

# THE BO BUS

PROFILE  
IRIS LAVY

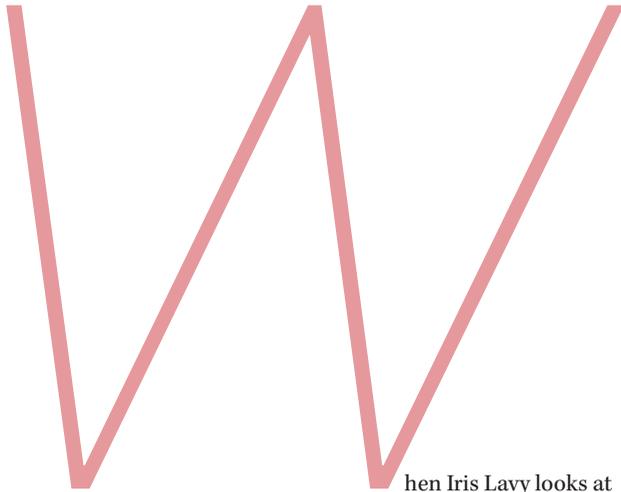
# ART

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*IRIS LAVY CONNECTS THE MULTILAYERED WORLD OF ART  
TO THE BOARDROOMS OF TODAY.*

# MUSE



hen Iris Lavy looks at a work of art, she sees the boardroom behind the brushstrokes.

Great artists, like great leaders, the art historian and management consultant explains, are visionaries who disrupt popular culture, and business leaders can look to them as role models.

Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, and Ai Weiwei, among many others, she says, developed new artistic languages, spearheading change within their generations and leading innovative and creative ways of thinking.

“While visual art has not been a traditional source of inspiration for business leaders, my message is that the business world can gain new insights from looking afresh at challenges and opportunities,” says Lavy. “If, as the say-

ing goes, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words,’ then the richness of the world of art can draw a thousand colorful and creative cognitions.”

Lavy, author of the 2017 book *Leadership Framed by Art*, draws parallels between art and business by pairing iconic artists like Matisse, Picasso, and Warhol with visionary business leaders like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Elon Musk.

Do you know what Salvador Dalí, the Spanish surrealist artist with the outrageous mustache, and Richard Branson, the colorful and charismatic founder and CEO of Virgin Group, have in common?

Lavy can tell you.

Dalí channeled his creativity into painted dreamscapes, while Branson focused on PR stunts. In 2012, for example, Branson started an air war with British Airways, his competitor, when technical issues stopped the erection of London’s Ferris wheel the airline sponsored. The slogan Branson brashly coined—“British Airways Can’t Get It Up”—flew around the world.

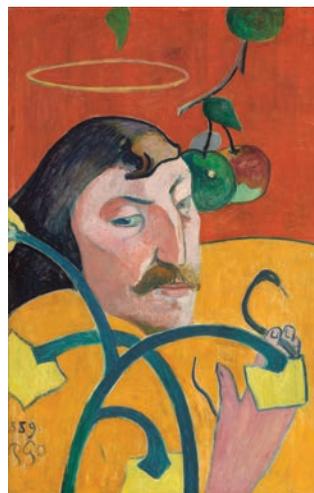
“Dalí’s eccentric personality and unique style made him one of the leading figures of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century art scene,” Lavy explains. “Like Dalí, Branson lets go of all constraints, gives full rein to his creativity, and brands his company with his unique personality.”

The Tel Aviv-based Lavy, who has a master’s degree in art history, says the art-business connection is a prime motivator to help business leaders see and think in creative out-of-the-box ways.

As part of her management-consulting program, she often suggests that clients attend art shows and exhibitions, display art in their offices, sponsor art-centric company workshops, and observe and learn from artists about process, passion, and vision.



Piet Mondrian  
Gray Tree  
1911



Paul Gauguin  
Self Portrait  
1889

Lest CEOs be reluctant to take her advice, she reminds them that Apple founder Jobs was an artist as well as a cutting-edge leader.

“He demanded that the people who worked for him be artists and be creative,” she says. “People are afraid of art because they don’t understand it, but art means excellence of craft and vision and creativity.”

