



The Portland Art Museum Podcast - Episode 4

SPEAKERS

Grace Kook-Anderson, Rob Rhee

G Grace Kook-Anderson 00:05
You're listening to the Portland Art Museum Podcast. On the previous episode we heard from Annette Bellamy, an artist and commercial fisherman whose work is featured in our current exhibition, "the map is not the territory." On this episode, Seattle artist Rob Rhee, talks about his background influences and life in the Seattle art scene. Rob considers himself a collector of accidents, a rubbernecker, and the results of his discoveries are simply breathtaking. Relevant links will be in this episode's description, and a full transcript is available at portlandartmuseum.org/podcast. You will hear my voice from time to time but only when there is a shift in topics. Until then, this is Rob Rhee.

R Rob Rhee 01:02
My name is Robert Rhee, I'm a visual artist and a writer and I live here in Seattle. I consider myself a sculptor. And even though I work in a variety of different mediums and materials, some of its writing, some of it is poetry. I think of most of it in terms of sculptural processes, cutting and bending and latching, welding, pinning. I really think about material pretty broadly. So it doesn't necessarily have to be a thing that you can pick up, but something really anything that you can manipulate, put together with something else. I wasn't really aware of contemporary art in high school. I didn't really start making art until college. And I remember this because, or there was it was really funny. My dad used to teach golf at Chelsea Piers. And I remember I would go visit him in high school and I would walk past all the galleries and in Chelsea, and I remember thinking that they should

really do something with These enormous spaces I was totally unaware of, of anything happening there. But when I got to college, I needed a work study job. And so I had I chose to I applied to to the first one was to drive the Zamboni at the ice skating rink. And I got there and there was when I got to the interview there was there was like a hockey coach sitting down and then two hockey players. And I immediately understood that this is not a job that I'm going to get this is a job for, like a hockey player to have a work study job. And so I got my second choice, which was to run the wood shop in the metal shop and the sculptor department. And there I just learned how to use the tools. I started making things for friends and us and one of the sculpture teachers, definitely Fitzpatrick said, you know, you hear all the time just making stuff. So take a sculpture class, and I was thinking Which major at the time and, and they didn't let you do any creative writing until your senior year, you had to first imbibed classics before you were ready to speak, produce words of your own. But sculpture was the total opposite. Like, I remember. I remember, you know, taking these classes and then Jessica Stockholder who ran the graduate program, you know, she, she saw me around, she's like, you know, I see you're here on Wednesday nights on Wednesday nights, we do the graduate critiques, you can just come. So I would go and it would be like, you'd show up in a room and there would be something on the ground or something. It was very hard to know what you're going to expect. And then there would be a two hour conversation that would often get heated or would lose steam or it would just go in all these different directions. And I was I was a suburban kid from from Long Island. So to me that was, it was the most wild thing I've ever seen. So I just didn't go back since I've never gone back since then. Daphne Fitzpatrick was a sculptor. She taught the intro sculpture classes. And then Jessica stockholder, she taught an advanced class and ran the graduate program. And she was she was definitely a very important mentor for me early on. Yeah, Jessica stockholder and Joe Scanlon. They really, they really encouraged me to, to jump right in without a lot of prior knowledge. I think that was that was extremely important for my development. The I remember a funny story where, you know, so I was, I was like a sophomore going to these graduate critiques and very illustrious, you know, critics and art historians and artists would come in for these critiques and basically for the first couple, maybe like a for the first year, so I didn't really say anything because I was just getting my bearings. But then I remember there was some conversation about medium specificity. Which, in in like in, like an artistic conversation means specificity to the medium. So specificity that painting specificity of sculpture so like a medium specific painting is like a painting that deals with its flatness or it's, it's, I don't know, like pictorial quality or something, or the flatness against the idea of the picture playing whatever. But I didn't know that. I just thought they were being really obnoxious and saying that it was better for something to be medium specific, as opposed to very specific. So in the middle of this, like, graduate critique, I was like, I think I need to stand up and say something. I was like, I don't know how I did. That was like, I thought art was about being very specific. Like, why are we talking about being medium specific? Don't we? Don't

we all want to be very specific in art? It was like, a very long hush and people are like, Rob it's a medium specificity. Go read some Clement Greenberg. I think that was a way in which the the program is very open. Like I really didn't know something very foundational to the conversation, but I was never asked to leave. Yeah, kind of learned on the go to other mentors who are really important to me what Mikko i'd Sumo who was a graduate student, who I worked, I worked for after, after undergrad in her studio and continues to be really important friend and mentor and then Dave Hardy, who's at both Dave already who's a sculptor. And he really showed me how to build things.

