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**PATRICK
ROCK**

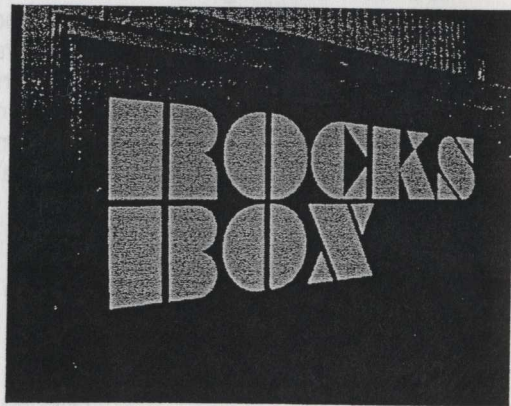
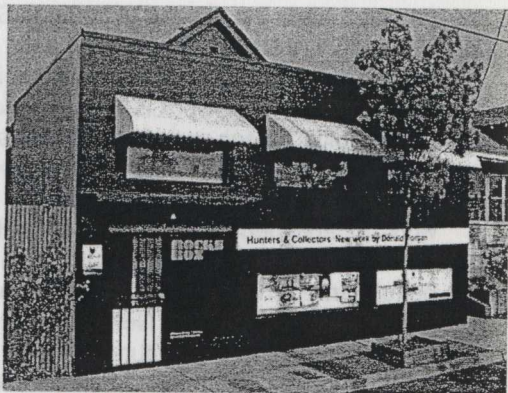
Patrick Rock is the director of Portland State University's Asian & OAC Galleries and Rockbox Fine Art on Interstate Avenue in North Portland. Rockbox is an art gallery.

CYRUS W. SMITH OF ART TALK AM IN CONVERSATION WITH

PATRICK ROCK

SEPTEMBER 29, 2008

Patrick Rock is the director of Portland State University's Autzen & MK Galleries and Rocksbox Fine Art on Interstate Avenue in North Portland. Rocksbox is an independently run exhibition space and short-term artist in residence program committed to the promotion and support of contemporary artists and their work. Independent of his work as a curator, Patrick has exhibited his sculpture, installation, performance, and video work internationally and possesses an MFA in New Genres from the San Francisco Art Institute where he was employed before returning to Portland. Rock is a native born Oregonian whose initial art exposure was as an awestruck child standing in front of the Rasmussen Collection of Pacific Northwest Native American art at the Portland Art Museum, which acted as surrogate and babysitter while his mother was completing her masters degree in teaching at PSU in the early 1970's.



CYRUS SMITH So, you've been here in Portland since 2003, but you're actually from here, correct?

PATRICK ROCK Yeah, I was born here in Portland, Oregon in 1968, and ended up in San Francisco to pursue my MFA from 2000 to 2002 in New Genres, which is basically performance video and installation art. Then in 2005, along with my sisters, purchased the building I'm currently in, and opened up Rocks Box. We're on our tenth show in a little over a year.

CS On the subject of SFAI¹, the first place that I noticed that you graduated from there was actually at Rocks Box. You have your diploma there on top of the toilet, in the bathroom?

PR Yeah I do.

CS Is that a comment maybe on the value of

IMAGES /// Top: Rocks Box, 6540 N. Interstate Avenue, Portland, Oregon. Pictured in 2008. Bottom: Rocks Box Logo. **NOTE** /// 1: San Francisco Art Institute

PR an arts education?

CS Oh goodness no. Just so I can see it everyday.

PR Is that a place of honor for you?

Like I said I can just see it there everyday. Other people can see it to. I don't want them to doubt my credentials.

CS

(laughs) Okay, great. So, if you could describe Rocks Box for us, it's an interesting space, it has a lot of layers to it.

