

# Episode 12 - Portland Art & Learning Studio

## SPEAKERS

Caitlin Pruett, Elmeater Morton, Daniel Rolnik, Jon Richardson, Matthew Spencer

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Daniel Rolnik 00:05

You're listening to the Portland Art Museum Podcast. My name is Daniel Rolnik, and I'm the Gallery Director of the Portland Art and Learning Studio, an art studio and gallery space for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are a program of Albertina Kerr. The nonprofit has been working for over 100 years in Oregon to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health challenges, and other social barriers to lead self-determined lives and reach their full potential. The Portland Art and Learning Studio and Albertina Kerr are not directly affiliated with the Portland Art Museum. I submitted this episode suggestion because I want to let everyone know about the things I've learned during my time working with over 200 artists at the Portland Art and Learning Studio, who work on their raw, creative passion of art each and every weekday. The voices you'll hear on this episode are me Daniel Rolnik, and Matthew Spencer, one of the artists who just closed out an epic gallery show called "Am I Monster", and Jon Richardson he produces this podcast and I asked that he sit in with us. There will be links to some of the things we mentioned in this episode's description. And at [portlandartmuseum.org/podcast](http://portlandartmuseum.org/podcast). You can also go there to read this episode's transcript. And if you want to submit an episode suggestion like I did, visit [pam.to/podcastidea](http://pam.to/podcastidea). And now here's my conversation with Matthew Spencer and Jon



Matthew Spencer 01:41

I'm Matthew Spencer. I'm autistic. I've been working at PALS, Portland Arts and Learning

Studios for a while now. And I just came out with an art show called "Am I a Monster."

D

Daniel Rolnik 01:42

Hi, everyone. I'm Daniel Rolnik, and I help artists like Matthew get their art out to the universe. I used to have a gallery in Los Angeles. And then my wife and I moved to Portland and we were collecting art from studios like the Portland Art and Learning Studio. And actually, we were collecting art from the Portland Art and Learning Studio. And one day they were seeking out a gallery director. And I was like, I'm your guy. This is my passion. This is what I love. And so I joined the team, and it's been amazing.

J

Jon Richardson 01:46

How did you first find out about the studio?

D

Daniel Rolnik 01:47

Um, I'm one of those weirdos who tries to find all the most wonderful, strange and beautiful art spaces in any city I go to. And so PALS, or the Portland Art and Learning Studios, is one of those places.

J

Jon Richardson 02:43

Great and can you either one of you, would you mind just describing the studio and the gallery and really what it's all about?

M

Matthew Spencer 02:50

Okay, so I'd be happy to. PALS, Portland Arts and Learning Studios is a space for people with special needs, adults with developmental disabilities, to come participate in artwork. We have fieldtrips daily so that we can participate in what's known as community inclusion and that's just getting people involved in everyday community activities. And at the studios itself, which can be a chaotic place. We have individual pods. So usually people are sorted by interest. And we have a ceramics pod. We have a digital arts pod, a textiles pod and so on.

J

Jon Richardson 03:41

Matthew, how did you first find out about the studio?

M

Matthew Spencer 03:43

Do I need to get into history for them?

D

Daniel Rolnik 03:46

Yeah, you can, you can talk about it.

M

Matthew Spencer 03:47

So first, there were two separate programs. There was Art from the Heart and Port City that eventually merged into a new building because their leases were up. So a lot of people with disabilities have brokerage services. So basically, that's to help with the funding. Because you know, you have government funding, to allow you to use certain services. And that brokerage will help you distribute your hours accordingly. So my broker found Art from the Heart and suggested that I consider it. And that's actually really common. And so I checked Art from the Heart out, I started working there, and that gave me a place to work on my art outside of where I was at the time. Let's see, actually, at that time, I had just left Milepost 5, which is an artist community. And so I kind of needed a new place to make stuff anyways. And it was it was different than anything I'd expected. And I will say that it can be a little distracting. Having a workspace with other adults with developmental disabilities. I'd sit down doing a linoleum block print. And it's mildly dangerous, like, I mean, I'm holding a carving tool and chiseling away at this linoleum and every now and then this hand starts reaching towards the linoleum block for it. And so I'd have to stop and the staff would talk to him and tell him that if he doesn't stop, she'll have to move him. But eventually, I got up, put a piece of paper in front of him and put a pencil in his hand and he started drawing. So that worked out. But

D

Daniel Rolnik 06:00

That's one of the fun story--That's the fun part of being in the studio, though.

M

Matthew Spencer 06:04

Yeah, it can be. But that's that's how I got started. And then we moved into Portland Arts and Learning Studios, after our lease went up. It's a different space, and it has a different feel to it. Things are more separated.



Daniel Rolnik 06:21

In a good way, though.



Matthew Spencer 06:22

Yeah. In a good way.



Daniel Rolnik 06:23

Yeah.