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Grace Kook-Anderson 06:53

It should come as no surprise that Rob has an open curiosity and willingness to explore his place. In life, his art is evident of that. And like many of the artists in the exhibition, Rob's ability to reimagine his place in the world is exactly what brought him to the northwest.

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Rob Rhee 07:12

So my partner just finished her PhD at the University of Washington. But we moved out here six and a half years ago for her PhD. It was interesting because it was, in some ways, really important move for me that I never would have chosen for myself. Because, you know, theoretically you're if you're an artist, you should be in New York or Los Angeles. And those are these the centers of the conversation or the energy or that's where the big shows happen, the resources. The one thing that was really helpful for me, as an artist being here in Seattle was, I think, in New York, I spent a lot of time blocking things, a lot of my energy, keeping things Out of my own consciousness that I couldn't deal with, you know, works, bodies of work or conversations that I thought were bogus, but that were preeminent things that I just thought didn't really deserve attention. And New York, I spent a lot of time trying to not see it, avoiding it, like making my life so I wouldn't come across it. And I think in Seattle, I've found that a lot of that energy now goes to finding the things that I want to be part of. And I think that just fits my personality better. Yeah, it's kind of funny. I don't know what the threshold is where you become part of the place where you live. I know one threshold for me is when I fly home to Seattle does it like I go back to New York for the holidays, but which one is a departure in which one is an arrival? So it definitely feels like Seattle is a place where I already arrive, you know, it's like, I wrote this article for art in America about this. It's this zine gathering called Dune that happened, I hope it's still happens. I don't know if it still happens. But it happened in Wallingford, or sort of like more like North Seattle, I think it was. And then I was like, maybe they it was between Wallingford and Green Lake. But people would get together at the cafe racer, like, one night a month to make a collaborative Xen, everyone would draw a page. And then at the end of the night, you put in your page, give \$2 and you would get, you would

get a copy of last month seen. And then all the drawings would be put together into a single volume, and be reprinted for the next month. And that's what I thought was really fascinating about it was, here's a community where no one is a bystander where no one participates just as a viewer. every viewer is also a maker. And that really changes the dynamics. It's not scalable. It's not. You can't use that model to broadcast. But something different happens when everyone has skin in the game. So I think something of that relates to being in a more intimate community, and also a community where people are here for multiple reasons.

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Grace Kook-Anderson 10:24

I'm thrilled that Rob ended up in Seattle because it's hard for me to imagine this exhibition without his work. Every artist contribution to the exhibition stands out when you walk through the galleries, and Rob's is no exception. After you pass through Fernanda D'Agostino's installation, you are directly facing one set of Rob's work sculptural pieces that are individually recessed into the wall.

R

Rob Rhee 10:50

For "the map is not the territory", I'm going to be showing a brand new body of work and then presenting an older body of work, but the way I've never done before. And the connecting concept is the idea of a vessel trying to think broadly about what it is a vessel is what it does. What does it actually hold? How does it what is its effect on the world? And some of this came directly out of some reading I had been doing over the summer into media theory. There's this writer Bernard Siegert, who writes about vessels but also anthropologists like Benjamin Albert, he looking at sort of Amerindian vessels. And, and, and one thing that they, they brought up for me that I thought was very powerful was, is that like, a vessel is a very fundamental creator of difference. Once you have a vessel you have, you have an inside and an outside, it affects the world. It doesn't simply like hold a thing. It embodies a situation where you can have something sacred and something profane. You can have something contaminated in something pure. And I think a lot of my work revolves around these borders or kind of moments of encounter or sort of like edges. And the vessel for me seemed like a something that is so straightforward, and yet its effect is really quite profound. So I have these sculptures I've been making with cultivated gourds under the title occupations of uninhabited space. Yeah, so it's really cool to show the occupations of uninhabited space in Portland because that title comes directly from the dispossessed by Ursula Le Guin, who I think is a really important and continues to be a really important person I associate with with Portland. Really great thinker. In the dispossessed, there's this character who's a physicist and he kind of he moves between his world which is a it's almost like moving between like a

