

TD art collection an investment in Canadian culture

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Hanging a watercolour over a couch isn't exactly the style of TD Bank Financial Group. They've been building a massive modern art collection for almost 50 years and now have 5,500 pieces in 1,000 locations around the world.

What The collection consists primarily of colourful non-figurative paintings, with some sculptures, prints and photographs. The work is almost exclusively Canadian, by artists such as Dorothy Knowles, William Pehudoff, Jack Bush, Ivan Eyre, Harold Town, Jack Chambers and Carol Wainio. Much of the work fills the executive floors in the TD Tower in Toronto's financial district, and loans are frequently made to public institutions.

Standout pieces The jewel in an impressive crown is a massive, multicoloured 1952 Jean-Paul Riopelle (*Composition*), an early acquisition and one that expressed the bank's then-desire to showcase groundbreaking work. In Michael Snow's *Red Square*, the canvass has been folded to resemble a blue-grey batik covered in bright, imperfectly geometric red blocks. And Paul-Emile Borduas' untitled 1956 work, with broad swathes of black and white paint battling for dominance, was valued at a higher price than curator Natalie Ribkoff's condo when she bought it 10 years ago. Gathie Falk's highly glossed life-size papier mache sculpture of a white tuxedo shirt with a black bow tie and cufflinks adds a touch of fun to the investment banking floor.

Where With more than 5,000 pieces, you'd think that some of the work might be banished to a basement, but Ms. Ribkoff-- who has been with the bank for 20 years --doesn't buy work unless it can be displayed. "Everything we have, we use -- with the exception of about 100 pieces that are coming in or going out at any given time," says Ms. Ribkoff. "The work should be seen."

How In 1962, Allen Lambert, chairman of the bank -- referred to by Ms. Ribkoff as "the father of the art collection" -- sought to make TD the first Canadian bank with a substantial modern art collection. He enlisted the help of Martin Baldwin, director of the Art Gallery of Toronto, to build a collection that showcased young, inventive, emerging Canadian artists. Mies van der Rohe's modern TD Tower was an ideal showcase for abstract, challenging works, and even today the collection feels progressive. The bank is still collecting -- sourcing from private galleries and individual artists -- but the number of additions varies every year.

Why When Lambert set out to build the collection, he wanted to raise the profile of the bank, complement the interiors of the TD Centre, support Canadian artists and introduce art as a point of engagement among colleagues, customers and other bank-related stakeholders. Ms. Ribkoff credits him for setting an enduring tone of art appreciation that continues to drive acquisition. As we toured around the TD Tower's 54 floors, no less than 10 people stopped Ms. Ribkoff to comment on the artwork.

"When someone quits or retires, I usually hear about it first in an email from someone who has their eye on a piece in that soon-to-be-vacated office," says Ms. Ribkoff.