

FRANK GEHRY

8 OCTOBER 2014 – 26 JANUARY 2015

The "Frank Gehry" monographic exhibition presented at the Centre Pompidou retraces the stages marking a globally acclaimed body of architectural work.

If the name of Frank Gehry embodies the very image of contemporary architecture, it is because his work has been questioning the identity and standards of the architectural form since the Sixties. The exhibition is intended to shed light on this career. It is divided into six sections, following the development of his work through some 60 projects, with a large number of original drawings and research models. From the first period of his work (when the architect was close to artists on the Californian scene and working on a new grammar) to the development of a production platform that incorporated new digital tools, Gehry has pushed out the boundaries of architecture and emancipated it from all its conventions. A patient constructor, a creator receptive to all

kinds of inventions and open to every challenge, he produces work that is both critical and practical, and has led to reflection about the heterogeneous nature of the city and the fluidity of the architectural organism.

After an initial presentation of Gehry's European projects at the Centre Pompidou in 1992, this exhibition now provides a comprehensive overview of a major body of work, for the first time in Europe.

ELEMENTARISATION- SEGMENTATION 1965-1980

In 1962, Frank Gehry opened his own office in Santa Monica. Drawing on his considerable knowledge of the construction world, he carried out numerous projects for property developers, industrialists and town planning agencies. At the same time, commissions for private houses and artists enabled him to experiment with the place of architecture in the Californian landscape. He began to build up an architectural language based on the object's relationship with its environment, the use of economical industrial materials (galvanised wire meshes, corrugated metal sheeting, stucco, cardboard and asphalt) and a new approach to traditional construction methods in wood. In formal terms, he segmented and decomposed the elementary geometry of the building. Each design, explicitly critical in respect to functionalism, thus explored the relationships between "closed/covered", "open space/closed space" and "visible/hidden", together with the continuity between wall and roof. From the minimalist volumes of Louis Danziger's studio (1964) to the illusionist geometries in the house designed for Ron Davis (1968-1972), Gehry increasingly explored an experimental field, including for the extension of his own house in Santa Monica (1977-1978), which condensed the critical scope of his work and led to his international recognition in the early Eighties.

COMPOSITION-ASSEMBLY 1980-1990

Beyond any aesthetic application, Gehry's closeness to the Californian art scene contributed to his profound questioning of architecture: a patient reinvention of the idea of the architectural object, and the assembly of complex projects. An appropriation of the "one-room building" concept put forward by architect and theorist Philip Johnson marked his style in the early Eighties. The designs he produced were based on the separation of the functional elements, and accentuated their heterogeneity. The intuitions he explored with each new project involved opening architecture up to confrontational correspondences between various entities, bringing in new influences through its

interactions with the city, and recomposing projects using autonomous units.

First challenging the identity of the architectural form, then redefining the assembly of projects' different parts, Gehry invented an architectural style based on interrelation, as symbolised by Claes Oldenburg's famous binoculars for the Chiat\Day advertising agency (1985-1991, Santa Monica).

FUSION-INTERACTION 1990-2000

Conscious of the limitations of an aesthetic of aggregation and assembly, Gehry sought to revive a principle of unity and continuity between the architectural object and its environment. In this respect, his designs for the Lewis Residence (1985-1995) and the Vitra Design Museum (1987-1989) were major experiments, transfiguring the question of form to invent new principles of architectural style and create an organic unity. The use of wax-impregnated fabric for the Lewis Residence models, in order to capture the dynamic movement of drapery, again asserted the interaction between structure, material, envelope and ornament. At a time when Gehry was exploring the potential of new forms of computer-assisted modelling, the new building information instruments he developed enabled him to produce a genuine architecture of continuity, where walls and roofs became huge "sails" – an envelope produced using a single material – fusing together the split-up volumes of an initially fragmented project. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (1991-1997) is one of the most exemplary demonstrations of this.

TENSION-CONFLICT 1990-2000

Gehry's work on interstitial spaces combined visual effects of tension and attraction. The architect staged contradictions and abrupt changes in the urban fabric, and created the effect of rifts, clashes and even conflict between the different volumes of a building. Behind the growing complexity of his constructions, Gehry nonetheless sought to re-establish harmonies. For example, in Prague, he called the Nationale Nederlanden building (1992-1996) "Fred and Ginger", indicating that the two bodies of the building were a single entity in movement, just like the dancers' bodies in relation

to each other. His work on elasticity, compression and the actual conflict between the constructive elements (masonry, glazing, roofing, etc.), and the interaction of materials with each other were ultimately designed to play a connecting role in a complex urban fabric.

Frank Gehry has always been opposed to the inert, fixed identity of the sculptural object. His quest for an architectural space where the interstices between buildings intensify the city's energy, with its movement and flows, found one of its most powerful expressions in the Walt Disney Concert Hall (1989-2003) in Los Angeles.

CONTINUITY-FLOW 2000-2010

Now that he had acquired mastery in producing complex interstitial spaces, Gehry began to reduce them, exploring new spatial forms engendered by continuous envelopes.

