SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE ART COLLECTIONS:

TWO CASE STUDIES

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CORPORATE ART

There is little doubt that art moves us, opening us up to the world and expanding our horizons. Art inspires with its promise, soothes with its beauty, and aggravates with its ability to challenge. It can spark creative thinking—and even controversy. Above all, art is meaningful, transforming people.

Can art also transform the places where people work? Certainly the presence of other people in the workplace—as well as their rapport with each other—is essential to this transformation. But what about the objects that are displayed in a workspace? Family photographs, mementos of happy occasions, souvenirs and other pieces of personal “artwork” adorn workplaces, making those spaces more tolerable, expressive and pleasant. And beyond the art that individual employees bring to adorn the workplace, what is the effect of art in the corporate surroundings on the people who occupy the space?

Art in the workplace can have positive psychological effects on the employees in those spaces. Deborah Dague-Barr, a Professor of Fine Art at Modesto Junior College, in her article, “The Power of Art In Society” states, “Recent art theory and criticism reflects a shift in emphasis from the object to the experience of the viewer.” What is important is the interpretation of the art object, rather than the object itself. It is through this ‘experience of the viewer’ that employees are transformed.
Research has identified numerous ways that people are influenced by art in their workplaces. Art influences how employees feel. Els Andringa and Mirjam Oskamp, authors of “Functions of Art in Life,” state that art “frees employee emotions, promotes reflection, beautifies, pleases, and provides delight.” Sue Kennedy, author of the study, “Art in the Office and Increased Employee Motivation,” finds that art can “create better employee attitudes, improve morale, and enhance an employee’s commitment to the organization.” Rosalia Lelchuk Staricoff, a physician and director of research at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, reported on a three-year study of the effects of exposure of patients and hospital staff to art. She found that art enhanced patients’ and staffs’ self esteem (“Can the Arts”). Pulitzer Prize winner and Nobel laureate in literature Toni Morrison, in *The Habit of Art*, says that art “ennobles workers with universal themes” (7).

In addition to affecting peoples’ emotions, art can transform and improve employees’ cognitive functioning. Jan Betts, a senior lecturer in organizational psychology, states that art in the workplace can stimulate creative and critical thinking, empathy, and “thinking outside-the-box” (Betts 157; see also Kennedy, and Dague-Barr). Ellen Winner, professor of psychology at Boston College and author of *Invented Worlds: The Psychology of the Arts*, has found that “studies of the perception of art have revealed the extremely active, problem-solving stance that perceivers adopt when attempting to make sense of a work of art” (306).

Toby Devan Lewis, long-time curator of The Progressive Collection, says that art challenges people to look at things in new and different ways, encourages discussion, and sparks controversy (8). Rita Kottasz, Roger Bennett, Sharmila Savani, and Rehnuma Ali-Choudhury, in “The Role of Corporate Art in the Management of Corporate Identity,”
find that art stimulates employees’ imaginations and intellect (246). As a result, many companies regard art as an “integral part of a motivating and productive working environment,” the result being that “more organisations are actively seeking to maximize the benefit within the context of their broader business philosophy” (Kennedy). There is evidence to support the notion that an environment that includes works of art can influence “the bottom line.”

Finally, and perhaps because of these influences, Corinne Shane, founder of Investinart, a full-service art advisory firm, says that art enhances employees’ working environment (52; see also Chin-Tao Wu, author of *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*) by improving employees’ job performance, ability to communicate with each other, morale, and job satisfaction (Staricoff 44; Kennedy). As a result of the positive working atmosphere, Roger S. Ulrich, a researcher on the effects of healthcare facilities on medical outcomes, has linked the display of art in the workplace with staff retention (24; see also Staricoff “Arts in Health” 20; Staricoff “Can the Arts”). In a similar vein, Staricoff (“Arts in Health”) found that art in the workplace influences successful employee recruitment (20).

Employers have long invested in important works of art of all types—paintings, prints, photographs, sculptures and works in other media. Editor of *The GoodLetter* e-zine, Turner Wood notes that, “Increasingly, such art has been sought for the fundamental purpose of engaging employees and changing the way corporate spaces look and feel.” When there is art in the workplace, “Employees notice the artwork. They gather around it. They talk about it when pieces rotate or change.” Suffice it to say that art can have a deep and lasting effect on workers. As Peter B. Lewis, long-time Progressive CEO and
patron of the arts says, “Art inspires. Inspiration begets invention. Invention creates change, and change ignites progress … This art is not mere food for thought. This is fuel for fire” (i).

In an attempt to bring some beauty into the lives of employees, as well as provide them with other benefits, employers have sometimes created art collections, and displayed them in corporate offices and galleries. Such collections, called “corporate art,” have been around since the early days of the twentieth century. The term “corporate art” refers to art displayed in a business environment.

Financial services institutions (e.g., banks, investment firms and insurance companies) were among the first to initiate art collection programs, and they remain a major force in the field of corporate art (Kottasz et al. 235). Since the early twentieth century, other types of businesses have joined the ranks of collectors: hotels, real estate developers, railroad networks, healthcare facilities, manufacturers, and foundations.

Art in the workplace is part of a larger trend toward humanizing the working environment that reached its zenith in the 1970s and 1980s with the Human Relations movement. By the mid-1990s, about half of the Fortune 500 companies and around 2000 other major enterprises in Europe and North America were collecting art (Kottasz et al. 235; Shane). More recently Iain Robertson and Derrick Chong, authors of The Art Business, have noted that despite the economic slowdown, “the art market has grown spectacularly in both volume and value in the past few years” (xii). As a result, editor of The Corporate Art Brief Shirley Reiff Howarth, “The World of Corporate Art Collecting” finds that “corporate art collecting is now an established segment of the art world, with its
own corps of professionals and specialists, its own philosophies and standards of ethics, and its own professional organizations.”

As an illustration of how entrenched corporate art collecting currently is, there are several million works of art on display in corporations around the world today—almost as many as are displayed in all municipal and private art museums (Howarth). In addition, the value of all the artworks displayed in corporate offices is several billion dollars, and corporations spend millions every year purchasing art. In fact “the most important patrons of the arts during the past fifty years have been … not governments, or private collectors, or religions, or even museums … but corporations!” (International Directory of Corporate Art Collections).

Corporate art consultant Susan Abbot notes that “A corporate art program is there for a purpose, and the purpose is always business. There would be no art on the walls if the collection did not do something for the company, either by projecting a particular image, or by improving relations between the company and the community, or by refreshing and stimulating the company’s employees” (33).

This study will examine the corporate art collections and programs of two insurance companies: The Progressive Casualty Insurance Corporation of Cleveland, Ohio, and Safeco Insurance Company of America of Seattle, Washington. These two art collections were chosen for analysis because the corporations are similar. Both occupy the same business sector. Both collections were started at about the same time, and both have developed corporate art programs designed to encourage art appreciation among their target audiences.
In addition, there are some potentially important differences between the two collections. For instance, the differences include their relative sizes, how the collections and programs have developed, and the underlying “reason” the collections have been assembled. In addition, Progressive is an independent corporation, while Safeco was purchased by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, of Boston, Massachusetts in 2008.

The Progressive collection was chosen due to the ease of access by this researcher. The second is the collection amassed by Safeco Insurance Company of America, of Seattle, Washington. The Safeco collection was chosen for study because of similarities between the two companies and the two collections. It was believed that analyzing the corporate art collections of both of these companies could only serve to make that analysis more valid and worthwhile.

Analyzing what benefits these two collections have for its target audiences will demonstrate the effectiveness of each of the collections. Do they have the effects they are designed to have? What effects do these collections have on employees and consumers? What are the similarities and differences in the programming related to the two collections? Finally, the results may ultimately contribute toward describing the “best practices” for art collections and programming in the workplace.

The methodology for this research includes an analysis of recent historical and archival information on these two collections, an examination of the case study of each corporation, and finally, the rationale for the development of the collections. Interviews were conducted with the curators of each collection, H. Scott Westover of Progressive, and Jacqueline Kosak of Safeco. In addition, interviews were conducted with Susan Abbot, a corporate art consultant, Kristin Rogers, education and communication manager
at Progressive, and Jim McDonald, the past curator of the Safeco collection. Finally, the benefits of the collections will be examined in the course of drawing conclusions on the effectiveness of the collections and their programming.
CHAPTER II
BACKGROUND

This chapter examines two background factors. The first describes the history of corporate art in America. This section provides a context to aid in understanding the two corporate art programs that are the focus of this analysis. The second factor concerns why corporations buy art. The point being made in this section is that the reasons are the criteria used to evaluate the two collections and programs.

