

March/April
2008

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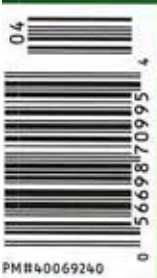
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MAR./APR.

The AGO's wall of wonders

Though its full name is more fusty than fun, the Art Gallery of Ontario's Off the Wall! Dr. Mariano Elia Hands On Centre is one of the city's most popular creative spaces for kids of all ages. It's likely to become more popular this year, thanks to Reich + Petch Design International. As part of the Transformation AGO expansion project, the gallery enlisted the international design firm (based in Toronto, with offices in Washington, D.C. and London), along with Holman Exhibits, to redesign and reinvigorate the centre. Says Britt Walter-Nolan, the AGO's coordinator of family programs, "This revitalized space will attract kids and unleash their creative genius."

Off the Wall!'s focal point will be the Cabinet of Curiosities (a Wunderkammer, or wonder-room) that invites families



and children to look at interesting objects and consider different themes related to art and creativity. The curiosities can include everything from feathers and claws to cassette tapes and remote controls. Children can also sign out a discovery case and take it with them into the galleries, finding new relationships with the art. "Interestingly, Wunderkammers once were owned by such wealthy monarchs as Peter the Great and the Hapsburgs, whose collection included the feather headdress of Montezuma," says Tony Reich, co-founder of Reich + Petch. "We believe curiosities from the past or the present can help provoke interest in their history and imagination."

The AGO's interpretive strategy for the space is divided into five zones exploring different aspects of creativity. Make your Mark looks at ways to record an idea that moves beyond pen and paper. Memory Maker reminds us that our life experiences are a source of artistic inspiration. Seeing is a necessary part

of creativity and the "eye spy" activities in the Observatory suit even the youngest visitor. In Body Canvas, children dress up in non-traditional ways – an important outlet for personal expression. In the DIY Junktion, everyday items become components of sculptures. The activities in each zone will change constantly, so no two visits will be the same.

Fabrication of exhibits in the 1,700-square-foot Off the Wall! space is underway in preparation for the AGO's grand reopening in the fall.

The Cabinet of Curiosities, chock full of found objects, is the focal point of the Art Gallery of Ontario's redesigned Off the Wall! Centre.





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