

# All Dressed Up: A Place to Show



**P**aris' Musée d'Orsay, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and London's National Gallery are symbolic of fine art collections showcased in outstanding buildings. This May, Canada will join the world-class ranks when the National Art Gallery of Canada opens in Ottawa.

According to its director, Shirley Thomson, "The gallery has a solid, representative collection of European works, and the best collection in the world of Canadian art. Contemporary Canadian artists were asked to donate their diploma (initial) pieces to the collection, and more than 200 of them will have their works displayed."

Canada's gallery will be more than simply a place for the public to view art. Thomson envisages it as a place of

respite, a forum for the exchange of ideas, and a meeting point for the public, artists and critics. Contemporary art education programs will enhance the gallery's primary mandate "which is to show off fine works of art."

## Shedding Light on the Collections

Over 40 000 works of art are currently being moved to their new home in a spectacular building designed by internationally renowned Canadian architect Moshe Safdie. Boasting over 3 000 m<sup>2</sup> of vaulted exhibition galleries surrounding two interior courtyards, Safdie's innovative design has skylights and windows on all three floors — an unusual

feature among world-class galleries. With natural lighting on all levels, the Canadian gallery will not be forced to restrict its most important exhibits to the top floor. In fact, Safdie's unique use of natural lighting has turned the readily accessible ground floor into the primary galleries housing the featured Canadian art exhibits.

Careful planning has enhanced the educational aspects of this new gallery: there is a 350-seat theatre, an impressive art research library with over 96 000 volumes, a children's art book store, a major auditorium and a number of seminar rooms. And still in the formative stages is an ambitious plan to catalogue the collection and make it available to the public on colour computer screens.

The new National Gallery of Canada, an architectural masterpiece high on the cliffs overlooking the Ottawa River, will house Canada's national art collections.

## Distinctive Canadian Art on Display

More than 2 000 works of art — double the capacity of the old gallery — will be on display in the new building. And that's still only 5 per cent of the gallery's total collection. Naturally, the centrepiece of the collection will be Canadian works, which range from early eighteenth-century religious sculpture to a video exhibit room designed to increase awareness of film and video as art forms.