Guggenheim and YouTube Seek Budding Video Artists

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For artists, being included in a museum exhibition generally means first having to penetrate the well-guarded gates of a prestigious art gallery. But now the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and [YouTube](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/youtube/index.html?inline=nyt-org) are aiming to short-circuit that exclusionary art-world system, at least briefly, in much the same way that other hierarchical systems have been blown apart in the Internet age.

Beginning Monday (June 14, 2010) anyone with access to a video camera and a computer will have an opportunity to catch the eye of a Guggenheim curator and vie for a place in a video-art exhibition in October at all of the foundation’s museums: the Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York, the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

The project, called YouTube Play and conceived as a biennial event, is intended to discover innovative work from unexpected sources. It is open even to entrants who don’t consider themselves artists, and actively encourages the participation of people with little or no experience in video. “People who may not have access to the art world will have a chance to have their work recognized,” said Nancy Spector, deputy director and chief curator of the Guggenheim Foundation. “We’re looking for things we haven’t seen before.”

For YouTube the project is one in a series of experiments in tradition busting. In late 2008 it created the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, which allowed any musician to audition for a concert at [Carnegie Hall](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/c/carnegie_hall/index.html?inline=nyt-org) conducted by [Michael Tilson Thomas](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/t/michael_tilson_thomas/index.html?inline=nyt-per); the previous year it helped create the CNN/YouTube debates, giving everyone with a Web cam a chance to ask a question of a presidential candidate.

“What we’re doing is removing the middle man,” said Hunter Walk, director of product management for YouTube. “Whether it be Carnegie Hall or the Guggenheim, we’re giving people a way to see the aspirational light on the hill. And not just online but in the physical world too.”

While the company does not publicly discuss it, some of its officials say it is also hoping that collaborations with august institutions like Carnegie Hall and the Guggenheim Foundation will attract high-end advertisers.

Applicants will be able to submit their videos (only one entry per person) starting Monday, uploading them on a channel created for the initiative, also called YouTube Play ([youtube.com/play](http://youtube.com/play)). The works must have been created within the past two years and cannot be longer than 10 minutes, made for commercial use or excerpted from longer videos. The deadline for submissions is July 31.

A team of Guggenheim curators will look at all the submissions — the foundation is expecting many thousands, Ms. Spector said — and narrow them down to 200, which will be seen by a jury of nine professionals in disciplines like the visual arts, filmmaking and animation, graphic design and music. (Ms. Spector, who will be a juror herself, is putting the group together.) Although the jurors will know the names of entrants, Ms. Spector said, the makeup of the jury should be diverse enough to prevent art-world or other biases from infecting the process.

Then, in October, the jurors’ final selection of 20 videos will be on simultaneous view at all the Guggenheim museums. And the 200 that made it through the first round will be available on the YouTube Play channel.

There will be no first prizes or runners-up among the 20, Ms. Spector said, “because this is not about finding the best, but making a selection that represents the most captivating and surprising work.”

That work could come, the foundation and YouTube say, from any quarter. “Within the last few years you can get a camera and for a few hundred dollars get the tools to create Hollywood magic,” Mr. Walk said. And [Hewlett-Packard](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/hewlett_packard_corporation/index.html?inline=nyt-org), which is collaborating on the project, is not only providing hardware to all the Guggenheim museums for displaying the videos, it is also offering online tutorials on YouTube Play to teach skills like editing, animation and lighting to the video-naïve.

While Ms. Spector and YouTube say they created the project as a way of breaking down traditional art-world boundaries, some in that world question how meaningful it really is.

“Hit-and-run, no-fault encounters between curators and artists, works and the public, will never give useful shape to the art of the present nor define the viewpoint of institutions,” said Robert Storr, dean of the [Yale University](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/y/yale_university/index.html?inline=nyt-org) School of Art, the organizer of the 2007 [Venice Biennale](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/v/venice_biennale/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) and a former senior curator at the Museum of Modern Art, in an e-mail message from Europe.

“It’s time to stop kidding ourselves,” Mr. Storr added. “The museum as revolving door for new talent is the enemy of art and of talent, not their friend — and the enemy of the public as well, since it refuses to actually serve that public but serves up art as if it was quick-to-spoil produce from a Fresh Direct warehouse.”

But those involved in the project, naturally, see it differently. “If this is all the Guggenheim did, it would be a problem,” Ms. Spector said. “There are many layers to our programming. And we can’t say at this point that this won’t spawn ongoing relationships with people we discover through this process. One can only hope that it will.”

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