

AMANDA ROSS-HO LECTURED ON HER WORK AT SHATTUCK ANNEX ON NOVEMBER 6TH, 2013



[STUDIO] IS THE DOCUMENT OF PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S MFA STUDIO VISITING ARTIST LECTURE SERIES.

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AMANDA ROSS-HO's work is inspired by detritus: the clutter and remnants of daily existence and the 'negative space' of things overlooked. Ranging across sculpture, installation, painting, and photography, her work seeks to uncover the subtle beauty of coincidence and anomaly and to highlight points of cultural intersection. She has exhibited nationally and internationally, including recent solo exhibitions, "AMANDA ROSS-HO: TEENY TINY WOMAN," at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2012 and "Time Waits For No-one" at The Approach in London, UK in 2011, and was featured in the Museum of Modern Art's "New Photography 2010." A graduate of USC and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Ross-Ho is in the Rubell Family Collection, and is represented by Mitchell-Innes and Nash (New York) and Cherry and Martin (Los Angeles).

NEXT

EDITION OF [STUDIO]
Sergei Tchernin

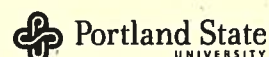
LECTURE

William Pope.L • January 15th, 2014

The new PSU MFA Studio Lecture Series brings together artists from a variety of disciplines to explore the subjects of their own work before a live audience. Lectures and related events are held throughout the year, most often at 1914 SW Park Avenue in Shattuck Annex on Wednesday nights at 7pm.

PSU's two-year, full-residency MFA in Contemporary Art Practice/Studio degree program is dedicated to interdisciplinary exploration through the experience of making. Students are supported in a range of production disciplines, from the traditional to the emerging, as they consider the multiple ways art can live in and beyond the studio.

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INTERVIEW WITH
AMANDA ROSS-HO

[STUDIO]

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[S]: Was there a particular moment in grad school when you felt you had found your "voice" or come across what you were looking for?

AMANDA ROSS-HO: I came to the grad school experience with an existing voice, having been out in the world for a handful of years making and showing work. But the experience of rigorous reflexivity, heavy scrutiny and sustained hours in the studio rewired my practice, bifurcating my voice into two distinctly analytic and intuitive intonations. I think the moment of discovering this split personality and important internal collaboration was a defining moment. It's important to push towards these moments, and also to regularly strive to redefine and diversify your voice.

[S]: How did you find the confidence to construct narratives across so many sources and media?

ARRH: I don't know if I would call it confidence, but I am aggressively omnivorous when it comes to mining the visual world, casting a wide net with an almost audacious inclusivity. This means everything is fair game and nothing is off limits as a possible subject, area of focus, or even material. The challenge becomes how to handle the gathered data. Selection, editing, and combing through the rubble is a large part of my process. I'm regularly introducing new information to the established vocabulary of my language to grow its terms and produce new forms. One of my persistent interests is the broad connectivity between personal and universal structures and the collapse and scrambling of these hierarchies. I have always been interested in the tension created by this mixed company.

[S]: Were there any particular "failures" you experienced utilizing multiple sources, or making reiterations, or crossing medias?

ARRH: At a certain point in my experience, I learned that an artist's responsibility is not only to act but to observe, and to identify and respect the work's internal mechanisms as they begin to function autonomously. There is a release of ego in relinquishing control, and one's role shifts from author to that of mediator or director. Knowing when to employ more subtle gestures like restraint is important, and this also includes the ability to identify and locate successes and "failures," between which there is a very fine perceptual line. For me, there was a moment when I realized that the "failed" gestures in the studio were holistically integral to the otherwise primary gestures—they were codependent and couldn't exist without one another—so the totality of their relationship, and the inclusivity of those peripheral maneuvers was in fact the work.

[S]: Was there a particular frustration in getting things to work together in a way that made sense to you? Can you describe this process of discovery?

ARRH: One of the things I confronted in the context of graduate school that still resonates with me today is the problematic of seduction. Formal pleasure is relatively easy to achieve. The material world is seductive and abundant and looks great, and visual culture has carved out these known quantities that still initiate response and satisfy, satiate. The struggle for me is that while I am complicit in the seduction, I also have always been highly suspect of it, despite being heavily invested in materiality and the formal vehicle. A purely confident gesture lacks tension, vulnerability, or problematic and I knew deeply that for me, repeating a known quantity or formal success was not enough, no matter how well done. But I realized that it was not a matter of abandoning indulgence in form or material investigation or formal math, but rather engineering a strong anatomical structure into the work—tough conceptual bones and muscles that the materiality can hang on.