Overview of Corporate Art in America

Corporate art collecting probably began in earnest in the late fifteenth century during the Italian Renaissance, when the Medici and other Florentine merchant bankers patronized contemporary artists and architects of the new humanism. Laurie Adams, author of Italian Renaissance Art, suggests the Italian Renaissance marks the advent of artists’ works and treasures being displayed for all to see and enjoy. No longer were objects of value or significance housed in vaults or in private homes. Instead, art works were given back to the people so they could appreciate the beauty, wealth, and achievement of the region in which the patrons lived (4).

Subsequently, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries both the Church and monarchies in the most prominent countries in Europe sponsored painters, writers, architects and sculptors. These new patrons projected their ideals onto the upper
echelons of society, expanding on the concept of sponsorship initiated by the Medici in the early years of the Italian Renaissance.

Industrialization came to Europe in the nineteenth century, providing the captains of industry with the time and capital they needed to patronize the arts. These captains purchased and displayed their art for the middle classes. Marjory Jacobson, an independent curator and business consultant on art collecting and programming, describes how European industrialization ultimately spawned an interest in the visual arts in the U.S.

Along with the advent of modern capitalism, which came of age with the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century, business began to court the visual arts again. When the concept of industrialization took hold in America, the scene of unsurpassed capitalist expansion shifted across the sea from Europe to the United States, where land, resources, and opportunity for unlimited wealth were available on an unprecedented scale (10).

Corporate collecting began in nineteenth century United States as a movement to preserve the records, memorabilia, and products of a company. While not perceived as an attempt to create a corporate art collection, materials were collected for company archives. According to Victor J. Danilov, founder and director of the Museum Management Program at the University of Colorado, the concept of a corporate museum in which company artifacts were put on display for the public emerged. It is believed that the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad is the first company to assemble a collection for public display. The B&O Railroad started collecting locomotives and railway cars in 1890 for its exhibit at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Danilov 6).

The first American museum-like facility was opened by the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company, of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1892; and by the first decade of the twentieth century a
number of corporate museums could be identified. These included the “Where We Began” House at the H.J. Heinz Company in Pittsburgh in 1904; a collection of historic artifacts on banking at the Philadelphia National Bank in 1905; exhibit halls dealing with the development of new medicines and the importance of medical research at Burroughs Wellcome & Company USA in New York in 1907; and a museum of horse-drawn vehicles and early automobiles at Studebaker Brothers Corporation in South Bend, Indiana in 1908 (Danilov 6).

At the same time corporate museums and collections began to appear in other countries. The first company museum in Great Britain was the Wedgewood Museum, founded in 1906 by Josiah Wedgewood & Sons, a producer of ceramics and china. In Germany, the Daimler Motor Company in Stuttgart began collecting and displaying automobiles and motor equipment in 1911 (Danilov 7).

Even more corporate museums were created in the 1920s. Among these collections were the children’s penny banks manufactured by the Seaman’s Bank for Saving in New York City in 1928; rock drilling machines at the Ingersoll-Rand Company in Phillipsburg, New Jersey; and photographic equipment by the Eastman Dry Plate Company in Rochester, New York. The Ingersoll-Rand and the Eastman collections eventually became corporate museums in the 1940s.

Numerous types of company museums and exhibits have been formed in the decades since the mid-1920s. Danilov lists ten distinct types of museums: historical museums, collection-based museums, contemporary museums, product-oriented museums, science centers, unrelated museums, mobile museums and exhibits, special long-term exhibit, the corporate housing of independent galleries or collections, and art
museums and galleries (11). In 1943 Laurence Vail Coleman, then-president of the American Association of Museums, listed eighty-three corporate museums, collections, and trade exhibits in his book, Company Museums. Only seventeen of these were still in operation in 1992 (Danilov 9).

The corporate art movement experienced a lull in the 1940s, especially during World War II, and it was not until the 1950s that art facilities began to appear again. Much of the corporate museum/gallery movement in the 1950s and 1960s took place in Japan.

With the resurgence of corporate museums, galleries and sculpture gardens after World War II, the 1970s and 1980s marked the heyday for launching new corporate art facilities. More than half of the exhibit halls, corporate museums, company art galleries, sculpture gardens and visitor information centers were opened then (Abbott interview).

By the 1970s the United States had taken the lead in corporate collecting (Danilov 9; Jacobson 13). Art became synonymous with success, and corporate art was synonymous with a successful business (Abbott interview). Some of the distinctive companies involved in collecting were Ciba-Geigy chemicals, the Prudential, and the American Republic Insurance companies, Owens-Corning Fiberglass, Atlantic Richfield Corporation, the Security National Bank, Bank America, The First National Bank of Chicago, the Campbell Soup Company, Best Products and Steuben Glass (Jacobson 13).

The Safeco Insurance Company began displaying its collection of Northwest art in its corporate headquarters in Seattle in 1973 (“Art Collection”), while The Progressive Corporation, another insurance company, began displaying its collection in corporate offices in 1974 (“Progressive Art Collection”). Other American art facilities established


This decade also marked the collaboration between museums and corporations. Museums began to loan exhibitions to be housed in corporate facilities. The Whitney Museum operated branches at four sites in the New York City area: the Champion International Corporation in 1981, the Philip Morris Companies Inc. in 1983, the Equitable Life Assurance Society in 1986, and Park Tower Realty and IBM’s Federal Reserve Plaza in 1988. The High Museum of Art also opened a branch in the Georgia-Pacific Corporation’s headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia in 1986 (Danilov 22).

The 1990-1991 ARTNews International Directory of Corporate Art Collections lists 833 American and 337 foreign companies with corporate art collections (Danilov 35). Most of these collections adorn the walls of corporate offices. Few of the collections, however, are displayed in public access corporate art galleries and museums.

One of the surprises that became apparent during the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s was the unexpected resilience and stability in the corporate art world
(Jacobson 14; Howarth “Corporate Art Collecting”). Although during the economic
downswing of the 1980s, a number of large collections were dispersed, sold, or
redistributed to other facilities due to companies going out of business, collections being
combined, or companies dropping their art collections as a cost-saving measure. The
recession of the 1980s took its toll on corporate collections. Nevertheless, the actual
number of companies with collections grew as more new ones replaced the old ones that
had left the field (Danilov 39).

In the leaner corporate structures of the late-1990s and early-2000s, art, like
everything else in the corporate environment, had to be accountable. Art had to be able
to “pay for itself” by demonstrating it contributed to the company “bottom line”
(Robertson and Chong 11). While an art collection could not show a profit in the usual
sense of directly increasing corporate revenues, business executives began to realize that
art could contribute to the ‘bottom line’ through other means—by making employees
happier and more creative, by making communities stronger supporters of the company,
or by making customers more appreciative of company efforts.

Writing in 1993 in *Art for Work: The New Renaissance in Corporate Collecting*,
Marjory Jacobson said, “I expect the 1990’s [sic] will be a period in which goals and
priorities are reevaluated and a revolutionary model for the partnership of art and
business is sought” (9). She continued her prediction: “In my view, the future of these
two heretofore antithetical forces lies in the role they both play in the international
cultural landscape of generations to come” (9). This “revolutionary model for the
partnership of art and business” Jacobson speaks of concerns using corporate public
spaces for exhibitions and temporary installations, and integrating the arts into the design
of new and renovated spaces. Furthermore, in the late 1990s there was a push to incorporate site-specific works, i.e., permanent installations housed at corporate facilities, by architects taking into account the artist’s perspective and vision for the space to house their work. Executives must hold both art and business accountable for transmitting culture.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century corporate art is perceived as important in the businesses that have a program. Weathering the recession of the 1980s and 1990s, it appears that corporate art facilities and programs have, at least maintained their stature in the business world. Business leaders want the art collection to be a symbol of the company’s unique focus and niche.

Why Companies Purchase Art

In many cases, the art that formed the basis of the corporate collection was originally in the collection of the company’s founder or chief executive officers, who usually had a “passion about art on a personal level” (Kottasz et al. 236). These private collections were donated by the founder or CEO of the company, becoming the seeds for the corporate collection.

An understanding of why companies buy art is important because only by understanding the motives behind art purchases can the value of the collection to the corporation be evaluated. Susan Abbott, in her book Corporate Art Consulting, lists six reasons why companies buy art. While the terminology differs, a similar set of motives is identified by Kottasz et al. These reasons are the benefits that executive officers hope to achieve as a result of their art purchases.
First, a corporation buys art to fill blank walls. A company moves into a new office, or renovates an existing facility, and something is needed to cover blank wall space. This is called the “Art as wall décor” approach, and is reflected in the statement, “We’ve got some empty walls and we want some pictures for them” (Abbott 36). Not just any quality of art will do to fill the blank walls, however. The art must be aesthetically appealing, and make the viewer think. Art should be more than merely “pretty,” an idea expressed by Canadian painter Christian Cardell Corbet: “When one buys some of my artwork I hope it is because they wish to learn from it and not because they think it will match their drapes” (Ernst).