communist society in a capitalist society, one which is very egalitarian. And one which is they called proprietarian. And his, his wife, who's a sculptor, makes these kind of like mobiles. They are these there, these sculptures that that they described is kind of hanging from the ceiling and spinning. They serve almost like a portal in the story, where when he returned, when he returns, he returns also to those sculptures. I think probably for personal reasons. I found that very moving. And I guess today I was thinking about the idea of the automobile, like immobile as a term that's very resonant, like both with Alexander Calder, who's an artist to who I really admire, but also like Bruno Latour is immutable mobiles. I think of my sculptures as being a part of both of those definitions of the word. Like when I'm working with the cultivation process, my material isn't a gourd. Oh, yeah. I think that perhaps like the, I hadn't mentioned little war and the immutable mobile and I was thinking that perhaps that's not exactly totally accurate because, you know, unlike the tour's immutable mobile like that the kind of reproduction of the printing press, I've never made a repeated form with my sculptures. And I, I've done this for six years now. And and that's something that a lot of people have kind of asked about, like, why don't you make, why don't you repeat a form because it's built into the language that you have. This metal cage you can think of is a cage, you can think of it as a forecast, you can think of it as a model and then you have this culture. invaded gourd, which has its own if not cage it has its own boundary, which is like you have a kettle gourd which for 10,000 years has been bred to be this shape or you have a snake cord for 10,000 years. So in the DNA, there's a lot of manipulation in there. So I think of of like the interaction between the steel structure and the gourd as not being sort of out of the blue. It's not like you have this pure unadulterated natural material that is now suddenly being manipulated by man. I think it it's highlighting something that we already do, but we don't see ourselves doing and I was thinking like, perhaps one of the reasons why I don't want there to be a single form that gets repeated and then multiple gourds go in, is like I do think of the successful sculptures as subjects. I guess saying that they are people's a little too silly, but I think they are subjects in that when, when they're good or when they achieve something, what they achieve is a kind of presence. They don't achieve a finish they achieve a sense of being, like, a sense of on deniability for me. And I think part of that is this relationship between a life and the shape of that life, which has to be contingent, you know, it has to be this contingent relationship between this growing thing, and then the things that shape its growth. And, like, I think we have enough I mean, maybe I'm getting too political here, but I think we have enough examples of ways in which living things or human forms are like, very, in very sophisticated ways are, are like truncated and move through processes up. I actually don't think I could do anything as sophisticated as all the ways in which our movements and in and conversations and in motions are analyzed and aggregated. And so I think that there is something that's like, there is something a bit more perfect in the bio almost biographical relationship between the living thing and the context or, in this case, in this case, the the metal structure that it encounters. I started working with gourds

maybe 10 years ago, and it's probably surprising but the first thing I'd liked about gourds was that they were vegetables that were big, like it. I had come from making lots of I spent a couple years making work a lot with eggplant skins. Yeah, which I found to be a very evocative material. It's almost like leather. You know, I came from to go back to like my mentors. Like Jessica Stockholder, I think of her as like a very important early influence. Because I think of myself as a bricoleur. So I like an artist who puts things together. And it's it's the putting things together seeing what does it does not go together. That's basically my main operation as an artist. So a lot of a lot of the brico Lodge. History involves found objects and, and so of course, I started with found objects, but eggplants, like, kind of like organic materials are an interesting found object because they're all there a found object. Only notionally, like every orange is different, every eggplant is different, but we kind of have an a normative sense of what an eggplant is. Whereas like, every one of these buckets is produced by the exact same process. So they are much more the same thing. So that's kind of that was the transition to working with with organic materials is having something that was both a found object and yet was a living thing. would change over time, which would give back much more, but the sculptures, the scale of the sculptures are in a sense tied to assert tied this to the size of the the the eggplant. And so, that was one way in which I got to gourds because gourds are a bigger vegetable skin. So it kind of very stupid reason. But oftentimes it happens where one comes across the thing for a reason that is not particularly meaningful. But once you once that relationship is cemented, then like if it is a meaningful one, like all these other evocations come out, like for example, like one thing that I found very exciting about the gorgeous I was showing my work and internationally. so fascinating that everywhere. I showed it like in career the Netherlands, United States, people saw gourds as their own kid folk object so they're like oh yeah I I like my grandma has one of these at her house or this is there's like if you go to like the Folk Village that you have you can use they had these gourds is dippers or musical instruments are kind of like birdhouses, it was very fascinating where the their, their sense of authenticity was really mixed up. were like, on the one hand, they were seen as these kind of inauthentic kitchen items, but they were seen as these inauthentic kitchen items all over the world. And it's because gourds have been there the first domesticated plant they've been with human beings for 10,000 years so they're in globally indigenous wherever people are gourds are so in a sense they are this universal thing. And it's in this that universality that that makes them seem kitschy this is I think that's a very, like very strange and thing now that I've worked with gourds for 10 years, and not just with already grown gourds, but with the cultivation process, you know, for the occupations of uninhabited space, I first started to think about it. The the prod product is having to materials, you have the steel structure, and you have the gourd. But really the material is neither of those things. It's actually something that only exists within the time frame of the sculpture, which is the growth like this, this kind of this material that I never actually touch, but I'm always working with. I don't necessarily know what it's going to do, but I know its

