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National Gallery of Canada
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After MassMoca, Dia, Tate Modern— Shawinigan's new exhibition space

Offshoot of the National Gallery of Canada opens in rural Quebec

Jason Edward Kaufman

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The National Gallery of Canada (NGC) has opened a 25,000 square-foot kunsthalle for temporary exhibitions in Shawinigan, a rural town of 50,000 halfway between Quebec and Montreal.

The venue is a century-old aluminium-smelting complex that aluminium conglomerate Alcan donated to the Cité de l'énergie science centre in 2001. The centre restored two of the 11 brick-and-steel buildings hoping to make contemporary art part of its programme, and turned to the NGC for ideas. “Even before it was restored I thought we could do something like MassMoca, Dia, or Tate Modern,” says NGC director Pierre Theberge. “Not on their scale, of course, but the same idea of transforming industrial space to space for works of art.” He says “no Canadian museum has had such a satellite operation,” but with the NGC mandated to send shows across the country, the project seemed appropriate.

For the inaugural show, “The body transformed” (until 5 October), Mr Theberge and co-curator Mayo Graham have assembled 60 modern sculptures from their own collection, plus blue-chip loans including works by Picasso, Giacometti and Louise Bourgeois.

Mr Theberge has an agreement to do a different summer exhibition for at least five years, and is considering shows of earlier work, as well. “My idea is that it be mostly sculptures,” he says, “because to divide the space would go against the building.”

Whether it will become a permanent venue for the NGC remains to be seen. The exhibition and its insurance are draining about C\$900,000 from the NGC annual budget.

The challenge will be to draw visitors to a remote industrial enclave whose main features are a new aluminium factory and a paper plant. The science centre attracts 100,000 local visitors a year, but will tourists make the trek and pay the C\$12 entry fee?

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