[S]: Is there something that is particularly satisfying in the work you create?

ARRH: I make work out of a condition of anxiety. Satisfaction is a tricky notion, but I guess it comes from identifying patterns and crystallizing moments of clarity or certainty within the chaos. But the certainty teeters and vibrates with the temporal time signature and possibility of collapse. That's the dance.

[S]: Do you ever feel a sense of completion in what you produce or is everything perpetual?

ARRH: I describe the work as an organism, each form functioning like a core sample of a larger whole while also maintaining a discreet totality of its own. Every gesture is embedded with the cellular data of the past work, and yet aims to contribute new vocabulary to my personal language. As the work evolves, so does its internal logic and momentum, making the pursuit feel increasingly urgent.

[S]: If given unlimited resources (with no restrictions on materials, space, and time) what would be your dream art show? What materials would you immediately gravitate towards? Do you think that unlimited accessibility would have any impact on your aesthetic?

ARRH: I always joke that my ultimate life's work will be to make a one-to-one replica of everything on earth, to scale. But this joke encapsulates a real problematic, as I'm an artist that converses with and is dependent on limitation. I already approach the world as an impossibly limitless structure, and the grandiose scale and simultaneous crush of life's offerings is beautifully suffocating. An opportunity to actually encapsulate this impossibility might ultimately deactivate one of my work's most critical sources of motivation, which is chasing that infinity.

That said, if somehow I were truly confronted with limitless resources, I'd probably feel compelled to balance the absurd inequity of this condition by creating something sensitive to that distortion—something massive and far-reaching but distinctly intimate, generous and anti-heroic.

[S]: In an interview with Elad Lassry, you mention collecting written language from Craigslist posts and other sources. How do you see written language functioning within the investigation of the visual in your work?

ARRH: Language is crucially important to the work. The forms I engineer are deeply informed by language structure, in particular notions of connectivity, articulation, and legibility. Language as a form has an incredible ability to embody poetic accuracy, double entendre and simultaneity of meaning, and the work aims to embody this unique capacity for specificity and openness.

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I am less interested in the specifics of narrative and more so taken with the hieroglyphic possibilities of language as form and structure.”

Writing also plays a pragmatic role and is an important part of my private practice and working process. I'm a compulsive stenographer, note taker and collector of language fragments, and I also regularly write rational texts about the work to help articulate its objectives. This is another important voice within the work that slips between sincere and theatrical modes, complicating the self-consciousness and location of authority of the work. ■

UNFOLD FOR STUDENT RESPONSES

[STUDIO]

RESPONDS TO AMANDA ROSS-HO



01 SEVERAL WEEKS AGO I FOUND MYSELF SCAVENGING THROUGH PILES OF USED WOOD WITH A COUPLE OF FRIENDS AT A PORTLAND BUSINESS THAT REDIRECTS SCRAP WOOD "WASTE" FROM THE PORT INTO SEMI-ORGANIZED STACKS OF TROPICAL OAKS, SIBERIAN BIRCH, WHITE OAK, AND DOUGLAS FIR.

Despite the attempt at consistency in displaying these products on the concrete floor of a warehouse, the wood retained marks of its former use. A friend purchased piles of White Oak that had parallel ridges cut into one side of each two-inch by 8-foot board. The manager said that was the way the wood was cut. Crosscutting is a technique that exposes the grain's pattern, which, in turn, makes it more desirable. The manager failed to mention the previous life of these boards, after they were cut from a tree but before they were shipped to the Portland port. The oak now rested in a peculiar position in time and space as an object with both a history and a future, neither of which were fully known.

Glancing towards a corner of the warehouse, I noticed *A Row Of Large Tie Downs, Arranged By Color, Hanging On A Wooden Support*. Perhaps it was the color that struck me in the dark, monochromatic space, or the way that such attention was given to their organization. My vision of formal elegance (a work of art!) was a projection I had placed upon a functional grouping of objects. Seeing potential in a chance arrangement is a method that artist Amanda Ross-Ho regularly employs in her work, and I couldn't help but see one of her pieces, *Untitled Spatial Arrangement (Drying Rack)*, in this readymade sculpture. Amanda Ross-Ho navigates through the binaries and slippages of intuition and authorship, and in doing so, does not claim the value of one over the other. Sometimes literally placing her studio walls into the space of the gallery, Ross-Ho similarly investigates such conflicting constructions of the present as omnipotent and intimate, institutional and personal, interior and exterior.

