

PRESS RELEASE

THE NEXT HELSINKI---INTERNATIONAL CALL FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED GUGGENHEIM HELSINKI

(September 9, 2014)

Coinciding with the end of the official competition for the design of the controversial Guggenheim Helsinki, a group of independent arts organizations has issued a call for submissions for alternative ideas. This competition—titled The Next Helsinki—is designed to attract innovative ideas about how to more fully meet the city’s cultural, spatial, and sustainability needs.

Following the success of the Guggenheim Bilbao in transforming that region’s tourist economy, many city managers have been seduced by the fantasy that a high-concept museum, designed by a starchitect, will turn around its urban fortunes in a similar way. Advocates of this branding formula see Helsinki as an ideal candidate for a new Guggenheim franchise. Yet the proposal has generated a surprisingly heated public debate among Finland’s citizenry, with pro and anti-Guggenheim sentiment running high.

The Next Helsinki competition aims to elevate the debate by giving voice to bold and thoughtful alternatives. It calls upon architects, urbanists, artists, environmentalists, students, activists, poets, politicians, and all others who love cities to imagine how Helsinki and the South Harbor site allotted to the proposed museum can be transformed for the maximum benefit of the city’s residents and visitors.

“The city is the greatest collective work of art ever conceived, and Helsinki is one of the most exquisite,” observed Michael Sorkin, architect and chair of the international jury for the Next Helsinki. In contrast to the “anachronistic vessel of the traditional museum building,” he added, “the goal of the competition is to attract projects that attach artistry to all aspects of everyday urbanism.”

Terike Haapoja, a board member of Checkpoint Helsinki (one of the organizations producing the competition), wants contributors “to be attentive to production platforms and exhibition spaces that emerge from the needs of cutting edge contemporary art – art, that is now fringe, but will be iconic in 40 years. We call for ideas that take as their starting point the growing interest in social responsibility in art, as well as the

appreciation for developing existing local institutions, their international knowhow and networks.”

“The formula of using a landmark building to brand a city is played out, and, in the case of a museum, always had more to do with merchandizing the place than with art itself,” commented Andrew Ross, New York University urbanist and jury member. “Helsinki deserves much better for the public money it has allocated for developing this site.”

Another jury member, Juhani Pallasmaa, Finnish professor of architecture and Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, noted that “instead of being agents for new ways of looking at the world and the human condition, museums are increasingly turning into a worldwide cultural marketplace, reflecting consumerist ideals and encouraging a universal uniformity of artistic approaches, instead of strengthening cultural originality.” Referring to the waterfront location he added that “this unique building site in the historical center of Helsinki cries out for alternative ways of stimulating artistic culture.”

More information about the competition can be found at www.nexthelsinki.org (under construction)

Deadline for submissions is March 2nd, 2015 at noon Helsinki time (GMT+2). Results will be published in the Spring of 2015.

The Next Helsinki is co-organized by Checkpoint Helsinki, Terreform, and Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F.).

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