Jon Richardson 06:24

Because we have more room to spread out,



Matthew Spencer 06:26

We have more room. Staff is more easily able to work with people separately, as they need to.



Daniel Rolnik 06:35

When you say spread out, I think I'm trying to interpret it for the audience listening, because they haven't seen the the space yet. Do you mean that's more like there's a ceramics department here and painting and drawing happens here. Versus before. In our older building, it was all happening everywhere.



Matthew Spencer 06:54

It seemed a little more chaotic. Even though we had specific classes at specific times, things were more chaotic. And so now that we have a more structured space, the environment becomes more structured.



Daniel Rolnik 07:12

Can you describe what it's... So if a new artist comes to the space, no one's told what to do. Right? They just everyone comes in and does their own thing? How would you describe that?

M

Matthew Spencer 07:24

Yeah, well, it's, I mean, I, I assume now that it's a process for them to get to know the space first. And when I started at Art from the Heart, what they would do is they'd have you come in and have you spend a day there just to see if you fit into the space. And if we could work with you. I'm not sure exactly how the processes for new people. Now, I will say it's also a bit of a surprise on the first day for everybody. Because every time we have a new person, we have to do a fire drill. And yeah, that's a little bit crazy.

D

Daniel Rolnik 08:00

Can you talk a little bit about how you think the experience of having autism as a sculptor, an artist, is different than not having autism as a sculptor and artist?

M

Matthew Spencer 08:15

Can I talk about something I haven't experienced? That's the hard part, right? No, it's... For me, I will say that clay is very much an aesthetic experience. And I like to be able to communicate with the clay. And that's a very interpersonal dialogue. And really, I mean, I've even had times when back when I was at community college CCC, when nobody else was in the studio. I remember getting on top of a clay table because they're sturdy. And actually screaming at the mask, tell me what you want to be. And then it ended up having gills. And so I think that that's kind of an autistic experience, where you're trying to pull something out of yourself. And rather than putting it into words, forming it physically.

J

Jon Richardson 09:13

Would you mind talking a little bit about your own personal background with art in general?

M

Matthew Spencer 09:18

Yeah, I mean, I've always been one of those people who doesn't go anywhere without a sketchbook in hand, if possible. always wanting to draw something or make something. And regularly, I always dr-- I'll just draw my hand. And that's something that somebody at my high school suggested, if I can get my hands on clay, I have to, you know, always be doing something with my hands. So that's always nice. But let's see, I started really getting into art when I started going to community college, which I had mentioned. I took ceramics, took sculpture, great sculpture program at the time, probably still, I took painting. And that's, I think, the gist of it. And that's when I really started exploring myself

as an artist, and figuring out that I wanted to contribute some serious time into it, whether it was professionally or just recreationally. And I think I will jump forward and say that, PALS has been interesting in that it's taken what was forced to almost be a hobby, and given me an avenue to almost think of it as a career. And I will, I still won't call it a career yet. I'm still washing dishes every weekend.

**J** Jon Richardson 10:51

But you have sold your art. And you and you had just finished a gallery show at PALS,

**M** Matthew Spencer 10:58

right, and I started selling art more when I moved out for the first time I moved into a place called Milepost 5. And there I had two studios, one I used as a bedroom. And the other one I used as a studio gallery. And so once a month, we would do First Friday shows, and invite the public to come in as an open house. And so I'd open up my studio gallery, start selling work there. And that was always a slow process. We didn't always have that many people coming in. And so that, that was a good start, though. And I had my first solo show. Well, I made it a group show at the time. But it kind of felt like a solo show because I was still curating and I still did, I think at least half the work. Don't quote me on that. But I did I want to say almost half the work, then curating a show, I mean, was actually harder than I expected. I expected that that would be easier than doing everything myself, but then to also coordinate other artists. And make sure I had everything installed on a date was a challenge that I wasn't quite ready for at the time. But now I'm getting ready to curate another show coming up in what six months.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 12:30

Yeah.

**M** Matthew Spencer 12:31

And I'm looking forward to that I'm going to have definitely the help that I'll need. I have more time to get ready for it. I have artists that I've already been thinking about putting in, I just need to talk to staff at PALS, to make sure that we have enough of those people's work. And we'll probably do some more talking about specifics on how that show is going to be set up

D

Daniel Rolnik 12:56

Something that is so epic about you, Matthew, is that I've used the term before that you are almost like a window, and a bridge between the universe that that I've experienced and the universe that you've experienced, which is the universe of experiencing a disability, and you're able to translate that experience so articulately, I've always been interested in how your experience within our studio is with the diversity of disabilities that the artists experience.

