The museum as destination

The role of iconic museums in urban boosterism

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Abstract: *This article discusses how iconic museums function as instruments of city marketing and corporate branding. The overall question is whether the use of iconic museums in urban boosterism is in opposition to the traditional role of museums as part of the enlightenment project. Two different urban contexts are used to analyze the role of museums in the process of city branding. Los Angeles is seen as an example of an “experiencescape”; here the main question is whether the J. Paul Getty Museum can be seen as an antidote to Hollywood hype or if it adds to it. Paris is seen as a “brandscape”, using iconic museum architecture to enhance its global image and generate economic growth; this trend can be traced in the presidential “Grand Projets” initiated since the 1970s and in the more recent corporate branding exercise Fondation Louis Vuitton. The article concludes that even if the enlightenment theme has been toned down, there is still a more traditional “museum mission” behind the iconic façades.*

Keywords: Museums, urban boosterism, experiencescapes, brandscapes, cultural icons.

The effects of globalization and post-industrialization have led cities to become ever more competitive, and today they are increasingly planned and designed to attract tourists, residents and businesses. At the same time, cultural institutions – in the context of this article: museums – have become part of a *cultural turn* in which economic and symbolic processes intertwine. In a new “experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore 1996), storytelling and branding are used as an added value not only to products and services but also to cities and cultural institutions (Skot-Hansen 2007, 2008a, 2008b). In this situation, cities have

become *experiencescapes* (O'Dell 2005) and *brandscapes* (Klingmann 2007).

In this article, I will examine and discuss the role of museums in *urban boosterism*. The overall question is whether the use of iconic museums in city branding is in opposition to the traditional enlightenment rationale. In other words, has museum architecture in itself become the main attraction? To examine this, I will discuss the role of iconic museum buildings in two urban contexts, characterized by two different strategies of urban boosterism. Los Angeles is chosen as an example of an *experiencescape*; in O'Dell's sense, a space “in

which experiences are staged and consumed” (2005:16). The question here is whether the new Hollywood Museum and the J. Paul Getty Museum just add to the Hollywood hype or if they also serve an enlightenment purpose. Paris is chosen as an example of a brandscape; in Klingmann’s sense, a city using architecture to enhance its image, generate economic growth and elevate its position in the global village (2010:33). The question here is whether the art museum Fondation Louis Vuitton, opened in 2014, adds anything substantially new to the Paris art scene or if it is actually a corporate branding exercise.

The description and analysis of the museums used as cases are partially based on my own observations as a visitor (in 2017), and partially on relevant documents: academic writings, journalistic articles and the museums’ own presentations in pamphlets and on the internet. The main focus is on the architecture and visual representation of the museums and to a lesser extent on their exhibitions and practice. This is presented in order to discuss the relationship between experience and enlightenment in these museums.

URBAN BOOSTERISM AND ICONIC ARCHITECTURE

Cities in the 1950s and 1960s tended to concentrate on stimulating economic growth by creating favourable conditions for trade and industry – planning pedestrian streets and industrial parks, for example – whereas planning in the 1980s and 1990s focussed on the (re-)establishment of city centres and the extension of high-profile waterfront areas offering new combinations of consumption and experience. Cities are increasingly becoming “experiencescapes”, a notion defined by the Swedish ethnographer Tom O’Dell as:

The spaces in which experiences are staged and consumed can be likened to stylized landscapes that are strategically planned, laid out and designed. They are, in this sense, landscapes of experience – experiencescapes – that are not only organized by producers (from marketers and city planners to local private enterprises), but are also actively sought after by consumers (O’Dell 2005:16).

According to O’Dell, the experiencescape represents a commercial streamlining of cities and urban centres into lifestyle environments aiming at attracting tourist demands and markets. However, at the same time, he stresses the consumer’s lust for fun and new experiences. Even though O’Dell does not explicitly mention museums in this context, there is no doubt that the investment in new, spectacular museums adds zest to the urban experience, attracting tourists who can say, “Been there, done that”.