While art can be decorative, it is more than mere decoration. Beyond Corbet’s comment, displayed artwork constitutes a message from those occupying the space to customers, clients and visitors. One such message might be that beauty is important to the company (Kottasch et al. 244). In this way, art improves the quality and beauty of the working environment (Kottasch et al. 244). For the employee, this is probably the most important reason why the company buys art.

A second reason a company buys art is to improve the work environment (Abbott, 36; Kottasch et al. 244). This may mean wanting employee and corporate spaces to be attractive, or it could mean wanting to create a stimulating and pleasant environment where employees enjoy working. This is, “Artwork as stepchild to décor,” as is reflected in the statement, “We want an attractive, comfortable office, and art is a part of the overall décor” (Abbott 36).

In fact, art is more than wall décor—it is wall décor that transforms the environment. The presence of art in the workplace benefits the employee as well as the
client by breaking up plain walls, and relieving the potential visual boredom of the employee (Kennedy). Studies by Mike Brill, founder of BOSTI Associates, an architectural firm, have shown that the design of an office space, including artwork, influences job productivity, job performance, and job satisfaction (4).

Third, there is “Art as image,” which is reflected in the statement, “Through our décor and art program we want to communicate a successful image to our customers” (Abbott 36). According to David A. Whetten, corporate identity researcher at Brigham Young University, image is the “who we are” component of a corporation’s identity (219). According to Kottasz et al., a corporation’s image—how it wants to be seen and considered—is presented to the outside world. “The art hanging on the company walls or in its gallery is a message delivered to all who see or hear of it … a message that concerns how the company wishes to be perceived” (238). The purchase and display of art, then, can be an important element in creating the kind of corporate image that is functional for—and crucial to—the corporation’s survival.

The specific messages a corporation wants to deliver concerning its identity includes symbolizing and communicating its core values, presenting a positive and useful image to its customers and clients, and creating the impression that the company is a cultured organization.

A fourth reason a company buys art is to support the local community by its art, as well as to support the local art community. “Art as community” says that “We want to support our local art community by buying regional art” (Abbott 36). Companies are often concerned with being a good corporate citizen. They view their art collections as a way to support the local fine arts community.
Hans Hoeken and Lenneke Ruikes, two researchers exploring the possibility of aligning works of art with an organization’s identity, find that philanthropic social responsibility can take several forms. First, the collection enriches the working environment, making the community the kind of place where employees want to work and live. Second, a corporation can recognize and support local artists who might not otherwise have a forum for displaying their works. Third, exhibitions or lending pieces to local museums, public libraries, and institutions for display allows the community to enjoy these works of art. Finally, the corporation is acting as a patron of the arts (234).

Companies are often concerned with being ‘good corporate citizens’ of their communities. Putting money—and in this case, art—into the community, while improving that community and creating goodwill, is in the best interest of the company. Exhibitions, sponsorships, education, and special tours for local residents not only give the impression that the company contributes to the community, they also make that community the kind of place where employees and non-employees want to make their homes. Providing support for local artists through the purchase and display of their artworks is another way that a company contributes to the community. Thus, an organization can implement its ‘good corporate citizen’ image through acting in socially responsible ways (Kottasz et al. 245).

“Art as corporate theme” is a fifth reason why a company buys art. This concept is expressed in the statement, “Our company is in the paper business, and one way we can personalize offices is through our collection of outstanding works on paper” (Abbott 36). Thus, Consolidated Freightways, a trucking company, developed a collection of roadway
landscapes; Wedgwood China has a ceramics and china museum; and Corning had its Museum of Glass, a world-famous collection of 25,000 glass objects.

In the business environment, where often it is difficult to develop a public perception of why one service or product is better than any other, a corporation must find a way to stand apart from its competitors. An art collection can be a powerful marketing tool that attracts clients and customers who wish to “buy into” that identity. Thus, corporations may decide to purchase and display art that reflects its theme, its identity (Abbott 36).

Robert Zinkhon, principal of Zinkhon Communications, finds that, “Art collections offer important clues about a company, its taste, its financial stature, its relationship to the community (especially for site art) and its appreciation of the links among business, design, and the fine arts” (Abbott 35). More than merely ‘a clue,’ however, corporate art can help identify the unique characteristics that set a corporation apart from its competitors, giving it an advantage in its business sector.

Sixth, there is “art as value,” which says, “Our company values creativity and innovation—no better way to express them to our employees and public than through our art program” (Abbott 36). The creativity displayed in art in the workplace sparks problem-solving, dialogue, and “thinking outside the box.”

In the case of “art as value,” there is a unique message delivered by the art—that the company values and is committed to the creativity and innovation that results from art being in the workspace. As viewers of the art, employees are the beneficiaries of innovation and the broadening of their perspectives (Hoeken and Ruikes 234). For example, financial services provider Deutsche Bank bases its corporate identity on the
values of “creativity, modernity, dynamism and innovativeness,” and uses its art collection to “stimulate the creative imaginations of the firm’s employees … and to generate images of the bank’s creativity, energy and modernity in the minds of its clientele” (Kottasz et al. 240). Thus, art challenges, provokes and inspires, and the provocation, and the inspiration helps the employee to do his or her best possible work.

There is a possible seventh reason that a company buys art, and that is as an investment (Abbott 37; Peterson 2). Head of Research for Sotheby’s and a fine art portfolio manager Jeremy Eckstein suggests that while art can be a good investment, it is only a moneymaker for large art dealers or auction houses (72). Viewing art as a commodity suggests that people can invest in art just as they invest in other commodities. Accordingly, art is purchased as an investment for the future, speculating that it will increase in value. To be sure, the United States Internal Revenue Service views art as investment, and as a result, does not allow a company to claim art as a business expense that can be depreciated (Eckstein 74). Purchasing art as an investment is a high-risk activity, best left to art dealers and auction houses. Other types of businesses stand a better chance of higher financial gain by investing in things other than art. While the value of art should not be ignored when making decisions about wealth management and asset allocation, this is not the same thing as treating art as an investment (Eckstein 71).

Robert Anderson, author of “Painting as an Investment,” finds there is little evidence to suggest that corporations purchase artwork primarily for financial reasons (152), a view with which Australian journalist Rod Myer (“Moving out of the Frame”), and Canadian journalist Paula Arab (B08) agree. Indeed, “Wu (2003) reported that not one of seventy-two companies she surveyed in North America stated that tax concessions
and/or monetary gain were important factors in decisions to initiate art collections” (Kottasz et al. 236). In a survey conducted by Kottasz and her associates on reasons why corporations create art collections, “provides good financial returns” was ranked tenth (of twelve) and “attracts tax relief” was ranked twelfth (236).

These seven reasons why an organization might buy art can be used as a basis to assess the worth of a corporate art collection. The degree to which a corporate collection beautifies and improves the surroundings, enhances the corporate image, supports the local art community, portrays a company theme, and provides for a financial gain to the organization, is the degree to which that collection is valuable to the organization, its employees, and the community.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHOD

The case study method was used to explore the issue of what characteristics influence the success of a corporate art collection. Two companies that have large and important art collections were examined: the Progressive Corporation, and the Safeco Corporation.

The case study utilized both archival and interview research. Five interviews have been conducted. The first two were with the curators of the collections: Jacqueline Kosak at Safeco, and H. Scott Westover at Progressive. These interviews had two purposes: to fill in the gaps in information retrieved through the archival research; and to supplement that research with information that is not contained in the documents. The following is a list of question areas for the curators:

- What is the curator’s training and experience in art? How long has the curator been in his/her current position?
- What are the job responsibilities of a curator at Progressive/Safeco?
- What are the current holdings of the collections? How many pieces are in it? Have they changed over the years? What are the specializations? Are there any overarching themes to the collection?
• How do pieces get selected for the collection? Who makes the selection? Are there any important criteria the person/committee uses when selecting the pieces?

• Has the current economic crisis in the country affected the collection or collecting? If so, how has it influenced it?

• Where does the corporate art department fit into the hierarchy of the business? Where is the department, in terms of the organizational chart? Whom do you report to?

• What do employees feel about the art collection? Do you have any data from employee opinion surveys or interviews on the issue of the collection? How is the average employee involved in the art collection or program?

• Does your company have any educational programs or outreach to the community? Does it involve the community in any way?

• How would you measure the success of your art collection and/or program?

The researcher also interviewed Kristin Rogers, Art Education and Communications Manager at Progressive, and past curator of the Safeco collection, Jim McDonald.

A final in-depth interview was conducted with Susan Abbott, principal of Abbott and Company, Inc. She is a lecturer on corporate art consulting and fine art public relations in the U.S., U.K., and Japan. She is the author of “Corporate Art Collecting,” and has been in the field of corporate art for the last forty years. The following questions were asked in her interview:
• Has corporate art collecting changed over the years? If so, how?

• What is the effect of the current economic downturn in corporate collecting?