With the Jay Pritzker Pavilion (1999-2004) and the Richard B. Fisher Centre for the Performing Arts (1997-2003), he superimposed the roofing elements, which seemed to become independent; with the Marquès de Riscal Hotel (1999-2006), he multiplied them in a luxuriant combination of metallic ribbons; with the DZ Bank (1995-2001) and the Lou Ruvo clinic (2005-2010), he created dramatic continuity in the roofing surfaces. This geometrical play with the envelope of the building produced compositions whose infinite complexity pushed the very ideas of façade, roof and conventional points of reference in relation to the building's verticality to the point where they virtually disappeared.

Through the flexibility permitted by digital simulation, making it possible to fuse the constructive structure of the building with its envelope, the notion of ornament was then transferred to the skin itself. Thus the interpenetration of volumes and their fluidity produced an architecture free of all conventions: an organic, living architecture buoyed up by the complex flows of the city.

SINGULARITY-UNITY 2010-2015

With a patiently-forged architectural language at his fingertips, Gehry could now apply this critical strategy to his own work and once more question the identity of the architectural object. The Üstra Office

Building (1995-2001), a parallelepiped with a slight twist, was the first to address this problem – one explored in greater depth by the IAC Building (2003-2007) and 8 Spruce Street in New York (2003-2011). The morphologically complex façade of this tower resonates with the vibrations of Manhattan, achieving icon status. Here, as with the Louis Vuitton Foundation built in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris (2005-2014), the architecture enters into movement, constructing a kind of syncopation through the many different ways it can be looked at.

While the question that Gehry settles here is no longer the object's identity so much as its singularity, his projects – all urban – not only tell us what architecture could be; they also enlighten us as to the place where the constructed artefact is rooted: a geography, a space and a landscape; a social time and a materiality – in short, a territory.

POINTS OF REFERENCE

TECHNIQUES

With the project for the Fish sculpture of Barcelona in 1992, Gehry turned to the 3D computer-aided design software CATIA, developed by Dassault Systèmes for the aeronautics industry. Adapted to the field of architecture – in 2002, the architect founded Gehry Technologies, a branch of his studio dedicated to the research and development of digital technologies – the design software gradually turned into a construction programme. The architect thus contributed to the development of BIM (Building Information Modelling) technology, which incorporates 3D digital design and production parameters into a simultaneous representation of all the project's phases right through to its construction.

Emblematic of an architecture renewed through digital technology, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (1991-1997) deployed all the potentialities of CATIA.

MATERIALS

Whether rehabilitating "poor" industrial materials (the corrugated metal, wire mesh and untreated plywood of the Gehry Residence) or using materials at the cutting edge of technological innovation (the high-performance titanium plates of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum; the Ductal roofing of the "icebergs" in the Louis Vuitton Foundation), Frank Gehry sees materials as a central element of his architecture.

This can be seen in his artisanal use of the model, where he treats the materials – paper, cardboard, wood, plastic, wax and fabric – as subjects for research and experimentation. Twisted, folded and tested, they are explored in terms of their plastic expressiveness as well as for their structural capacities and specific aesthetic qualities.

When he turned from architecture to furniture design, Gehry experimented with cardboard, then curved wood, aluminium and finally plastic.

TERRITORIES

Town planning has been a constant theme in the work of Frank Gehry: first during his studies (at USC, then Harvard, 1956), then at the various offices he worked for between 1956 and 1962. With his own firm, he produced numerous urban projects. These included lodgings, like those for the Bixby Green Company; studies on urban renovation, including the one for the small industrial town of Kalamazzo; shopping centres – for example, the one in Santa Monica Place; huge industrial sites like for the Herman Miller Company in the New Mexico desert (1987-1989, Rocklin), and in-depth city centre restructuring programmes in Dallas, Mexico, and more recently, New York and Los Angeles. Through each of his projects, Gehry introduces logical ways of integrating architecture, which not only situate the building but also act as an urban "connector" and define the territory.

NARRATIVES

The figure of the fish first appeared in Gehry's work in the early Eighties. From the floating fish of the Fishdance Restaurant (1986-1988) in Kobe, Japan, to the unbuilt Lewis Residence in Ohio (1985-1995), where the form appears over a hundred times, through to the fish sculpture in Barcelona (1992), this recurring motif has several meanings. While criticising a certain historicism – "It was a kind of comment on post-modernism," he said "The fish was a sort of counterpoint to all those references to the past. Everyone was quoting these old classical buildings, so I decided to quote something five hundred million years older than mankind" – the fish also acts as a narrative driving force in his architectural work.

EXHIBITION

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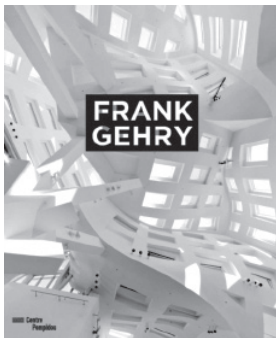
Frank Gehry

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INFORMATION

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a.m. to 21.00 p.m.

Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

Prices

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€13; reduced price €10

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