

# Guggenheim goes virtual with new high-tech installations

Deutsche Telekom backs struggling SoHo branch

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Deutsche Telekom AG is helping the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum reinvent its faltering four-year old SoHo branch as a flashy futurama of high-tech multimedia art.

The scheme calls for the newly privatised German telecommunications giant, whose gross sales last year were around DM66 billion, to contribute \$10 million over five years to fund programming in the newly dubbed Deutsche Telekom Galleries, four central rooms on the main floor to be devoted primarily to multimedia art.

The deal reflects the multinational Guggenheim's growing ties with German businesses such as Lufthansa and Hugo Boss, and also demonstrates one way museums can afford to show new art forms. "The only way museums can consistently develop and present multimedia and high-technology exhibitions is through collaborations with organisations like Deutsche Telekom which have a broad range of resources and expertise", says Guggenheim director Thomas Krens.

He adds that a partnership with the Italian power company ENEL will support two more high-tech galleries in the SoHo museum. The ENEL Electronic Reading Room will be filled with CD-ROMS on art subjects (ENEL created the CD-ROM catalogue for the Guggenheim's recent survey of post-war Italian art and design), and another space will present examples of virtual reality, for which ENEL will provide the hardware. Museum

president Ronald Perelman declares that the newly conceived SoHo branch “will establish the Guggenheim as the major venue for the interplay of art and technology today”.

Mr Krens will be hiring a separate director for the SoHo branch, which consists of four floors—the lower two for exhibitions—in an 1882 brick loft building converted by Arata Isozaki.

Since it opened in June 1992, the SoHo branch has never quite met the museum’s expectations, with attendance dropping from around 200,000 a year to 125,000 visitors in 1995. The branch has been closed since January as it undergoes a modest transformation that will enlarge the first-floor galleries and open a new entrance on Mercer Street, opposite the present entrance on Broadway.

When the museum reopens on 14 June the redesigned lobby will reflect the new mission with a 41 x 15-foot video wall consisting of ninety-eight monitors, programmable by artists-in-residence, and a large Nam June Paik video sculpture. The second floor will continue to show the Guggenheim’s modern and contemporary collections as well as travelling shows.

The inaugural exhibition, “Mediascape” (14 June-1 September), is a collaboration with ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie), a public foundation established in 1989 by the State of Baden-Württemberg and the city of Karlsruhe, which opens to the public next year. Most of the show will be drawn from ZKM’s 1,000-piece collection of video, computer graphics, computer animation, and interactive multimedia projects by Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, Woody and Steina Vasulka, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, and others. According to Mr Krens, ZKM will assist in future exhibitions as well.

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