M

Matthew Spencer 13:34

Um, well, first off, I will not claim to know what goes on in anybody else's head. But as a person with disabilities, I've always been around people with other disabilities. And so you kind of get used to knowing how to interact. Also, it's interesting, if you're going to talk about being in both worlds, I work in retirement home, that can also feel like the same, a similar type of institution, I won't say the same thing. And I will point out that, yes, I'm a dishwasher. But being aware of how HIPAA works and how people interact with their care providers, gives me kind of that, I don't know if I want to say background knowledge. But that's kind of how it feels like, I know what it's like to need help and to have to ask for help. And that's always a challenge. And I kind of understand how when people want things a certain way, and it's hard for them to ask for help. I think that's what you're getting at.

D

Daniel Rolnik 14:41

Yeah, I'm just it's just it's so interesting, because within the studio, we have such a diversity of what every-- how everyone experiences life, we have close to two hundred artists, including Matthew, and everybody is different. Yet there is the common factor between all of the artists at our studio that they have, and or experience some kind of intellectual or developmental disability,

M

Matthew Spencer 15:07

right, we everybody experiences an intellectual or developmental disability. And everybody experiences society reacting to them in certain ways. And that's also part of what I can relate to. Which I could easily segue into the my current show, if you like.

J

Jon Richardson 15:10

Please.

M

**Matthew Spencer** 15:10

Okay, so my current show is called "Am I a Monster." And that name was specifically chosen to target stigma, and how people relate to each other with biases in their head. Because I started out, I'd been doing my mugs with faces. And then Daniel here, and Chandra, one of our heads, suggested that I make the mugs with faces into a big show. And so I liked that idea. And I started working with that, but I wanted to do something more thematic. And so I decided monsters would be fun, especially because at the time, we were thinking it'd be an October show. But then we had problems with our kiln not working properly at the times, we had other problems with just the hard part of getting a show ready by then. So we kept moving the date back. And then I kept thinking about monsters. And then I thought about how it'd be nice to incorporate a social message. When I think of monsters, I always think about stigma and prejudice, and how we treat people in society. And that's also like what I kind of relate to myself. And I've seen other people with disabilities and other people without disabilities relating to being stigmatized or noticing themselves having stigma towards others. And so I kept thinking about that as I was developing this monster theme show. And then I had this coffin that I'd built. And Daniel had suggested, the idea that if we're incorporating stigmas that the coffin could represent death of stigma. And so I liked that, but I wanted to push it a little bit further. And I wanted to have some kind of interactive bit to the exhibit. And so I invited people to rip up strips of paper, and write down a stigma or stereotype or prejudice that they wanted to eliminate from society, stick it in the coffin. And I'd been promising that by the end of the show, I would burn all the stigmas. And we finally got to at a private show that somebody had hosted at Gallery 1122, it's basically their private gallery in their garage. But they made that into a house show, open up their backyard, they had a fire pit going. And so we just propped that coffin up on top of a little platform. And I pulled out a torch that I use for grilling and barbecuing, and we just let them on fire. And that was you know, kind of a nice release to let go of all the pressure and negativity that those kind of thoughts and biases have in society, and really let go of the negative effects that they have on ourselves. And it was also to be perfectly honest, a release for me, just because I been obligated for so long, because I'd promised this and wasn't sure exactly where to do it. Because we were talking about doing it like in the parking lot of PALS, which we could have done. But let's just say it was easier doing it in somebody's backyard.

D

**Daniel Rolnik** 16:07

Matthew can you define stigma?

M

**Matthew Spencer** 19:12

Okay, so I would define stigma as prejudice due to fear of the unknown. And usually, when

I think of stigma, I think of social stigma, but it can also be referred to like anything, you can have a stigma around behaviors, you can have stigmas around people, you can have stigmas around inanimate objects. But it's that fear of the unknown. And that personal bias that gets into our heads that I was thinking about when I mentioned stigma.

D

Daniel Rolnik 19:50

And on that note, have you had an experience of stigma against you?

M

Matthew Spencer 19:58

Against me, I mean, I don't like to think of that too much. Because I don't want, I don't want to get into the whole ego trip. I will mention that when I was a little kid, and I was playing soccer, there was a parent that would yell, get that kid off the field. And I think that was the parent of another kid on the same team. And that was probably the way I was running or something. So yeah, people have had different reactions to either the way I speak, or the way I behave at a time, because I'd always have trouble interacting with people as a kid. Since we were incorporating stigma into my show, as a theme. And since we were doing it at PALS, I wanted to take advantage of some people's experiences, really explore how people had experienced stigma. So I actually sat down with a few artists, from PALS, and talked to them about their own personal experiences. And so there's interviews that we have now on... is it the Instagram page?

D

Daniel Rolnik 21:18

Yeah, they'll appear slowly throughout time on our Instagram page, because I think it's an ongoing series. Right, Matthew?

M

Matthew Spencer 21:26

It might be, no promises on that specifically. But we did three terrific interviews. Honestly, I was crying by the end of it. I don't want to say too much about it, because nobody likes spoilers, but I was definitely crying. And I definitely talked to some of them afterwards. And just to show you how real the thoughts and stories actually were, I mean, a lot of them were still a bit stressed out just because they'd had to delve back into unpleasant personal experiences.

