

The Best Contemporary Art Galleries in Toronto

- Posted by Guest Contributor
- Filed in Best of Toronto
- July 23, 2008



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When it comes to the topic of Contemporary Art, it often seems there are only two kinds of Torontonians. There are the culture-junky downtowners who try to visit the galleries at least a couple times a year, in an effort to find unique gems for their collections and to remain cognizant of the heartbeat of the city. And then there is everyone else, the other 98% of our neighbours who don't know that there are galleries in the city other than the ROM and AGO and wouldn't have the faintest idea of how to find fresh, exciting new art if it occurred to them to look. What a shame because Toronto sports a wildly creative, at times bombastic and risqué, gritty, gorgeous, and cerebral art scene.

Most people in this city, for instance, have no idea that the Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art (MOCCA) sprouted up like a sunflower in 2005 on Queen Street West. Nestled in the rear of a funky, mural-lined courtyard just east of Ossington, it functions as the anchor of Toronto's Contemporary Art scene. (While The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery casts a long shadow, any Toronto artist will tell you that the MOCCA does the real, vital field work of supporting local art and keeping it from floating away into irrelevance.)

This internationally respected institution, directed by the rockstar-ish, hockey coach-like, beer-drinkin', curatorial Godfather of cool art David Liss, hosts public openings for its raucous, sexy, intelligent and adventurous exhibitions every six weeks or so. Not only are these creative parties open and welcoming to everyone and their children, but they are free and fun and come with a nice dose of wild. (At all other times, entrance to the museum is "pay what you can".)

One thing all the art dealers in the city will agree upon is that they wish more people visited their commercial galleries. Like a tree falling in the forest, art only makes an impact when there is someone there to see it. The more people the better. Unlike the pretentious art galleries of New York City or London, the staff and owners of Toronto's best galleries are friendly and welcoming, always happy to explain the sometimes mysterious but always thought-provoking pieces on display.



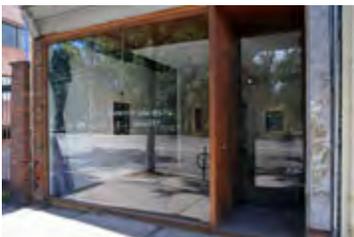
1 Stephen Bulger Gallery

Galleries simply cannot be higher quality than Stephen Bulger Gallery, in Toronto or anywhere. Always welcoming, professional, educational and relevant, this West Queen West gallery is dedicated to photography. Presenting images by the finest photographers in the world from the earliest days of the medium through to current practice, this gallery is an essential stop on any art tour. For photographers, it is Mecca.



2 Le Gallery

Hands down the freshest gallery in Toronto, young owner/director Wil Kucey consistently looks under wet rocks for visionary, ultra modern artists no one has ever heard of. Many of them are still in art school. Kucey, who graduated from OCAD himself not so long ago, has the best eye for the new.



3 Clint Roenisch Gallery

More curator than gallerist, some people in the scene wonder why owner Clint Roenisch, possibly the finest curator in the city, runs a commercial gallery when he should be the curator of contemporary art at the AGO. Insightful, knowledgeable and challenging, the exhibitions at this essential Toronto gallery take no prisoners.



4 Artcore/Fabrice Marcolini

Not only does this Distillery District gallery have the most international program of any of the city's contemporary galleries, but it also has one of the biggest and best spaces to show art. You may never have heard of the artists showing here, but the rest of the world certainly has. If you are looking for "blue chip" Contemporary Art from around the globe, speak to gregarious and knowledgeable Fabrice.



5 Monte Clark Gallery

The commercial home base of the internationally admired "Vancouver School of Conceptual Photography", not only does this gallery consistently present art of the highest quality, often by Canada's finest artists, but it is housed in one of Toronto's most gorgeous display spaces, down in the Distillery District. If you are lucky, Douglas Coupland might just be hanging out when you stop by.



6 Interaccess Electronic Media Arts Centre

As famous Canadian-Mexican digital media artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer says, "the only thing new about New Media art is that it is not new anymore." Toronto needs more galleries like this Ossington Street staple, dedicated to ballsy, adventurous, techno-geek art that exists at the gummy intersection where technology and creativity collide.



7 Angell Gallery

With exhibitions that are always daring and original, this gallery was one of the pioneers in the West Queen West art district. You'll rarely see a safe, conservative show here. Owner Jamie Angell is easily the friendliest, most enthusiastic dealer in the city.



8 Christopher Cutts Gallery

If you like a spoonful of mean, gruesome, beautiful decadence mixed into your art, Christopher "Cutter" Cutts is your tour guide. The art in his gallery usually has a dark and mischievous side. Though a bit out of the way near the intersection of Dundas and Bloor (yep, they intersect), it's always worth the visit.



9 Diaz Contemporary

You could drop this gallery unmolested into any of the great contemporary art centres of the world and you wouldn't have to change a thing. Owner Benjamin Diaz had an illustrious and influential career in Mexico City's art scene before opening this important gallery in Toronto which usually exhibits works by Canadian and Mexican artists.



10 Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects

Now in its tenth year, this gallery is spread across various store fronts on Queen Street West. Edgy, relevant, and, at times, cutesy, this gallery is one of the most respected and established spaces showing "emerging" and "mid-level" artists in the city.

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