

# GUGGENHEIM

Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

## NEWS RELEASE

# PRELIMINARY STUDIES ON THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO EXPANSION PROJECT IN URDAIBAI ARE PRESENTED TO THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION BOARD OF TRUSTEES

(NEW YORK, NY – December 16, 2009) – The results of preliminary studies analyzing the critical factors for success for the proposed Guggenheim Museum Bilbao expansion project in Urdaibai were presented December 16 at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

The first stage of feasibility studies, carried out in 2009, identified and analyzed a number of issues, including the new museum's conceptual model and curatorial program; the legal, urban, environmental, and geological conditions of the chosen site; the museum's spatial needs; potential visitor attendance; and the economic impact of the museum both during the construction period and its ongoing operation.

The expansion project is one of the long-term initiatives included in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Strategic Plan 2009–2012, which was approved by its Executive Committee and Board of Trustees in December 2008. In June 2009, these governing bodies also approved the signing of a collaboration agreement with the Executive Council of Biscay to finance the Urdaibai studies.

At the meeting of December 16, 2009, the Guggenheim Foundation Board received an overview of the feasibility studies, including a needs analysis for the program provided by Cooper, Robertson & Partners. The results of the study were presented by the President of the Executive Council of Biscay, José Luis Bilbao; the Deputy of Culture, Josune Ariztondo; Richard Armstrong, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Museum; Juan Ignacio Vidarte, Director General of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and David van der Leer, Assistant Curator of Architecture and Design, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The Guggenheim Foundation board members were encouraged by the study and

recommended proceeding to the next phase of review for the project as outlined in the objectives of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's Strategic Plan.

"In keeping with the Guggenheim Foundation's strategic-plan commitment to a strong international perspective that is both inspirational and transformative, we believe the Urdaibai project will offer exceptional opportunities to reimagine the creative process and offer memorable cultural and artistic experiences to visitors," said Mr. Armstrong, Director of the Guggenheim Foundation and Museum.

"With the expansion in Urdaibai, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is not just trying to have access to some additional exhibition space. The goal is to embark on new projects, strengthen relationships and alliances, and develop an innovative museum experience based on the integration of art, nature, and environment through a combination of creative initiatives," said Mr. Vidarte, Director General of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. "Moving forward, the museum is not attempting to repeat the Bilbao model but instead to replicate its level of ambition, inventing a new cultural paradigm through change and innovation that may be as unique for the future decade as the existing one was when it was conceived almost twenty years ago."

The results of these preliminary studies will be presented to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Executive Committee and Board of Trustees December 22, 2009.

The proposed site is located about forty kilometers from Bilbao in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve by a tidal inlet of the Gernika River near the point where it meets the Bay of Biscay. Preceding the first stage of feasibility studies, the goals for the project were laid out by an international panel of artists, architects, urban planners, scientists, writers, curators, and critics during meetings held in the spring and summer of 2009. Their ideas were distilled into a vision of an innovative ecological museum that functions as a conceptual counterpoint to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The ambition is not to create another iconic building but rather to generate an iconic landscape experience that sets forth a new model for the seamless integration of architecture, environment, and art. Among the next steps for Guggenheim Urdaibai is the design selection process, which would take place over the course of 2010.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Chief Curator Nancy Spector stated, "Through a blend of art, nature, and educational programs, Guggenheim Urdaibai would pursue diverse cultural initiatives with an emphasis on the creative process rather than the finished product. Artists and thinkers would be invited to stay at the site for varying periods of time, providing an ever-changing center for experimentation and the exchange of ideas with an ongoing focus on issues of locality and the landscape. Guggenheim Urdaibai will encourage interaction

across disciplines and create a catalyzing platform for inspiration, dialogue, and action.”

#1144 – December 16, 2009

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT**

Eleanor R. Goldhar  
Deputy Director, External Affairs  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation  
Betsy Ennis  
Director, Media and Public Relations  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum  
212 423 3840  
[pressoffice@guggenheim.org](mailto:pressoffice@guggenheim.org)