



by Richard Florida

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Creative Toronto

Toronto's ongoing creative transformation is coming more fully into view. This week saw the opening of Frank Gehry's newly renovated [Art Gallery of Ontario](#).



(Photo via [AGO](#)).

I was there for the opening (full disclosure: I serve on the board) and the building is beyond spectacular in the way it activates the art, stitches together old buildings and reanimates old spaces, and relates to the messy urbanist neighborhood which surrounds. Here's what the [NYT](#) has to say;

[Frank Gehry](#) has often said that he likes to forge deep emotional bonds with his architecture projects. But the commission to renovate the Art Gallery of Ontario here must have been especially fraught for him. Mr. Gehry grew up on a windy, tree-lined street in a working-class neighborhood not far from the museum. His grandmother lived around the corner, where she kept live carp handy in the bathtub for making her gefilte fish. Given that this is Mr. Gehry's first commission in his native city, you might expect the building to be a surreal kind of self-reckoning, a voyage through the architect's subconscious. So the new Art Gallery of Ontario, which opened to the public on Friday, may catch some fans of the architect off guard.

Rather than a tumultuous creation, this may be one of Mr. Gehry's most gentle and self-possessed designs. It is not a perfect building, yet its billowing glass facade, which evokes a crystal ship drifting through the city, is a masterly example of how to breathe life into a staid old structure. And its interiors underscore one of the most underrated dimensions of Mr. Gehry's immense talent: a supple feel for context and an ability to balance

exuberance with delicious moments of restraint. Instead of tearing apart the old museum, Mr. Gehry carefully threaded new ramps, walkways and stairs through the original. As you step from one area to the next, it is as if you were engaging in a playful dance between old and new.

But that's not all. Earlier this month, Toronto's Artscape unveiled its [transformation](#) of Toronto's old street car repair barns into an urban park plus work-live space for artists and creators.



(Photo via [Blog TO](#))

The project is an amazing example of creative, sustainable, and inclusive adaptive reuse. Rana and I were blown away when we saw the project as host of its opening night. The *Globe and Mail* [reports](#):

The reinvention of the old Toronto Transit Commission streetcar-maintenance sheds in the St. Clair-Wychwood area of the city will banish forever your spontaneous, ill-considered desire to damn all urbanity ... [T]his is a chance to feast on a version of urban heaven, a wondrous, hybridized redevelopment of something that had been left for 30 years to die a slow death. The Artscape Wychwood Barns, which open to the public this week, give us a new kind of temple in which art, community and urban agriculture are allowed to happily conspire ... This is not to say that the barns will replace such major destinations as the Art Gallery of Ontario or the Royal Ontario Museum ... The compelling city allows for an intermingling of all creative players. And it's that potent mix which inspires us to stay.

Exactly. Artscape founder Tim Jones likes to say the city's ongoing transformation involves the simultaneous recognition of the need both to put creativity on display and to more fully engage creativity at work. These two projects are part of that unfolding process to celebrate and harness creativity in a sustainable and inclusive way.