



Guggenheim Abu Dhabi has been designed by Frank Gehry, the architect who also created the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Construction on Saadiyat island has not yet begun, but the building is expected to be completed by 2017. AFP Photo/Karim Sahib

## Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will change cultural landscape of region and world, museum bosses predict

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ABU DHABI // The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will change the cultural landscape of the region and the world, the head of the prestigious New York museum has predicted.

“It will bring a different audience to Abu Dhabi from Asia, Europe and North America,” said Richard Armstrong, director of the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

“With their increasing exposure to the UAE there is a very strong possibility that the world’s perception of the city, the country and the region will also change for the better.”

Outside New York, the Guggenheim already operates in Venice and Bilbao. Abu Dhabi, said Mr Armstrong, “will be the third, the largest and the most connected to contemporary art exclusively and therefore possibly the most radical and, of course, it will have a tremendously memorable building”.

Guggenheim Abu Dhabi has been designed by Frank Gehry, the architect who also created the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Construction on Saadiyat island has not yet begun, but the building is expected to be completed by 2017.

Mr Armstrong, 65, a former director of the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh became director of the Guggenheim in 2008, a year after the agreement to develop the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi was signed.

When he inherited the project he was “relatively unaware of its scale and unfamiliar with this part of the world”, which presented him with a challenge.

However, after frequent visits to the UAE for art events in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah, he feels much more confident in the region and the institution is now “a happy part” of his responsibilities.

He said the social and cultural impact of the museum in the UAE had been overwhelmingly positive.

Mr Armstrong was in Abu Dhabi to oversee the opening of *Seeing Through Light*, the first exhibition of works from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi’s permanent collection.

Mr Armstrong said the “personality of the institution” was starting to reveal itself through this exhibition and other pieces the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi has lent to Venice and Bilbao.

“If you think of the collection as being the DNA of the institution then it is certainly beginning to show,” he said.

The exhibition includes Robert Irwin’s *Untitled*, 1967-68, which is considered a seminal piece of work from the California Light and Space movement he helped to found. There are also works by Rachid Koraichi, an Algerian artist who won the Jameel Prize in 2011; Shizareh Houshiary, who is from Iran but has been living in London for 40 years; and Angela Bulloch, a Canadian-British artist who was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1997.

In January, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, a Canadian-Mexican who works with electronics, will install an interactive work on Abu Dhabi Corniche called Pulse Corniche, to engage the public in what is happening on Saadiyat Island.

*Seeing Through Light* runs from November 5 to January 19 at Manarat Al Saadiyat.