parameters. I never get direct contact with it. And I think that's what's really exciting is when I'm making these structures on, I'm always I'm setting up our proposition and imagining what a counter proposition might be. And then working in this kind of stuff. along. And now that I've done this for six years, like this dialogue has made me more fluent in. It's kind of silly, but in the language of this growth, I know more what can or cannot be done. And my body knows it. And another really interesting thing about it is that, you know, I'm, I'm just like everyone a part of a, like our contemporary world where like, everything is on demand, the seasonal changes of life don't don't affect our food supply. As much as I've been maybe it's happening more now. But like I can get, I can get oranges all year round I can, like I don't really think about my food in terms of seasonality, or even much of my life in terms of seasonality. But this process, it can only happen according to the seasonal calendar, and it can only happen over the course of a year. So like it's a very restrained process. That brings me back to the agricultural calendar. Every year. And that's been really important to me because like, as an artist, you know, opportunities come up, sort of out of nowhere and you and you always want to be able to kind of like to jump on them, capitalize on them, but this process doesn't work that way. And I think that's really been important for me growing as an artist to have this thing that is outside of a kind of, whatever capitalist time scale or, or like a kind of the speed, the speed of contemporary life, because if I could make it go faster, I would, but I just can't and I think that that constraint on me as really molded me. I was interested in I plans for a very specific project at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, they have this child size, Souza suit of armor is such a weird object. And I was fascinated with this. Like why would you have this elaborately design I built an executed suit of armor for a child. I mean, of course, the child would never be sent into battle. So it was just like so strange, strange thing to have. And I got, I kind of looked into it more and I found that that suit of armor was actually a really important message. I think it was King Philip. But King Philip was air to to multiple kingdoms in Europe throwing off the balance of power. So he needs to announce one of his lineages, so that like the balance of power be restored. So he does that. And then his son gets this suit of armor which has the line of Leone The Castle of Castillo and the poor Florida Leah friends. So he gets a suit of armor, which represents his claim to all those thrones, but not the thrones. And so like this armor that is never used for battle, this like lineage that is never used for claims of rights of rulership. I don't know how to describe it, but there's something so perfect about it. It's reality and it's unreality. And I think I personally, was interested in it as a sculptor is just so beautiful. But also like, as a Korean American, like my, so much of my images of Korea come from my dad's imagination. These like, sort of like fables and tales, and, and it is a kind of thing of like Asian Americans in particular, I think, Corinne, I don't know if it's specific trainings, but like, talking about how, you know, when they were back in Korea, they were princes and kings and, and so like, I think I've kind of grown up as a person who felt like he had some kind of fabled past. You know, like, that was something that my dad really talked about a lot. And