• Where should it fit in the corporation’s hierarchy? What department? Who should the curator report to?

• What criteria do you use to judge the success of a corporate art collection? Are there any characteristics of a “good” vs. a “bad” collection? Are there specific standards that have been used to judge their success?

The researcher will analyze the information from these interviews, synthesizing it with the archival data in order to compare and contrast the two corporate art collections and programs. This information will then be used to assess whether the collections and programs are successful.

A “good” corporate art collection has the following characteristics: it enriches the work environment; enhances the community outside of the corporation; and projects the corporation’s identity to employees and the community.

A corporate art collection enriches the work environment by beautifying the work space, making it a pleasant, stimulating and aesthetically pleasing place to work (Abbott; Shane; Wu; Betts). It also can improve employee morale (“New Research Shows”; Kennedy), making them feel valued and creating a more positive attitude and greater commitment toward the corporation (Kennedy; Vogel). Finally, enhancing the environment can stimulate inventive thought, motivation, promote intellectual stimulation, problem solving and “thinking outside of the box” (Kottasz et al. 235; Hoeken and Ruikes 233). And as a result, the corporation can attract skilled employees, and employee productivity improves (“New Research Shows”; Kennedy).
In addition to enhancing the work environment, a corporate art collection enriches the community outside of its walls. Corporate image consultants Paul Argenti and Janis Forman indicate that an art collection can improve a firm’s image in the community by attracting more customers and other stakeholders (17; Argenti 79). The artist community is supported, allowing young artists the opportunity to sell their work, and giving emerging artists the opportunity to increase their visibility (Kottasz et al. 236.) Supporting the local art community also has the benefit of enhancing the social environment, as described above. Public Relations practitioners Dan Lattimore, Otis Baskin, Suzette Heimam, and Elizabeth Toth note that all corporations have a responsibility to serve in the public interest (221), making the host community a more viable, stimulating and beautiful place to live and work.

Finally, a corporate art collection effectively projects a corporation’s identity (Kottasz et al. 235). Corporate identity researchers Geoff Bick, Marciene Jacobson, and Russell Abratt suggest that the term “corporate identity” is commonly used to define a company’s presentation of its core values, philosophy and/or strategies to the outside world (838; also Kottasz et al. 237;). Corporate image authors Klaus Birkigt and Marinus Stadler find that these core values, philosophy and strategies are critical to the corporation’s mission (also Hoeken and Ruikes 237) and to the collection’s philosophy. Managing that identity so that it is functional for the corporation is an important challenge. Core critical values include the support of beauty, refinement, civility and sophistication, and the corporation’s emphasis on the collection’s primary beneficiaries: the corporation’s employees, or the community outside of the corporation.
CHAPTER IV

THE CASES

The Progressive Corporation’s collection was chosen for analysis because of the ease of access by the researcher, and its location in Northeast Ohio. Safeco’s collection was selected because it is in the same business sector as Progressive (i.e., insurance), and was started in the same time frame—Progressive in 1974, and Safeco in 1973. Both companies’ art programs began as a way of beautifying corporate spaces. Both companies have curators to oversee the collection. Both companies commission works from emerging local artists.

Finally, both companies own the naming rights to a major league professional baseball park. Safeco has the rights to Safeco Field, home of the Seattle Mariners. Progressive owns the rights to Progressive Field (formerly Jacobs Field), home of the Cleveland Indians. The significance of the insurance companies owning the naming rights to two baseball parks is that the parks are a form of advertising, and a major branding mechanism that can create a positive community image for both corporations.

The Progressive Corporation

The Progressive Corporation will be discussed first in this section, followed by a description of its corporate art collection.
The Company

The Progressive Corporation is headquartered in Mayfield Village, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. The Progressive Casualty Corporation, founded by Jack Green and Joe Lewis in 1937, was originally called The Progressive Mutual Insurance Company (“Progressive Overview: History”). Currently it has about 28,000 employees in more than 450 offices throughout the nation, carrying lines of auto, boat, recreational vehicle, motorcycle and commercial auto insurance, underwriting policies sold online or over the telephone by more than 30,000 independent insurance agents and brokers (“Progressive: Our Businesses”).

Progressive is publicly owned, and its stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Currently, it is ranked 209th on the Fortune 500 list (“Progressive Corporation”). It is the third-largest auto insurer in the U.S., with over 11 million policies in force (“Progressive Reports January Results”).

The Art Collection

The Progressive Collection was initiated in 1974 with a set of thirty prints contributed from the personal collection of Peter B. Lewis, Progressive’s president and chief executive officer (“Progressive Art Collection”). The collection was inspired by David Rockefeller’s Chase Bank Art Collection; however Lewis had a vision for his own version of a corporate art collection. He did so by hanging modestly-priced contemporary art created by regional artists on the walls for the employees (P.B. Lewis 12).
Peter B. Lewis’ approach in the collection was to challenge the employees who would view it while making the space an interesting place in which to work. He wanted to communicate the company’s philosophy of respect for creativity, and to support the careers of young artists. Lewis requested $50,000 from the Board of Directors as seed money for the collection (T.D. Lewis 8).

The Board of Directors asked Lewis about his knowledge of art, which he admitted was slight. Lewis assured them he would seek a mentor, Arthur Feldman, who was experienced in prints and contemporary art. Feldman was considered a major force in Cleveland’s arts community (T.D. Lewis 8). With that assurance Lewis was granted $25,000 instead of $50,000 from the Board of Directors.

Today, Peter B. Lewis is a major art patron. Among the many things he has done for the art world include creating and supporting the Cleveland Center for the Contemporary Art, donating $50 million to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and donating $1 million to Princeton University for a contemporary gallery at the Princeton Art Museum (“Faces of Philanthropy”).

Peter B. Lewis was the first curator of the Progressive collection, retiring from that position in 1985 to devote more time to his position as the company’s chief executive officer. His wife, Toby Devan Lewis, then became curator.

Toby D. Lewis was well prepared to take over the position as curator because of her commitment and passion for art. She began her formal art education in 1973, taking courses in art history from Case Western Reserve University. She took numerous trips to New York with mentor Arthur Feldman, providing her the opportunity to meet artists,
dealers, curators and art administrators. She furthered her education by reading extensively on the subjects of art and aesthetics.

As she dedicated herself to learning as much as she could about art, she became increasingly involved in the art community in Cleveland. Her involvement in the Cleveland art scene gave her the opportunity to develop a second mentor, Marjorie Talalay, Director of the New Gallery (later to become the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art.) Through her associations with Feldman and Talalay, Toby D. Lewis gained expertise and the confidence necessary to take on the position and responsibilities of curator of a growing collection (T.D. Lewis 10). Continuing the collection policies of her husband, Lewis did not have a theme for the collection; instead, she acquired what she felt were the best works being created at that particular time.

Toby D. Lewis created a budget and, “adhered to a price range of $100 to $10,000 (for objects, other than site-specific pieces)” (T.D. Lewis 10). She had sole responsibility for choosing works, and says, “I had no red tape, no committee approval. I simply bought what I felt would work well in a corporate setting” (T.D. Lewis 10).

Dan Cameron, director of visual arts at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans and former senior curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, states that “the first major turning point in the Progressive Art Collection … came about in 1986” when Toby D. Lewis acquired some of the collection’s first “cutting-edge” pieces, for example, significant paintings by Sherrie Levine, Ed Paschke, Tim Rollins, and K.O.S. (16).

In 1985 Toby D. Lewis oversaw the creation of the Corporate Art Department. The department reports to the Compensation and Benefits office in Human Resources.
The department reports to Human Resources because the collection is perceived as having the corporate function of encouraging staff engagement and promoting a stimulating atmosphere at work. H. Scott Westover, who succeeded Toby D. Lewis as curator of the collection, emphasizes that “art is here for the employees, and one of the obligations of this department [Human Resources], in addition to payroll and benefits, is employees’ morale. It’s to enhance, challenge, and beautify the environment they are in” (Westover interview).

The 1990s also marked a change toward a policy of developing diversity in the collection, taking a step farther toward making the collection more inclusive. Progressive started acquiring works from international artists in addition to the regional and national artists who were collected during the 1970s. It was a risky for Progressive to start acquiring international works because many artists whose work were acquired had not yet developed reputations in the U.S. But the move paid off in the sense that having art works in the Progressive collection helped international artists achieve prominence in the U.S. (Cameron 17). Some works in the collection of particular note by international artists include a Francis Alÿs painting (1997) showing the torso of a man with another man’s foot hovering above his temple, an eighteen-foot-long Takashi Murakami painting (1996), and an early Thomas Scheibitz canvas (1997) (Cameron 17).

