

DESIGNING INNOVATIVE OPTIONS REQUIRES MORE THAN THE TRADITIONAL ANALYTICAL SKILLS TAUGHT DURING THE PAST HALF CENTURY IN MOST MBA PROGRAMMES. RATHER, IT REQUIRES SKILLS THAT CREATIVE ARTISTS HAVE USED FOR YEARS. NANCY ADLER, PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY AND AN ARTIST, SHARES HER VIEWS ON ART AND LEADERSHIP WITH **MALINI SEN**

# THE FINE ART OF BUSINESS



Nancy Adler

**GIVEN** the dramatic changes taking place in society, the economy and technology, 21<sup>st</sup>-century organisations need to engage in new, more spontaneous, and more innovative ways

of managing. Nancy Adler, professor, Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, and a painter herself, believes that the world of business has a lot to learn from art and artists.

"As the business environment more frequently calls upon managers to respond to unpredictable threats and opportunities, the ability to improvise increasingly determines organisations' effectiveness. Strict

reliance on traditional managerial planning models no longer works. Without the luxury of the lead time necessary for planning, managers must use their professional expertise and experience to respond spontaneously. The time seems right for the cross-fertilisation of the arts and leadership," says Adler.

As an introduction to her research on 'going beyond the dehydrated language of management,' Adler is hosting an art and leadership exhibition in Montreal this week, a forum that will bring together global management scholars to discuss art and leadership in the 21st century.

Further elaborating on what the world of business can learn from art, Adler says that 21st century society yearns for a leadership based more on innovation than replication. "Constant, intuition-based innovation is required to respond to discon-



ART SMART: A painting by Nancy Adler — the world of business has a lot to learn from art and artists

tinuous change. Three distinct trends within the overall pattern of chaos and complexity — discontinuous change, networked teams, and simultaneity — help explain business' appropriation of more arts-based approaches of creativity and innovation. Also actors, dancers, and musicians — performing as ensembles — have developed team-based collaborative skills to a much greater extent than have most managers," she adds.

A course on Art and Leadership was added as an elective to the core MBA curriculum at Desautels Faculty of Management way back in 2002, and it is taught by Adler. Following the economic meltdown, many business schools across the world are looking beyond finance and strategy to make the curriculum more holistic. There is a concerted effort to focus on responsible leadership and sustainable business. Responding to this, Adler says, "I am very happy to see this change. It is imperative to understand that only by doing good, can we do well."

According to Adler, an increasing number of companies are including artists and artistic processes in their approaches to strategic and day-to-day management and leadership. The Master of Fine Arts will soon become a much sought after business degree, she adds.