so I think maybe that is what drew me to that object. And because I think it's, you know, like, I think like objects aren't objectively important they like speak to those who can i mean it's that's a little too mushy but like i think if something speaks to you you are speaking with it it's not it is of course a dialogue and so i wanted to make my own suit child sized suit of armor so to like just remake it and i need to make the gloves and the clothes beautiful leather tiny hand gloves and i didn't want to use leather because i think like i just didn't want to get into any conversation about like consumer products and and like the value of like leather and luxury product like handbags and all this so i wanted something that would read as leather but not invoke the conversations about luxury goods and so i think i just shot an eggplant and i thought oh that has that has like leather enos that contains a connection to leather and so the That was, it's like this connection between the vegetables and the body. Like, like this, like eggplant skin being used to form a finger, like gourds to me really represent are really, I think service surrogates for the human body and, and it's just very easy to see the ways in which gourds resemble human forms. And I think, I mean, it's a kind of wacky idea, but I think in the same way we've bred animals to, to kind of serve as a kind of, almost like the opposite side of a puzzle piece of shadow of us, like gourds, we, you know, we've, we've been choosing these things for 10,000 years. I think they formed some part of our silhouette, and are there for bodily in this in the exhibition, like alone that the idea of vessels, there are other sculptures that that I've been making along that alongside the process that use some use cord some use other natural materials some he's found objects but i think one way i often describe myself is is as like a bicycle or rubber necker oftentimes i set myself up on i set myself going on projects just so that i'm kind of in the flow lucky in the river basically and and where i end up going seems or where i set out to go i think it's much less arbitrary than that encounters i make on the way and i think that's because i'm looking for something on the tune to things and my attune minutes specific like one of the processes processes i'm working with now is it's algae net which is like made from alginic acid which is seaweed and i made sculptors the seaweed like 10 years ago and i really liked when see we dries the way it kind of like ripples and like distorts and you can see it in the ultimate like basically This is cut up seaweed that's like mixed with some kind of, I don't know, binder or something. And as it dries, it distorts and shrinks. And then like, I'd make these kind of fast molds using using gourds. And then I would pour Allegiant in first and while the house and it was still wet, I pulled this plaster in and because of differences in density, it's basically like a soft mold. So that the relationship between this and this, it's almost totally decided by the materials, because like, they're in the enclosure, but then they, they have to negotiate the space together, and it creates these really wild forms of like, contact. And so like, I think if I were to describe my process, I find material itself to be very inspiring. And I take a lot of cues from material. I think I do my due diligence to keep to keep My to kind of hold my responsibility but, but I am not the primary actor nor nor should I be. I would say part of maturing as an artist is, is definitely like claiming things about yourself that are

true but maybe are not standard. And so I actually had a really fun studio visit with a close friend of mine math, Matthew often Barker here in Seattle, where we took turns, watching each other work. And the idea came from my dad gave me Michelangelo's notebooks for Christmas, I was reading them, and there was this one passage where Michelangelo was describing, working in a studio and then the pope came by and just sat down and watched him work for two hours and didn't say anything. And Michelangelo is kind of processing processing this in his journal. And I just put one I was like, Oh my God, is that a studio visit? Like what is that because we don't do that today. Today we talk so much about process that We don't show process. And that's that's just weird. I just realized that we don't do that. So, Matt and I took turns, you know, watching each other work and then just telling each other what we saw. And one thing that Matt said that was really surprising, but not surprising, but just so factual that it was powerful for me was like, yeah, it seems like you just, you don't know what you're doing. You said about a process, you move the material. And then as you're going, you kind of find a place to go. And I think for a long time, I was really, I both knew that was who I am, but didn't was always trying to say, not say that really directly. Because it seems lesser than it seems like not a position but the, the lack of a position. And I think part of that is like there's something really strange about our culture. Where we believe that choices are tied to personhood, like, the more choices you have in your life, the more you activated is your personhood. And I said, there's a really like consumer, me, I'm a part of it. It's just part of our structure. But then I think about like some of the most meaningful things that happened in my life, like becoming an artist. To some extent that I didn't choose that it, I came upon it, it came upon me. So then why do we only value or why do we value the choosing of things where we don't value the encountering, or the recognition of encounters. So for me, the studio that those moments are aware that the proof of concept really flourishes is that I mean, to be just be surprised by the material world is in a way, making contact, just in a very, like direct, I think itself meaningful thing I think about I get, you know, like I said, I think of myself as a sculptor. And I think of sculpture as a medium, in terms of time. And, and so for example, like, very primary elements of sculpture like material, or scale, or even form, I think about temporarily, much more than I think about visually or spatially. So like, with, with scale, like I think very much about the time scale of a project versus the kind of physical scale of it timescales, and the ways in which I want to push myself as an artist is to greater and greater or more meaningful timescales, more profound timescales, as opposed to more profound physical skills. You know, like right now I'm working with one generation of growth, could I work with, could I work with 10 generations were like the kind of the end product is like the descendant of a distance of a descendant. I mean, that's where we're like, the relationship between the living thing and a kind of repeated form might be really interesting. where it's like, it's, it's this generational thing, where in some ways the gourd is the same. Oftentimes with with with in sculpture people talk about material as if it were this dead or dumb thing. I like to think about material, like the way

