

Association of Corporate Counsel – St. Louis Chapter Receives 2023 Outstanding Achievement Award for “Innovative Programming Effort”

The national Association of Corporate Counsel award recognizes the St. Louis chapter for its member program, “Artful Observation with a Diversity Lens,” guided by Dr. Cathleen Fleck, PhD., Saint Louis University

We are excited to share that our Chapter received the 2023 Outstanding Achievement Award in the mid-sized chapter category for “Innovative Programming Effort” from the Association of Corporate Counsel global association at its annual meeting held in October.

The Chapter’s Diversity & Inclusion Committee hosted members on March 31, 2023, to a guided tour, “Artful Observation with a Diversity Lens,” lead by Dr. Cathleen Fleck, Ph.D., Saint Louis University, Chair of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts and Associate Professor of Art History. The program was held at the Saint Louis Art Museum with a focus to help participants develop their awareness of issues related to attentiveness, empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Artful Observation is a project spearheaded by the Saint Louis University (SLU) Art History Program to establish curricular and research programs based on evidence-based methods about utilizing the visual arts to help students and professionals develop their awareness of issues related to attentiveness, empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Lisa Savoy, Legal Counsel, Experian, and 2023 Social Justice Coalition Chairperson, said that the Chapter was honored to receive the 2023 Innovative Programming Effort award. The membership values the diversity programming that the Chapter hosts and tends to have great turnout for events. The Artful Observation Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program was especially popular because Dr. Fleck presented diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) material from an artist’s perspective, which included a discussion of the moment in time and history, the individual artist’s training, and other aspects of the artist’s background, and the significance of the medium used for the artist’s particular vision. The program was limited to 20 spots and was so popular among members that there was a waitlist of members who wanted to attend.

Dr. Fleck used Artful Observation techniques to enhance bias and observational awareness and facilitate conversation about DEI. Art served as the catalyst to encourage conversations among the members who attended.

“The Artful Observation session that I planned with the ACC at the Saint Louis Art Museum was meant to use art as a tool to engage the group and reinforce two key ideas about observation and about diversity and equity in society. First was to ask the participants to explain what they were seeing, breaking down that process of seeing as a physical act informed by our social and cultural circumstances. The attorneys quickly absorbed the main point that one’s own way to see is not the only way. Second, we concentrated on how certain artworks can reveal systems of discrimination and exclusion based on race, class, and gender that have long existed in our society,” said Fleck.

“We discussed artworks by underrepresented identities in the museum—particularly women, African American, and Native American artists—as signs of resistance, repression, strife, pride, and triumph over such challenges,” added Fleck.

In July, Chapter members participated in a second program, “Artful Observation of the Cultures of World Faiths,” presented by Dr. Fleck, which used Artful Observation techniques to enhance bias and observational awareness and facilitate a conversation about the diversity of cultures of world faiths using art as conversation tools.

Vikas Sunkari, Senior Managing Counsel, System Legal Affairs, SSM Health, and ACC STL 2023 Diversity & Inclusion Chairperson, said, “We are honored to receive this award. The St. Louis chapter is committed and invested to bring varied learning experiences and program opportunities to our growing and diverse membership.”

“I honestly took away from this program a greater appreciation for the artist behind the art as well as a new appreciation for the different layers of a particular piece. I never really thought about the struggles that some artists had based on gender, race, or culture, and the fact that we have such well-known diverse artists at the St. Louis Art Museum is significant,” said Lisa.

The ACC STL has previously been recognized by the Association of Corporate Counsel for the 2022 Best Diversity Initiative Award, and 2020 Innovation Award for its Diversity & Inclusion Summer Internship Program.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a committee member to the DE&I committee or any other Chapter committee, please contact Sue Wagner at accstl@qabs.com.