Where O’Dell focuses on the experience dimension as a strategy for attracting tourists, the American architect Anna Klingmann sees the branding of cities as a strategy for attracting capital. She uses the concept “brandscales” when she describes how “the skylines and urban landscapes throughout the ‘Global Village’ have become staged, composed of towering symbols of corporate identity, where everything seems to be arranged for effect” (2010:31). She sees this as a trend that perceives architecture as a commodity keyed to the realities of global capitalism “where cities are trying to position themselves favourably in the worldwide marketplace in order to attract capital” (2010:33). Of course, these two concepts – experiencescapes and brandscales – overlap to some extent, both addressing a worldwide trend for architects to create iconic buildings in cities competing to elevate their image.

The concept of urban boosterism can be seen as an umbrella term for both tendencies. In the article "Iconic architecture and capitalist globalization", sociologist Leslie Sklair identifies urban boosterism as the most common rationale for deliberately created iconic architecture in cities wanting to be easily recognizable for purposes of commerce as well as civic pride. As he states, "those driving urban boosterism deliberately attempt to create urban architectural icons in order to draw tourists, convention, and mega-event attendees with money to spend, and the images they project are directed to this end" (2006:24).

Sklair's definition of iconic is "a building or a space (and perhaps even an architect) that is different and unique, recognized to be famous and to have special symbolic/aesthetic qualities" (2006:28). This definition can be said to be a bit "fuzzy", bringing together buildings of very different qualities. Still, I have based my choice of the museums in the following on this definition, stressing the dimensions of being unique, famous (or supposed to be) and having aesthetic qualities. In this sense, cultural institutions in particular have become icons, the most successful and discussed of these being Frank Gehry's hyper-expressive New Guggenheim from 1997, which gave the name to the so-called "Bilbao effect". This refers to the use of a flagship building (e.g. a museum, an opera house, a concert hall, a theatre) characterized by an iconic architecture and designed by a leading "star architect". Gehry's unique design for the Guggenheim Bilbao ushered in a new wave of museum construction. Widely commented on in popular press and academic literature alike, the museum has been heralded as "one of the most transformative symbols of city place-making of the last decade" (Evans 2003:420). As the architect Charles Jenks phrases it,

politicians and mayors all over the world now "demand the 'wow-effect' in new buildings and explicitly ask for the 'Bilbao effect' which brought in millions of dollars to that rust-belt city" (2006:8). More recent examples of iconic museums include Cape Town's Zeitz MOCAA (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa), designed by the British architect Thomas Heatherwick, the Sumida Hokusai Museum in Tokyo, designed by Kazuyo Sejima, and the Jean Nouvel-designed Louvre Abu Dhabi. The latter is part of the Saadiyat Island development, an experiencescape based on cultural institutions designed by "starchitects" such as Foster + Partners, Zaha Hadid, and Tadao Ando. However, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, originally scheduled to open in 2012, is still on hold, due to the potential for the museum to be seen as a target for terrorism (Lloyd 2017).

In Denmark, there has been an array of high-profile museum buildings within the last ten years for example Henning Larsen Architects' Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Vadehavscentret near the West Coast by Dorte Mandrup and in the same region the bunker museum Tirpitz by BIG, founded and led by the internationally renowned Danish architect Bjarke Ingels. All these museums are characterized by integrating architecture with the surrounding landscapes. In other words, they turn landscapes into experiences.

The city of Helsingør (Elsinore) is a good example of a brandscape. Within the last ten years, the city has undergone a transformation from an industrial city with a shipyard to a "culture city", using iconic architecture to rebrand its image. The area around Kronborg Slot, the Renaissance castle known as Hamlet's Castle, has now become a Cultural Haven, including The Culture Yard (Kulturværftet), a new library and arts centre designed by the

Danish Architects 3XN, and the M/S Maritime Museum of Denmark designed by BIG. This prizewinning iconic museum, built around an old dry dock, is known for its experience-orientated exhibition design, with uneven floors and irregular angles giving the visitor an experience of being on board a real ship. Since it opened in 2013, the museum has received a number of international awards and tributes. In 2014, it was listed as one of *The New York Times*' recommended "52 Places to Go in 2014" and voted the best cultural building worldwide by *archdaily.com* – the world's most visited architecture website (Internet source 1).

