

Collecting Art Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Michael McCready** (October 3, 2024)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

We often view the practice of law through a strict lens of logic, evidence and procedure. Yet in its most effective form, law requires a more nuanced skill set of empathy, creativity and critical thinking. Collecting and appreciating art can significantly contribute to these essential skills, enriching a lawyer's personal and professional life.

While I have always loved art, I have no real talent for it. However, as a consumer, I have the opportunity to be as creative as I want with the art I buy and display. Additionally, I benefit from the therapeutic aspects of art, which enhance my observation skills, empathy, cultural awareness and creativity, ultimately making me a better lawyer.



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Recognizing good art and being an effective lawyer both require observation and attention to detail.

Appreciating art requires time. The more you look at it, the more nuanced it becomes. While it may sound cliché, viewing the piece of art as a whole allows you to see the big picture, but true appreciation begins when one focuses closely on the intricate details.

Observing the length of the brush strokes, the interplay of colors, and the combination of light and shadows reveals the depth of the work. Perhaps the artist has even included an allegory or allusion in the figures present. This kind of careful observation is not only valuable to assessing a painting, but essential in the legal world as well.

As lawyers, we must dig into contracts to catch any vague or tricky wording, pick apart witness statements for inconsistencies, and closely examine evidence to piece together our case. The true meaning of a particular piece of art can be nebulous; however, by making a habit of careful observation — even of the smallest details — of a piece, we are better equipped to do the same in our legal practice.

Understanding art improves empathy and human understanding.

Art is a reflection of the human experience and the creator's emotions. Art is subjective because it reflects individual perspectives. Our differing tastes and preferences contribute to this subjectivity.

The more art you are exposed to, the more you can begin to understand different viewpoints and narratives. This exposure can foster empathy, as it affords you a better understanding and appreciation of different realities.

Empathy is one of the most crucial traits a lawyer can possess, as we represent clients from all walks of life, many of whom have lived experiences unlike our own in nearly every way. Yet to achieve the best outcomes for them, we must be able to truly understand their emotional state and motivations. Doing so can improve communication and build trust.

Deeper empathy can also aid lawyers in jury selection and courtroom presentations, where understanding and appealing to the emotions of others can be pivotal to a positive case outcome. I believe you can build empathy like a muscle. The more art you consume, the more stories and perspectives you take in and study, the stronger your empathy can become.

Art improves cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Art can function like a window into many cultures and times in history. When you collect and enjoy art from all around the world, it helps you see things from different interpretations and learn more about how diverse and interesting our world really is.

This kind of cultural understanding is essential in the legal field. Being mindful of different cultural norms and expectations can make a big difference in how you work with clients, plan your cases and handle things in the courtroom. A lawyer who appreciates a wide range of cultural expressions is in a better position to speak up effectively for their clients and create a more inclusive legal environment.

Art appreciation can provide stress relief and foster mental well-being.

The legal world is known for being stressful and having demanding workloads, which often leads to burnout and overwhelm for many attorneys. However, collecting and appreciating art can offer a therapeutic escape. I know it has for me. Immersing yourself in the beauty and inspiration of art fosters a sense of peace and tranquility.

Art can also offer mental stimulation and emotional solace, allowing you to momentarily detach from life's stresses and find comfort in the artistic experiences. This makes you feel better, and when you feel better, you work better.

Taking a moment to indulge in something you love, such as art, is essential for maintaining both productivity and happiness on the job.

Having art in the office makes it a safer space for clients.

A law office can be an unsettling place for many clients. Like hospitals, many people will never find themselves in a law office unless something is seriously wrong. They are facing a problem they can't solve on their own, be it a divorce, personal injury suit or criminal proceedings.

While those who work in the legal profession consider the environment normal, for most clients, it can be unnerving and new. I have found that a great way to make clients feel more at ease is to have inviting, interesting artworks on display. Paintings, posters, photographs and even sculptures can help start conversations between clients, lawyers and other office staff, making everyone feel more at ease.

Perhaps you have a framed photograph of Yosemite National Park, inviting clients to discuss their love for the outdoors, or an aboriginal dot painting from Australia, allowing a nervous client to talk about how they've always wanted to visit. Even abstract art can be an easy

conversation starter: "So, what is that painting of anyway?"

Showcasing different types of art can foster a more inclusive and culturally aware atmosphere at work. Additionally, a thoughtfully curated art collection will make any office look and feel more inviting, transforming a sterile environment into a bright, welcoming and lively space. Come visit our office, and you'll quickly know how art has transformed me and our firm.

Michael McCready is the founder of McCreadyLaw Injury Attorneys.

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