J

Jon Richardson 22:05

So you mentioned Chandra at the Portland Art and Learning Studio, do you want to tell me a little bit about who she is?

D

Daniel Rolnik 22:11

Chandra Glassman had this extraordinary vision to turn what would primarily be described as a day program into an art focused environment for individuals with disabilities. And it's been so enriching and amazing, because from that experience, while while Matthew was already doing art, Matthew is one of the most amazing artists of the studio, because while he was already doing art, he also teaches other artists in our studio, who maybe have never worked in clay before how to make a sculpture, but also gives them the freedom to play and make what they want to do instead of "this is how you make a face, this is how you make a tree." You show them, you show other artists, the basics of ceramics like if you make it in this way, it won't explode in the kiln, but do it, but do it in your own version. And so this universe that that Chandra has facilitated via the Portland Art and Learning Studio has been absolutely incredible. But I'm an outsider, you know, that's part of the that's part of the team. But it really is a fantastic place.

J

Jon Richardson 23:28

And just along the line of ceramics exploding in the kiln, we just looked at our Apex exhibition for Stephen Young Lee. And I was wondering what your impressions were on that Matthew seeing ceramics that were intentionally kind of exploded or imploded.

M

Matthew Spencer 23:45

Man, I've always loved and have a fascination with artists who intentionally break their own work. I back when I was at Milepost 5, I went through a very brief phase where I had ripped and purposely cut canvases that I was painting on. But that was also when I was going through a abstract expressionist phase. So it fit. Let's see. And it also reminded me of one of my art professors back at CCC, my ceramics Professor Katie McFadden, after 9/11, she was making these human figures which she'd been kind of getting really well known for. And she said that the emotion had hit her so hard that she was kind of having a hard time processing everything. And so she takes these fears that she was building for the head and actually end up throwing them against the wall. And that's the first thing that I thought of when I saw this, just these broken open heads on top of these figures. And that was for her way to vent frustration. So I've always had kind a fascination with the different reasons that people will break a piece. I also love the idea of reconstructing something, saying that it's not done and then saying that it needs to be either broken or

redesigned.

**J** Jon Richardson 25:19

When I came to visit the studio, you had shown me a piece that you had done where it had broken and you had thrown it in the trash and someone took it out of the trash. And that made me think about this a little bit more. And it's kind of just like, right, but maybe it isn't finished, maybe it does have life to it.

**M** Matthew Spencer 25:37

And that's an interesting thing that will happen at the studio is you never know when or who you're going to collaborate with. Sometimes by accident, I've had pieces where I've just left something laying around and somebody else starts glazing it, or

**J** Jon Richardson 25:50

an accidental collaboration,

**M** Matthew Spencer 25:58

You can call it that. Personally, I'm able to appreciate it when that happens, especially when it happens to something that I'm not looking forward to finishing like a piece that breaks in the kiln. I wasn't looking forward to finishing it, I like you said I was going to throw it out. And another artist had fished it out, gotten really attached. And Daniel actually has a really neat video footage that I don't know if he's ever going to show anybody this but of the other artists that I'm having an accidental collaboration with on this pepper mask, picking it up and holding it in front of his face, and probably having the time of his life doing so. And so sometime we're expecting him to go ahead and glaze it and that'll be a separate collaboration.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 26:51

And what's extra incredible is the artist who picked up this mask that's in the shape of a like a pepper...

**M** Matthew Spencer 26:57

Chili pepper.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 26:58  
Yeah, a chili pepper has an never worked in clay before. So from his love of finding Matthew's trash he's gonna start working in an entirely new medium. And it was organic. You know, we didn't go, here's clay, work with it. He found something that he loved within the studio and is like, I want to do more of this. How do I do it? And we're, I'm really stoked about that. That's one of the things that I love being in the studio, every day and seeing is just organic, raw expression. Nothing is very contrived. Nothing is very over the top conceptualize, you don't see stress in the creation of art. In the studio, you only see pure joy in the expression of art, which I think those who have visited us. Like you Jon it's difficult to describe but it just like, it's just an energy that's flowing throughout the space of like, here's a place where people love to be here and create and express themselves and have the time of their lives and bring you into their world.

**J** Jon Richardson 28:08  
Daniel, would you mind telling me a little bit about a few of the other artists there?

**D** Daniel Rolnik 28:12  
Yeah, so we have an artist named Ricky Bearghost, who currently has a show in Texas, at one of the top outsider art galleries in the country, the Webb gallery. And speaking of collaboration that Ricky makes weavings.

**J** Jon Richardson 28:29  
And Ricky showed some of his weavings here correct?

**D** Daniel Rolnik 28:33  
Oh yeah. So Ricky, Ricky Bearghost who works out of our studio had pieces at the Portland Art Museum. For the we.construct.marvels.between.monuments exhibit curated by Libby Werbel. And he makes these incredible, one of a kind experimental weavings, which incorporate everything from grass he finds on his morning commute to trash he finds to...

