Office Memo:

Why Art Matters

YOUR NAME

PROFESSOR’S NAME

CLASS

DATE

**Office Memorandum**

**Re: Company Art Work Recommendations**

Dear Mr. Smith,

Upon careful consideration of the options available to us and within our price range, and in keeping with our commitment to cultivate a warm, safe, and nurturing environment for our clients here at Smith and Jones Consulting, I have come to the conclusion that the following six impressionist and post-impressionist works will be ideal: Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral,* Renoir’s *The Two Sisters on the Terrace,* Degas’ *The Ballet Class,* van Gogh’s *Starry Night,* Toulouse-Lautrec’s *At the Moulin Rouge,* and Cézanne’s *The Card Players.*. Taken together, these paintings exemplify the humanistic ideals that Smith and Jones seeks to espouse. These works illustrate the beauty and the complexity of humanity, the splendors of the human experience of life, and the universal hopes and dreams that unite us across racial, economic, religious, and geographical divides. The pieces reveal to us what it means to be human—and members of a common human family. These pieces teach us who we are and who we want to be.

***Rouen Cathedral:*** Monet’s studies in the 1890s of the famous Rouen Cathedral have the power to touch the human soul, regardless of one’s religious affiliation. These paintings are less about faith and more about feeling. Specifically, these paintings rejoice in the wonders of being alive, of being breathing and present amid the beauties of the natural world. Monet, above all, uses the cathedral as an instrument to explore the play of light on a subject and to evaluate how that dance of light might best be captured on canvas (Sayre, 2014). In this sense, then, Monet’s painting is a celebration of that which it is all too easy to take for granted amid the bustle and worry of the modern world: the play of sunlight on one’s shoulders, the magic of light beams radiating off of brilliant marble, the breathtaking interplay of the natural and the manmade—and the wonder of being alive to experience it all. This is the kind of wonder we at Smith and Jones want to impart to our clients. We want to revitalize their passion and their interest. We want to help them become as excited about their own lives as Monet was about the glimmer of sunbeams off of Rouen Cathedral.

***The Two Sisters on a Terrace:*** Renoir’s iconic two sisters painting will be a perfect addition to our office space because it illustrates the unrivaled bond between family. The elder sister watches protectively over her young sibling’s shoulder. The two are apparently enjoying a beautiful spring or summer day, and both are themselves adorned in flowers and finery, as fresh and blooming as the idyllic pastoral backdrop, as bright as the blossoms in their basket. The impressionists are, above all, concerned with capturing a moment in time, a fleeting impression to freeze a moment before the rush of modernity sweeps it away (Sayre, 2014). Renoir’s scene captures a peaceful moment between sisters. There is something gentle and almost quaint and rustic about the scene. These are not the cityscapes that so many impressionists and postimpressionists would concern themselves with. In an increasingly tumultuous modern world, Renoir here offers a moment of serenity, a deep, calming breath in the soothing presence of a loved one. This is precisely the sense of solace and connection we want to inspire at Smith and Jones. We want to help clients discover exactly what is important in life, who and what are meaningful to them, who and what motivate them and lend color and beauty to their lives.

***The Ballet Class:*** If Renoir is to capture a moment of beautiful repose for our clients, Degas’ *The Ballet Class* is designed to celebrate the valor of desire and effort. In their study of Degas’ use of photographic studies to discover new ways to pictorially represent temporality, Nather and Bueno (2012) argue that impressionist paintings like Degas’ were able to “record what happens in the here and now, that which has just happened or is about to happen” (17). While this desire to capture a fleeting moment in time is universal to the impressionists, what is unique in a painting like this is the subject that is being captured. Here we have intensive effort; we have even the youngest among us striving for perfection, for the achievement of almost superhuman goals. There are few endeavors more rigorous or punishing than ballet. Yet when it is done well, there are few things more beautiful. This is another key message we at Smith and Jones want to convey to our clients: the awesome power of hard work and the importance of never giving in, no matter the odds, the pain, or the adversity.

***Starry Night:*** Moving on now from our collection of impressionist paintings to the postimpressionists, we begin with one of the most iconic works in the world of art: van Gogh’s *Starry Night.* Clients will likely be familiar with the story of the painting’s creation: it was based upon the artist’s view from the window of the insane asylum where he spent so much time in treatment. The postimpressionists value innovation and, in many cases, abstraction. The goal is a highly personalized and fairly idiosyncratic representation of perception. This is certainly the case in van Gogh’s masterpiece. In his analysis of van Gogh’s psychiatric illness, Blumer (2002) says of *Starry Night,* “van Gogh may have immortalized his memory of a particularly haunting and perhaps recurrent vision of apocalyptic dimension experienced during a twilight state” (522). While we at Smith and Jones certainly don’t want to infuse our clients with a sense of the apocalyptic, we do want them to recognize the reality of struggle and, indeed, often its beauty. After all, this remains one of the most stunning, moving, and beautiful paintings ever created. It may have been born out of pain, but it will live eternally with power.

***At the Moulin Rouge* and *The Card Players*:** The final two selections chosen to adorn our offices share similar concerns and therefore may be discussed together. Toulouse-Lautrec’s *At the Moulin Rouge* captures all the heady excitement of modern life. Above all, it embraces a vision of modernity in which all are welcome, a vision in which the classes commingle in their revelry. What once would have been considered perhaps seedy or taboo is now celebrated. The imagery is at once whimsical and exciting, inviting and a tad disorienting, just like the allures of modern life.

Cezanne’s *The Card Players* suggest similar themes, but here we find two chums engaged in friendly competition. This, too, seems to invoke a modern city scene; it suggests a friendly pub or dance hall akin to those populating Toulouse-Lautrec’s works. What we find above all here is the celebration of the leisured life, of the importance of friends and good times, of the value of finding joy and release from care. These paintings reveal that there is still childlike wonder and great good fun to be had, even in our chaotic modern world. We need only to look for it.

This is what we at Smith and Jones are devoted to helping our clients find: the fun, the joy, the struggle, the effort, the connection, and the wonder of being human and being alive. These six paintings, each in their own way, will remind clients of this. These paintings will help teach clients who we are and who we can help our clients to be. I hope that you will approve my selections and will find them as meaningful as I do.

References

Blumer, D. (2002). The illness of Vincent van Gogh. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 159(4),* 519-526.

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Sayer, H. M. (2014). *Humanities: Culture, Continuity, and Change* (Vol. II, 3rd ed.). USA: Pearson.