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ART, BOSS BOYS, BUSINESS, INTERVIEWS, POP CULTURE / APRIL 5, 2019

#BOSSBOY : SMASHING CREATIVE BLOCKS & BRINGING ART TO THE WORLD WITH ARTIST RODNEY DURSO



Among all the hustle loving entrepreneurs we work with on this series, we love when we meet someone who's passion and experience has lead them to filling a crucial need gap and positively impacts the world we live in. [Rodney Durso](#), an artist and avid supporter of emerging talents talks us through his journey to where he is today – and some advice for all our creative readers.

HOC: Great to meet you, Rodney. Tell us about your journey from your graphic design business to becoming an artist?

Rodney: My first love was advertising and design which I studied at Boston University. Through that program I also studied British advertising and TV commercial production in London for a year and worked as an intern for Spot Films near Leicester Square. When I returned to New York I returned to graphic design, and after a few years of study and freelance projects I started my own agency called Stormhouse Partners. For about 8 years I ran the agency and was Creative Director.

We had a good run and won a ton of awards, but in the end I was totally burned out. I decided to try my hand at a few new things, including teaching at Parsons School of Design, which I did for four years. I also started a Masters of Architecture and began painting.

Well it's the painting and fine art that stuck.

HOC: Being a graphic designer by trade did you find the leap from taking a brief (from a client) to working from your own brief challenging?

Rodney: Interesting question. One of the reasons I left design was frustration with meagre budgets, impossible timelines and short sighted strategies. Painting did away with all that. However in the brand business having a creative brief actually made it very clear what was needed to solve a marketing or business problem, and that part I liked. I knew what the rules were, there were guard rails, so to speak. In a sense it was easy to measure success, and failure.

In fine art, there is none of that. There is no one and nothing to tell you what to do, which seems great, right? Well the truth is that having no boundaries can be much more difficult. In fact, being an artist, and having to create something from nothing makes you go deep. It's super personal, I tell people it's like looking in the mirror all day, everyday. It's not only a monastic practice, it's a little too self involved at time. So, there's that. But after a time, the challenge becomes more about getting your work seen and sold. To me, that's where the challenges now lie.

HOC: I believe you don't create art full time as you also run ArtBridge and OffSite, how do you balance these varying demands on your time?

Rodney: I founded ArtBridge in 2008/2009 and ran it full-time for a number of years. As we developed a board of directors and expanded our staff I was able to transition to Board President and stepped back from the day-to-day. So somewhere along the way I was able to dedicate more time and space to my art making. At this point I'm in the studio three days and working on ArtBridge and other projects the other days. I'm still always pushing for new connections and opportunities for [ArtBridge](#), and my 'elevator pitch' is always at the ready for anyone who's interested.



HOC: Can you tell us more about ArtBridge and OffSite?

Rodney: I founded ArtBridge in those first years after I left the branding business. I was looking for an innovative way to get the work of emerging artists seen outside of the gallery system, which I saw as impossibly closed to new artists. The idea of exhibiting art on construction scaffolding around the corner from major Chelsea galleries was pretty bold. Art that the galleries would never consider was all of a sudden printed and installed at 100x a few blocks away on the largest building in Chelsea! It was pretty exciting for those first artists. In fact that was exactly 10 years ago, and we are about to stage a 10 year anniversary exhibit on London Terrace Gardens, the same place we hung our very first exhibit on West 23rd Street and 9th Ave. It was a few years later we started Off Site Art (OSA) with Veronica Santi in Italy when L'Aquila was destroyed by a terrible earthquake. The idea of creating a sister organization not only to carry the same mission but wanting to help L'Aquila on it's way back seemed important and something we could help with. (Editor's note see [www.offsiteart.it](#) for more!)

The idea of bringing new light, color and life back to L'Aquila's city center after such a disaster was something we knew we had to do, and for the last several years, Veronica and her team have done quite an amazing job. In fact, the ArtBridge/OSA partnership is one of our most successful projects to date and OSA is now looking at projects in other Italian and European cities. We're also talking to art advisors about possible inclusion of an Off Site Art project in the 2019 Venice Biennale.

