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MAN OF STEEL

**World renowned sculptor Albert Paley still
pushing boundaries of metal art**

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Man of Steel

Rochester sculptor Albert Paley has been pushing the boundaries of metal art for 45 years

By Amy Cavalier

Chances are you've passed by one of world-renowned artist Albert Paley's sculptures at Rochester's National Museum of Play or at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

There's also a good chance you did not even realize what was right under your nose.

"There's a tremendous creative force here and I think we don't have many opportunities to see things like this or people like this," said R. Roger Remington, Vignelli distinguished professor of design at RIT. "We know about it because we've read about Picasso and great artists and great sculptors, but having him here in our presence and being close to the whole process is such a valuable opportunity for everyone."

Since coming to Rochester to teach at RIT in 1969, Paley has assembled a body of work that includes over 60 large-scale, site-specific sculptures in the continental United States, Asia and Europe and hundreds of private and public commission pieces. Using an amalgamation of materials and

techniques, he's transformed metal into everything from jewelry, candlesticks and tables, to ornate gates, fireplaces and sculptures up to 100 feet tall and 100 tons in weight.

"When new opportunities or new experiences would arise, I would take them on and then inadvertently I created the skills and the disciplines to do other things," Paley said. "The drive was finding out what my abilities are or what my boundaries are or what it is all about."

"Paley is one of the primary American sculptors," said Bruce Beasley, a widely recognized and accomplished American sculptor based in Oakland, Calif. "His work is very vigorous and he's a master at bending and shaping of the metal. He manipulates metal in a way that's quite unusual and pretty exceptional."

Known for his signature style of forging cold hard metal into soft, ribbon-like shapes, audiences around the world have been wowed by Paley's portal gates at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

"He is, without a doubt, the top person in the world," said his wife Frances Paley, a metal and print artist herself. "Nobody can forge and form the way he can and that's just a fact. In the way he has evolved, no one can touch him."

Children and adults alike are charmed and mystified by Paley's 130-foot long archway *Animals Always* for the St. Louis Zoo. His ceremonial archways grace major cities including Philadelphia and Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, and he has permanent collections in major museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Houston, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

This year, Paley unveiled one of his most ambitious projects yet — 13 sculptures on New York City's Park Avenue — and he completed "Soliloquy," the centerpiece of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester's Centennial Sculpture Park unveiled in October. At the age of 69, there is no punch clock, no 9-to-5 schedule, no retiring for Paley. Art isn't



*Albert Paley working
in his studio in Gates.*

something he does to make a living.

"This is my life," he said.

From class artist to the Smithsonian

Growing up in Philadelphia, Paley gravitated toward the arts. Voted class artist, he worked in the art department at Gimbel's department store in high school. Using \$600 in war bonds, he enrolled at Tyler School of Art at Temple University in 1962. He likens becoming an artist to a monk taking a vow of poverty.

"When I realized, whether it was an epiphany or not, that this was the life that I wanted to lead, you were dedicating yourself to a lifestyle and dedicating yourself to a process that was not economically viable at all," he said.

Majoring in sculpture with a minor in metal, Paley paid his way through

school working as a studio assistant.

"Because of that I had the keys to the school so when security would kick people out, I would work until two, three, four in the morning and use all the facilities, so I just worked non-stop," he said.

In his senior year, Paley was chosen for a teaching assistantship assisting professors and teaching at night and during summers. He continued teaching through his graduate studies.

By the mid-1960s, Paley had begun displaying his work at museums and art colleges and being featured in trade magazines throughout New England. In 1968, using earnings from selling his art, Paley took a trip to Europe where he studied the techniques of European metal work and met famed jewelers and metalsmiths, including the Pomodoro brothers and Max

Frolich.

Landing a job as a professor of goldsmithing at the School for American Crafts at RIT in 1969, Paley said, afforded him the luxury of not having to compromise his aesthetic direction in order to make a living as an artist.

"It allowed me to be very idealistic and very much a purist about what I was about," he said.

Remington was a faculty member when Paley began teaching at the college.

"I don't think Albert has changed that much in terms of his way of working, his way of being," he said. "He's always been a person of integrity. I feel he's always been a master at working with form, shapes and three dimensions, whether it's a tiny piece of jewelry or a large architectural structure."

Reaching new heights: These four photos show the process from the drawing to the first cardboard model to the second cardboard model to the final installed piece... this is *Languorous Repose* which is located at 66th Street and Park Avenue in New York City.



After four years at RIT, Paley went to teach drawings, 3-D design, goldsmithing and sculpture at SUNY-Brockport. He and his wife met in 1974. She was studying metal work at San Diego State University where he was giving a lecture.

