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Taking creativity beyond art to entrepreneurship

Creativity has long been part of the DNA of Rochester. Dotted around the city are interesting and unique attractions such as the photographic collection at the George Eastman House, classic paintings at the Memorial Art Gallery and a riot of artifacts at Artisan Works. Rochester encourages artistic talent: Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Crafts is here, and museums and other institutions exhibit works of local artists.

Yet few artists gain the international reputation enjoyed by Albert Paley.

Paley is a world-renowned metal sculptor. In Rochester his work is prominently displayed at RIT and outside corporate headquarters for Bausch & Lomb Inc. and for Klein Steel Service Inc. He has designed large entrance rotunda gates for the State Courthouse in San Francisco; gates for the main entrance of the Museum of Art in Naples, Fla.; and an amazing ceremonial archway at the St. Louis Zoo. His works, which are exhibited in museums as distant as London and Australia, range from abstract to realistic.

Paley's studio is in downtown Rochester and is well worth a visit. The unpretentious building shows no signs of the creative work going on inside. The studio has a small office and a display area to show some of his smaller works. Naturally, most of the studio is devoted to work space. Workers shape metal pieces and weld them to form objects to be assembled into a fin-



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ished sculpture.

On the second floor is an area where Paley creates and assembles models to make his vision more concrete. These help him communicate with clients and potential customers. Finished parts intended for specific projects are stacked in a storage area.

Now consider the business model of connecting the twisted metal sheets, the welding sparks and aisles of inventory, and it is clear that Paley's creativity extends beyond art. He consciously minimizes his financial risk, exploits several marketing channels and leverages available resources. He is a creative entrepreneur.

As a marketer, he knows building awareness and interest through a variety of channels is critical. Some channels are conventional—exhibits at major museums, shows and tours of his studio. Others are less conventional. He has published several books with his work. Documentary films describing his design process air on television. He willingly volunteers to talk to students. Also, he knows customer responsiveness is

critical.

Let's take a group from St. Louis—interested in having a major piece of art constructed—that visited his studio. The next day he got a call from a woman on the team who wanted to talk to him about a different project. That day Paley drew up a preliminary design for the project, got on a plane and flew to St. Louis. The project was the archway for the St. Louis Zoo.

In addition, Paley has carefully worked on building efficiencies into his supply chain. Resources and capabilities more efficiently provided by others are outsourced, resulting in a network, built up over time, of 50 suppliers and subcontractors. For example, most of his works are oversized sculptures, and shipping them to exhibitions or their final destination is not a trivial exercise. Shipment has to be carefully scheduled and tightly coordinated using specialists from outside Paley's studio.

Rochester is a fertile place for painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers and other artists. Albert Paley demonstrates that people with creative visions coupled with entrepreneurial zeal and skills can carve out an international reputation. Some people are born with business acumen. For others who seek to gain those skills or get business advice, Rochester offers venues such as the University of Rochester and RIT.

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