

MUSEUMS ARE THE NEW CHURCHES

Across the United States, arts institutions are in the middle of a building boom. About twelve museums have been built in the past year. That means twelve temples devoted to art in a single year. Near the end of the 1990s Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao marked the beginning of a new era of museums designed by star architects. Churches and cathedrals once stood at the top of the architectural hierarchy, but today the museum is the building that every renowned architect dreams of designing. Besides, only a museum can attract the sort of budget that used to be reserved for cathedrals in the past.

Art museums are the new churches not because the role of the church has declined in recent centuries and something had to fill the gap. The new status of museum architecture is rather a reflection of how art has changed over the years. Before the 18th Century, non-religious art could only be found in palaces and lacked any public function. By the 19th Century, museums were meant to serve as places for ethical and social improvement. But, in the 20th Century, aesthetic contemplation became a virtue in itself, and museum architecture changed accordingly.

That is why modern museums are marked by pure, white walls and by giant spaces that, like the nave of a basilica, make visitors seem small in comparison.

Art has imitated religion in other ways too. These days, we frequently use religious language when talking about art. We make "pilgrimages" to museums in far-off places. We experience "transcendence" before major paintings.

And, of course, Sunday is the busiest day of the week for most art museums.

I * COMPREHENSION (3 points)

CHOOSE AND WRITE THE CORRECT OPTION (A, B, C or D). (0.5 points each)

1. The building of museums...

- (a) has been the dream of architects throughout history.
- (b) is now the professional aspiration of prestigious architects.
- (c) reduced the importance of the church throughout history.
- (d) is slowing down in the US.

2. The role of art in society...

- (a) has declined in recent centuries.
- (b) has always been private.
- (c) has moved from the private sphere to the public one.
- (d) has been supplanted by religion.

ARE THESE STATEMENTS TRUE OR FALSE? JUSTIFY YOUR ANSWERS WITH THE PRECISE WORDS OR PHRASES FROM THE TEXT, OR USE YOUR OWN WORDS. (0.5 points each)

3. The Guggenheim Bilbao marked the end of the trend for iconic buildings by famous architects.

4. Religious buildings used to be the most important constructions in the past.

5. Some expressions describe both religious and artistic phenomena.

6. Art museums often close on Sunday.

II * USE OF ENGLISH (4 points)

7. GIVE A NOUN WITH THE SAME ROOT AS "announce" (verb).
8. GIVE ONE OPPOSITE FOR "top" (noun) (line 4) AS IT IS USED IN THE TEXT.
9. FIND IN THE TEXT ONE SYNONYM FOR "huge" (adjective).
10. FIND IN THE TEXT THE WORD WHICH HAS THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION:
"Categorization or arrangement of a group of people or things into ranks or grades."
11. FILL IN THE GAP WITH A CORRECT PREPOSITION: "Isabel thanked him... his help."
12. FILL IN THE GAP WITH A CORRECT FORM OF THE VERB IN BRACKETS: "I am tired of... (hear) you complain about everything."
13. GIVE A QUESTION FOR THE UNDERLINED WORDS: "This train runs every 10 minutes at night."
14. TURN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE INTO THE PASSIVE VOICE: "Workers must wear a safety helmet at all times."

III * PRODUCTION (3 points)

18. WRITE A COMPOSITION OF APPROXIMATELY 120 WORDS ABOUT THE TOPIC PROPOSED AND FOCUS STRICTLY ON IT:

What are the most popular hobbies in modern society and what do you think about them?