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The Microsoft Art Collection

Founded in 1987, the Microsoft Art Collection came into existence in response to employees' requests to fill empty wall space. The purpose of the collection was then, as it is now, to create a positive working environment for employees and an appealing business setting for customers and Microsoft guests.

The Microsoft collection began, as most corporate collections begin, with the premiss that if the environment you work in

can be improved then the quality of your employees' life and their work will improve. Companies therefore need to create and maintain stimulating work environments. A catalyst to creating that atmosphere is an exciting and well-planned art programme. At Microsoft this programme is now in its fourteenth year.

"Like most things at MS, the art collection is tangible evidence of the Company's strong commitment to put employees first. It is one of

the things that motivate me to come to work. The art collection is also a source of pride (and awe) to visitors that I bring to the campus." (Grant Duers, General Manager)

The Microsoft Art Collection says much about who we are, and the environment in which we work. It also says a lot about how we would like the world to view us. Yes, we are a leading technology company, but we are also more: we are also an international cultural community, a cross-section of the world made up of thinking, feeling and responsible individuals who care about the character of life as well as the quality of life. Each of us works on a multitude of projects and products in a variety of settings and locations. That atmosphere and environment in which we work is crucial to the success of our endeavors. "We've got customers coming to visit Microsoft offices from all over the world. An intelligent, sophisticated and innovative art collection is important because it is a direct representation of our company and the people who work here." (Julie Blackwell, Marketing Manager)

Over the past fourteen years the unprecedented growth and success of Microsoft has seen a transformation of this



JACOB LAWRENCE
(American, 1917-2000)
Play, 1999
28" x 38"
Serigraph



DAVID MACH
(Scottish, born 1956)
Edinburgh Castle - Loch, 2000
40" x 64"
Drawing and collage on paper

Northwest-based firm into a worldwide organization with offices in every continent and employees from all over the world. Because of this great expansion the needs and function of the collection have also grown and multiplied.

Today, as part of its mission, the art collection focuses on emerging and mid-career artists from the US and abroad. The scope of the collection should be viewed as exploring developments in contemporary art from the early 1980s to the present, and should include the widest possible variety of materials and represent the full range of art being made around the world.

Though the collection began with a focus on Northwest artists such as the late **Jacob Lawrence**, illustrated here with his print *Play* (1999), when the Seattle Art Fair came to the Northwest newer and more international works entered the collection. The collection also includes 127 19th-century *ukiyo-e* wood-block prints, Native American masks, a portion of the graffiti-covered Berlin Wall (a gift from Damler-Benz to **Bill Gates** in 1995) and some 2,700 other examples of late 20th century paintings, sculpture, photographs, drawings and an array of works on paper. Add to this studio glass and ceramics such as **Akio Takamori's** *Old Woman*, 2000 and you will discover the complete selection of art at Microsoft.

We have now acquired works by artists from Germany, England, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands, Japan, Canada, Argentina, Israel, France, Nepal, Switzerland and of course Spain. **Marcelo Pombo** and

David Mach are good examples of work from Argentina and Great Britain on permanent view on our Redmond, Washington campus.

We have also acquired mid-career artists such as **Nicholas Africano**, **Gregory Amenoff** and **Richmond Burton** and at the same time emerging artists such as **Graciela Sacco**, who will represent Argentina at the next Venice Biennale, and **Robert Zandvliet**, who will open a major exhibition of his paintings at the STEDELIJK MUSEUM in Amsterdam later this year.

Another aspect of the art programme's mission is underscored by two words: diversity and innovation. These two words seem very much in line with the company's vision of itself and how it projects itself into the future. In order to accomplish this task, art fairs like ARCO are extremely important for seeing work and meeting other collectors, curators and the press. As a result of what I have seen here, I am looking at the work of a young English sculptor and I am also considering a painter living in Mexico City, a sculptor from Austin Texas, a young Japanese artist who was living in Seattle but is now back in Tokyo, a young Brooklyn painter, a Swiss photographer, an American painter and printmaker who lives in Hong Kong, and so on and so forth.

Collecting is only a portion of the art programme at Microsoft. A second part of the programme takes the form of a major educational programme for employees. We do this through the publication of collection



MARCELO POMBO
(Argentinian, born 1959)
Paisaje Nocturno con Dos Figuras [Nocturnal Landscape with Two Figures], 1999
29" x 40"
Enamel on wood panel

brochures, artist's talks, and lectures and panels on collecting. In March we hosted a panel called *Collecting Prints Today*. Next year we will organize panels on the subject of collecting painting and sculpture. The third element in the art programme is our Websites. A well-designed and content-rich Website is crucial to any collection today; it is a very important feature here. The external Website is the public face we present to the business

world and the art world. We also maintain an internal Website exclusively for use by Microsoft employees with information about events on campus, artists in the collection, essays on works in the collection and a database. For the immediate future, we are currently planning for the company's 30th anniversary. This will be a travelling exhibition and will be accompanied by a catalogue. And we are busy with new acquisitions and programmes for 2001 and 2002.



AKIO TAKAMORI
(American, born 1950)
Old Woman, 2000
30" x 10" x 7"
Stoneware ceramic