Yale University Art Gallery 2014 Spring Exhibition Guide

March 2014

Academic Affairs

Management Leadership and Literature Course

At the financial crisis emboldened, Professor Ahren Bader, the John L. Frank Professor of Accounting, Economics, and Finance at the Yale School of Management, grew increasingly concerned with what he considered the failure of business education to develop reflective leadership qualities in students. He decided to seek the humanities, with the idea that, in thinking, speaking, and writing about values, aspirations, and attitudes, the students might better cultivate leadership skills, such as communication and creativity.

Professor Bader first turned to literature, theater, and film but soon became an enthusiastic proponent of bringing his students to the Yale University Art Gallery to engage with original works of art. Every fall since then, he has brought his classes to the museum as part of his innovative seminar Management Leadership and Literature. As a world-renowned accounting theorist and experimental economist, Professor Bader admits that his expectations came from statistical theory of valuation and design of electronic markets that Abstract Expressionism or classical sculpture, but he is a passionate museums visitor. "Art makes us think," Bader explains. "It introduces us to new ways of seeing things. That is important because it is often too easy for most of us to fall into familiar ways of thinking about the world around us."

New ways of thinking are critical for leadership in management, and sometimes it is easier to see this when we operate outside our own immediate context."

David Bell, the Bradley Assistant Curator of Academic Affairs, and Modern Theater, the gallery’s former Lewis A. and Dorothy Greenman Senior Fellow in the Education Department and current Assistant Curator of Programs, is also engaged in a new position funded by Jane and David Otterton, has worked with Professor Bader to help his students move away from their comfort zones and encourage them to consider art and artists who have changed the way we see the world. Looking closely at masterpieces from the collection—such as Benjamin West's monumental historical painting "Allegory of American Revolution," with the Ashes of Germania, 1780, and Vincent van Gogh's "Van Gogh's Bedroom in Arles (The Night Café), 1888"—students are given a framework for approaching art. They learn to focus on what they see, begin to develop a vocabulary to discuss their observations, and begin to draw parallels between artistic innovation and leadership in a business context.

Students then select a week in the Gallery's collection for their own study. As the culmination of the semester, they submit an essay and give a presentation in the museum about their chosen work, discussing how it demonstrates an aspect of leadership and how the artist helped them reflect on their own qualities of leadership. As Nicholas Crilich, M.B.A. 2013, a recent seminar participant who is now working as a strategist for a technology firm, says, "The final project was thought provoking, engaging, and well outside the conventional notions of business training. More specifically, it highlighted how asking the right questions about business and society requires more than acquiring and distributing isolated sets of information. Instead, thought leaders must engage more nuanced concepts, including interpretation, reflection, and active curiosity."