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will build a permanent collection that reflects a specific point of view about the art of our time, namely its essentially global orientation. The new museum will include not only key examples of Western art, but also the rich and diverse fields of African, Asian, South American, and Middle Eastern art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Exhibition Overview

The Guggenheim: The Making of a Museum charts the history of the Guggenheim’s collection from 1929, when American businessman Solomon R. Guggenheim began to actively acquire modern art, to 1959, when the landmark Frank Lloyd Wright–designed museum building bearing the founder’s name opened to the public. The works in the show reflect the particular emphases of the collection and exhibition program during these formative years, thereby calling attention to the ways in which the time period,

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place, and individuals involved in the making of a museum have an impact on the mission of the institution. In this way, the exhibition also points toward the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum.

The exhibition explores the history of abstract painting in Western art during the first half of the twentieth century. The pictures in the first three sections of the show, many of them drawn from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, represent a particularly fertile period in art history. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, artists associated with the most important movements in the West—among them Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, and Neo-Plasticism—broke with the traditional view that visual art should faithfully reproduce the visible world. These artists' pioneering styles opened up a number of new formal possibilities that radically transformed both the look and content of art and in so doing inaugurated the history of modern art in the West.

This presentation begins with Cézanne and Georges Seurat, who pushed the limits of representation even further than the Impressionists and helped to solidify the status of Paris as the leading center for experimental avant-garde art. These artists provide a context for a survey of the work of artists who contributed to the history of Cubism, which is widely regarded as the most innovative and influential artistic style of the twentieth century. Artists of various generations and nationalities mastered this revolutionary approach to painting, which fragmented objects and pictorial space into semitransparent, overlapping, faceted planes of pigment in order to show the spatial shift from different perspectives within the same time and space and to emphasize the canvas' real, two-dimensional flatness instead of conveying the illusory appearance of depth.

Cubism served as a point of departure for many twentieth-century artists who evolved their own, even more abstract visual languages. This part of the show examines the emergence of an entirely nonrepresentational art during this period by presenting the works of Kandinsky, František Kupka, László Moholy-Nagy, and Mondrian. A special section is dedicated to the impact of Kandinsky's works and theories about the spiritual and universal dimensions of purely abstract art on the early history of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Guggenheim's art advisor at that time, Hilla Rebay, described such art as nonobjective, a translation of the German adjective *gegenstandslos* (literally, without object), which she borrowed from Kandinsky's writings. Her passionate commitment to advancing nonobjective art shaped both her choice of works for Guggenheim's collection and the singular focus of the first New York art venue established by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which opened in 1939 and was called the Museum of Non-Objective Painting.

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The second half of the exhibition considers the impact of early-twentieth-century abstraction and Expressionism, represented in the show by Kandinsky and Franz Marc, on painting in Europe and the United States in the decades immediately following World War II. In the late 1940s and 1950s, artists working on both continents emphasized spontaneous execution over planned composition in paintings often characterized by heavily articulated surfaces. In Europe, Jean Dubuffet and an association of artists from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam known as CoBrA turned to alternative artistic practices such as graffiti and the art of children as sources of inspiration for their highly expressive, semi-figurative paintings. In addition to their work, the show includes pictures by leading Paris-based artists who in the 1950s produced entirely abstract paintings defined by an emphasis on gestural brushstrokes, a looseness of form, and an improvisational sensibility, an approach historically referred to as Art Informel. This work had many affinities with contemporaneous developments in New York, which emerged as a leading avant-garde art center at this time.

Beginning in the late 1940s, artists such as de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, and Pollock began producing abstract paintings characterized by loose brushwork and a belief in the role of the individual's subconscious thought in the process of making art. Pictures by these three artists as well as other leading Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko are featured in the exhibition's final section, which provides a rich overview of this watershed chapter in the history of twentieth-century abstract painting in the West.

This serves as a fitting endpoint to the presentation, as many of these artists and some of these paintings were included in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's inaugural exhibition in 1959. By that time, the range of art acquired and exhibited by the Guggenheim had expanded beyond its early emphasis on nonobjective painting, and the institution had begun to signal its interest in a more global orientation through, among other means, the establishment of the biennial Guggenheim International Award in 1956. Even as the Guggenheim underwent these changes, it continued to collect artworks and mount exhibitions that testified to the enduring power of abstraction, a reflection of the institution's ongoing commitment to its founding mission to educate the public about modern and contemporary art.

Catalogue

The exhibition is also accompanied by a fully illustrated, hardcover, bilingual catalogue (Arabic and English). The 192-page book includes a chronology of the Guggenheim from 1929 to 2009, an essay detailing the three decades (1929–59) leading up to the opening of Frank Lloyd Wright's museum building, and texts on the developments in art history and the achievements of the featured artists.

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About TDIC

Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC) is a master developer of key cultural, residential, and tourism destinations in Abu Dhabi. The principal goal of its cultural program, up to and including the creation of the Saadiyat Island Cultural District—the world’s largest single concentration of premier cultural institutions—is to establish an international platform in the UAE for arts and culture.

Unprecedented in scale and scope, the Saadiyat Island Cultural District will include museums such as Zayed National Museum, Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum, all due for completion in 2013. Education is essential to fulfilling TDIC’s mission, and this initiative provides opportunities for the local and regional community to participate in programming of the highest quality; to be engaged in the city’s urban, cultural, and artistic development; and to develop professional skills and knowledge through a dialogue with representatives from the world’s leading cultural organizations.

Alongside the Cultural District project, TDIC presents a diversified program of art exhibitions, events, and talks aimed at all levels to further engage audiences in the arts.

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Museum

Founded in 1937, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, and other manifestations of visual culture, primarily of the modern and contemporary periods, and to collecting, conserving, and studying the art of our time. The foundation realizes this mission through exceptional exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications, and strives to engage and educate an increasingly diverse international audience through its unique network of museums and cultural partnerships. Currently the foundation owns and operates the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, New York City; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection on the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy; and provides programming and management for two other museums in Europe that bear its name, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain and the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. With nearly three million annual visitors worldwide, the Guggenheim and its network of museums is one of the most visited cultural institutions in the world. In 2013 the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum, a museum of modern and contemporary art designed by architect Frank Gehry, is scheduled to open.

For further information please visit artsabudhabi.ae, guggenheim.org, or tdic.ae.

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