PR

Basically it's an entire house. I've always shown in alternative spaces myself... not necessarily by choice, it just kind of wound up that way. But I wanted to have a place where contemporary artists could come, stay for a couple of weeks, and do basically whatever they wanted to do. No restraints you might get in a commercial space, or even an institutional setting. Where you could come and do whatever you wanted to do, and I would support that. I feed them, and give them a place

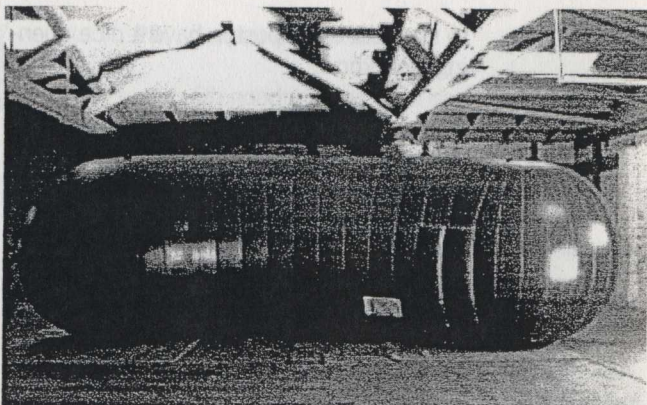
to stay, put out a poster, have a nice opening, you know.

CS And do you think it's the kind of space that you only could find in Portland?

PR You can find them in other places. It's modeled on other similar ideas. You'll find places like that in Rhode Island, all over L.A., in Chicago with the Garage, Queens Nails Annex in San Francisco. I modeled it off of places that I've shown, and places I respect. It's definitely something that's out there and happening. I've seen some of the more interesting work in places like that.

CS You mentioned the commercial space, where maybe the drive might be to sell work?

PR I mean, ultimately I think that's the drive of a space like that... and I'm understanding of that. I'm not against selling work. If you could tell me how, I'd like to. I mean, a lot of it was just wanting people to come here and visit me in Portland. To share the city with them, and share that energy that



I received from them in places that I've shown before.

CS So that's relatively recent that you've been focusing on this role of the curator too. You are the curator of Rocks Box, right?

PR Yeah, I don't know about...

CS Is that the right word?

PR I don't know if that's the right word or not. It's the word everyone uses. And curators seem to have all the power right now, don't they? I shouldn't say that out loud. Yeah, I'm definitely the curator. The artists have free reign to show whatever they want at Rocks Box, and I kind of take sole responsibility for that.

CS What drew you that? Why take on that role? When you as an artist could find another curator, or another independent space where you could be contributing.

Why take the reigns of that?

- PR** It's exciting for one thing, and also, I'm a control freak on the other hand. From the paint on the walls to the paint on the floors, to cleaning the toilets and washing the windows, and putting out the press releases. I think that excited me. I view it kind of as an art project.
- CS** That's a good point. One thing I've seen around is that there are a lot of artist slash curators lately. Do you think that is important? For a curator to be an artist also, and to treat curation as an art?
- PR** What I think, is that an artist can't just do one thing anymore. Very few artists are able to just go to their studio, produce work, and then sell that work. You'll find a lot of artists out there are either teaching, or have some other form of income. There are students here at PSU who are running spaces. Damien Gilley with Igloo, you guys with the Pancake Clubhouse. And I think that model's been around since the seventies, where an artist, just

can't do one thing any longer. They have to stay busy, and kind of have their hands in everything.

- CS** So It's a matter of staying busy for you?
- PR** Yeah, you know, someone asked me one time, what do you want to be doing in ten years. I was like, "I want to be busy. I want to be doing art full time." And I am.
- CS** You're full time lately, right?
- PR** I'm full time lately.
- CS** So, I was going to get to your personal work. We've been talking about your work as a curator, something that you're busy with right now, but you've been busy for quite a few years with projects all over, including some success in Europe, right?
- PR** I don't know if success is the word for it. I've shown in Europe.
- CS** You've shown in Europe. Well that's good.

