



In the woods of the Ozarks, an unlikely location for a world class museum, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art is exactly that. Until recently, Bentonville, Arkansas was known only as the headquarters for the Wal-Mart Empire, but the top notch museum

has put the small town on the map as a cultural destination. In the two years since its opening, Crystal Bridges has proved that it is not only worthy to be considered one of the top museums in the country, but in its brief life has seen over a million visitors.

Involving the Walton Family Foundation, Alice Walton, the youngest heiress of the Wal-Mart fortune spearheaded the project to build the museum, and amidst much controversy, brought it to fruition. Passionate about art since childhood, the avid collector recognized the absence of a major museum for hundreds of miles, and wanted to provide the region with exceptional art and easy access to it. In 2005, she began amassing the prestigious multi-million dollar collection, and today Crystal Bridges is regarded as one of the most important museums to open in a generation.

Israeli/Canadian architect Moshe Safdie designed the 217,000 square feet of galleries and meeting spaces with the dramatic curves and geometry which are his signature, the contemporary structures fitting seamlessly into the beautiful Ozark woods.



The extraordinary complex, consisting of a series of stunning wood and glass pavilions is situated around two pools, which are fed by Crystal Springs, thus the name. Safdie's brilliant design allows the visitor to enjoy the verdant landscape, while simultaneously viewing a noteworthy body of art.

Extensive nature trails peppered with sculpture wind about the one hundred twenty acres, and one trail provides an easy walk into downtown Bentonville. The property, developed while still maintaining the integrity of the Ozark fauna, is an important part of the overall experience, uniting art and nature. A full-service restaurant, *Eleven*, named for the day the museum opened, 11/11/2011, overlooks the peaceful pools of water, the impressive architecture and the luxuriant grounds.



Work by exclusively American born artists comprises the permanent collection, which spans five centuries and is displayed in the gallery in chronological order. Although the collection will continue to add pieces, the museum had a full inventory the day it opened, several pieces having generated a good deal of hype in the art world based on their

importance and the exorbitant prices at which they were acquired. The broad selection of paintings incorporates the exquisite realism of Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits* with the stark minimalism of Mark Rothko's *Orange*, and sculpture includes work by noted artists Roxy Paine and James Turrell.

Emphasis is placed on ensuring that children of all ages experience the museum, with their travel, lunches and any other incidental expenses paid by Crystal Bridges. The creative stimulus imparted on children viewing art of such quality is likely immeasurable, and for many, their trip to view the prominent collection will be a day they will always remember. Bus-loads of children arrive each day and their enthusiasm is palpable as they are ushered throughout the complex and given special instruction on specific works.



Incredibly, there is no charge for admission to the museum, the gardens or even to park one's vehicle. The positive economic impact the institution has had on the region is hard to overlook however. But from a cultural and educational level, Crystal Bridges is an amazing gift of art and beauty that is a special crayon in the coloring box of Northwest Arkansas.