"He was very well known even then," Frances said. "He was only 30 years old but he was the top person in jewelry art form anywhere. We're talking United States and Europe."

His first public commission was for the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 1974 when he completed the Portal Gates. He then created the Paley fence at the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga, Tenn. in 1976.

The Strong Sculpture in front of the National Museum of Play was his first site-specific sculpture in 1982.

Paley's career has seen highs and

lows through the years. He has been the subject of multiple books and various films including "Albert Paley: Man of Steel" produced by American Public Television. An endowed chair at the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences at RIT, Paley lectures worldwide and at universities, museums and art forums in the U.S. on a monthly basis.

In 1995, Paley was the first non-architect to win the institute honors award from the American Institute of Architects.

In 2002, Paley was severely burned in a propane explosion. Paley spent one month in the burn unit at Strong Memorial Hospital. After undergoing multiple surgeries and skin grafts, and working determinedly through rehab, Paley healed, returning to his work.

"If he hadn't been as close to the hospital as we were, it's possible

he would not have made it," said Frances.

Made in Rochester

Paley has four large public artworks on display in Rochester. In addition to his site-specific sculpture at the National Museum of Play, his 40-foot-tall "Genesee Passage" has been located outside the former Bausch & Lomb headquarters since 1996. "Sentinel," a 73-foot steel and bronze sculpture, has adorned the entrance to RIT since 2003 and in 2006, he created "Threshold" for Klein Steel's services headquarters.

That only scratches the surface of Paley's resume. And it's all done right here in Rochester.

"There's no other place like it in the country," said Frances of her husband's Rochester studio.

Paley's studio was located on West



Paley's "Genesee Passage," 1996, rises on the grounds of Bausch & Lomb headquarters.



Albert Paley has four works on display in Rochester. His Memorial Art Gallery piece recently installed plus the piece destined for RIT in November will bring his total sculptures in Rochester to six. (Photos by Bruce Miller.)

Main Street from the early 1970s until 1985 when he moved to a 15,000-square-foot studio on South Washington Street. Three years ago, he moved into his current 40,000-square-foot workshop located off Lyell Avenue in Gates. There are 13 full-time employees, the most he's ever employed. Nearly 350 people tour each year in addition to numerous fundraisers held at the studio, according to Jennifer Laemlein, studio director.

"He works long days," said Laemlein. "He has no qualms at all about rolling up his sleeves and getting in there. He's also a perfectionist, so when he has an idea in mind, we have to make sure we meet his expectations. He's very hands-on with every aspect

of this business."

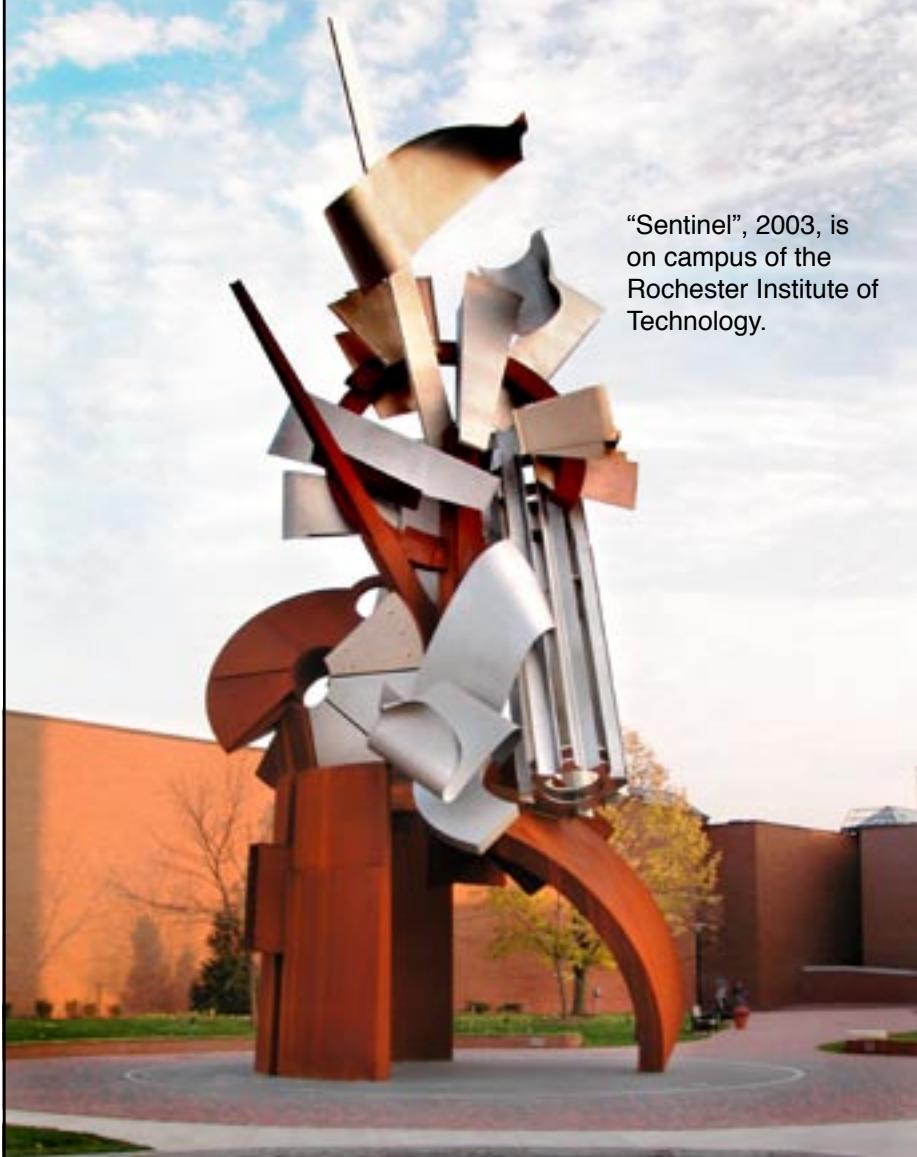
At the studio, towering sculptures draw visitors inside to where Paley's lamps are perched on desks, combining art and functionality. Several massive gates grace the large open space and sculptures rest seemingly precariously on stands. Each piece represents a different type of material or technique or demonstrates Paley's visions of shapes and form.