- PR** What is success, anyway?
- CS** I was hoping you could talk about a piece that was shown in Berlin called *Cool*. It was a gigantic cooler, shaped like a coffin, right?
- PR** Yeah.
- CS** Like a beer cooler?
- PR** Right, the styrofoam beer cooler. Kind of your traditional American EPS styrofoam beer cooler. The white one you see in the grocery store, which has been theme in my work. I've got a video which I can't mention on the air,² where I crush the cooler over and over again. And I was like, "Well, they're probably going to bury me in a beer cooler, so I should probably make my coffin." So, I took that styrofoam cooler, I had it scanned with a 3-D laser, and I plotted it into a horizontal milling machine and took a giant chunk of EPS styrofoam and carved that beer cooler.

NOTE 111 2. Patrick Rock, *Iggy Want To Fuck*. 2004.

in a crate, shipped it over to Berlin, and this is where the story gets funny. When I arrived in Berlin my piece wasn't there. They explained to me it was in Hamburg in customs, and that it was being held because they thought it was a real coffin. So we drive to Hamburg, and customs there is basically like a walled compound. So, we get in the compound, and I showed them the video, with me crushing these coolers over and over again. At that point they were convinced that this was indeed an art piece, and we could indeed take it.

- CS** That's funny to imagine it inside of a crate, too. It's what you would expect to find inside of a crate, but maybe what would be protecting the art. The styrofoam itself was the piece, that's great.
- PR** And they don't know what a beer cooler is in Germany.
- CS** Yeah, did that translate at all?
- PR** It did. I think enough people have been to America and are aware of our consumer

kind of throw away culture. But it did translate. People are well aware of our Sunday picnic excess.

CS That's an interesting thing though, showcasing American excesses. When you're here it means one thing, and you're talking about the state we're in as you're living it. But then taking that to Europe... how was that received? Were they proud that you were pointing this out for them?

PR You never know how they take things there. But they do engage you in a dialog. It's not necessarily an attack, but they engage you in a dialog about every aspect of your work. It's actually really kind of refreshing. And there's a respect of artists there. It's a respectable trade.

CS Getting back to, blowing these things out of proportion. One of the first pieces I saw of yours was a gigantic sausage. You could actually walk inside of it, a large inflatable sculpture, right?

PR That's *Simulacra/Hermaphrodite*, which

is a forced air inflated jump room. That was actually my thesis piece for graduate school. It's like a kiddie jump-room, so it's a fun and a viewer interactive piece, but there's no real easy way to enter or exit the piece, so there's no real dignity involved. It started out as a drawing of a phallus. Like a hot dog, or a sausage, or feces. Can I say that on the radio?

CS Yeah, sure.

PR I sent that drawing to a fabricator, and the fabricator said, "Oh, I think we got what you're after." That was the first piece I actually had fabricated.

CS It's funny thinking of this as your culminating graduate school experience. Your thesis project being this gigantic sausage. How was that received?

PR People weren't real happy. It was really loud. And I kind of kept it under my hat. I also knew the dynamic of a graduate show can get pretty messy. So I had this piece ready, I rolled it out, I turned on the



switches and I left. There was some complaint, but ultimately the piece stayed, and people had a good time with it.

CS More generally about this subject matter. It seems like you're dissecting the Bar-b-que, pretty thoroughly. I noticed a link from your website to this rolling bar-b-que on the back of a truck. And then, various other obsessions around bar-b-ques, beer coolers and sausages. Is that the center of the American experience for you?

PR I think it references American leisure. Respite from failure, and humor, I think is what's going on in my work. Does that make sense?

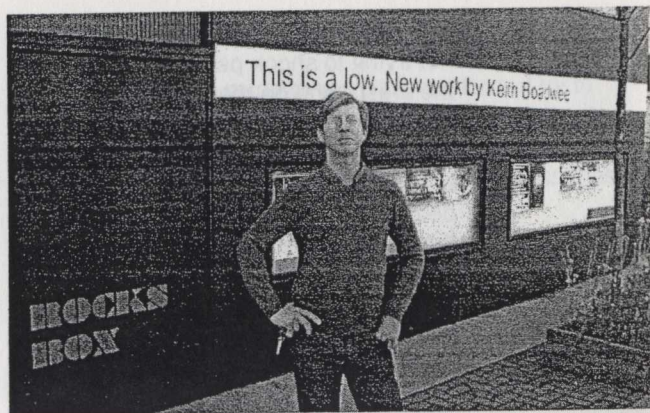
CS Yeah, I think that's simple enough. But some of this work we can't talk about on the air, right? And I was actually going to get you talking about that. Some of the work you've been showing at Rocks Box could be considered racy.

