

The Art of David Finn

BY ELIZABETH HOWARD

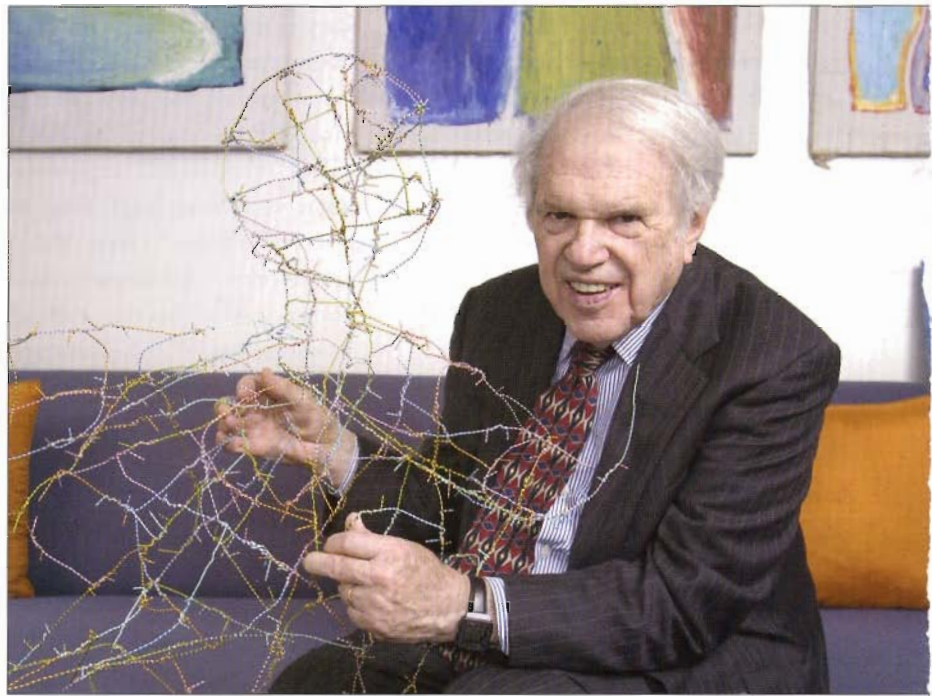
The first impression you have stepping off the elevator at Ruder Finn's headquarters in midtown Manhattan is that of entering an art gallery. Black-and-white photographs cover one wall. There are large paintings, a low table with a few art books, and, through a set of glass doors, a tall and stunning wooden sculpture of a woman, her leg outstretched as if she is moving through space.

Winding through a maze of desks and more art, you reach David Finn's corner office. Not surprisingly, the space feels like an atelier with shelves of art books, paintings, small metal sculptures — some configured from paper clips. It's what you'd expect to find in an artist's studio. The paintings, sculpture and photographs on the walls at Ruder Finn are all the work of David Finn, the agency's chairman and CEO.

So which came first? David's passion for art or his passion for communications? Is art a digression or a passion?

Finn smiles thoughtfully, hesitates and answers in a gentle voice. He is an artist who has been painting and drawing since he was 11. As a teenager, he carried a sketchbook on the subway and drew faces of the people around him. He interrupted his studies at City College to spend a year studying the theories of art with Dr. Ernest Zierer. When he and Bill Ruder decided to go into business together, they realized that they could incorporate art into their work and their professional careers. Today, Ruder Finn is one of the largest independent integrated communication firms in the world with offices in Los Angeles, Guangzhou, Singapore, Paris and Tel Aviv, among other cities.

Finn believes that creative thinking plays an important role in solving business problems. He was attracted to sculpture because you cannot view a piece from a single point in space. The same can be applied to communications. *Move!*, a magazine Ruder Finn publishes several times a year for its clients, was created to provide many perspectives on communications. The content ranges from an interview with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to an article about



how marathon running can affect your career, pointing out the parallels between the two.

Finn is most comfortable speaking as an artist and thinking about the role of imagination and the quest for new approaches to identify solutions. The German artist Joseph Beuys believed that "everyone is an artist" and thought everyone should apply creative thinking to their own area of specialty — whether it be law, physics, education or homemaking. By expanding on the idea of human creativity, and therefore a broader definition of art, Beuys believed what could result would be "social sculpture," by shaping things in the environment whether it was the economy or the political system. Finn embodies the ideal Beuys describes. He has been successful in integrating his passion and love for the visual arts as an early supporter of the Business Committee for the Arts and as possibly the only PR executive to serve on the board of trustees of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. It is through communications and public relations that he has shaped social sculpture by working with business leaders and multinational corporations around the globe. ■



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