In this way, iconic museums have a significant influence on the branding, design and marketing of cities. But their role and effect depends on their context. In the following, I will present examples of high profiled museums and their role in two different urban environments: Los Angeles and Paris.

LOS ANGELES – AN EXPERIENCESCAPE

In his still relevant book *Amérique* (1986), the French postmodernist philosopher Jean Baudrillard depicts Los Angeles in this way: "No verticality or underground, no intimacy or collectivity, no streets or facades, no centre or monuments: a fantastic space [...] signs with no hierarchical ordering – an extravaganza of indifference, extravaganza of undifferentiated surfaces – the power of pure open space..." (Baudrillard 1999:125). Still, L.A. – or *La La Land* as the Oscar-winning musical names it – is perhaps one of the most iconic cities in the world because of its connection with the film industry. The "HOLLYWOOD" sign with its huge white letters on the sloping hillside represents Hollywood as a cultural icon and symbol. In the book *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood*, professor

of communication Alison Trope states that Hollywood is synonymous with Los Angeles as a brand. Not only the film industry itself but also another kind of material presence developed simultaneously around the films as landmarks and tourist destinations, fan magazines and souvenirs, costumes and props – all things that signify Hollywood and offer the opportunity for the public to see, consume and memorialize the industry and its history (2002:2).

Nowhere has more examples of "themed entertainments" than Los Angeles, where studios and other corporate entities have devised new ways to mediate Hollywood's symbolic stature. Disneyland, opened in 1955, became a model of the juxtaposition of "the museum and community center alongside the fair, playground, and showplace". Here the Disney rhetoric revealed a conscious desire to blur the lines between high and low culture (Trope 2012:96). When the iconic Walt Disney Concert Hall, designed by Frank Gehry, opened in 2003, the brand finally bridged the gap. As the homepage of LA Phil states:

Walt Disney Concert Hall is home to the LA Phil – one of the world's preeminent orchestras – and an unrivalled venue for classical music, contemporary music, world music and jazz. From the curved stainless-steel exterior to the stunning wood-paneled main auditorium, the 3.6-acre complex embodies the unique energy of Los Angeles and its signature orchestra (Internet source 2).

A "HOLLYWOOD MUSEUM"

In 1964, Universal Pictures opened its backlot to visitors. The tour included a series of dressing room walk-throughs, peeks at actual productions and, later, staged events. Over the years, this grew into a full-blown theme

park containing the staged events, stunt demonstrations and high-tech rides. Today, Universal Studios Hollywood claims to be the “world’s largest movie studio and theme park” (Internet source 3). In 2017, the venue received 9,056,000 visitors, ranking it the 15th most visited theme park in the world (Internet source 4).

However, the motion picture industry has not had its own “real” museum until now. Since the mid-1950s, there has been an ongoing battle to construct a county museum devoted to motion pictures (Trope 2012:53). In 1962, the banker Bart Lytton opened the private Lytton Center of the Visual Arts, including the Mogens Skot-Hansen collection of pre-cinema artefacts, bought as a donation to the Hollywood Museum scheduled to open in 1964 (Mogens Skot-Hansen (1908–84) was a film producer and director, founder of Laterna Film production company). However, a confluence of factors led to the failure of the Hollywood Museum. According to Trope, the museum’s downfall stemmed from differing values, perceptions, aims, expectations and interpretations of how the project should be characterized. As Trope asks:

Was it a tourist venue that would bring visitors to Hollywood and satisfy the economic motives of the county and Hollywood Chamber of Commerce? Was it a public service institution that would cater to the people of Los Angeles and celebrate the arts and industry of Hollywood? Was it a memorabilia collection, a technology center, a science and industry exploratorium, or an exhibitions space? Was it a world-class art museum and archive comparable to MoMA? Was it a slice of Americana, a representation of civic pride? Or was it all of these? It seemed that the intention or need was to create some kind of synthesis, a balance of high and low, art and industry, private and public, education and tourism, culture

and commerce, real and imaginary, and national and international (Trope 2012:73–74).

