

AGA History

The Art Gallery of Alberta was founded in 1924 as the Edmonton Museum of Arts Association, an organization of influential Edmonton citizens who saw the Museum as a vehicle ‘to promote the knowledge and enjoyment of, and cultivation of the fine arts and to preserve historical relics.’

Over the course of its history, the Art Gallery of Alberta has had a variety of different homes—from rooms in the Hotel Macdonald to the early 20th century mansion, Secord House, where the museum would become known as the Edmonton Art Gallery. In 1969, a building on Sir Winston Churchill Square, designed by Edmonton architect Don Bittorf, opened to national and international acclaim. This was the Gallery’s first home designed specifically to meet the needs of a modern art museum.

As the Gallery was growing, so was its permanent collection. Throughout the course of its history, the Gallery has acquired significant works of art by major 20th century artists. Early on, there were some significant acquisitions by such artists as A.Y. Jackson, Walter J. Phillips, Franklin Carmichael and George Reid. Many of the artists who have since become significant figures in the canon of Canadian art donated their work to the Gallery, and collectors in Edmonton and beyond made a point of donating paintings, prints and sculptures to build the permanent collection.

During the 1970s and 80s, the Gallery’s permanent collection grew substantially, as it acquired historical art works by Maxwell Bates, Emily Carr, H.G. Glyde, Lawren Harris, Cornelius Kreighoff, David Milne, Marion Nicoll, Tom Thompson and Frederick Verner, and modernist works by Jack Bush, Anthony Caro, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski and Larry Poons. The Gallery also acquired a significant photography collection, including works by Hubert Hohn and Douglas Clarke and works by major American photographers such as Ansel Adams, E.J. Bellocq, Edward Curtis, Walker Evans and Ben Shahn.

The expanded Bittorf building served the Gallery well for over 25 years, but with time, its mechanical and electrical systems became dated, the building envelope was not able to maintain the environment required by international museum standards and each year, the Gallery was faced with the challenge of leaks from the roof, ice damming in the walls and old plumbing. As the permanent collection grew to over 6,000 works of art, it was clear that a new, state-of-the-art facility was needed to accommodate both the art and the 21st century vision of what a public art gallery should be.

In 2005, Los Angeles based Randall Stout Architects, Inc. was selected, from 25 international submissions, to redesign the former gallery building originally designed by Edmonton architect **Don Bittorf** in 1969. The RSA design was chosen by a selection committee and announced on **October 15, 2005**. The new building has nearly doubled the area of the former gallery and its environmental controls meet the highest museum standards.

The Edmonton Art Gallery was renamed the Art Gallery of Alberta on October 13, 2005 in honour of a \$15 million gift from the Province of Alberta gave \$15 million to the AGA’s capital campaign.