**M** Matthew Spencer 29:00  
Beads, lots of beads

- D** Daniel Rolnik 29:01  
Lots of beads that he both collects, finds and makes himself out of ceramic. And actually, Matthew has collabed with him before by Ricky describing different kind of beads he would like and Matthew will sculpt beads that then make it into Ricky's sculptures.
- J** Jon Richardson 29:21  
Oh, wow.
- D** Daniel Rolnik 29:22  
Yeah.
- J** Jon Richardson 29:23  
That's really special.
- M** Matthew Spencer 29:24  
Yeah, it's fun. Ricky's just one of my favorite artists at PALS. He'll just sit there weaving and just laugh at random things. I like to say that the universe is his private joke. Because you never know what he'll randomly start laughing at.
- D** Daniel Rolnik 29:43  
Yeah, a thing he likes to do is when a piece is done, he'll often just crack up laughing and then then say something like Daniel, look at this, and put it hanging off of a garbage can. And that's kind of Ricky's symbol that he's he's completed his weaving and is ready to work on another one.
- J** Jon Richardson 30:05  
Wow.
- D** Daniel Rolnik 30:06  
And he's somebody I think, you know, maybe at one point in the studio, someone showed him a basic weaving technique, like the most basic form of doing it you could possibly do

and he just took it into his own realm that no one can even replicate. No one knows how he keeps the leaves and, and grass in his weavings. It's almost an impossibility that he's able to work magic around.

J

Jon Richardson 30:33

And I did see that one of the artists from the studio is going to be showing at Stumptown

D

Daniel Rolnik 30:38

Yeah, another artist we have that comes to the studio. Alister Bond, has his first ever solo show called "My Works" at Stumptown coffee. And that was really awesome. The curator came in looked at all of the work, we had Wendy Swartz, who's been creating that space for like 15 years, which is amazing. All local artists too, and she chose Alister. And Alister came in, and he brings a party wherever he goes, he's amazing. And he just like quickly, like, went through all of his pieces. And then there's a lot of garbage can things. I'm realizing he took my arm and he was so excited that his his version of showing how happy he was, was putting me in the garbage can. And, and that was the like, best experience ever. And then with Alister, for example, we had a challenge. How does Alister create an artist statement? He communicates very differently than the three of us talking here. And so to get like a linear artist statement is a challenge that, that we've actually approached various researchers about how do we have artists that communicate in a different way or are nonverbal, still have a part in creating their statement. So when a visitor comes, it's the artist's expression of the work and not an interpreter's. And we're working on some very cool things like photo voice, method and stuff like that. But in this particular case, we I went to his mother, Marty, and I was like, why don't you guys get together as a family? And what if you guys could create together an artist statement, so it was very organic, and it it was coming right from the soul, instead of like, an interpretation of what was going on. And she gave us back, pure gold. And it was something like Alister is so excited, he just smashed his pita chip into the hummus. And and, and I think that's like pretty much the artist statement. And I was like, that's so awesome and pure that, that, you know, we didn't interpret something, and then showcase in a different way. We're just showing it as it is. And, and if excitement showcases its self in the form of a chip, dashing into hummus or, or throwing your gallerist into the garbage can in a playful way, then that should be the way to it's expressed. And I think that's the joy of the studio. I'm trying to think of another artists Yeah,

M

Matthew Spencer 33:16

Actually, can I ask you to talk about William?

D

Daniel Rolnik 33:19

Okay. We have an artist we have, we have so many artists in there, every artist there creates in such an amazing universe of their creation, which you don't necessarily see in your, for lack of a better term, neurotypical artists environment. You know, there's no there's no right or wrong way to phrase anything but things feel much more pure, from, from straight expression and soul from from the studio. And so, one of our artists, William Damiano has literally constructed worlds of characters from Patricia Poodle, to Fox Family, and they go through holidays. They go through family, intense family, greetings and passings. And it's all done in these illustrations of their life of every single year. And it's amazing, he comes in, he wears a Super Mario Brothers hat he puts on his headphones, and he paints. And that's what he loves doing. And it's so spectacular to see histories and worlds of this Fox Family and Patricia Poodle, you just like flip through each page, and you go, Wow, how is this universe so complete, it's so dense, it's so rich. And it's so pure. At the same time, there's not a, there's not an outline of how it has to format.

J

Jon Richardson 34:50

And these are pieces that you did show me when I came to visit the studio. And they're very precise, they have a symmetry to them. And there's nobody I could think of that would come up with the scenarios that some of them were in, it was like Academy Awards 1990. Yeah, something like that. And it was these characters that William had created. And that that was one artist who really blew me away, I really could not have imagined I'd be walking in there seeing work that other people doing and thinking that they would be working in the same space as somebody like William. It's really, really fascinating.