Four decades later, in 2004, serious plans again emerged to build what the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences saw as a “world-class” motion picture museum. The Academy hoped to emulate the successful erection of other Los Angeles landmarks, such as the Getty Center and the Disney Hall, and wanted to make a “major statement”. Now, at last, L.A. will get its long-awaited motion picture museum, due to open in 2019. The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures has been designed by the renowned Renzo Piano, one of the architects behind the Centre Pompidou in Paris more than 40 years ago. The design is inspired by the museum’s mission “to turn the dream factory inside out and give visitors an unprecedented opportunity to peer behind the screen and into the creative, collaborative world of moviemaking” (Trope 2012:74). At the same time, it is supposed to create a beacon for cultural tourism, “attracting visitors from all over the world” (Internet source 5).

Time will show whether the new Academy Museum of Motion Pictures lives up to expectations as an icon, celebrating the industry that defines Los Angeles and at the same time attracting visitors from all over the world. It will be especially interesting to see if the long-term battle between culture and commerce and between high and low culture has finally been resolved.

THE GETTY MUSEUM

Even though Hollywood has branded Los Angeles as an experiencescape per se, its wealthy inhabitants have fought to endow “tinsel town” with cultural capital, the most famous figure being the American-born British

industrialist Jean Paul Getty (1882–1976). He was an avid collector of art and antiquities, and in 1974 he opened his collection to the public in a replica of an ancient Roman villa in the grounds of his Malibu Canyon ranch. However, according to Baudrillard, the export of European cultural values to the US does not make sense:

When Paul Getty gathers Rembrandts, Impressionists, and Greek statues together in a Pompeian villa on the Pacific Coast, he is following American logic, the pure baroque logic of Disneyland. He is being original; it is a magnificent stroke of cynicism, naivety, kitsch and unintended humour – something astonishing in its nonsensicality (Baudrillard 1999:101).

Getty established the J. Paul Getty Trust in 1953 and left over \$661 million (approximately \$2.8 billion in 2017 terms) of his estate to the Getty Center after his death. The trust is the world's wealthiest art institution and operates the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Foundation, the Getty Research Institute and the Getty Conservation Institute (Internet source 6). According to its own presentation, the Getty Center aspires to be an asset for the city as such:

Los Angeles is bound to become a world capital for the twenty-first century. The Getty Center is an unparalleled resource for L.A. as the city achieves cultural maturity and comes into its own as the most diverse metropolis on the planet (Seeing the Getty Center 2014:10).

The Getty Center opened in 1997 and was designed by Richard Meier (b. 1934), a New York architect who was already known for several Le Corbusier-inspired museums in the US. Interestingly, L.A.-based architect Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum opened in

Bilbao just two months before the Getty, and Gehry was among the first group of thirty-three candidates in the architecture competition for the Getty (Internet source 5). Instead of what could have been Gehry's more upscale, postmodern approach, the committee chose Meier's more conservative style, characterized as "modern academism". Still, even if Meier is not one of the trendy "star architects" of today, the magnitude and complexity of the Getty Center qualifies it as an icon in Sklair's sense of "a building or a space that is different and unique, intended to be famous and to have special symbolic/aesthetic qualities" (2006:28). When the Getty Center opened, however, writing in his article "The Big Rock Candy Mountain", art critic Martin Filler complained:

Nowhere in Meier's 110-acre campus is there a vista of calm and repose, except when one looks past the frenetically overdesigned buildings – with their restless forms and mixture of stone, metal and glass – and out toward the dazzling views of the Pacific Ocean, the mountains and the city that stretch in different directions (Filler 1997).

According to Filler, with its curving wall and isolated hilltop perch the Getty Center "resembles a pristine fortified city of its own". For the visitor, nevertheless, arrival at this "fortified city" is part of the adventure. Turning off the San Diego Freeway, you leave your car in the seven-level parking structure at the bottom of the hill and take an elevator to the roof where you board a small white tram that transports you the three quarters of a mile up to the summit. The view of L.A. – on a clear day stretching to the Pacific Ocean – is breathtaking, and the surrounding garden is worth a visit all of its own. Here you find the five two-storey pavilions that house the J. Paul Getty Museum. Inside the pavilions, you

Fig. 1. View from The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2017. Photo Dorte Skot-Hansen.

visit the permanent exhibitions of European paintings, sculptures and decorative arts, as well as international photography. Temporary exhibitions are also held; at the time of my visit in November 2017, *Happy Birthday, Mr. Hockney* was showing. Thus the museum also functions as a “Kunsthalle”; as one critical voice said, perhaps the original board feared “that after one visit to their mountaintop, the average visitor will not be inclined to return without the incentive that the blockbuster special events supplies” (Filler 1997).