HOC: Why, in your opinion, is it so important to link the public to art?

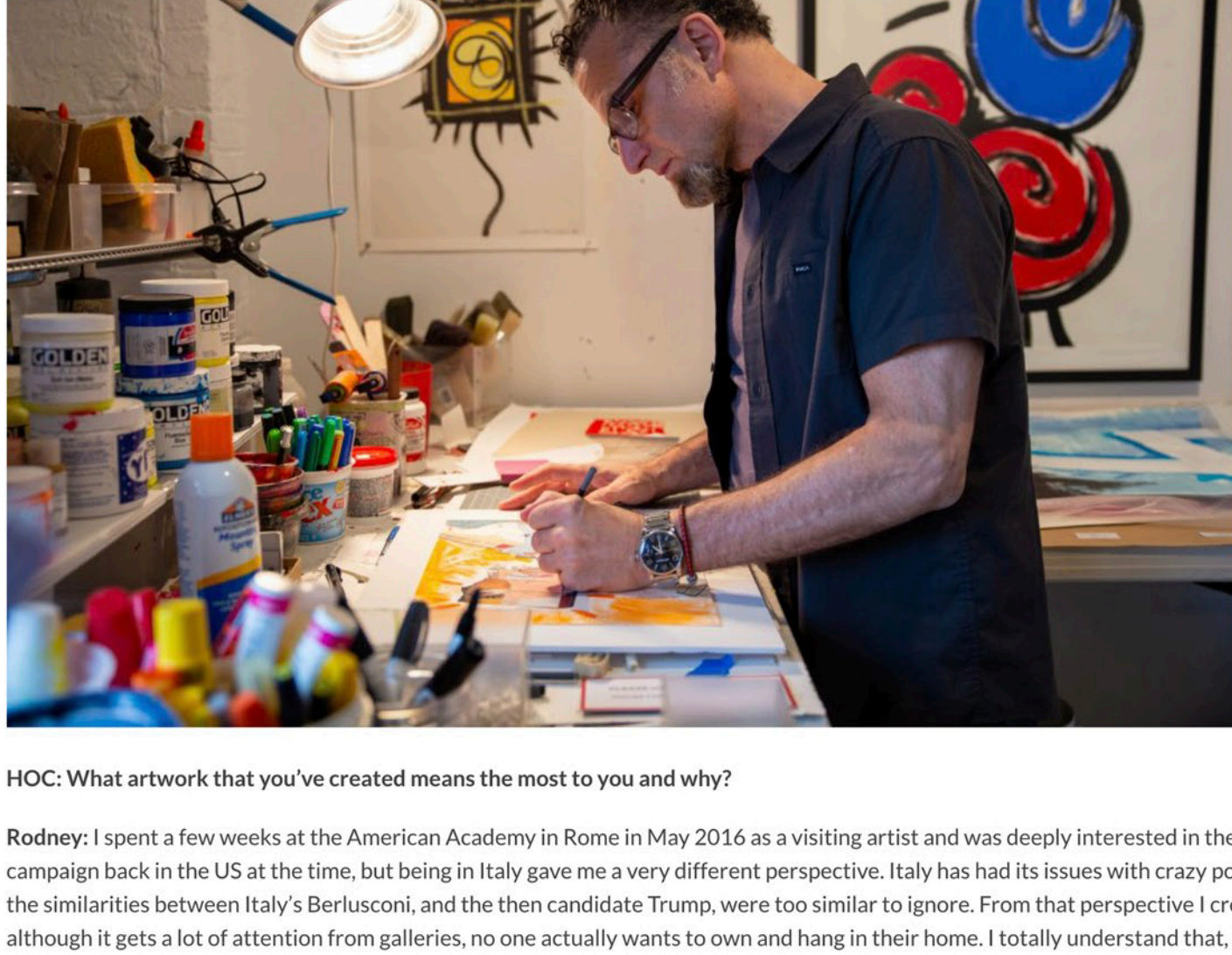
Rodney: Good question. The gallery system is changing, some say it's dead. I'll just say it's less important that it was 10 years ago. There are so many online opportunities and other ways to see art, but here in Chelsea there are still plenty of galleries. Or look at Instagram, and how that has changed the public's access to art. The point is that we need as many channels as possible to get people in front of art, and I think Public Art is one of the most important ways to get that done. Art in the public realm is uplifting to the daily pedestrian experience. Seeing art on your way to work, or anytime you're walking is a treat, and it's especially important in an urban environment of concrete and steel, for example. Color, shape, line, and light in an artistic form enriches our minds, makes us think, and stimulates. It's a very different experience for our brains and nervous system then just looking at billboards, or such.

