

Spain

Niemeyer Centre may include new port

Project seen as boost to European Capital of Culture bid

BARCELONA. As the €30m Oscar Niemeyer International Cultural Centre in Avilés—a coastal city in Asturias, northern Spain— inches closer to completion in summer 2010 (*The Art Newspaper*, April 2008, p13), the Asturian councillor of culture Mercedes Alvarez has said that it will be “an important asset” in the city’s candidacy for European Capital of Culture in 2016. The 50,000 sq. m complex is being constructed on a former industrial site, and Francisco González, the Asturian councillor of infrastructure, territorial politics and housing, has said that it will also include a port for cruise ships—although this has yet to be approved, according to Pedro Zuazua, director of communications at the centre.

The project is funded jointly by the governments of Spain and the Asturias region, but Mr Zuazua told *The Art Newspaper* that the annual operating budget has yet to be approved. More than one million visitors a year are anticipated.

“There will not be any permanent exhibitions. They will all be on rotation and complemented with music, theatre, cinema and open-air activities related to each exhibition,” said Mr Zuazua.

The complex was conceived spontaneously in 2006, when Natalio Grueso—then director of international relations at the Prince of Asturias Foundation—went to Rio in an attempt to convince Niemeyer to attend the



The Niemeyer Cultural Centre is due to open in summer 2010

celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Prince of Asturias Awards (given for science, the arts and public service). Niemeyer, a winner in 1989, cited his long-standing fear of flying (he is now 101 years old) and politely declined. “I’m not a professor or someone who speaks at conferences,” he said. “What I do is design buildings. I’m an architect.” And, with a thick felt pen, he made an impromptu sketch of the complex and offered the design as a gift to the Asturian government. The idea was quickly approved and Niemeyer finalised the design free of charge.

In order to see the project through to completion, the Niemeyer Foundation was created with the support of the Spanish and Asturian governments, as well as the Avilés civic authorities and various private interests. The management com-

mittee is partially composed of past recipients of the Prince of Asturias Prize.

Mr Grueso, currently the foundation’s director general, will become the director of the Niemeyer Cultural Centre. A graduate in law and international relations, he has previously worked as director of inter-regional cooperation programmes at the European Commission. Mr Grueso was appointed directly by the president of the Asturian government.

The artistic management committee will include film director Woody Allen, author Paulo Coelho, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking and computer scientist Vint Cerf. Actor and theatre director Kevin Spacey, who will not be on the committee, will collaborate with the theatre programme, as will playwright Wole Soyinka.

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