Studio Art Alumnus is Digital Advertising Forerunner
by Kristin Kemp

During the 1990s dot.com bubble, David Savinar (BA, studio art, ‘76) got recruited to lead the creative team at an international internet advertising agency. He arrived with years of agency experience and an international client list that included Fortune 500 companies. He was on the forefront of digital advertising and got to create some of the world’s first consumer websites for brands like VISA and Molson.

But then the bubble burst, and Savinar found himself without a job.

So he followed the Silicon Valley entrepreneurial spirit and founded The Rain Agency, a Portland, OR, integrated advertising agency. His group provides advertising and promotions services to clients who have included Intel, Intuit and Nike.

“At Rain we are big idea people, and I’m not your typical branding exec. I approach our work through a creative lens because of my arts background,” said Savinar. “I only like to hire people with a very diverse background. We need creative thinkers in the world now more than ever.”

Flexibility and adaptability are required to succeed in the rapid-fire industry of advertising. Savinar has thrived in the fast-paced environment, in part, because his interests have always been multi-faceted. “I was a fine arts major at DU, but I took all kinds of other courses not at the art school. I think you need a well-rounded background to pursue any career. Because if you can’t think or if you can’t figure people out, then it’s not worth it,” said Savinar in a web video for DU.

In fact, after studying studio art at DU, Savinar moved to California to obtain his BFA from the Art Center College of Design. His two degrees helped him get his first job at an ad agency, but it was on the other coast, so he packed his bags again and moved to New York.

Next he worked for McCann-Erickson where he was dually based in Manhattan and Mexico City doing creative direction for clients like L’Oreal and Gillette. From there he moved to Devon Direct/Euro RSCG, another international agency. He worked on the launch of MCI and was part of the team to launch the ‘Friends and Family’ plan after the long distance telephone industry was deregulated. “Understanding multicultural and diversity has played an important part of my life and is infused into my work,” said Savinar.

With a record of overseeing demanding and deadline-driven campaigns for international Fortune 500 companies, Savinar was recruited by CyberSight during the tech boom to become the executive creative director. He packed his bags again and moved back to the west coast.
At CyberSight, an international internet advertising agency based in Portland with offices in California and Toronto, he created a 20-plus person, multi-city, interactive creative department. He did branding and developed some of the first corporate and consumer websites for brands like VISA, Molson and Cap’n Crunch.

But when the tech bubble burst, Savinar lost his job. He had to adapt to a radically different job market. And he thrived. A self-proclaimed entrepreneur, he founded his own integrated advertising agency.

He and his team are currently working on a project for the historic Old Town Chinatown in Portland. The goal is to build community and create a brand to attract new audiences to the often neglected but historical part of Portland. “It is rewarding both personally and professionally to give back to the community on this project and to see how my work can change things for the better in a diverse neighborhood,” said Savinar.

Giving back is a priority for Savinar, so he often selects projects that serve the community. He also makes time to volunteer personally despite the busy schedule of running an agency. With a BA in studio art from a traditional liberal arts university as well as a BFA from a specialized arts school, today Savinar is a major advocate for both liberal arts education and the fine arts.

He has served on numerous boards, including the Pacific Northwest College of Art, Maryhill Museum of Art and the Oregon Zoo Foundation Development Committee. He is as a member of the AHSS Advisory Board at DU.

Savinar is eager to help individual DU students, too. “Call me at Rain if you’re looking for a fun, fast-paced internship in Portland!” he said.