IMAGES /// Top: Patrick Rock, *Iggy Want to Fuck*. Film still. 2004. Bottom: Patrick Rock, *Cool*. 2003.

- PR** I don't consider it racy.
- CS** I'm going to use a phrase here. I try to avoid these sort of phrases, but "shock and awe." Just to get your thought on what that has to do with exhibitions these days.
- PR** I find that I'm drawn to work that contains pathos, and work that is performance influenced, work that is influenced by slapstick humor. I was watching Chevy Chase on Youtube the other day. I hate to admit I watch Youtube, but he was talking about Sarah Palin. Am I saying her name right?
- CS** I don't know. Pay-lin, I think.
- PR** I don't know, but I can see Russia from my house. Anyway. He was talking about the role of humor in politics, and how humor was necessary to work out the serious unpleasanties of our culture. How humor could be a way to ease into that. And I think I've always found that interesting in work. So, I'm not necessarily

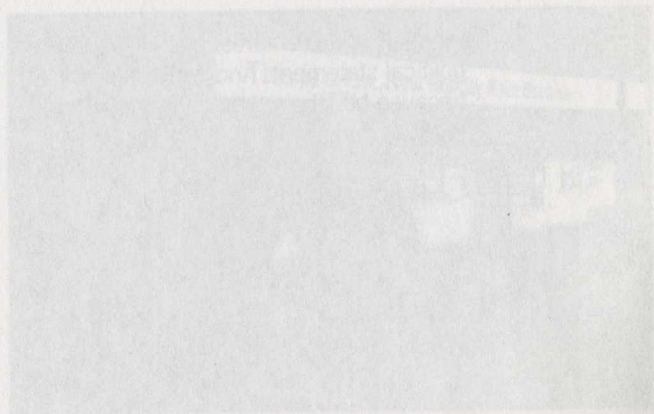
shocked by this work, and I'm honestly not trying to shock people. I don't think the artists who do that work are trying to shock people. If you sit down and talk with the artists who show there, you find out that they're very serious, and very dedicated, and very sincere about what they're doing. At the same time, yeah, I think it does push some social norms, and social boundaries, but I think often that is the role of art, and the role of humor.

- CS** So more of an elaborate dark humor than a shock.
- PR** You know, I'm shocked by strange things. I put the posters for the exhibitions on the front of the building, and someone in the neighborhood continues to tear them down every time I put them up. Why would they want to tear down an art poster, when there's these news boxes, which contain advertisements for call girls in the back? Nobody seems to be offended by that. Which is what I love about art... It still has the ability to move people.



I think if you're an artist at all, it's a social political statement. And I still enjoy art, because has the power to change things, to move things.

IMAGES /// Top: Keith Boadwee, standing in front of Rocks Box in 2008. Bottom: Benédikt Ender, *WW III-The General of Freedom*. Performance at Rock's Box. 2007.



ART TALK AM // ON THE RADIO

CYRUS W. SMITH IN CONVERSATION
WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
KPSJ RADIO 2008-2009

Page 2 of 10

This interview took place September 25th, 2008, live on KPSJ, independent of the 2007 AFA Monday night Lecture Series.

All audio available for download at www.arttalkam.com

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Book 5 of 10

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ART TALK AM 11 ON THE RADIO

KPSU RADIO 2008-2009
WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
CYRUS W. SMITH IN CONVERSATION

Box 2 of 10

This interview took place December 29th, 2008, 11am on KPSU, Eugene,
Ore. of the PS125/126A Monday night lecture series.

All audio available for download at www.kpsu.org



