

The History of the Rector & Associates Holiday Cards

The firm was incorporated on January 17, 1991 under the name “Rector & Associates Insurance Regulatory Consultants, Inc.” The initial name quickly proved unwieldy, so it was shortened to “Rector & Associates, Inc.” on January 22, 1991.

In addition to such logistical tasks as finding office space and hiring an administrative assistant/office manager, much of that first year was spent trying to let the world know that we were in existence and to describe to potential clients what kind of work we did. Shortly after the firm was founded, I mailed several hundred handwritten notes to friends and business acquaintances along with a one-page brochure about the firm. When Bob Eyers joined us in March, we mailed printed announcements to virtually anyone we could think of in a further effort to attract clients.

As our first year drew to a close, I had to decide whether to send Holiday (Christmas) cards. I was somewhat reluctant, initially, because I knew that sending cards would be expensive, and money was tight. George Fabe (the Director of the Ohio Department of Insurance during the time I served as Deputy Director) advised against spending the money on cards. He pointed out that so many businesses send Holiday cards and the cards sent tend to all look so much alike that, once January comes, it is almost impossible to remember who sent cards and who did not. So why spend precious money on something that is so quickly forgotten? Yet business was scarce, and we needed to remind people that we were here. I could not decide what to do.

At about the same time, Charles Foley of the Foley Gallery in Columbus was planning a show of works by Richard Anuszkiewicz and wanted to advertise it. But the cost of preparing cards to advertise the show was higher than he could justify. He lamented the fact that the largest expenses were the initial, fixed ones: having the image photographed, preparing the layout for the card, having the film prepared, applying the film to the press, etc. The costs involved in actually printing the cards were not that significant, in comparison, so that printing 2,000 cards was only slightly more expensive than printing 1,000 cards. Yet he did not need enough cards to achieve the necessary economies of scale.

It suddenly occurred to me: why not select an Anuszkiewicz image that Charles Foley could use to advertise his show and that we could use for our Holiday cards? By going in together, we could have a larger number of cards printed, which would significantly reduce the per card cost for each of us. And using an Anuszkiewicz image would address George Fabe’s concerns since whether you liked them or not, the cards would certainly be distinctive and memorable.

The next task was to select the image. I wanted to show a work that was either in my personal collection or in the Rector & Associates collection, yet Charles Foley wanted to use an image from a work that would be in his show and that was available for sale. We quickly settled on “Translumina—Summer Reds,” shown on the cover of this card. The piece is from an edition of 15 published by Graphics Studio at the University

of South Florida in Tampa. The first example (1/15) is owned by Rector & Associates; another example was to be included in the show at the Foley Gallery. In addition, despite the name, I thought the reds and greens were about as “Christmasy” as Anuszkiewicz got.

I was very anxious when the cards were mailed. Every other business I knew sent traditional cards. What would people think about this wild image and the unpronounceable name? I only had to wait a few days for the answer; almost as soon as the cards were mailed I began to receive telephone calls from people who wanted to talk about what they had received. The vast majority of people were complementary, although some wondered what the card had to do with the Holidays. Virtually everyone, though, primarily wanted to know “what is it?”

As I talked with Pat Jacoby (who was our Administrative Assistant and Office Manager at the time) about the telephone calls, she suggested that I write a short article to “explain” the art. I had been writing fairly extensively about art at the time anyways, and I liked the challenge of trying to describe a complex artistic vision in a simple, understandable way.

Based on the response to this first card, I decided to continue sending cards containing images from works that are either in my personal collection or in the Rector & Associates collection. The cards are individually signed by each of us at the firm. Beginning with the card sent in 1992, I began to prepare and include an “insert” to provide some basic information about the artist and the work shown. Different people in the firm take turns writing the holiday message on the inside of the card. Part of our tradition has also been to give the featured artist a number of blank cards as our thanks for allowing us to use the image on the card.

What began (as do most interesting things) as an attempt to find a creative solution to a problem in the face of tight finances has become a tradition that is now an integral part of the firm. We are by now closely identified with sending these cards. Each year, as fall begins, I am asked by dozens of people what we plan to feature on our card, and on numerous occasions I have visited offices where our past cards are kept and displayed on a shelf or desk: a small island of contemporary art in what is otherwise a traditionally-decorated office. Perhaps my greatest joy is when someone says—as at least one person seems to every year—that getting the card gave them the chance to really think about and discuss contemporary art in a serious way for the first time ever.

Our firm is its people, and, like the art shown, they are principled, dedicated and of the highest quality. Like the cards, the people who comprise this firm have deepened the lives of our clients and each other, often in unexpected ways. Displaying these cards is the most appropriate way I know to record and show the history of the firm and to honor those who have been a part of it.

Neil K. Rector
March 25, 1996