comedians say like I have my material, you know, I have 10 minutes of material, because, like when when you hear that, you know that the material is part of the person, the person can use it and manipulated because it comes from them. They've minded from themselves. So that material always has to come from the flow of time or the flow of a person's life. And then with forms, like I think about forms, again, in terms of this sense of normal activity, so like, not like whether whether or not this sculpture is finished. Like we're in the evolutionary process, do we find it? Is it it's not about like a process of refinement of taking a thing and making it most perfect. But like, we're in the life cycle is it most itself? So? Yeah, that's the way I think of the relationship between sculpture in time. But I didn't start this project until I moved out here. And talking about timescales, I think, being in proximity to, to forests. When I enter a forest, I, my time scale resets. It just seems so unnatural to be for me in a forest and be thinking about a kind of communicative pace of like, every 15 seconds. Like, instead you have like, you have this like ecological timescale that's undeniable. I would certainly expect that that has influenced me in my time here.

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Grace Kook-Anderson 36:00

I appreciate the way that Rob describes his practice as an artist and explore of surprises. He also has a clear admiration for the gifts of nature and honors them in his work. At this point in Rob's interview, it felt appropriate to ask about one of this exhibitions, major themes, decolonization in terms of decolonization.

R

Rob Rhee 36:23

I've had several projects which which are late more directly to that idea. I have this this Sudoku poem series, which takes like a kind of a Japanese kind of seven century Japanese poetic format, and uses it to bring kind of disparate points of view into contact. Sunoco poems have a syllable structure of 577577. And they were I think they were sometimes discussed as envoy poems. So there would be like a voice and there would be the envoy bringing the return voice back. There's always this this This relationship lovers poems. So I saw that as a really interesting opportunity to have, again, like this board or this, this edge, where I could have two things, two things meet. And sometimes those two things were totally alien to each other. So I've written, I've written pieces that kind of like talk about the meanings of different people who are others to each other, which kind of relate some of like, one of them relate directly to, like, this book, shamanism colonialism in the wild man, in terms of the the the way that the work I'm showing for this exhibition relates to decolonization. I found this quote from Trinh T. Minh-ha. And then she's talking about clarity as it relates to writing and the ways in which like, clarity can we can think about clarity as being a kind of objective measure, but she makes the argument that some people have more access to clarity than others, because some people have things to say,

that don't necessarily fit within that pre existing conversation. And therefore, it seems like it's coming out of nowhere. I want to read this thing, because I think it's a really relevant to both the question about decolonization and then my own work in relationship to it. So she writes, and this is from woman native other to write well in this framework of mind is to arrange the signs of literary conventions, so as to reach an optimum form to quote express a reality, such as, for example, the self. Hence the concept of art as self expression, which is often taken for something given as solid. So she's talking about the self, which is often taken as something given as solid as referral as an object that lies deeply hidden under my layers of artificiality. He's waiting patiently to be uncovered and proven yet either right or do not express a reality more than a reality impresses itself upon me, expresses me. So I thought that part was was really something that I connected with. Yeah, I really connected with that. This idea of, of me as an artist, not being the not being the holder of the reality, or not holding a kind of one sided relationship to reality, but this like dual force of expressing itself, through me, it impressing upon me, it expressing me myself. And so perhaps this is a kind of oblique way of addressing the question of decolonization. But kind of in the prelude to this, this particular quote, she says, clarity she's talking about, about writing and writing clearly, and the ways in which that clarity is not equally available to people to all people. And she writes clarity is a means of subjection, a quality of both official taught language and of correct writing to old mates of power together they flow together they flower vertically to impose an order. Maybe that's the answer. Maybe I was having a conversation with my my friend who's a painter and the conversation was about craft, but the conversation about craft of course, like related to canons and the ways in which like craft ties one to to kind of canonical sense of like, what is good, what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. And then when one works sort of like outside or against that kind of dualism, you can be seen as being unclear or not fulfilling the criteria. And I I, I really responded to 20 mins Ha's writing because I think she makes a space for for voices that are outside of the Canon for their way of making meaning that is not a kind of a not a lesser than version of, of kind of canonical way of speaking. It's saying like, I can't do what you're asking for. And it's, and I also don't want to, and I can do something that you're not asking for, and it's something you can't do. I found that to be an extremely powerful position, as opposed to a defensive position.