In 1995 Progressive built new facilities at its Mayfield Heights location, the East and West Buildings, with the objective of housing commissioned site-specific works (T.D. Lewis 8). Peter Lewis decided to build instead of leasing so he could commission site-specific works of art to fill atria, staircases, and uninterrupted corridors linking the two buildings. Peter Lewis incorporated designated areas for the display of art into the
overall architectural design of the facility, creating space to suit exhibition requirements. Ultimately the buildings captured the essence of a museum experience. They are more than just buildings that hold art; they allow the works to be viewed in a congenial setting and interpreted as the artist originally intended.

The first site-specific work commissioned for the new building was *Cleveland Clouds, 1994*, by Vik Muniz. The work was installed in 1994 in the monumental atrium of the East Building. The influences on the artist Muniz harkens back to Marcel Duchamp, known for elevating everyday objects into the realms of iconography. This installation is a group of cloud-like formations of fiberglass suspended from the ceiling. The work creates a changing pattern as people move through the space, and makes an interesting connection between the inside and outside, perhaps referencing Cleveland’s notoriously unpredictable weather and cloudy skies. The work also suggests that though clouds can take on many shapes and forms that represent different objects seen in everyday life, very few objects take the appearance of clouds. Muniz’s work may also reference the fact that the insurance business is in a constant state of flux.

The goal of the collection, according to Toby D. Lewis is “to surprise, to please and even provoke employees.” She adds, “What I don’t want is the art that has the wallpaper effect” (Peterson 5). According to Progressive’s “About the Collection” Web pages, the purpose of the collection, in concert with Progressive’s Core Values, is to present:

excellence in artistic achievement while providing a stimulating work environment that encourages open-mindedness to what is unfamiliar and different. Wholly committed to creativity and diversity in our corporate community, the Corporate Art Department uses the Progressive Art Collection as a tool to spark rich dialogue about the ideas and concerns of our time, ultimately inspiring our
people to risk, learn, and grow. Sometimes bold and beautiful, sometimes subtle and profound, and always reflecting Progressive’s culture of change, art at Progressive changes you whether you know it or not” (“Progressive Art Collection”).

The Core Values, as listed on the Web site, are: Integrity, the Golden Rule, Objectives, Excellence, and Profit. Of special significance for the art collection and this research is Integrity; Progressive cultivates a corporate culture that welcomes disagreement. The Core Value of the Golden Rule is that Progressive will respect all people, valuing the differences among them, and deal with them as they want to be dealt with. The third Core Value is Objectives. Progressive desires to communicate its objectives, and evaluate its performance against those objectives. The final Core Value is Excellence. Progressive will attempt to acquire valuable and quality pieces of artwork.

An employee does not necessarily have to like the art, but he or she can appreciate its message or its ability to spark controversy among employees. The most prominent example is a series of Mao prints by Andy Warhol. When Mao (1972) was first displayed in 1974, there was an uproar among the Progressive employees. They misread the content of the image, interpreting it as a portrait honoring Mao, rather than as a graffiti-like representation of a dictator. There were many Vietnam veterans at Progressive, and a petition was signed by 300 of the 400 employees demanding the removal of the series. Peter Lewis complied, and removed the series from its public space. In 1987, after Warhol had died, the series was hung in the boardroom (Westover interview).

Education and Communication Manager Kristin Rogers states, “Progressive encourages employees to share their viewpoints, and it is our obligation to facilitate
discussion, and in certain circumstances, invite artists to discuss the significance of their work from their point-of-view” (Rogers interview). For example, Kerry James Marshall was brought in to discuss his large painting, *Bang* (1994). Employees were outraged at the depiction of African American children holding an American flag on the Fourth of July. The children were painted black, and African American employees were offended by the color choice and the looks of disregard on the faces of the children toward the flag. The employees thought a Caucasian artist had produced the work. When the artist appeared for a lecture to explain how the work was intended as political commentary, employees were surprised that Kerry James Marshall was an African American (T.D. Lewis 11).

The Corporate Art Department is centrally located on campus, and has an “open-door-policy.” Employees are encouraged to stop in, share their opinions, and discuss any questions they have about a work of art. In addition, the Corporate Art Department conducts workshops and loans books, journals and pamphlets. Employees are given the opportunity to choose pieces from the collection for their offices. The chosen pieces symbolize that the employee has “arrived” in the Progressive culture and that the creativity on their walls inspires and enhances problem-solving abilities.

As the collection and the company grew, the Corporate Art Department expanded as well. *CoolCleveland* editor, Tisha-Nemeth Loomis, reports that in 2004 under the direction of the new curator, H. Scott Westover, the department initiated an art education program for Progressive employees (1). Since 2004, four members have been added to the Art Collection Department staff. In addition to the curator, a new regional manager, a
registrar, a preparator, and an education/communications manager were added to the department (4).

The department operates in a fashion similar to a museum, with Westover as curator. Westover began his training as an Intern in the Corporate Art Department at Progressive as a requirement to fulfill his Master’s Degree in Art History and Museum Studies at Case Western Reserve University. After he obtained his degree, he replaced Toby D. Lewis, and readily acknowledges that everything he knows is because of the expertise she provided (Westover interview). As curator he is responsible for all administrative duties overseeing the collection in its many locations across the nation. Furthermore, Westover manages the Corporate Art Department employees.

Michael Wartgow is the Regional Manager of the Northeastern Ohio office. He oversees the spatial configurations of the art to be placed in the offices, transfers works to locations across the state, and loans works to other nonprofit organizations. The Preparator, David Russell Stempowski, reports to the regional manager and is responsible for such things as installing, deinstalling, and transporting works from one location to another. Registrar Christie Frey maintains and tracks the integrity of data associated with each work, i.e., its significance, medium, size, artist, year, location, and logistical information.

The Educational and Communication Manager, Kristin Rogers, facilitates programs that educate employees about the significance of the works. His responsibilities include touring collections (both lending and hosting), the employee art show, guest lectures, tours to nearby art institutions, brown bag art appreciation lunches, and art-making workshops (Loomis 4).
The educational program is critical to the department because it helps employees understand how to incorporate art into their everyday lives. The program informs, inspires, and challenges people to look at something from a different perspective (Westover interview).

Westover indicates that as curator of the collection he has virtually total autonomy in guiding the collection. Under his leadership acquisitions have emphasized new media, sculpture, tech-based art, video works, as well as more two-dimensional pieces (Loomis 4). Currently, the collection has about 7,000 pieces. There is no overarching theme to the pieces in the collection except to be “provocative and challenging” (Westover interview). Currently, the artists whose works are displayed may be local, national, or even internationally known. They may be young, or advanced in their careers (T.D. Lewis 8). The collection now houses prints, drawings, paintings, and sculpture (site specific, in mixed- and multi-media). In some cases, pieces are commissioned (T.D. Lewis 8).

Between 200 and 300 pieces are acquired each year (“About the Collection”). Westover acquires pieces for the collection in two ways—by visiting galleries across the country, particularly in New York and Los Angeles, and by artists contacting the Corporate Art Department directly. The Corporate Art Department does not have to adhere to a Board of Directors in the selection process, and the budget given annually, according to Westover, “Is more modest than you think; however I cannot disclose it” (Westover interview).

In sum, the goal of the collection is to provide a beautiful and engaging environment, to encourage employees to ‘think outside the box’ and to provide a stimulating and pleasant workplace. “The art is not intended to persuade or capture new
business; rather its sole intent is to fuel the creativity of its employees” (Cameron 15).
The collection has received recognition from Business Week, and Art and Antique Magazine rated it as “one of the 10 best Corporate Collections in America” (Loomis 4).

The Safeco Corporation

The Safeco Corporation will be discussed first in this section, followed by a description of the corporate art collection.

The Company

Safeco Insurance was founded by Hawthorne K. Dent in 1923 as the General Insurance Company of America (“Our History”). “The General,” as it was known, was only a property and casualty insurer at the time. General Insurance’s original headquarters were in downtown Seattle, Washington. In 1936 The General moved to the University District in Seattle. General Insurance began selling life insurance in 1957, and at about the same time began in mutual funds and commercial credit services. Its products today include auto insurance, homeowners insurance, liability insurance and title insurance (“Our History”).

In 1968, General Insurance changed its name to the Selective Auto and Fire Insurance Company, which was called SAFECO (i.e., S.A.F.E. Co.) for short. In 2000 the company changed its name from ‘SAFECO’ to “Safeco” (“Safeco”). Safeco moved into the Safeco Plaza building in 1997 (“Safeco”). These facilities were sold to the University of Washington in 2006, leading to the speculation that the company would be sold (“Safeco”; Young and Allison).

During the 1999-2001 economic downturn, these purchases put a severe financial strain on the company. New management was brought in to restructure the company. Approximately 40% of the workforce was laid off in three separate waves over the next two years, leaving Safeco with 2,700 employees throughout the United States, in seven regional offices. Commercial credit operations were sold to General Electric in 2001, and the life insurance and investments business to a group of private investors led by Safeco board members in 2004. As a result, Safeco’s $1 billion loss in 2001 became a profit of $300 million in 2002, and a record $880 million annual net income in 2005 (“Our History”).