Inside Paley's work space, models made of cardboard and a variety of other materials are spread across various stations. Laemlein turns one of the models over to reveal that the base is a repurposed cardboard.

"If he's looking for something representative of a shape, he'll use

"Threshold," 2006, is installed at Klein Steel company.





"Sentinel", 2003, is on campus of the Rochester Institute of Technology.

chopsticks, dental floss, spray cans, or even repurposed box materials such as materials that one would find in their home recycling bin," said Laemlein. "He doesn't get a lot of uninterrupted work time here, so a lot of his design work happens during off hours. We've gotten sketches on napkins."

Paley begins the process with a series of drawings that then go into cardboard models. Next, a metal model is created to work out the structural engineering and the joining of the steel. That model, or maquette, becomes the basis for fabrication.

Some of Paley's sculptures are made of painted steel while others are made of Corten, an atmospheric corrosion-resistant steel patented by U.S. Steel.

"Sometimes it's stainless steel, sometimes it's bronze. Sometimes we use patina, sometimes we paint it," he said, glancing around his studio at the various mediums. "You can see a lot of glass here. I do sculptures with

glass or steel or I carve wood or stone, so that varies."

'A treasure' in Rochester

Nan Miller, owner of Nan Miller

This sculpture, from 1982, is at Strong Museum.



Gallery at 3450 Winton Place, has represented Paley's work including candleholders, coffee tables, lamps, small to medium size sculptures and maquettes of his larger monumental pieces for about seven years.

"He's not just a passing, everyday artist," she said. "He has a reputation. He has credentials. He's in museums and he has monumental pieces all over the world. He's a treasure to Rochester and it's a real feather in Rochester's cap to have been able to have kept him here."

On the studio floor, Paley is involved in every stage of the process. Two techniques are utilized in creating the sculptures. Forging involves traditional blacksmithing techniques, where a bar of steel is heated and shaped with hammers or by pulling it or compressing it.

"This is a hot, physical, labor-intensive process," said Laemlein.

Paley also uses fabricated metal techniques in his sculptures. Patterns are sent out to steel suppliers which use various cutting methods including plasma cutting, laser cutting and water jet cutting, depending on the materials' thickness and the desired aesthetic Paley is designing for.

Day-to-day operations work like any other business, with organizational meetings to make sure projects are staying on budget and schedule. Laemlein communicates with clients and staff on the floor while studio

foreman Jeff Jubenville, an employee at the studio for 27 years, conveys Paley's vision to the metal workers on the floor.

"We have understandings with very few words really spoken," Jubenville said. "I can understand what he wants with few words spoken. When he is at the studio, he has to switch gears like 12 times a day. If you can't keep up with that you're in trouble."