I left the warehouse without asking the manager if the straps were for sale, out of fear of the conversation, or laughter, that would follow. But I left thinking about how the appropriation of the language of such industrial spaces might transform our thinking about other spaces, such as the gallery. It was also interesting to think about the personal value I had placed upon these objects, regardless of their functional value or role within a commercial industry. How does a scale shift change one's perception of an object? When Amanda Ross-Ho recreates by hand a large-scale version of a t-shirt that she wore in the studio and hangs it on a gallery wall, what questions arise about the degree of separation between an artist's practice and a gallery space? The trivial might become monumental in an effort to compete or have a dialogue with the architecture that organizes and directs our experiences in spaces, both physically and intellectually.

This shifting seems to place all things, whether the nature of their circumstances are choreographed or impulsive, onto a level playing field. When one assigns value to the personal, the potential for understanding might allow for more complex relationships to form. What might have developed out of that conversation in the warehouse could have ended in me feeling like an artist who is disconnected from reality, from people who know what crosscutting is. But a reality that is defined by someone else is not a place where artists want to be.

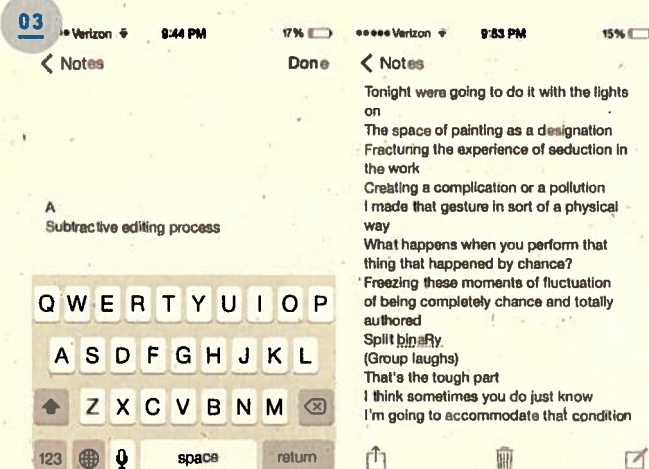


02 As if all of us didn't have big enough crushes on Amanda Ross-Ho after our individual studio visits with her, she went ahead and kicked off her rapid-fire lecture with the line, "We're gonna do it with the lights on tonight." Proceeding to barrel through image after image of over ten years of work, she succinctly outlined the development of her artistic practice and hugely successful career.

What has stuck with me since emerging from the beautiful web Ross-Ho wove out of cultural detritus, personal artifacts, cat litter, missing earrings, and formal properties, is the way she works within poles to expound the relationship of those things we often consider "opposites."

Massive <> Minute
Personal <> Universal
Image <> Object
Truth <> Fiction
Maker <> Observer
Logic <> Nonsense
Presence <> Absence
Work <> Life
Form <> Function
Authentic <> Fake
Appropriation <> Originality
Private <> Public
Whole <> Part
Hidden <> Visible

By examining what is between these opposites, Ross-Ho creates foils for our own human, categorical way of looking at things. If we can see these as ends of a spectrum, rather than oppositional, our understanding of the parts can be enhanced by the knowledge that they are two facets of the same phenomenon. The best way I can wrap my mind around Amanda's practice, is through her assertion that her work is primarily about the notion of understanding.



03 Amanda Ross-Ho talked about gestures of separation and conflation. In relation to her work, I take this to mean extrapolating a structure that exists within human experience and peeling it away from the concept to which it is applied as a means to imbue it with a more isolated fundamental meaning.

Her creative impulse with these gestures is to inspect and investigate the beliefs, attitudes, and frameworks that create or, at minimum, contribute to identity and perception.

I was reminded of how I came to own my first real photo book, a nice over-sized hard-bound copy of Nan Goldin's *Devil's Playground*. A patron of Multnomah County Library had performed the villainous act of tearing a single page out of this book, resulting in it being decommissioned and sold at the library's non-profit bookstore outlet, Tidal Wave. Purchasing this book elsewhere would take anywhere from \$50 for a used copy to more than \$75 new. At Tidal Wave, it was mine for \$5. The images are powerful and emotive. Some are fuzzy, dark, and shot with mixed lighting sources. Over the years, as I've studied technical aspects of photography, there are phases when this book sits unviewed for months at a time.