She says the unconventional world we’re living in requires unconventional methods of learning.

“The future remains unknown, but it is clear that the professional landscape is facing a deep change,” she remarks. “Organizations should aim not only to survive but also to thrive. They need leaders who unleash creative energy among their employees and peers to bring about the human spirit. It is up to leaders to push ideas and empower people to break through boundaries.”

One of the best ways for business leaders to tap into their own creativity, says, is to start with a self-portrait.

“I don’t mean that they should take brush to canvas,” she says. “Rather, I encourage them to perform a self-observation for self-learning.”

For artists, she explains, a self-portrait is virtually a *de rigueur* exercise.

“A business leader’s self-image is his or her self-statement,” she notes. “And what it says is important because it projects onto the company.”

She points to Belgian artist René Magritte, whose self-portrait—which shows him drawing a magnificent bird in flight while looking at nothing more than an ordinary chicken egg—illustrates his self-confidence.

“Leaders, like artists, should sit down and face the blank canvas for the purpose of sketching out the vi-

sion and the way forward,” she says.

She adds that, like artists, business leaders need to possess passion and perseverance, adding that being a good leader is not only about introspection—it is also about action.

“The majority of leaders can talk about a good vision or strategy, but great leaders are the ones who can get things done,” she explains. “They do smart planning, which begins with learning, listening, and observing before setting a strategy, defining goals, and translating those into action.”

Lavy singles out Pablo Picasso, who in 1937 completed what is arguably his greatest work, *Guernica*, an 11.5-foot by 25.6-foot mural. Although he was a well-known artist, he produced more than 60 preparatory paintings and some 800 sketches before settling on a style and composition.

Once the planning is done, business leaders need to focus on their goals.

“This is one of the most important lessons taught at Harvard Business School,” she says. “Steve Jobs was a master at this; he always asked himself, ‘If I could do only one thing, what would I choose to do?’”

She suggests business leaders take a lesson from the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italian artist Michelangelo Caravaggio, who was the first artist to use an external light source to direct the eye of the



Paul Klee  
*Metamorphosis*  
1935

PROFILE  
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viewer to areas of the most importance.

Lavy believes innovative leaders, like artists, often look to the past to bring the future into perspective. Typically, artists had apprentices who learned to copy their works. In business, she says, the temptation is to continue the practices of predecessors because they were successful.

“The purpose in both professions,” she reveals, “is to learn from the greats and be inspired by them.”

She cites Edouard Manet’s painting *Olympia*, which was inspired by Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* from some three centuries earlier. At first glance, they seem like mere copies of each other, but careful examination reveals differences in style and characterization that put them each in their specific time periods. Titian painted a portrait of a nude goddess reclining on a bed, while Manet depicted a flesh-and-blood naked woman seductively reclining and brazenly staring at her viewers.

“Manet’s bold approach was considered scandalous in 1863,” she says. “But this fresh interpretation, as with so many others of his works, positioned Manet as one of the leaders of the modern art movement.”

The idea of change—whether it’s from Titian to Manet or Henry Ford to Jeff Bezos—is a key driver in today’s world, Lavy says. Those who have long careers learn to adapt and push the envelope (or canvas) into new directions just as Picasso did or Musk does today.

Picasso, who lived to be nearly 100 years old and produced works through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, started painting at age seven. His first works were in the realistic style popular before cameras became

commonplace. But he wasn’t content just creating works that looked like those of his painterly peers. He began looking for new ways to distinguish his images.

Guided by his study of physics, philosophy, music, theater, and Einstein’s theory of relativity, he began exploring the concept of space and time on a flat canvas. The result was Cubism, which reduced images to flat, fragmented geometric shapes. This breakthrough made Picasso one of the more important cultural leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century art world.

“Just as Picasso led constant change and innovation, cutting-edge corporations should look to their external and internal sources to lead change and break through boundaries,” Lavy says.

According to Lavy, it’s particularly important today for leaders to understand how art can be applied to business because of the vast technological changes and innovation that are occurring within the business world.

“As Andy Warhol said, ‘Good art is the best business,’” she quotes. “And looking to the art world for ideas and inspiration will help business leaders.”

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