The difference between a regular business and an art studio is that Paley's sculptures are not mass-produced. Sculptures can range in price from \$250,000 to \$3 million. It is important to stay on budget and schedule, and to meet clients expectations while planning for a unique design that has not been fabricated prior and may have unforeseen challenges, said Laemlein.

"Albert never does anything half-way, so everything that's done is 150 percent, which means there are demands on people, financial demands, emotional demands," said Frances. "It's intense."

Malcolm Holzman, a partner of Holzman, Moss, Bottino Architecture in New York City, has worked with

Paley on four projects, including several gates for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Sewanne: The University of the South in Tennessee, and the central branch of Howard County Library System in Columbia, Md.

"I think anything that makes architecture richer is a good thing," Holzman said. "I view the things Albert has done for the buildings that I have designed in that vein. He has added something to them that the architecture alone could not provide. It enhances the architecture and it also makes it a richer environment for the people who use it."

Reaching new heights

"What I'm doing now is different than what I was doing 30 years ago and it changes because you develop different skills and abilities," he said. "There's an evolution."

This year, Paley landed one of his most high-profile exhibits yet in New York City's Park Avenue district. He also unveiled "Soliloquy."

For 16 years, the large-scale works of world-renowned artists have been temporarily on display on the medians of Park Avenue which run over the subway tracks. Made possible through

a partnership between The Fund for Park Avenue's Temporary Public Art Collection and Public Art Program of the City of New York's Department of Parks and Recreation, artists can apply or be chosen for the opportunity. Close to three years ago, Paley was selected for the series.

"I have thousands of sculptures that have never been realized so I went into my archives and there were pieces that I always wanted to do that I never had the opportunity to do so I figure now is the time," he said. "I took the various drawings and photo-montaged them into various sites and that is what I presented to the committee."

Asked to provide six pieces, Paley developed designs for 13 sculptures within 10 days. Traditionally, the Park Avenue Temporary Art Collection features three artists a year. Due to the magnitude of Paley's proposal, the duration of the exhibit was extended to six months from June until November of this year.

"Paley's is the 22nd exhibition we've done since the formation of the sculpture committee in 1999 and it's certainly one of the most ambitious exhibitions we've had in terms of the

Albert Paley Waxes Poetic

Paley on vulnerability:

"To challenge yourself, you have to go into new realities that you haven't experienced. You create a problem where you paint yourself into the corner and the problem is how do you get out of the corner. Ultimately that creates innovation." — from the video series "Paley on Park Avenue: New York City" produced by WXXI (interactive. wxxi.org/paleynyc)

Paley on inspiration:

"The inspiration for the work is kind of difficult to figure out, because obviously it's based on everything, my own sensibilities plus what I've

experienced along the way." — from "Meet the Artist: Museum of Glass on Albert Paley" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsgI74niiOo)

Paley on creating:

"The art process is a very dynamic one. It deals with introspection. A lot of it is self-realization. I don't know what I am capable of doing until I do it and the process allows for that." — from Albert Paley on the Memorial Art Gallery's "Soliloquy" (<http://mag.rochester.edu/centennial-sculpture-park/about-artists/albert-paley/>)

Paley on art today:

"Now if you get a master's degree or bachelor's degree in art you're more likely to be hired in industry because now the key word is innovation and creativity and this is what allows breakthroughs in companies. The art process is one that allows you a different type of perspective to problem solve in a different way that allows things to happen. So now people with fine arts degrees have an edge over people, which is a total transformation that has happened."

For more on Paley, visit [www.albertpaley.com/](http://albertpaley.com/)

number of pieces, size and scope," said Jonathan Kuhn, director of art and antiquities for New York City's Parks Department.

Ranging from 15 to 21 feet tall and up to 40 feet long, with the heaviest weighing over seven tons, Paley's 13 sculptures were unveiled in June between 52nd and 67th streets on Park Avenue. The process from start to installation is the subject of "Paley on Park Ave: New York City," a six-part series produced by WXXI.

High-level sponsorships

Before Paley's studio could build the Park Avenue sculptures, he had to find sponsors to fund them, each of which retails at \$300,000 to \$800,000. When the exhibit closes in November, eight of the 13 pieces will be permanently installed in sponsors' collections. Sites include public parks in Lincoln, Neb. and Leawood, Kan., university art programs and private collections. The five remaining will be sold or potentially go on exhibit at a sculpture park.

"Cloaked Intention," a 20-foot-tall, 4 ton weathered steel sculpture built for the Park Avenue project, was sponsored by RIT and trustee emeritus Ann Mulligan, a distinguished professorship in contemporary crafts at RIT. Slated to be installed on the campus in a public gathering area surrounded by Center for Integrated Manufacturing Studies and the Golisano Institute for Sustainability and College of Health Sciences, "Cloaked Intention" is the second Paley sculpture at RIT.