The question is whether the J. Paul Getty Museum fulfils its purpose as a cultural resource for the city or whether its 1.8 million annual visitors just come to “ride the tram, take in the panoramas, grab a cappuccino, and leave without bothering to explore or even enter the museum, as often happens at the Pompidou Center in Paris” (Filler 1997). At any rate, the J. Paul Getty Museum cannot compete with the 9 million annual visitors to Universal Studios. Then again, even if the visitors just “come for the ride” – does it matter? According to Baudrillard, exporting our aesthetic demands to places where they do not belong is a mark of cultural ethnocentrism:

Here in the US, culture is not that delicious panacea which we Europeans consume in a sacramental mental space and which has its own special columns in the newspapers – and in people’s minds. Culture is space, speed, cinema, technology. This culture is authentic, if anything can be said to be authentic. That is why searching for works of art or sophisticated entertainment here has always seemed tiresome and out of place to me (Baudrillard 1999:101).

PARIS – A BRANDSCAPE

Paris is a city in which museum architecture in particular is perceived as a “commodity

keyed to the realities of global capitalism” (Klingmann 2010:33), and in this way it can be designated as a brandscape *per se*. Even from the early nineteenth century, Paris was recognized around the world as a centre for art and culture. In the postwar era, however, it was being outstripped by cities such as London and New York, and consequently Paris rebranded itself in order to participate in this new global competition. Since the 1970s, it has become a tradition for successive French presidents to make their mark on the Parisian landscape with one or more “Grands Projets” designed to bolster the image of Paris as a leading city of culture. Common to all these projects is their origin in a desire to reinforce France’s image as a global cultural nation at a time when it is being challenged by North American and now also Middle Eastern and Asian art. A common feature of these projects is a pivotal focus on *French* art and cultural heritage (including that of the former French colonies) in the museums’ collections and exhibitions (Skot-Hansen 2013). Moreover, these “Grands Projets” stem from both an instrumental rationality aimed at enlightenment and a cultural-economic goal in terms of promoting cultural tourism and urban development (Skot-Hansen 2005).

Georges Pompidou (president 1969–74) erected the first presidential monument in the shape of the Centre national d’art et de culture Georges-Pompidou, a project designed to show the world that the “*jour de gloire*” of French art and cultural life was still very much alive. When opened in 1977, Centre Pompidou was the most innovative and bold arts centre in Europe. With its striking architecture, multiple functions and involvement of new media, it became an icon for the library and art museum of the future. With its trendy location in the Les Halles district, it also anticipated the movement towards regenerating former

industrial areas with the arts placed centre stage. Centre Pompidou was designed by the then very young and unknown architects Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. The pop-art inspired aesthetics, combined with high-tech architecture and glass façade fitted out with escalators in exterior transparent tubes, has contributed to the building's iconic twentieth-century status: an expressive structure that resembles anything but the classical museum. As Renzo Piano has explained, the design was meant to create "a building which will not be a monument but a celebration, a big urban toy" (Del Drago 2008:53). If anything, Centre Pompidou is an example of an iconic building that is unique, intended to be famous and to have special aesthetic qualities.

Subsequent presidents continued the branding of Paris as an art and cultural city. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (president 1974–81) instigated the making of Musée d'Orsay, a museum for modern art in the former railway station Gare d'Orsay. François Mitterrand (president 1981–95) presented his "Grand Louvre Plan" in 1983: a thorough renovation of and extension to the Louvre, involving the Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei's striking

and controversial postmodern glass pyramid situated in the middle of the classic courtyard. Jacques Chirac (president 1995–2007) had his "Grand Projet" with Musée du quai Branly, a museum for non-western art designed by the French "star architect" Jean Nouvel. With its overall expression as a low-level village of houses built on piles along the Seine, the building does not function as "icon" in the traditional sense because, as Nouvel says, "the building should not be an affirmation of the triumph of Western architecture" (Ouroussoff 2006).

FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON – ARCHITECTURE AS BRAND

The most recent art museum to feature on the Paris tourist map is the privately funded Fondation Louis Vuitton in the Bois de Boulogne. This is not a "Grand Projet", initiated by presidents and financed by the state, but rather an example of corporate branding, as a symbol of corporate identity, where "everything seems to be arranged for effect" (Klingmann 2010:31). It is financed by LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy), a European multinational luxury goods conglomerate native of France and headquartered in Paris (Internet source 6). Since 1991, LVHM has become one of the leading corporate philanthropists in France, supporting artistic heritage and humanitarian projects (Internet source 7). The Fondation Louis Vuitton marks a new phase in the philanthropic efforts of the LVMH group, and it epitomizes the support for art, culture and heritage they have been providing for nearly twenty-five years. As stated on the homepage, they "wanted to present Paris with an extraordinary space for art and culture, and demonstrate daring and emotion by entrusting Frank Gehry with the

Fig 2. Fondation Louis Vuitton in the Bois de Boulogne, 2017. Photo Dorte Skot-Hansen.

construction of an iconic building for the 21st century” (Internet source 8).

According to chairman and CEO of LVMH, Bernard Arnault, the choice of the Los Angeles-based architect Frank Gehry, renowned for the previously-mentioned Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (1997) and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (2003), was obvious: “because he is one of the great architects of our time”. He continues:

The idea was to enrich the architectural heritage of our capital with a founding act that had global resonance: the very first gesture of the Fondation Louis Vuitton. Working in perfect harmony with Louis Vuitton’s values of excellence, perfectionism, and performance, Frank Gehry made an extraordinary construction, a true masterpiece (*Fondation Louis Vuitton* 2014:5).

The trip to the museum is in itself an exclusive experience. A small white electric shuttle bus takes you on the fifteen-minute journey from Place de l’Étoile in the centre of Paris to the museum next to the Jardin d’Acclimatation, an eighteenth-century theme park with tropical plants, exotic animals and rides, now being refurbished by the LVMH. Gehry’s conception of the museum as a huge glasshouse was in response to the specific context of the Jardin d’Acclimatation, once home to a winter palace and a palm house. He was also inspired by the Grand Palais, built for the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, a structure that became a landmark with its 43-meter-tall glass roof.

Upon arrival, the museum would seem to resemble an iceberg enveloped by glass sails. As the Gehry partners see it, “the sails give Fondation Louis Vuitton its transparency and sense of movement, while allowing the building to reflect the water, woods and garden and continually change with the light” (Internet source 9). The twelve glass sails are

supported by a mixed framework combining wood and steel, an intricate “patchwork” of 3,600 glass elements, each unique in its radius and the direction of its curve. The inside of the “iceberg” is clad in panels of white concrete with the sensual quality of biscuit porcelain. One of the main delights when visiting the Fondation Louis Vuitton is to stroll around the building with all its many terraces, staircases, small plazas and sitting areas, enjoying the view of Paris from different perspectives. Should you be interested in viewing the art, however, you start by passing through the ground-level entrance hall, featuring a restaurant and bookstore. The Fondation has its own collection, but the museum mostly functions as a “kunsthalle”. At the time of my own visit in the autumn of 2017, the temporary exhibition was *Être Moderne: Le MoMA à Paris* – an extensive exhibition on loan from the prestigious MoMA in New York, and thus Paris is linked to the international art world.

The building itself is not without its critics; the question posed is whether it should be seen as an architectural icon or as a brand. The journalist Rowan Moore from *The Observer* newspaper asks the following question:

Approaching the front door, you are left in little doubt as to whose glory the building serves. It wears like a big diamante brooch the intertwined letters LV, glittering in the sun. All around are the dazzling white curves, palpably expensive, of Gehry’s architecture. The building is massive, dominating its surroundings. It is a coalition of brands, of LV and Frank, and looks much as if it might be a work of star architecture after all. The question with this project is which Gehry, the serious architect or the hired signature, wins (Moore 2014).

