

MSU's New Art Museum Promises Community Impact

By Mariah Cherem



Museum professionals speak about the "Bilbao effect," referring to the substantial economic changes inspired by the construction of the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum in the provincial port city of Bilbao, Spain in 1997. The art museum and other nearby cultural buildings also designed by internationally renowned architects turned the gritty city into a must-see pilgrimage site for contemporary art and architecture enthusiasts and generated a local economic boom in cultural tourism. Similarly, in mid-Michigan, an enhancement of the Greater Lansing area as a national and international cultural destination will occur when construction of the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum on the Michigan State University campus begins. People will come to see this design by a world recognized architect and the museum's contemporary art collection.

As the capital region, mid-Michigan already has many resources that make it attractive including a community strongly committed to the arts. According to the Great Lakes Arts, Culture and Heritage Participation Report conducted for the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries (HAL) and published by Michigan State University's Recreation Industries Research Center in September 2007, 44 percent of respondents in Michigan and other Great Lakes states attended at least one musical performance, 37 percent attended a theatrical performance, 39 percent purchased some type of visual art from an art fair or gallery, and 37 percent of Michigan respon-

dents (and almost 41 percent of other Great Lakes respondents) visited a museum during a 12-month period. This survey provides baseline information to better understand consumer behavior in arts and cultural activities. Respondents were inclined to use their purchasing power at arts-affiliated businesses; eating in restaurants; staying in hotels; frequenting gas stations and shops; and enjoying a comprehensive, cosmopolitan experience. Indeed, according to the HAL report, awareness within Michigan of the state's cultural assets was significantly higher than among non-Michigan cultural tourists. This creates an opportunity to market our tourist destinations more broadly.

Art museum construction across the state and region is booming. In fall 2007 alone, the new Grand Rapids Art Museum and the renovated and expanded Detroit Institute of Arts opened to great acclaim. The University of Michigan Museum of Art expansion is under construction, and the Flint Institute of Arts opened a two-phased renovation last year. The new Broad Art Museum is part of this bricks-and-mortar momentum seen throughout the Midwest. In Akron, Cleveland and Toledo, to name a few, art museums have grown or are growing. Michigan State's deliberate decision to locate its art museum on the campus perimeter, along Grand River Avenue, links campus and city and speaks to the university's commitment to strengthen the art museum's role in the community, the state, and the region.

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The university's focus in 2007 – 2008 on the Year of Arts and Culture continues to bring greater visibility to the large number of events, exhibitions and programs organized by numerous separate units for diverse audiences. Joint publicity, a recognizable logo, and a coherent unified approach have drawn attention elsewhere in the state to Michigan State's rich arts and cultural offerings and to the efficiency and astuteness of collaboration.

Skeptics of the Bilbao effect warn of overly optimistic estimates of atten-

dance and revenue, the difficulties of sustaining interest when newness subsides, and the danger of reliance on an isolated architectural monument. Fortunately, in the Lansing region, the iconic Broad Art Museum will not be alone. Already, the mid-Michigan cultural boom is spurring greater interest in our community. The Broad Art Museum will share the limelight with improvements to the Wharton Center for the Performing Arts, innovative plans for the MSU Museum, and recently announced

Lansing building projects. Together, if we market jointly, collaborate, and continue to provide high-quality offerings, the region will reap economic and cultural rewards for businesses, local residents, and cultural tourists, turning all the positive outcomes of the "Bilbao effect" into the "Lansing effect." ■

Mariah Cherem is the events and communications manager at The Art Museum at Michigan State University.

World-renowned architect Zaha Hadid's winning design has been selected for the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon announced the winner on Jan. 15.

Hadid's design was chosen out of five finalists from a competition that began last June. When completed, the museum will be the first building by Hadid on a university campus and her second in the United States.

