



Have you ever wondered if a law firm that's been around for 144 years has spirit? Is it possible, within a large organization of highly business-minded lawyers, that an art collection could be a source of tremendous pride? I got my answers at Osler, one of Canada's largest business law firms, its main office here in Toronto at First Canadian Place.

Terry Burgoyne, a Senior Partner in the Corporate Practice Group and Managing Partner of the firm, toured me around the public spaces at the Osler office. Some of the highlights of the public spaces are pieces by, Ed Burtynsky, Harold Klunder, Micah Lexier, Susanna Heller, Evan Penny, Tony Scherman, Ron Moppett, John Hartman, Louis Comtois, Roland Poulin, Jeannie Thib, and Tim Zuck. I saw just one-fifth of the Osler corporate collection, but it was clear to me that this law firm has spirit, and takes great pride in collecting art.

T.B: We moved to this building in the late 70's when the building first opened. At the time, one of our partners Stephen Smart, who was interested in art, had raised with the firm, the idea of starting a collection. He was met with an enthusiastic response - to the point where they said, "Here's a big chunk of money, go buy art". But Steve said, "I don't want all that money at once.

I'd rather have a commitment to grow a collection over a number of years". Steve retired about a year ago, and I inherited the job.

How is the collection focused?

T.B: Steve conceived the collection and developed it with some principles about how we'd make choices. We decided to focus on only Canadian art, because we are a Canadian law firm, and we

want to support our art community. We've also focused on artists in their early to mid-career. There are a couple of reasons for that: one is that it makes collecting more affordable so you can grow a collection, but it also, demographically, reflects our demographics. The average age of the lawyers here falls in the 30's. So we're not a bunch of grey-haired older men, we're a much more diverse group than that.

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We collect in all of our offices: Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary, New York and here. And each of those offices have collections that are similarly focused, however there are some differences. In Ottawa, because of the interest of Glen Bloom, one of our partners there, the collection is photo-based, or photo related. In Calgary, the collection tends to have a western focus, with a lot of western artists represented. In New York, we have Canadian artists that live and work in the U.S, for instance, Susanna Heller and Graham Gillmore. And Montreal is our newest office, and they have a survey collection, like Toronto; we have work from all across the country.

The office is just filled with artwork, how does it impact the work environment?

T.B.: One impact is that there are a significant number of people who have become interested in art and become collectors based on this exposure. I'm one of them - I have no training in art. My real introduction to

visual art was with the firm. I would say I could easily name 10 people who have become collectors as a result of working here.

The other impact is that it enlivens the work environment; it makes it a more interesting place to work. I think everyone enjoys it so we don't often re-hang, because it's a monumental task, if we do, it's about how the piece relates to the location and other work. Law is a fairly intellectual discipline and I think art provides a different form of stimulation.

Is there a framework you use to source the work for the corporate collection?

T.B.: Sometimes we'll recognize that there's a gap where there's a mid-career artist that we don't have so we'll get something - like the Micah Lexier piece we have. And we're always looking for new talent. That's probably the main criteria. We don't have a big budget; we don't have gobs of money to spend every year so we buy selectively.

I think there's an idea with corporate collecting that you only need to buy art when you have new space - that if you're not taking on new space, why do you need more art? I think we've gone beyond that and we know that the collection could become stale or dated if it's not refreshed. When we did a client centre some years ago in this office; we did have a budget for art in that space and added some major pieces there for the collection and for the enjoyment of the clients.

I understand there are tours?

T.B.: Yes occasionally we conduct small tours through the public spaces. Obviously, due to the confidential nature of the information we have here we can't take people everywhere, though we do have art everywhere. The public spaces provide a good cross-section of what's in the collection.

For more information about Osler, see www.osler.com.