In their Seattle Times article entitled, “Safeco to sell tower in U District, cancel plans for new one,” Young and Allison stated Safeco was planning to build a new building across the street from its present location in the University District, but changed its plans. Instead, Safeco rented a building in downtown Seattle, and moved employees from two of its locations into that building. As a result of the move, Safeco lost 50% of its office space—meaning it has less space for displaying art (A1).

Safeco announced an agreement to be acquired by Liberty Mutual Group of Boston, Mass. Seattle Times business reporter Melissa Allison said the sale for $6.2 billion was finalized in April 2008, ending the eighty-five-year history of the company.
With the acquisition of Safeco, Liberty Mutual Group became the fifth largest insurance company in the U.S. Safeco is still located in Seattle, and has retained the naming rights for Safeco Field (“Safeco”).

The Art Collection

The Safeco collection began in 1973 with the commissioning of the Tsutakawa Fountain. The fountain is one of more than seventy-five bronze fountain sculptures George Tsutakawa created. The bronze sculpture is made up of five spiraling fountains of different heights. Tsutakawa’s work explores the relationship of man to nature. By blending an “East-meets-West” philosophy he captures the Japanese and Native American cultures in his work. The fountains take inspiration from Asian rock structures that are reminiscent of stone towers and pagodas found in Japan. It is also a reflection of the Pacific Northwest because of its totem pole quality. It was the first, and at the time, only piece in the collection (O'Donnell).

Originally pieces for the collection were selected by an employee committee, with the assistance of local art experts. In the early 1980s Safeco hired its first professional curator, Julie Anderson. According to the November 1, 1991, cover story of the Financial Times, a majority of Anderson’s first acquisitions were purchased from the Pilchuck School, a fine arts academy for producing works exclusively in glass (“Chin up”). This was done for three reasons. First, student and faculty art works are relatively inexpensive, and Safeco could acquire a variety of works at modest costs. Second, it demonstrates that Safeco believes in its community and wants to support the evolution of regional artists in their field. Third, it is a way to obtain a work from an artist at the
beginning of his or her career and be able to watch it come to fruition and reach high acclaim in the art world.

Safeco’s commitment to corporate collecting was initiated by the CEO’s “passion for art,” recalls Julie Anderson (“Chin up”). The annual budget for the collection was approximately $100,000, with about ten important works being purchased every year (Howarth 5). Additionally, smaller-scale works were purchased for approximately $500 a piece (“Chin up”).

One of the works that Anderson commissioned in 1991 was the Sperry Sculpture. It was created to mimic the shape of the Safeco Tower. The sculpture is faced with 359 ceramic tiles overlaid with Sperry’s signature crackled clay slip method. According to Kosak, “Sperry wanted to echo the smoky airiness of the Pacific Northwest” (O’Donnell).

The collection in the mid- to late-1990s emphasized paintings, prints and glass. The collection was built “on the belief that Safeco can enrich the working environment while recognizing and supporting local artists” (“Art Collection”). This statement suggests Safeco’s major thrust in the collection: to acquire good contemporary art from established and emerging local artists (i.e., from the Pacific Northwest). When Safeco acquired American States Insurance Company in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1997, its focus had shifted to include nineteenth and twentieth century works from “the heartland” (Howarth 5).

Anderson guided the collection and commissioned works until 1999, when Jim McDonald took over. McDonald received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also studied architecture in the graduate
program at the University of Washington. McDonald’s expertise spanned twenty years in
the visual arts field as an arts administrator and curator (McDonald interview). His
responsibilities as curator for the Safeco collection included acquisitions, exhibitions,
outreach, and education. In commenting on his position at Safeco, McDonald said,
“What I do probably has the smallest budget in the company but one of the largest
impacts. It sets the tone for a major part of people’s [Safeco employees] lives” (Wood).

By the turn of the century, the now nationally-acclaimed collection included some
2,500 pieces. Turner Wood author of, “The Finest Art,” states that at the time the
collection was “dynamic and ‘working,’ with displays in elevator lobbies one month, and
in cafeterias the next, making them “accessible and transformative for real people.” The
collection includes a variety of works by Northwest representational artists such as
William Cumming, Fay Chong, and contemporary artists such as Juan Alanso and
Michael Brophy. While all of the artworks can be broadly defined as representational,
the styles extend from the naturalistic modes of Victoria Adams, to near-abstractions by
Theodore Waddell and Richard Gilkey (McDonald interview). The collection had a wide
range of genres: landscapes, cityscapes, portraiture, comic art, still lifes, wildlife, and
scenes of everyday life.

The artwork is pleasant, beautiful, and can spark creativity. McDonald had said
that the collection “builds community” in the workplace (Wood). When interviewed,
McDonald further expanded on the issue: “I’m a firm believer that art in our daily lives
enables us to better understand ourselves, each other, and ultimately our community.”

The collection is displayed in public areas in Safeco’s regional offices across the
U.S., with the headquarters in Seattle having the largest number of pieces (“Art
Employees at the level of assistant vice president and above are permitted to select a piece from the collection to display in their offices. It is symbol of achievement at Safeco (McDonald interview).

McDonald held the curator position until 2004 when Safeco began selling off parts of the company. Before he left, McDonald negotiated for a replacement. Although at that time Safeco chose not to fill the position of curator, the company ultimately hired Jacqueline Kosak as a registrar. Kosak graduated from the University of California-Santa Barbara, and worked as an Exhibition and Collection Assistant at the Tacoma (Washington) Art Museum. Kosak recently was promoted to curator (McDonald interview).

In 2005 Safeco began reducing its collection by donating some pieces to other institutions and museums, selling others, de-installing some pieces that had begun to deteriorate, and loaning others on a long term basis. The collection is currently made up of about 1,900 pieces of various media: paintings, sculpture, photography, works on paper, mixed media, and ceramic and glass media works. According to Jackie Kosak, the curator, “The Corporate Art Program is among many programs that are in a state of transition from the Safeco environment to the Liberty environment. We are currently acquiring no new acquisitions and are re-evaluating the direction of the program” (interview).

The Corporate Art program reports to the Community/Public Relations Department. Its purpose is to promote community outreach while enhancing the work environment. The major beneficiary is the community of Seattle and the Northwest, as Safeco has an active outreach program for its collection. Safeco loans pieces for tours,
exhibitions, and donates pieces to other collections, area universities, charities, and museums.

Safeco has loaned pieces of art a number of times for display at the Frye Art Museum. Robert Sperry’s Safeco sculpture and George Tsutakawa’s Safeco fountain, both outside of the Safeco Plaza building, were donated (the sculpture) or put on long-term loan (the fountain) to the University of Washington. Safeco’s Anderson explains, “After the piece of art has had its opportunity at Safeco, often it’s time for it to go out into the world” (“Chin up”).

Safeco’s philosophy is that art is for everyone—not just for the privileged or critics. It is important that people are exposed to a variety of art in a multitude of media, to help them develop a taste for what they like, or to have regular access to works that speak to them. “Art in the Park” is a rather unique program in which forty-three baseball-themed works from the collection are on display in one location at Safeco Field for the enjoyment of baseball fans. Other pieces are displayed in other parts of the park as well.

The Safeco collection, as is true of the company itself, is built around the two ideals of “customer focus, and innovative thinking” (“Our History”). Safeco’s customer focus is shown through the many efforts to bring art to the community, e.g., ”Art in the Park,” the lending of art works for display in other venues, and donating works to the community. According to Michael Useem, in “Trends and Preferences in Corporate Support for the Arts,” corporations claim that their single most important criterion in contributing to the community is, “‘impact on the local community,’ and many of their donations are no doubt intended to make the local community a better place to live in by
strengthening its artistic and other cultural institutions” (xiii). Second, innovative thinking is reflected in that the works that are hung or installed in Safeco’s corporate offices help spawn creativity and a new perspective. In “Art Goes Corporate,” Linda Hagen Miller states, “Creative people are hungry for inspiration on a daily basis. Fine art is literally the embodiment of the creative force—the result or final stage of the artistic process which, in turn, can spark a new fire for ideas to be nurtured and tweaked.”
CHAPTER V

THE FINDINGS

Three of Abbott’s seven reasons for purchasing art are used as a basis for assessing the Progressive and the Safeco corporate art collections: Does the collection enhance the work environment, does it enrich the community, and does the collection demonstrate a positive identity for the corporation? Evidence as to whether the corporate art collections do each of these things serve as the basis for assessment.

Enhancing the Work Environment

Both corporations claim that their collections enhance the work environment. The degree to which Progressive’s collection influences its work environment is explored in the following section.

