



Roanoke: Modern Masterpiece

January 31, 2012

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The Taubman's dramatic facade; photos by Nicole Pensiero

Looming large amid the many Beaux Arts and Federal-style buildings in downtown [Roanoke, Va.](#), the striking [Taubman Museum of Art](#) really stands out.

Designed by Tennessee native [Randall Stout](#) — a protégée of celebrated architect Frank Gehry — the Taubman's dramatic steel-and-glass façade is strongly reminiscent of Gehry's [Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain](#).

Stout designed the 81,000 square-foot Roanoke facility to “evoke the drama of the mountainous landscape and the gritty industrial-area building culture.” Perhaps. But the design spoke to me on a purely visceral level: I immediately wanted to check out the inside.

The two-story museum's varied permanent collection spans works by American masters, such as Winslow Homer and Maurice Prendergast; regional artists from the Southeast and the immediate vicinity; and folk and so-called “visionary” artists.



A contemporary gallery at the Taubman

During a recent visit, I especially enjoyed the offbeat wearable “Soundsuits” by Chicago-based artist/dancer [Nick Cave](#) (not to be confused with the broody rock star of the same name), which enjoyed a three-month run through the end of 2011.

Currently, the Taubman is showcasing “Watch It! Video Art,” a survey of pioneering video artists, such as Laurie Anderson, William Wegman and Nam June Paik, through Feb. 9; “In the Moment: Light, Vision and Memory,” a survey of 125 years of photos from The Roanoke Times newspaper, through March 4; and “Metempsychosis: The Power of Transformation,” which pairs dissimilar works to spur conversations about art and the world around us, through May 1.

Although the Taubman’s current home is only about three-years-old, the museum’s history can be traced back to the mid-’60s, when the city opened a fine arts center. That facility in 1980 morphed into the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, and three years later moved from a location outside the city to downtown’s Center in the Square.

The move to the current downtown site — and construction of the new building — was meant to raise the Taubman’s profile, but due to financial issues, the museum has scaled back its ambitions to have more of a regional focus.

Still, for any Roanoke visitor, the Taubman is not to be missed.