There can be no doubt, however, that the Fondation Louis Vuitton does the trick:

Fig 3. Fondation Louis Vuitton's entrance, 2017. Photo Dorte Skot-Hansen.

branding the Louis Vuitton products on a new and higher level. Even if you cannot buy a Louis Vuitton handbag at the museum, and despite the fact that the only mention of the founder is the name of the museum at the entrance and its logo on the wall, the art museum is clearly designed to boost the LV brand. In addition, the visitors include members of the upper-middle class who are the target group for LV luxury products and the customers you might meet at the Louis Vuitton boutiques in upmarket city locations. The prodigious sense of luxury in the museum, and the almost overwhelming impression of the building itself, associate to Louis Vuitton values of excellence, perfectionism and performance. As Arnault says:

LVMH and its mansions have always stood for a certain art de vivre, founded on old-world craftsmanship in the service of an ever-evolving creativity and modernity. For the men and women of the LVMH group, this new cultural institution will be a source of pride and a symbol of who they are and the work they do (Internet source 10).

In addition to this, the Fondation adds an international outlook to the brand. By choosing a US-based architect and exhibiting internationally renowned artists (as in the MoMA exhibition), this is not only a landmark for Paris or France, but for the world. The Fondation adds zest to the more nationally orientated Parisian art scene. At the same time, it modernizes and updates the Parisian landscape of iconic buildings that starts with the Tour Eiffel designed for the 1889 World's Fair.

The main question, however, is whether the museum actually adds something substantial to the Parisian art scene or if it mainly functions as a backdrop to the “chattering

middle classes” seeking new experiences. Should it be seen as a commodity, a place to check off on the list “been there, done that”, or will it succeed in attracting a wide-ranging spectrum of art-lovers who visit again and again, offering them new perspectives on art and society? This will depend on whether the future curating of exhibitions goes beyond the mainstream “modern art” found in any urban destination today.

ICONIC MUSEUMS – EXPERIENCE OR ENLIGHTENMENT?

The overall question is, as mentioned above, whether the use of iconic museums in city branding is in opposition to the traditional role of museums as part of the enlightenment project. Are all the new hyped star-architect-designed museums more or less façade, built to attract tourists and (re)brand cities, or are they intended to fulfil other, more educational and enlightening goals?

It is important to note that the building of imposing museums is not a new trend. Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, the Metropolitan in New York and the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin, for example, are all spectacular museum buildings of their time. However, in these cases, the classical temple architecture refers to the classic concept of enlightenment or, in other words, the architecture and the content are working in tandem. The iconic museums mentioned in this article are characterized by architecture that makes no explicit reference to an enlightenment purpose. They could all be the receptacle for something else: the Maritime Museum a dry dock, Centre Pompidou a warehouse, the Fondation Louis Vuitton an exposition hall. The J. Paul Getty Museum with its pristine modernistic architecture, and its

location as a modern Acropolis hovering over L.A., could be an exception, although in some measure it functions as a destination to which the museum guests “go for the ride”.

The main question remains: Has the enlightenment rationale yielded to an economic rationale? Is it now all about urban boosterism and corporate branding? Looking at the iconic museums highlighted here, there can be no doubt that they all aspire to fulfil enlightening and educational purposes. The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Hollywood will finally present the history of filmmaking, the J. Paul Getty Museum is part of the Getty Center with its renowned research and conservation institutes, the Centre Pompidou has its library and archives, the Musée du quai Branly conducts conferences and discussions on global issues, and the Fondation Vuitton offers educational family activities. In this way, the new hyped museums tend to fulfil several rationales simultaneously; culture and commerce are not necessarily conflicting features. Even if the enlightenment theme has been toned down in the spectacular and iconic buildings, there is still a more traditional “museum mission” behind the façade. Even if we are experiencing a cultural turn, in which economic and symbolic processes are ever more intertwined, the idea of “museum” as such has not been lost. It has rather found a new and spectacular packaging.

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