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McGill's Nancy Adler and the Art of Management

By Peggy Curran - Monday August 2 2010

McGill management professor Nancy Adler teaches with broad strokes -- the brush strokes of an artist.

Adler, a professor of organizational behavior and international management at McGill's Desautels Faculty of Management, has been painting for the last two decades.



More than a decade ago, she began experimenting with ways in which to combine her dual passions to help ignite the creative juices of leaders in business and government.

When I wrote about Adler six years ago, http://www.fpinfomart.ca/doc/doc_display.php?key=ar|170896|mtgz|2004|207|13|9|630), I described her as "a quick-thinking, speed-talking, Phi Beta Kappa powerhouse with fierce opinions about the sorry state of global

leadership and the need for corporations to play a positive, creative role in making the world a better place."

A *summa cum laude* in econometrics from the University of California, Los Angeles, Adler can speak authoritatively about chaos/complexity theory and troubles that don't stop at border crossings: poverty, pollution, SARS, terrorism.

But Adler is also an artist who dreamed up her enormously popular Art of Leadership sessions while on sabbatical in a painting studio deep in the Banff woods, where she has spent several terms as artist in residence. Through storytelling, music, poetry readings and theatrical improvisation, she coaches students to incorporate the creative tools and holistic thinking of the art world into their personal business plan.

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Inspired by such works as *The Art of Possibility* by Benjamin and Rosamund Zander, Adler told me tomorrow's leaders must borrow from the spontaneity, adaptability, inventiveness and collaboration of the artist to tackle rapidly evolving and unpredictable problems.

"For great artists and leaders to have a huge impact, they have to be able to think for themselves," Adler said. "Exceptional leaders are those able to draw inspiration from spiritual as well as mundane sources and to articulate and communicate symbolically and artistically."

Now she's going public.

From August 6 to 10, Adler, who holds the Samuel Bronfman Chair in Management, will unveil an interactive art exhibit entitled ***Reality in Translation: Going Beyond the Dehydrated Language of Management***.

The multimedia show premieres at Gallery MX and features watercolour paintings by Adler with original new music by the Finnish composer **Silja Suntola**.

The show coincides with the annual convention of the Academy of Management, a gathering of management academics being held this year in Montreal.

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Blog Comment

Karl Moore

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I have had the pleasure of being involved in executive programs where Nancy has used art as part of the program, these sessions are always among the most memorable. I took part in one of her sessions, the result was a Japanese style ink drawing expressing

our leadership impact on the world. Though not very well done on my part it, nevertheless, it hangs on the wall in my office, and has been the cause of a number of conversations with students about what they hope to accomplish in their lives. It also serves as an almost daily reminder of what I hope to do in the world on my better days.
Thanks Nancy!

By the way, go see her show, not only is she a great teacher, her art is very, very good.

Source:

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