HOC: For our creative readers, what advice would you have for them to grow their artist practices and get their work seen?

Rodney: It's so multi tiered. There are so many options and ways to grow your practice and get your work seen, you have to really follow the path that not only feels right for you, but one that you get some joy from. It's always going to be work to get your art out there, but if it feels like drudgery you'll never succeed. Pick a channel that you can push on that brings you some joy as well.

For me, with my design and branding background, I love the brand and promotion aspect. I like posting on social media, I like designing postcards, and books of my work. I love a photo or video shoot that promotes my work, but that's me. I also need to see new work, I need to be inspired all the time, or I get sluggish with my work.

Being in NYC, I'm a bit spoiled. Running out to a gallery or museum in the middle of the day can change the direction of my art, or inspire me into some new idea, and then I'm back in the studio and working again. I would also really suggest doing studio visits with friends and other artists. I do a newsletter every few months and I always include an interview with another artist. This keeps me connected to my peers and reminds me that it's not "all about me". In fact we're working on the next newsletter now, so check back soon to see who'll be next.



HOC: What artwork that you've created means the most to you and why?

Rodney: I spent a few weeks at the American Academy in Rome in May 2016 as a visiting artist and was deeply interested in the ongoing presidential campaign back in the US at the time, but being in Italy gave me a very different perspective. Italy has had its issues with crazy political leadership, and the similarities between Italy's Berlusconi, and the then candidate Trump, were too similar to ignore. From that perspective I created a series that, although it gets a lot of attention from galleries, no one actually wants to own and hang in their home. I totally understand that, the work is hard to look at for very long. The series is called Disconstructing Trump and here is a bit from my curatorial statement:

"Watching Trump being interviewed – I began to photograph the TV screen with my iPhone and using the high-speed, (multi-shot function), I took about 300 photos in less than 10 minutes. With those images I began to build collages that, to me, capture Trump's multiple personalities. In these works,

I believe, his true conflicted and disturbing nature begins to be revealed. At once contradictory, creepy, binary, multi-layered and unsettling, I've only started to reveal the real persona. Dismantling, cutting, disassembling, rearranging then reassembling this imagery is the essence of Disconstructing Trump!"

(Editor's note, to find out more visit [www.rodneydurso.com/artworks/disconstructing-trump](#))

HOC: Who / where do you get your inspiration from?