Efforts to bring public artwork by renowned artists like Paley, Henry Moore and Jose de Rivera started nearly a decade ago, according to RIT's senior vice president of finance and administration and treasurer James Watters.

"The campus has a very corporate feeling," said Watters. "That came through in the surveys. We wanted to make it more of a university feel with gardens, public art, landscaping and public spaces that were very inviting as well as a lot of other things, as far as new housing, and pretty much a full transformation of the campus."

Paley's most recent sculpture "Soliloquy" was installed in September

and open on Oct. 13. With the mission of the project being "Connecting People with Art," Paley said the title "Soliloquy" is reflective of the individual transformation which occurs from viewing art, reading books, listening to music, attending plays or opera, or pursuing education or training, among other experiences which create an individual's vision of the world.

The 25-foot-tall, brightly painted stainless steel sculpture will anchor the Memorial Art Gallery's Goodman Street entrance, joining over 20 other sculptures on display outside the gallery. Paley's "2000 Millennial Bench" has been reinstalled on the University Avenue side of the campus.

Paley has helped turn the notion of art from a private object to a public celebration, MAG Director Grant Holcomb said in May when awarding Paley with the 2013 Eastman Medal, presented by the University of Rochester.

"Albert Paley has recast our understanding of metal as a medium," said Holcomb. "A true master artist, Albert Paley has not only reshaped what it means to forge iron into art but has also demonstrated a vision that has altered our appreciation of sculpture and architecture."

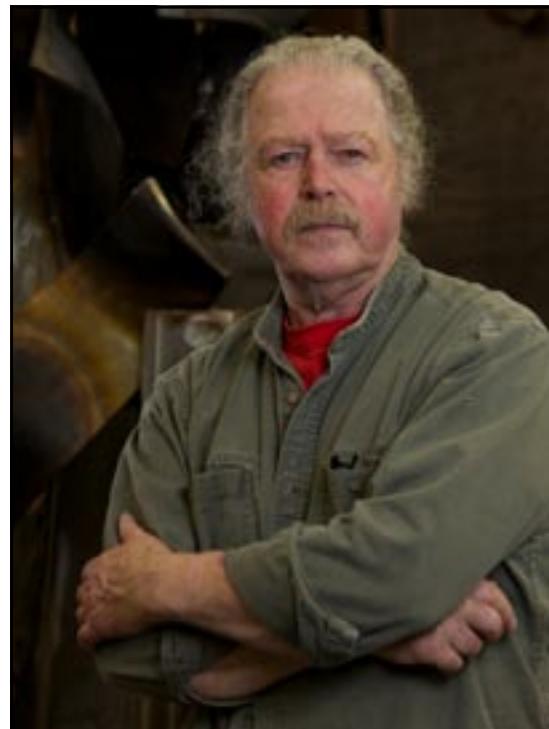
Man behind the steel

Often called a perfectionist, Paley admits there is competitiveness in his nature.

"That's one of the reasons I was drawn to metal because it's probably the most difficult and most resistant material as far as physical material and control and to develop that kind of refinement takes a huge amount of discipline, skill and demand," he said. "It's a challenge so I get extreme satisfaction out of that."

His wife Frances has a degree in metal working as well as psychotherapy. She's managed art programs at RIT. Her fine art prints apply digital techniques to original photography to give the image deep emotional impact. Frances' office is located at her Paley Studios. It's clear their home is one of two artists, she said.

"Everything is exactly chosen and I really mean that ... where everything



is placed ... what it is," she said. "Everything."

In all actuality though, Frances said, the man of steel is a real gentleman.

"He's humble," she said. "This guy is not about ego stuff. He really likes to work."

Paley said he finds his best inspiration being present and living in the moment.

"It's strange, even though a lot of thought goes into this, I really function in the present tense and I always try to," he said. "I'm doing exactly what I want to do. After all this time, if I wasn't doing what I wanted to do I'd be very frustrated."

Retirement isn't in Paley's vocabulary. When pressed, he responded, "You mean when you die?"

"Say you had a child. When do you stop being a mother? If you're alive and you think and you feel, when do you stop thinking? When do you stop experiencing things? When do you stop being emotional? When do you stop being sensitive? When do you stop engaging?" Paley questioned. "There's no such a thing. When you think of a job as a job ... but this isn't a job. It's who I am. So when do I not become who I am? When I'm dead."