The Progressive Collection

The Progressive art collection was initiated by Peter Lewis to enhance the work environment for employees, and to provide them with a creative experience (“Collection History”). The collection lines the public spaces of Progressive facilities across the country—in hallways, stairwells, cafeterias, and lobbies, as well as in the offices of Progressive’s headquarters. The artwork beautifies the surroundings, making Progressive’s offices exciting and stimulating places to work.
The large variety and volume of artwork in the collection provides opportunities to create theme-based exhibitions that travel to Progressive offices throughout the country. Headquarters employees visit Progressive’s art gallery, and exhibitions are viewed in virtual galleries by Progressive employees nationwide on its Corporate Art Department’s Intranet site.

The collection is more than just a pleasant diversion from the day-to-day grind of the Progressive workday, however. The collection “is intended to challenge and inspire people's creativity and originality while serving as a visual reminder of the importance and necessity of risk-taking and innovation at Progressive” (“Collection History”). Provocative, disarming and “edgy” pieces are displayed to spark employee discussion, stimulate innovative thinking, and seek new perspectives from which to solve problems (Westover interview).

Corporate art consultant Susan Abbott states that “any serious art program must have an employee education component” (38), and Progressive’s educational outreach program is broad and multi-faceted. The Corporate Art Department engages employees by hosting exhibition receptions, sometimes giving employees access to artists represented on Progressive walls and in its gallery. Visiting artist’s typically discuss their works with employees during installation.

The corporate Intranet expands Progressive’s educational outreach in ways that dramatically broadens its audience. Online galleries, exhibition archives, didactic labels, exhibition dates, regional resource links, and news alerts are a few site features that educate and communicate with Progressive employees nationwide.
The educational outreach program also involves art training as a way of promoting diversity at Progressive. The Human Resources Department at Progressive annually holds a conference on “The Art of Diversity.” During that conference, participants are challenged to develop an approach to issues related to interpreting art, as well as being sensitized to accepting and celebrating diversity.

Educational outreach is enhanced by an extensive array of resource materials, including books, periodicals, limited edition multiples, and other objects made available to Progressive employees. In many cases items can be checked out for research purposes or for sheer enjoyment. Recently “Eye on Art,” an art fan club, was created for those employees who wish to keep abreast of what’s happening in the Progressive collection, and in the public art community in general.

Corporate sponsorship of employee art is a final aspect of Progressive’s art program. The Progressive People’s Biannual [sic], formerly known as the Employee Art Show, is a company-wide juried art show for employees. Employees are encouraged to submit their own artwork, which are then judged by members of the Cleveland art community. An inaugural exhibit of the works is assembled at Progressive’s headquarters each year, and then travels to other Progressive facilities across the country (Westover interview).

Promoting acceptance of diverse opinions in art challenges employees to expand their own perspectives to seek creative business solutions. Despite the intentions of the art collection’s staff and its stated purposes, there have been no studies conducted to determine whether the collection is achieving its desired effects on employees. Moreover, there have been no surveys or questionnaires to measure employee attitudes
toward the collection. Most likely, this is due to the fact that accountability has not yet come to the world of corporate art collecting.

The Safeco Collection

The Safeco art collection began in 1973 by an employee committee working with local professional curators. The collection has been described as “a significant part of our … corporate culture” (“Art Collection”). The 1,900 works reflect the “belief that Safeco can enhance the working environment” through its corporate art collection (“Our Collection Philosophy”). In the broader context, Safeco acknowledges building its business around one practice that is “surprisingly uncommon in the insurance industry … innovative thinking” (“Our History”). One example of the Corporate Art Department’s contribution to that innovative thinking was the commissioning of a piece that became known as “The President’s Trophy.” Walter Lieberman was commissioned to do the award in the late 1980s. The work entitled Winter Trees is an eighteen-inch bowl with carved and sandblasted images of leafless trees. The trophy was awarded annually to the most successful marketing division in Safeco’s network of U.S. offices. The trophy then traveled to the office of the next year’s winner. Smaller versions of the same sculpture were given to the members of the winning sales team (McDonald interview).

When Safeco was taken over by Liberty Mutual Group of Boston, Massachusetts in 2008, the new management suspended almost all of the art programs that were designed to benefit Safeco employees. While the “art-in-the-office” program remained, no new pieces were purchased, the art in the public spaces of the Safeco headquarters was not rotated, and the President’s Trophy was no longer commissioned or awarded.
Ultimately, many works that were a part of the collection were donated, sold, or placed on long term loan to various institutions or galleries. Deinstalled works were not replaced in the collection. Apparently there are plans to continue to reduce the collection, as a current internship job description lists deinstallation as one of the main responsibilities.

It is relevant to note that Safeco’s Corporate Art Department is housed in the Public Relations unit, which is typically concerned with developing good relations between the organization and its external publics. The Public Relations unit’s focus, then, is on the external community, and not on employees.

Neither Progressive nor Safeco has conducted any employee surveys to determine the effectiveness of providing art to create a congenial and stimulating corporate environment. The difference is that while this goal is a commitment on the part of Progressive, Safeco is much more concerned about the effects of the collection on their external communities.

Enriching the Community

Both Progressive and Safeco maintain that their collections enrich their communities. Whether the collections actually accomplish this goal is explored in the next section.

*The Progressive Collection*

A corporate art collection may enrich a community through a number of means, including attracting new customers and other stakeholders; making the environment beautiful, and the kind of place where people want to live; and supporting the local art
community. Useem says corporations that claim that their single most important criterion in contributing to the community is, “impact on the local community,” Further, he believes that corporate art collections are intended to make the local community a better place to live in by strengthening its artistic and other cultural institutions” (xiii).

Outreach activities make art accessible to members of the community. Progressive has an active loan program, lending pieces to public libraries, college and university galleries, museums, and other not-for-profit venues. Its gallery is open to the public one day each month and through appointment, and customers or clients visiting a Progressive facility can view the art in the public spaces. Progressive’s campus in Mayfield Village is itself an artwork. Finally, Progressive’s Eye on Art club is open to interested community members.

Progressive owns the naming rights to Progressive Field, the baseball park of the Cleveland Indians. While probably more a marketing tool for Progressive Corporation than a focal point of local support for the arts, Progressive Field nonetheless exemplifies how the corporation supports the Cleveland community, if not the Cleveland art community.

Progressive supports the local art community. Young and emerging local artists were supported early in the collection’s history, while later acquisitions were by established artists of local, national or international fame. Progressive’s SOM Campus in Mayfield Village (as well as its Phoenix Call Center, and Wilson Mills Campus) was designed by Jack Bialosky, an architect with his roots in Cleveland (Lewis 8).

Another aspect of art as marketing is the creation of annual financial reports for the company. Annual reports are designed to be read by members of the financial
community—stockholders, investors, and potential investors. Progressive has artists design its annual reports. While the profit-and-loss figures are of primary importance a richer interpretation of the company culture is achieved when financial data is paired with works of art that adorn the pages. The artworks weave corporate themes into the report, making it pleasing to the eye, but more importantly, by providing a deeper meaning to the figures (Westover interview).

The Safeco Collection

In addition to the modest program to improve the working environment of its employees, Safeco has—or at least had—a highly developed community art program. In its Corporate Art Department, Safeco has an active program designed to build and enrich the community (Wood). From the beginning, the Tsutakawa fountain (1973) and the Sperry Safeco Tower sculpture were placed in the courtyard not only because of their size, but also because there they could be enjoyed by passers-by and community residents. When Safeco moved out of the Plaza in 2006, it sold the Safeco Plaza, including the Safeco Tower, and donated the Sperry Sculpture to the University of Washington. At the same time, Safeco put the Tsutakawa Fountain on long term loan to the University of Washington (O’Donnell).

Safeco has an active program of loaning pieces to museums, colleges and galleries in the area. The Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum has been a recipient of a number of pieces on loan for its exhibitions. Safeco also donates pieces to area institutions. For example, in 2007, twenty-six maritime oil paintings were donated to Seattle’s SOIL Art Gallery. The not-for-profit cooperative gallery owned by local artists
auctioned off the paintings, valued at about $100,000, with the proceeds going to the gallery’s operating expenses (Ramirez).

“Art in the Park” is Safeco’s program for placing art in the Seattle Mariner’s Safeco baseball park. It is a collection of forty-three paintings, prints, photographs and sculptures, all with a baseball theme. The sculptures are typically large, and are incorporated into the stadium as wall coverings, stairways and steel panels. The park’s Seafirst Gallery is also the setting for traveling exhibitions and baseball-oriented activities (Hackett).

The last outreach activity focused on marketing goals. The Safeco Classic, an LPGA event, was held in Seattle annually. A new sculpture was made for the occasion every three years. The sculpture stays at the country club hosting the event, with the tournament winners receive smaller versions of the same sculpture as a trophy. Dale Chihuly, a renowned glass sculptor, was commissioned to create the sculptures for the next three times. According to Jim McDonald, it “was incredibly prestigious for an individual to be awarded a work of this magnitude” (McDonald interview).

