View of the Scotiabank Plaza atrium showing the tellers’ rotunda and Derek Besant’s mural Waterfall, 1989.

69 oil panels, over 30 m x 15 m.

Courtesy of Scotiabank Group Archives 2008.

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Toronto Galleries & Museums

- Alliston Lounsbury Gallery
  Brookfield Place
  416.777.6480
  www.brookfield-place.com

- Art Gallery of Ontario
  www.ago.net

- Bata Shoe Museum
  416.214.9490
  www.batashoemuseum.ca

- Bulletin
  www.bulletin.ca

- The Drake Hotel
  416.973.4949
  www.thedrakehotel.ca

- Gardiner Museum
  416.531.5042
  www.gardinermuseum.com

- King Street West
  416.577.6666

- Michael Lee-Chin Crystal
  416.979.7799
  www.miagallery.ca

- Museum of Inuit Art
  416.603.7591
  www.mia.org

- Museum of Contemporary Photography
  416.479.5511
  www.mocopi.ca

- Museum of Fine Arts
  416.427.3400
  www.mfa.ca

- Museum of History
  416.288.6199
  www.museumofhistory.ca

- Museum of Popular Culture
  416.747.7200
  www.popmuseum.ca

- Royal Ontario Museum
  416.586.8000
  www.rom.on.ca

- Royal Ontario Museum (Bulger Gallery)
  416.586.8000
  www.royalontariomuseum.org

- Sandra Ainsley Gallery
  416.214.9490
  www.sandraainsleygallery.com

- The Distillery District
  www.thedistillerydistrict.com

- The Power Plant
  416.979.6648
  www.thepowerplant.org

- Toronto Harbourfront Centre
  416.973.4949
  www.harbourfrontcentre.com

- Toronto Reference Library
  416.393.2500
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- The Toronto Star
  416.977.6480
  www.thestar.com

- Toronto Tourism
  416.977.6480
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- Toronto Visitor Centre
  416.204.6517
  www.traveltoronto.com
No two people in Toronto hold the same opinion as to when the so-called Art and Architecture Renaissance of Toronto began. Some say it was the 1960s, others the 1980s, some the 1990s. I for one lean towards the year 2000, when British architect Will Alsop’s ultra fantastic Sharp Centre for Design—a startling black and white checked building built on toothpick stilts on top of the already existing Ontario College of Art and Design building—awakened Toronto, shockingly so, to the extraterrestrial possibilities of space-age design. It was around this time, when serious money began to flow, that the city’s two most prominent behemoths, the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario, hoping for the kind of magic and excitement that turned the Bilbao Guggenheim into a must-see tourist destination, imported international starchitects Daniel Libeskind and Frank Gehry to help change the face of Toronto.

While Libeskind’s recent multi-faceted glass and steel addition to the Royal Ontario Museum, the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal (2007), took the city by storm, the new building, after the shock and awe inspired by Will Alsop’s earlier creation, looks like a giant meteor that landed on top of the museum’s older buildings—and Gehry’s spectacular remake of Art Gallery of Toronto, with its block-long, show-stopping, glass enclosed sculpture promenade and 110 new gallery spaces, promises to do the same when it opens this November, as is the city’s highly unusual specialty museums, its Queen Street West art galleries, and the historic Distillery District, Toronto’s awesome arts and entertainment complex, that give the city much of its inner glow.

Adding color to confection are numerous “hidden” artistic wonders that are scattered throughout the city. Topping this list of these best kept secrets is Derek Beattie’s, 15 story Waterfall mural (1989) which graces the lobby of the Scotia Bank Plaza. Standing before the 62 canvases that form the vertiginous 100 foot plus high mural one actually senses the rushing waters as they cascade down the side of the wall. Just as exciting, architecturally speaking, is Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava’s spectacularly arched, 6-story-high steel-and-glass canopy at the Allen Lambert Galleria at Brookfield Place. Often referred to as “the Hall of Lights,” the canopy covers the shops, restaurants, office towers and heritage buildings on Brookfield Place, while linking Bay Street to Heritage Square. It imparts the sensation of walking under an urban cathedral. Another visual treat is the new Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts (2006), which houses both the Canadian Opera and Ballet companies. Like an Andreas Gursky photograph, its three, glass-fronted floors allow you to see, all at once, the comings of the Centre’s opera and ballet patrons.

Speaking of Toronto’s unique buildings, the Bata Shoe Museum, which houses the world’s largest collection of shoes and footwear-related objects, is a shoebox-shaped building with a lid-like roof. Buried among hundreds of pairs of shoes on view, some dating back 4500 years, are Picasso’s pony-skin ankle booties, Napoleon’s socks, and Elvis Presley’s blue patent loafers. The Gardiner Museum, also given a new glass face, is Canada’s only museum devoted solely to ceramics. Alongside the largest collection of early American ceramics on display in Canada, a plethora of 17th century Italian majolica, 17th and 19th century English pottery and English porcelain, the Gardiner is known for mounting landmark contemporary exhibitions. From May 15 – September 7, the Object Factory: The Art of Industrial Ceramics, an exhibition of 150 ceramic objects that document the artistic interplay between contemporary artists, industrial designers and manufacturers will be on view. The big surprise here is a Cindy Sherman, as Madame Pompadour on soup tureen (1990). Down at the Harbourfront Centre is the Museum of Inuit Art, Canada’s only museum dedicated to the art and culture of the indigenous Inuit peoples. Although the primary focus of the museum is sculpture carved from stone, amulet, ivory, and bone, all beautifully displayed in hi-end glass showcases, prints, drawings and wall hangings are also on display. All three museums have gift shops that sell original works of art.

Toronto’s premier contemporary, non-profit, art gallery is the Power Plant. Like London’s Tate Modern, the gallery’s three beautifully renovated exhibition spaces occupy an old industrial building complete with a tall smokestack. Currently at the gallery, from June 7 through September, is Not Quite How I Remember It, an exhibition of international artworks, sculpture, film/video, and performance that examine how we channel, mediate and memorialize history. For cutting edge art, Queen Street West, the art and design district, with its many small contemporary art galleries is the place to be. Be sure to check out the Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto’s only gallery solely dedicated to photography. From June 14 – August 2, the late Robert Gian’s portraits, nudes, and landscapes will be on view. While in the neighborhood you might want to pop into the Drake Hotel to see what Mia Nielsen, the hotel’s popular in-house curator is doing. Besides mounting contemporary art exhibitions “My focus is on international artists,” Nielsen says, “the hotel’s lobby, lounge, restaurants and rooms are filled with contemporary art.”

The coup de grace, a city in itself, is the historic Distillery District. Situated downtown on 14 acres of what was once the largest distillery in the British Empire, this pedestrian only village with its quaint, brick-lined streets and forty-five well preserved Victorian industrial buildings is seriously devoted to promoting art and culture. With 17 art galleries, 10 combination galleries/artist studios and 30 working studios (some open to the public) restaurants, countless jewelry, ceramic and furniture boutiques, and a performing arts center, there is no end of things to do. A highlight of the Distillery is the renowned Sandra Ainsley Gallery, arguably the most beautiful art glass gallery in the world. One could die for any of the art works, breathtakingly spotlighted throughout the gallery’s cavernous space. Their exhibitions feature one-of-a-kind artworks by Canadians, as well as international artists. A day or two at the Distillery is a wonderful way to end any visit to Toronto.