D

Daniel Rolnik 35:28

Yeah, from from the most abstract of abstract art to the most figurative of figure.

J

Jon Richardson 35:34

Exactly.

D

Daniel Rolnik 35:36

And, and for William and all of our artists, what we try to do is person first, what does the

artists want? What would make each artist individually happy instead of treating everybody as like this blanket thing? And so William one day I, we communicate by trading written notes. And so I had I had this feeling and intuition, so I asked him, Do you like video games? And he wrote back Yes. And seemed very excited. And so I wrote him. Would you like it if I brought in video game developers, something along those lines, to to turn your characters into a game? And he got very stoked, and was like, Yes. And so now we have indie game developers coming to our studio to work with William on a video game.

**J** Jon Richardson 36:29

That's just so awesome. Yeah, and perfect.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 36:31

Right. And that's totally just for him. Like, Matthew. You know, we have we have a technologist in residence, we have an artist in residence, and the technologists in residence brings VR, and works on virtual reality projects with the artists maybe built hardware and software. But that's not necessarily something Matthew has any interest in. He, I think, you tell me if I'm wrong, but you like fire. Clay.

**M** Matthew Spencer 36:57

I like fire. I mean, yeah, okay, I was I've been a pyro since in Boy Scouts. But yeah, I like clay. I love drawing, anything I can do physically. But technology, no, not my forte,

**D** Daniel Rolnik 37:10

Right. And then as much as it's not Matthew's thing to do technology we also have a group of artists who call themselves the VideoTones, and they make digital art music videos. And so the technologist in residence comes in and is helping develop apps for them for a different way to cut video for a different way to make music, which is totally incredible. And hopefully, you will get to play some VideoTones music.

**J** Jon Richardson 37:59

When did I come to visit, I met some of the other staff who was working there. Specifically in with with some of the music and the joy that they had playing some of the tracks for me was, you can't really describe it. They were just so elated to share the work that was

coming out of these artists, that they just helped bring it out of them, you know, they were just there to facilitate.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 37:59  
Exactly.

**J** Jon Richardson 37:59  
And that's the best part about it. They just let the artists do their art.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 38:28  
Yeah, I think the ultimate for all of us, that work at PALS, is how can we be less and less involved in the artists creative process, so it's more introducing something. In the example of the music. It's like Google just donated two pixel books, so they're touchscreens and computers, can we load up an app that intuitively, an artist with an intellectual and or developmental disability, can just start using right away and make music from but not have any previous knowledge of music theory? Can that expression still occur? And due to technology the answer is yes. And it's keeps getting more and more incredible, with software and hardware that people are developing, like Patatap, which turns a touchscreen or keyboard into both a visualization and an audio clip. And so the idea that someone could play a QWERTY keyboard, without any knowledge of music theory and make animation and video at the same time is just the most incredible thing of the 21st century, it enables the artists that come to us to not live within a world of marginalization. It allows an equal playing field now where someone with and someone without a disability can come together via universal language such as art and music, and have a connection, have a communication and have a collaboration, which is something we're super excited about happening at PALS.

**J** Jon Richardson 38:31  
That's so great.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 38:32  
Sorry--

J Jon Richardson 38:32  
No!

D Daniel Rolnik 39:37  
I try... I try to nerd out as much as possible.

J Jon Richardson 40:09  
Well, and just to go to something that we talked about before we started recording. And this is also connecting with some of the partnerships that you've had with like the video game developers, but you also had a chance to spend some time with the folks from Northwest Noggin, who you met, actually through Mike Murawski from our learning department here at the museum.

D Daniel Rolnik 40:28  
Yes, Mike is amazing. He I hope Mike you don't mind me saying this. But Mike is a collector of Matthew Spencer's, mug.

J Jon Richardson 40:37  
This is true.

D Daniel Rolnik 40:37  
Matthew is going to meet Mike soon. But Mike came to the studio. I think it's safe to say he fell in love, like Jon did, like I did, like Matthew did with the studio. And has an amazing Matthew Spencer piece to bring home. And, Mike at a certain point during the tour, said, Daniel, there's only one person more enthusiastic about what they do than you and that's a Bill from Northwest noggin, who hopefully you guys will have on the podcast one day?

J Jon Richardson 41:07  
Well, we'll definitely include a link to Northwest Noggin's website in the episode description.

