

November 11, 1991

## Guggenheim Postpones Reopening Until May

By WILLIAM GRIMES

The reopening of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum has been postponed until mid-May, its deputy director, Michael Govan, said last week.

The museum at 1071 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street, closed on April 27, 1990, for renovations to its building, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and construction of a 10-story annex that will house galleries and offices. Museum officials originally said the renovation and new construction, carried out by Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, would take about 18 months, but the completion date has since been postponed several times.

Exhibitions planned for 1992 will undergo only minor changes in dates as a result of the delay, Mr. Govan said. The first exhibitions in the renovated museum will be works from the permanent collection and an installation by the artist Dan Flavin.

"As in any construction project, we've had delays, but there are no extraordinary problems," Mr. Govan said. "Most of it is due to the care we've taken with the Wright building."

Mr. Govan said the scope of the renovations had expanded as continuing research into the original plans for the building yielded new information. Designs for an expanded and relocated restaurant, for example, had to be redrawn when the museum's researchers, working at the Wright Foundation headquarters in Scottsdale, Ariz., discovered that Wright's original plans called for a double-curved stainless-steel service bar.

In the main rotunda of the museum, elaborate scaffolding now rises from the floor to a temporary wooden platform at the base of the domed skylight. Workers are almost finished replacing the glass with thermal panes that allow more light into Wright's spectacular central space but filter out harmful ultraviolet and infrared rays. The entire restoration and expansion project is expected to cost \$24 million.

The special qualities of the building materials and unusual construction methods have also contributed to the delay, Mr. Govan said, citing a decision to apply a thin skin of plaster to all interior surfaces except the floor. By masking built-up layers of paint, the new surface will add crispness to the interior.

Mr. Govan also noted that bringing the building's wiring up to modern standards had proved more time-consuming than anticipated, since workers had to thread new wires through the museum's solid concrete walls.

"The building is so unusual that common techniques and common problems don't work," said Jacob

Alspector, the senior associate at Gwathmey Siegel overseeing the Guggenheim job. "When you strip off a section of roof, you discover all sorts of surprises, 10 different technical problems that couldn't be anticipated. It's a little like archeology."

Mr. Govan said: "We tried to be as optimistic as we could in setting the initial completion date. But when it's come down to decisions about quality versus time, we've opted for quality." Construction of the new annex wing has gone according to schedule, he said.

Mr. Govan said the museum's reopening in May would coincide with the opening of the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, on Broadway at Prince Street. That new branch museum, which will have two floors of gallery space, has been designed by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki. Its 30,000 square feet of exhibition space will give the Guggenheim 80,000 square feet of exhibition space in Manhattan. Mr. Govan said the museum's new \$7 million storage and conservation facility, an 11-story warehouse on the Upper West Side, would open in December or January.