Safeco’s program of supporting young artists from the Pacific Northwest (and Puget Sound) is built “on the belief that Safeco can enhance the working environment while recognizing and supporting local artists” (“Our Collection Philosophy”). The statement goes on to say that “by actively collecting work from established and emerging artists, and displaying their works at Safeco offices in the community, we provide a forum these artists might otherwise not enjoy” (“Our Collection Philosophy”). Some of the major Northwest artists represented include Mark Tobey, Jacob Lawrence, Morris Graves, Gloria DeArcangelis, and Jacob Elshin. The glass sculptures of Dale Chihuly,
Walter Lieberman, students, and visiting artists from The Pilchuk School are also represented in the collection.

Following the 1997 acquisition of American States Financial Corporation, of Indianapolis, Indiana, Safeco continued its practice of supporting local artists by purchasing art from the “heartland.” Artworks were purchased from the region and distributed to American States’ offices (Howarth 5).

Projecting Corporate Identity

A company’s corporate identity is important to it as it is the incarnation of what the company stands for, its core values, its mission and philosophy. A corporation must manage that identity if it is to survive and flourish. It must present its values and philosophy to others, convincing them that they are worthy values, and that the corporation truly lives by them. Core critical values of note include the support and promotion of the universal values of beauty, civility and sophistication. Through a corporation’s activities and programs, that corporation lets those around it—customers, community members, artists and employees—know what its priorities and culture are.

The Progressive Collection

All of the programs connected to its art collection demonstrate Progressive’s commitment to its employees and to a corporate culture that celebrates creativity, tolerance, and high standards. The extensiveness and intensiveness of the collection enhancing the work environment is not matched by an equal push to improve the surrounding community. While Progressive does participate in supporting and promoting local artists by purchasing their works, it does not use its collection as a marketing tool,
designed to bring more customers to Progressive’s door. Cameron states that, “attracting the right employees and keeping them happy” is equally as important as locating customers. “The intelligence and sophistication of the work environment can be a vital factor in the crafting and communication of your image” (15). And while Progressive contributes to the community by loaning pieces in its collection to community groups, it is not as much of a priority as contributing to the welfare of employees and the company. “What constitutes the main difference between Progressive’s art collection and others is that its target audience is the company’s employees” (Cameron 15).

The strength of the workplace enhancement program is projected outward to the community, informing it that Progressive truly cares about its employees. In addition, while Progressive is not displaying any new art due to the poor economy, it is still supporting the art community by purchasing new art. As a result, Progressive’s identity as a company that cares about its employees speaks clearly to the local community. Progressive’s corporate art collection, on the other hand, does not do the job of enriching the community, or selling insurance. Perhaps creating more positive community attitudes toward The Progressive is a job better done by an advertising campaign or marketing effort … or the naming of a baseball park.

The Safeco Collection

While Safeco uses its corporate art collection to some extent to enhance the work environment there is no employee education program, exhibitions for employees, or gallery. The art on the walls is “safe” and “representational”; it is selected to be pleasant, soothing, non-controversial, and not provocative (McDonald interview).
The combination of Liberty Mutual Group’s buyout of Safeco and the current economic downturn mean that art is not being replenished or replaced when it is sold, donated, or placed on long term loan. Currently there are no plans to purchase new pieces.

While the economy has a large effect on the work environment, its effects on enriching the community are potentially great—and positive. While Safeco is not adding any new pieces to its collection (purchasing artwork would be considered insensitive when employees are being let go, and remaining employees are having to tighten their belts), it is still donating artwork to museums and galleries, and giving it to not-for-profit organizations to sell. Safeco may actually be experiencing a windfall of community praise for stepping up its art lending program.

The Safeco collection’s strength is in creating a more aesthetically pleasing atmosphere by its presence in the community. It creates a tangible feeling that people want to live and work in the community that houses the collection. The Safeco corporate identity is that it is perceived as caring about the community and its members. It wants to improve it, making it an even better place to live.

The future of Safeco’s corporate art collection, however, is unclear at present. This is due to the negative effects of the economy on the collection. The probability of management restoring the art collection to its previous status is not likely. Nor is it likely that the economy will improve significantly in the long run to the point where management will support the corporate art collection.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

The research question addressed in this manuscript concerns assessing the quality and functionality of two corporate art collections: one belonging to the Progressive Corporation, and the other to the Safeco Corporation. These two collections were chosen because of the similarities of the two corporations for which they have been amassed as well as for their unique rationales for collecting. Both corporations are insurance companies selling automobile insurance to individuals and small businesses. Both collections were established in the early 1970s—during the heyday of corporate art collecting.

Progressive has been an independent corporation since its founding in 1937. It has operated under the leadership of a relatively small number of chief executive officers. Most notable of those has been Peter B. Lewis. Most recent of them is Glen Renwick who was named to the position when Lewis became Chairman of the Board of Directors. Lewis established the Progressive collection and has maintained his commitment to it even as his interest in the visual arts has moved to an international arena. Currently the collection includes some 7,000 pieces managed by a curator and a staff of four operating as a Corporate Art Department.

The Safeco Corporation has had a different history. Founded in 1923, Safeco has purchased, and has been purchased by other corporate entities, most recently in 2008,
when Liberty Mutual Group acquired it. At its largest, the Safeco collection had 2,500 pieces; but in 2004, when the company began to split apart and be sold, the corporate commitment to its art collection diminished. Today, some 600 pieces have been sold or given away; and although there is still a curatorial position, there appears to be less and less interest in maintaining a collection.

The support of an art-enthusiastic CEO, and the guidance of a professional curator makes Progressive’s corporate art collection one of the best in the United States. This is not due to just its size, but to the skill and enthusiasm of leadership as well. The Progressive collection emphasizes enhancing the employee’s workday experience through art. There is an extensive education program for employees, including an online gallery for them to enjoy, a resource lending program, and discussions with visiting artists. Art is everywhere at Progressive—in public and private spaces, in galleries, and on the Intranet—giving employees a fulfilling art experience every day they come to work.

The corporate art collection is just one of the ways that Progressive make its employees feel they are important to the company. In addition, there are quiet rooms for relaxation and meditation, exercise facilities, continuing education, and employee tuition reimbursement. Ergonomic consultants ensure that workspaces are set up so as to create the least amount of stress on a body. The Progressive Corporation matches employee gifts to charitable organizations.

Progressive’s community outreach program is relatively small. The lending program is narrowly focused on not-for-profit galleries, museums, and institutions. The local artist support program—buying local artist’s works—is active, however. Recently,
emerging and seasoned artists from around the world have had their work added to the collection. Progressive Field can take its place next to Flo, the Progressive saleslady, as a marketing tool.

The corporate culture at Progressive is strong, with employee welfare a major concern. The culture both reflects and represents a corporate identity based in the value of the worker: a company is only as strong as its workforce. People make up Progressive, and so Progressive people should be rewarded.

The underlying philosophy that led to the development of the Safeco collection was quite different. Unlike at Progressive, the collection appears not to have been conceived as a method to reinforce any particular corporate culture. Employee involvement with the collection is limited to art-on-the-walls, and an employee must be at the rank of assistant vice president or higher to be able to select a piece from the collection in his or her office—making art a reward for achievement within the corporation. Another recognition program, The President’s Trophy, is no longer being given. Because of corporate acquisitions and sales, the current lack of exhibition space, and a policy of lending or making donations of pieces to other entities, the commitment to enhancing or even maintaining the Safeco collection has diminished. Safeco’s community outreach program, however, is alive and vital despite the reduction in the number of pieces in the collection—maybe even because of it. There is still an active lending program in the community, and pieces that no longer fit the theme of the collection—contemporary pieces by Northwest artists—are being sold or given away. It may be that the curator is trying to unify the collection.
The weeding out of the collection may prove beneficial to Safeco; long-term donations, and gifts of artwork that could be sold for profit make for an appreciative community. For example, Safeco recently made a gift of the Sperry Sculpture, one of the larger and most visible pieces in the collection, to the University of Washington. Additionally, Safeco put the Tsutakawa Fountain, the first and perhaps most valued piece in the collection, on long-term loan to the University. The arrangement includes a provision for Safeco to maintain the fountain.

One cannot judge all corporate art collections with the same yardstick. Each organization’s criteria, objectives, and mission differ. But in a highly competitive economic system, and at a time when the public is disillusioned with corporate America, it may be a good time to be looking at the possibility of the arts as a means of enhancing the corporate brand through creating employee friendly environments, a culture of creativity and diversity, and a public image of community involvement.


McDonald Jim. Telephone interview. 22 Sept. 2009.


Rogers Kristin. Personal interview. 20 July 2009.