- D** Daniel Rolnik 41:11  
Yeah, so they bring real human brains, as well as animal brains and eyeballs as a learning experience to different environments. And normally, usually they go to schools or museums. And so I contacted Bill and said, Do you want to come to our art studio, bring brains and we'll all draw brains together? And he was like, Yes. And then, uh, Matthew, I'll let you describe--
- M** Matthew Spencer 41:38  
The experience?
- D** Daniel Rolnik 41:39  
Yes.
- M** Matthew Spencer 41:40  
Oh, it was... this was terrific. So yeah, they brought in actual specimens of human brains. We were invited to put gloves on and actually handle them. And this also gave me a chance to confirm that I am definitely not a zombie, because I completely lost my appetite.
- J** Jon Richardson 42:01  
You needed confirmation?
- M** Matthew Spencer 42:04  
Probably not. But as far as interest goes, I couldn't have had more interest. I was able to handle, really look at some of the tissue. And then they also brought out some 3D printed brains that we could handle without gloves. And near the end of it, I borrowed one of them. And I had half an hour to go. So I took a small chunk of clay that I wedged up. And actually within that half an hour, sculpted a brain as quickly as I could.
- D** Daniel Rolnik 42:40  
It's a photorealistic brain, by the way.

M

Matthew Spencer 42:43

Yeah, it I like to brag that it was, at least it felt like I got the basic shape, almost exact. And then I took a very small needle tool, and started carving out the little folds, just representationally. So that you would get the idea of the folds, because there is no way that I was going to get all the folds done exactly, especially within a short time frame. And so I had this, by the time I was done, I had this little two inch brain out of clay that I had crafted and getting to use, you know, a 3D model like that was just a terrific experience.

D

Daniel Rolnik 43:32

Yeah, and having neuroscientists there,

M

Matthew Spencer 43:35

Yeah, to actually explain how the different parts of the brain work, not that I was gonna remember everything, but and just get into very minute details was a neat experience for all of us.

D

Daniel Rolnik 43:53

Yeah. And I think what was really cool is bringing the brains there, none... None of us knew exactly how, you know how artists would respond. And the response was so positive. It was such a cool thing. No one was really afraid. Yeah. In fact, I'd say the opposite was true. I think that we as staff are more afraid that some of the artists fell in love too much with the brain, including an artist trying to kiss one of the brains, but they didn't kiss the real human brain. So it was, it was fine. But it made me think of another artist we should mention.

J

Jon Richardson 44:28

Sure.

D

Daniel Rolnik 44:29

We have an artist named Caitlin Pruett, who is awesome, she gives all of her friends and the staff and the other artists nicknames. So it's always the first letter of your name. So I'm Donald Duck. And what makes Caitlin so powerful and great, is that she makes these amazing paintings and of animals. And let's say there's an underwater scene, she'll draw a dog fish and a cat fish, but they'll literally look like a dog and a cat. And they'll be

underwater, and then she'll write "name" to symbolize the name of the painting and then it'll be something like

**C** Caitlin Pruett 45:10  
"some people got their hands and feets wet when we got at the beach today, okay"

**D** Daniel Rolnik 45:21  
And she loves telling this five part joke.

**C** Caitlin Pruett 45:25  
If I had a red apple and always still worked here, she can dig me out of the dirt I can turn into an apple tree because do you know why I'm saying that? You're not going to believe it but my grandma and me just drink cold water and all the seeds go in our stomachs too. I can turn into a banana plant because the thin lines of the banana go in my stomach and I know to drink cold water every day. I can turn into a pear tree because those seeds of the pears go in my stomach and I had to drink cold water. I can turn into a strawberry plant because I ate the green leaves off the strawberries and the red part too and I did drink cold water every day. Tonight, if you want me and my dad can go sleep in the elephant cage at the zoo for pretend. Do you know why I'm saying that? You're not going to believe but me and my dad can make a pretty good elephant sound do you want me to do it Donald Duck? [mimics elephant sound]

**D** Daniel Rolnik 46:24  
We also have another artist that we've had... another artist that comes to the studio that had her work at the Portland Art Museum is Elmeater Morton. And Elmeater makes completely abstract paintings. But if you ask her what's in the painting, she'll point to an area of it and say that's my brother. And this is my mother. And it's so interesting. So in her universe, this abstract painting to us has so much meaning.

**E** Elmeater Morton 46:25  
That's my brother and Mr Rogers and Dorothy Morton, my mother, when she died.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 46:39  
What happens when you turn it this way?

- E** Elmeater Morton 47:09  
Pink. She had a gown on. She had a gown, a gown on. She had a gown and bathrobe on.
- D** Daniel Rolnik 47:23  
And she has some of the best titles for paintings I've ever heard in my life because they're so descriptive. And yeah, hopefully, she's also done a lot of stuff with music and video. And we went to jackpot recording studios with her. And she produced an album and as everyone kind of does these amazing things. I'm trying to think of even Matthew, who else should we bring in possibly, who else would be good so that people could hear their their voice.
- M** Matthew Spencer 47:56  
But you got to mention our everybody's favorite bookbinder,
- D** Daniel Rolnik 47:59  
we have artists named James Enos and James creates books. But they're unlike any other book you've ever seen. They're bigger than 11 by 17. So take your arm out and measure from like your wrist to your shoulder. And that's about as long as the book is. And it's all held together with clear scotch tape. And as you turn each page, you feel that the page is actually thick, it's like heavy, and it's like a quarter inch thick. And that's because the page folds out. And you fold it out and you fold it out and you fold it out. And there's a world of illustrations, followed by a full narrative story from beginning middle to end. And that's just page one. And then you turn the page and on the other side, it folds out, folds out. And then you fold it back in and pull it back in, turn the page and then you've got thousands of pages of original illustration and handwritten story within one book, and James while he's making the books, is so engrossed in the process of making the books that he is within the universe the Kid Stuff universe, as he calls it, and you'll get to--
- M** Matthew Spencer 49:14  
Kingdom I believe
- D** Daniel Rolnik 49:15  
Oh, Kingdon, Kid Stuff Kingdom. Yeah, universe, or kingdom. And he'll be acting out verbally the scenes and it's so incredible. And the the best part, that something I love

