

# The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao

*By Andrew McClellan*

Art museums have emerged in recent decades as the most vibrant and popular of all cultural institutions. Though art museums have never been more popular, their direction and values are now being contested as never before—both in the media and in the art world itself. This engaging thematic history of the art museum from its inception in the eighteenth century to the present offers an essential framework for understanding contemporary debates as they have evolved in Europe and the United States. From the visionary museums of Boullée in the eighteenth century to the new Guggenheim in Bilbao and beyond, it explores key aspects of museum theory and practice: ideals and mission; architecture; collecting, classification, and display; the public; commercialism; and restitution and repatriation. The only single volume to give a comprehensive account of the issues critical to museums, the book also highlights the challenges they will face in the future.

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editorial:

From the Inside Flap

"Andrew McClellan's well-conceived, thoughtfully argued book provides a much-needed history of the art museum as well as an astute assessment of critical issues facing museums today. There has been a pressing need for a synthetic, even-handed overview like this one. It will find a large readership among those concerned with museums, art history, and cultural policy, and I predict it will be widely used in courses in museum and curatorial studies."—Martha Ward, author of *Pissarro, Neo-impressionism and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde*

"*The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* is extremely important to the growing field of museum studies. It will make an excellent text and will also be important to museum professionals, who must be aware of the complexity of the critical issues it covers. It is the only book that addresses museum architecture, ideals and missions, collecting and display, restitution and repatriation, commercialism, and the public."—Harriet F. Senie, author of *The Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?*

"The increasing number of people interested in the history of museums have benefited greatly from Andrew McClellan's contributions over the past two decades. In this exemplary volume, McClellan summarizes and extends his perspectives on museums as institutions 'of hope and aspiration' as he establishes a much needed context for the rhetoric of celebration and critique emanating from within and without these organizations. It is a useful as well as an important book and one that will be read by many—students and lay public alike—as they attempt to make sense of these institutions and the sometimes conflicting accounts of their purpose and programs."—Michael Conforti, Director of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

"Combining powerful critique with a grounded utopianism, Andrew McClellan dissects the art museum's past in order to identify its emancipatory potential for the future. The result is a tour de force that reinvigorates our sense of why art museums matter. This is a book that will leave its mark on debates about the social role of museums for some time to come."—Tony Bennett, Director, ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change

"With its long historical view of ongoing controversies and debates, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* represents a much-needed contribution to the discussion of the role of museums in contemporary society.

Museum professionals, scholars, and lay readers alike will find much to ponder in its pages.—Alan Wallach, author of *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States*

"Timely and topical, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* is a comprehensive study of the evolution of the art museum as a social institution. Andrew McClellan's clear-eyed and insightful analysis places key issues faced by museums today in historical perspective and gives us a better understanding of current debates about museums and their place in society. Combining a deep knowledge of history and critical theory with an understanding of practice, this text makes a significant contribution to museum studies and should be required reading for museum professionals and academics alike."—Christa Clarke, Curator, The Newark Museum

#### About the Author

**Andrew McClellan**, Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of Art History at Tufts University, is the author of *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (UC Press) and the editor of *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millenium*.

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