



'The manipulation of the inside of the container is for me an independent, sculptural problem and no less interesting than the design of the container itself. This manipulation tests the adaptability of the space for a program that by now can have changed several times.

In my work the perception of the object is primary. The imagery is real and not abstract, using distortion and juxtaposition of cheap materials to create surrealistic compositions.

'All in the pursuit of firmness, commodity, and delight.'

Except for the words 'cheap materials' that assessment is equally applicable to the Bilbao Guggenheim and the buildings that precede it. Several of the larger institutional buildings, such as the American Institute in Paris, for example, which Gehry designed before the Guggenheim, were no longer done in the almost throw-away materials of his Californian houses but were rendered or clad in masonry. Somehow, those that had rendered exteriors, such as the Vitra International Furniture Museum at Weil am Rhein, Germany, of 1989, seem more successful, less forced, than those covered in masonry like the American Center in Paris of 1994. Perhaps render still has some of the casual attributes of corrugated metal and chain-link fencing. Bilbao represents a significant shift. The use of a steel superstructure and a cladding of shimmering titanium scales (0.38 mm thick) made fluid forms appear natural; the building was like a thrashing fish with its tail out of water. The most relevant model came from two of Gehry's earlier creations: the Fishdance restaurant in Kobe, Japan of 1987, also on the water's edge and overlooked from an elevated bridge, and the Fish Sculpture built for the Villa Olimpica Complex in Barcelona in 1992. Both were in metal and with a fine grained skin. There is a suggestion that fish exercised an almost subconscious influence. Gehry has said in an interview, remembering excursions to the market with his grandmother: 'We'd go to the Jewish market, we'd buy a live carp, we'd take it home to her house in Toronto, we'd put it in the bathtub and I would play with this goddamn fish for a day until the next day she'd kill it and make gefilte fish' (Arnell & Bickford, 1985, p.XVII).

We come, it would seem, even to highly original projects with mental baggage. This does not mean that we set about