As Ross-Ho discussed works like *The Character and Shape of Illuminated Things* and the *Correction* series, this gesture of the stripping away of rules, evaluations and judgments made a profound impact on my thinking about creative expression. To inspect corrective marks made by a teacher on her schoolwork is a way of peeling back that layer of evaluation, not simply to remove it, but to place it into a larger framework for investigation. My sense is that what she sees is both an act of judgment and an identity-forming experience. Similarly, by creating a monument to photographic principles closer to the size of Mt. Rushmore than the scale of the original model on which it was based, both exposes the rules-based framework of capturing an image AND allows us to bask in its reflection of natural light...not unlike Goldin's bedroom lighting.

04 WHEN AMANDA ROSS-HO CAME TO MY STUDIO WE TALKED ABOUT ARTISTS WHO PRESENT EXPERIMENTAL LECTURES AS A PART OF THEIR PRACTICE AND ARTISTS WHO WORK AUTOBIOGRAPHICALLY.

Trisha Donnelly, Ryan Gander and Tino Sehgal are interdisciplinary artists who use lecture as their primary art form. Amanda is no different. In her lecture she sped through over a hundred slides in a breathless tale of her own history.

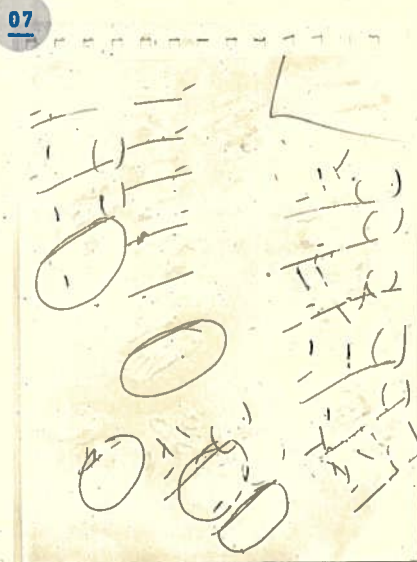
Contemporary artists, I feel, are under constant pressure to make art that separates us from our past in the name of creating something new and original, without reference to built-in histories. This is particularly prevalent in the fields that influence my work: Queer, Performance and Feminist Art. In researching Amanda's work, I was fascinated by the influence her family has on her art. She collaborates directly with her aunt on projects and has included photography by both of her parents in her own work.

At her lecture I asked Amanda how her family felt about her work, specifically, the sense of collaboration that is created when she uses their art in her own. I was moved when she explained that using her mother's self-portrait in the recent MoMA photography show—a surprise for

her mother—was a way to give her belated recognition as a photographer in the art world. Amanda doesn't consider herself a photographer per se so it was even more meaningful to have her mother with her in this important show.

And while Amanda's larger-than-life reproductions could be labeled Pop Art, they are often so much more. Amanda enlarges items that are both personal and related to her artistic experiences. For instance, scaling up the photo enlarger that her father had while she was growing up takes on new significance when you know the item is precious to her family history. Like her mother in the case of the MoMA show, her father was deeply touched.

The same week I met Amanda Ross-Ho, I was offered my first solo art show in my hometown of Las Vegas. Inspired by Amanda's art and studio visit, I quickly called my own mother and asked if she would be so kind as to assist me in an experimental lecture and performance about my family and the influence my mother, one of the many powerful women in my life, has had on me as an artist. I'm honored to now have the opportunity to be influenced by Amanda, as well. It is clear that, like her work, my work can be experimental and autobiographical, referencing my family, mother and friends while it also looks to the future.



07

08 Incorrect.

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01. KATHRYN YANCEY *A Row Of Large Tie Downs, Arranged By Color, Hanging On A Wooden Support*
02. BRYAN DALTON *Untitled*
03. KATIE HOLDEN *A Subtractive Editing Process*

04. JEA ALFORD *Untitled*
05. PAM MINTY *Corrective Measures*
06. MANNY REYES *Genealogy Through Art*
07. PERRY DOANE *Untitled*
08. PERRY DOANE *Untitled*