

Arts Education and the Creative Economy

Angela Adams: "I've created a business out of my art."

by Noah Keteyian

Angela Adams grew up in a community of 350 people on North Haven Island. Today, she runs *angela adams*, a successful lifestyle company based in Portland. Best known for organic geometric patterns and modern



Profiles: Arts Education and the Creative Economy

This profile of Angela Adams is the first in a series by MAAE that collects stories about the connections between arts education and Maine's Creative Economy. These profiles articulate the ways in which arts education brings people to communities as well as the connections between arts education and creative businesses and employment. We all use what we learn from the arts every day, often without even realizing it. This year in each issue of this journal, MAAE will profile a person who contributes to Maine's economy by using creativity or other skills developed through arts education. We will draw from throughout Maine's diverse economy. While these people may not be working purely as artists, arts education has contributed in some way to their professional or personal success. If you would like to suggest someone to be profiled (including yourself), email artseveryday@adelphia.net.

home furnishings, her rugs, furniture, papers, and home and fashion accessories shot to national popularity beginning in the late '90s.

"Success can mean different things to different people," Adams says, discussing the widespread popularity of her designs and the stature of her company. For her, success has not only meant using the business skills of an artist to make a living, but also fostering a community that values creativity. As much as finding a customer base for her work, she finds real satisfaction in the people with whom she works. "I'm very proud of the team we have assembled, of how we work and of the work we put out there."

Adams attributes the whole range of an artist's skills, such as discipline, self-confidence, aesthetic development, analysis, creativity, and problem solving, as key to any successful venture. It is these skills, developed through arts education, that she has utilized to create a thriving business out of her art. One way or another, all of the arts play a role in her daily life as a designer and entrepreneur. She notes that at *angela adams* "visual arts is what we do every day," and that all copy for their website, public relations, and catalogs is written in-house. She also talks about the sources of inspiration in performing arts. "Drama certainly keeps things interesting and challenging," she says with a smile.

Adams hopes to see more support for artists starting out in the world of business. "I wish there was a little more emphasis on how to create a real business out of one's art. I meet so many students who tell me they want a business like mine," but only see "business" as something to be avoided. "Business can be very creative and fun, and if young artists are afraid of or intimidated by it, they'll never commit to it."

"A lot of art institutions seem to frown on the idea of mixing busi-

ness with art, and today there are so many opportunities for exciting art businesses that I think they are not fully serving their students by not opening that up to them. So many artists are waiting tables late at night, catching up on sleep during the day, and then trying to muster the energy to make art in the leftover time. That's a hard way to go for too long."

As the designer on whose work the success of the company is based, Adams is closely identified with her business. This translates to thoughtfulness about her company's values. Taking her products on the road to international trade shows in major metropolitan centers throws these ideals into relief.

"There is always a very different vibe around our displays or booths, and I attribute a lot of that to a Maine sense of style and way of living." She talks about the "things Mainers value," using words like "personal," "natural," "comfortable," and "integrity."

She also talks a lot about community. "In a small community, you really value the people who make everything work: the lobstermen, the electricians, the plumbers, the boat builders, the teachers, the carpenters, the gardeners, the general store, the school. . . It takes all of those people to make the community function."

The support network that her creative business requires creates a dynamic local economy. "I truly value our shipping companies, the mail carriers, the printers, the coffee shop, the sandwich shop. All of these people are part of our daily lives and it would be. . . much more challenging without them."

The support of family, friends, and community has helped make Angela Adams the name of a successful business and contributor to Maine's Creative Economy. While her creative entrepreneurship has built a strong company, studying

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Angela Adams

art has deepened how she experiences the world around her. Her artist's focus not only helps her to see the people around her and the needs of her business, but also the beauty.

"Being inspired by a great swingset design, a manhole cover, a big old tree, an interesting door knob, a wild cloud formation, sunset, low tide, everything, each moment is so much more meaningful when we can really see the beauty that surrounds us. And then we are more inspired and in more peaceful moods which enables us to be better decision makers and nicer people to be around. That's very powerful."

Noah Keteyian lives on the Portland Peninsula with his wife and daughter. Noah spoke at the Blaine House Conference on the Creative Economy and is an organizer of Governor Baldacci's Realize!Maine initiative to help young adults stay in Maine.