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Grace Kook-Anderson 41:28

Something that I admire about the eight artists in the map is not the territory is their commitment to learning and exploration. Rob's connection between decolonization and the writings of trimming ha, shows to me, the exhibitions curator that there is more to these artists than just something that is aesthetically interesting. Rob's choice of passage makes clear that there is an awareness of where one stands in our society, and brings to mind the idea of resiliency.



Rob Rhee 41:59

So resiliency is very present in the gourd pieces, the occupations of uninhabited space series where you have this living thing that is growing and then it hits a kind of obstruction or a model or some kind of something that is something that is a kind of addressing it, to see the the gourd work around it. I think I do think of that as a form of resiliency. And I think of it as resiliency, both resilience, in some ways, a kind of simplistic way that people have viewed those sculptures is as a form of like manipulation, or I've heard some Senegal you're torturing like, why do you want to torture these vegetables? Which I think is it's just, it's just a little silly. Number one, because it doesn't, it doesn't acknowledge the ways in which every piece of produce we we eat is heavily manipulated. And it's not like you the same person goes into a supermarket and just sees it as an atrocity. It just it just like this manipulation is like visualize where the other manipulations are kind of hidden. And then like, I do think of the gourd meeting the, the model or the cage or that the forecast as a period of differentiation. So like, you could also think about, you have this seed you planted in the ground, and it grows up and it's going to grow to its heirloom shape. But because of this encounter, it will become something totally unknowable. I think there's something to see in that. Resilience is something that can only be understood in a relationship. It's not like and yeah, it's not it's not simply like one does not express resiliency on on one zone one expresses resiliency In response to one's environment, so with the map is not the territory I see, I see that as saying, you know, we have reality. And then we have all the modes with which we ascertain reality. So, these could be instruments or tools, it could be modes of thinking. And for me What, what's interesting about creating this, or stating this dynamic is not like the idea that our tools are necessarily distorting reality, or or that reality itself is, is kind of, like knowable or unknowable, but the ways in which like every experience we have of reality is always mediated, and and to always to understand that, that that mediation is not an impure thing. It's not like a corruption. It is our introduction to reality, that mediation is always part of the conversation and yeah, And actually, that's something that Bernard Siegert, who I brought up in when I was talking about the vessels, that's something he discusses where he uses this the kind of formulation of like the parasite, where, like, we have this idea that like, I am a speaker, I speaker a, want to talk to you speaker B, but he he presents this like, this parasite, which is see, which gets in between A and B. But he says that, like the parasite exists before, before both A and B, like, for example, like, like this idea that I have something to tell you, right. But the language this verbal language I'm using is getting in the way and it's, it's, it's like, in some ways, like manipulating the pure emotional content, I want to kind of get from my head into yours, but this idea of the parasite says like, the emotional content in my head, is constituted by like this possibility of language. And so like this mediation is what allows there to be things in my core, it defines the situation in which there are things in my head that I want to communicate to you. So for, for me the map is not the territory is interesting for that reason is that it looks

at mediation, not as a problem to be solved, but as a state of existence to be investigated. I hope viewers take away a sense of curiosity about the world as it exists, you know, it is not necessarily an avant garde position for art to be a place of attunement or paying attention of, of training the body to, to integrate with the world, but I think it's still important and perhaps even more important today, for us to be aware of the world and to not believe that everything is figured out in making sculpture in having these like very long term very deep relationships. With material, it allows me a sense of seeing the ways in which my relationship to the world is a, something I construct. I hope viewers see that and relate to that. Because that is really important part of being a person in the world. It's really great to be a part of an exhibition of, of artists in the region. And because it sets up the possibility for longer conversations and that this is perhaps the beginning of things that will continue between between the artists and and hopefully with people who see the show and, and, and connect with it and make connections between the artists as well. Yeah, and I've really enjoyed working with with everyone at the Portland resume and just the level of tension is such a, the just the level of commitment to the work. It's it's very profound way on the other side of it, so thank you



Grace Kook-Anderson 48:00

thank you for listening to the portland art museum podcast on the next episode you'll hear the full interview of jenny irene miller a photographer from anchorage alaska whose work can also be seen in the map is not the territory at portland art museum through may 5 2019 we appreciate that you've chosen to listen to this podcast and encourage you the listener to get involved if you have an idea for an episode of this podcast visit pan dot t o slash podcast idea and fill out the submission form we would also appreciate it if you could take a moment to rate and review this episode if you're using apple podcasts or itunes i'd like to thank Rob Rhee for this episode and Jon Richardson our producer and most importantly thank you for listening