about James, as he always tells me, Daniel put these on Amazon. And I'm like James, these aren't really their... to me, I'm like, this is the best piece of outsider art I've ever seen. Nothing is like this. It's, it's non archival. It's fully handmade. It's so the opposite of the Amazon experience. But in James's world, it is prime for Amazon.

**J** Jon Richardson 49:52

It's very tangible experience you showed me when I when I came to visit. It's, it's essentially like a scroll. But instead of rolling, it's folded in like an infinite, seemingly infinite, unfolding process.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 50:07

Yeah, we had a professor from Reed College come by Nathalia King, and she's like, Oh, my God, this is like an Aztec Codex. And I guess in Aztec codices and their codex, they would have these fold out pages describing their stories. And she's like, wow, this is almost like, there's so much connection here. It's, it's not conscious by James he I doubt that he has heard about Aztec codexes. But it's so cool that these connections exist. And also I say, whenever I say outsider artists, I mean it in the most highest term of endearment possible, because I in in one guy's opinion, in mine, an outsider is the best, coolest, most awesome person that has ever existed. You know, Martin Luther King was an outsider, Mahatma Gandhi was an outsider, Steve Jobs is listed as an outsider. All these amazing people who have changed history and society as we know it, for the positive have all been outsiders. And so I use the term outsider artists for the artists of our studio, because the artists that come to the studio are outside the main stream of academic art, it's, it's like I said, it's more raw versus the conceptual but there is a blending, there can exist a blending, for example, Matthew's show where it's his expression, but he's added a concept to it. But it's not academic, necessarily. It's still Matthews pure vision, and raw vision of what he wants to express versus what, you know, I don't know if I'm saying this wrong, Matthew, let me know. But you're not thinking. I've got to create this to sell this object.

**M** Matthew Spencer 51:57

I try not to but I'm not going to tell you that that thought never comes to my head.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 52:03

See, like "Daniel, what you just said is BS, it's my dream."

**M** Matthew Spencer 52:06  
No, no, I, I don't want sales to be the primary inspiration ever. I'd rather have a piece of artwork that speaks for itself and actually has its own life, than think about what somebody is going to buy.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 52:23  
Yeah.

**J** Jon Richardson 52:23  
Well, also, and this is kind of speaking to the work you just mentioned, the folded book, what's the name of the artist?

**D** Daniel Rolnik 52:31  
James Enos.

**J** Jon Richardson 52:32  
James Enos. So James, his book is a perfect example of how when you let allow yourself to think differently from the way that people might think that you should go about doing something, you end up creating something really extraordinary. And for somebody like James, it might be something that's just natural, where it's you don't have to try to force yourself out of what people are telling you is the right way to do things. That's just your right way of doing things.

**D** Daniel Rolnik 53:04  
Exactly. James doesn't look up how do I make a book? He's just like, I need to make a book. This is how I make it. This is the, this is the James way of making the book and it's so awesome.

**J** Jon Richardson 53:17  
And so put it on Amazon.



Daniel Rolnik 53:18

Yeah, put it on Amazon. And and special collections at the libraries are totally afraid of his books because you touch them and they're falling apart sometimes, but that's what makes them beautiful. Like if he was sitting there going I need to use archival tape and each page... It wouldn't, it wouldn't be the same experience. It wouldn't be a book by James would be a book created by society. Thank you for listening to my episode of the Portland Art Museum Podcast. If you'd like to learn more, visit [portlandartandlearningstudio.com](http://portlandartandlearningstudio.com) or click on the link in this episode's description. That's the best way to see what the artists here are up to. We offer tours of the studio, Monday through Friday between 10am and noon. So please reach out to schedule a time to come by. We're located at MLK, just south of Northeast Alberta in Portland, Oregon. And don't forget to visit [pam.to/podcastidea](http://pam.to/podcastidea) to submit your idea for an episode of the Portland Art Museum Podcast. I'd like to thank Matthew Spencer for joining me and Jon Richardson for having us here. And most importantly, I want to thank you, the listener.



53:19

X-RAY