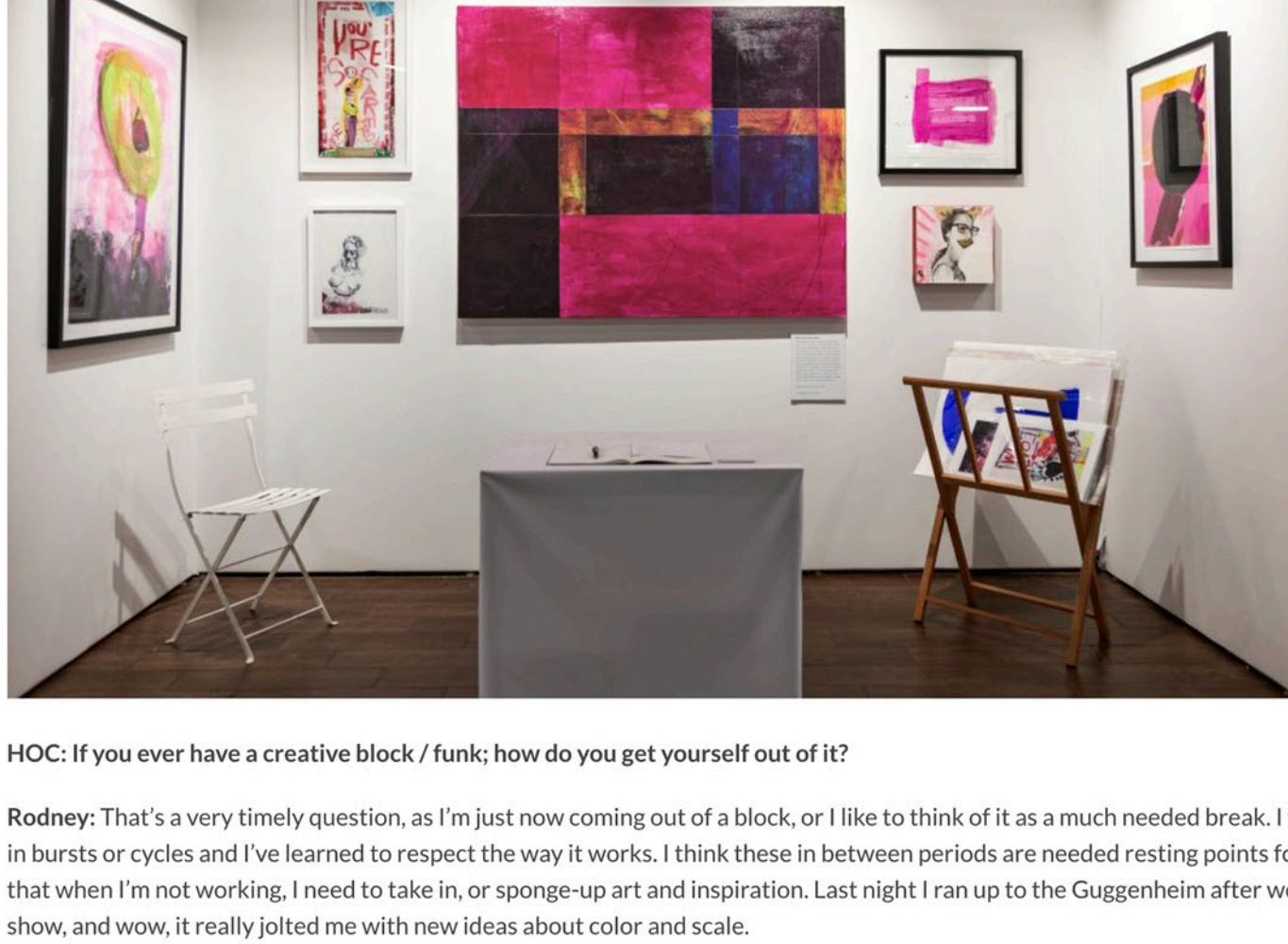
Rodney: The inspiration comes from the usual sources; anxiety, fear, pain, love, rejection, uncertainty, anger... you know, the regular stuff of life. But more seriously, I do think that I channel all of these emotions into my work.

To start my work I have a process. I start by putting on these emotions into my work. I leave in the studio. Then there's always strong English tea, like P&G, or Yorkshire Gold, or sometimes I'll have a coffee instead.

Then there's the music, and it's got to be loud. One of my favorite albums to start my work with is Paul Weller's "Wildwood". Something about those first guitar lines and songs – Sunflower, and Holy Man and then Wildwood – that get me into that headspace and ramped up to create. It's one of my favorite records ever. Full stop. Once I'm into my work I can switch it up and put on BBC, or NPR – the kind of American equivalent.

At other times, my inspiration comes from new materials, or news stories, or the need to complete a commission. Having a timeline, a deadline always gets me working. Not necessarily inspired, but moving and making work.

With my background in marketing and design, I still believe that art is just a product at the end of the day. A very personal one albeit, but a product nonetheless. So sometimes we can't rely on inspiration alone to get us making work, we have to have multiple methods to push us forward.



HOC: If you ever have a creative block / funk; how do you get yourself out of it?

Rodney: That's a very timely question, as I'm just now coming out of a block, or I like to think of it as a much needed break. I think creative output comes in bursts or cycles and I've learned to respect the way it works. I think these in between periods are the needed resting time for the creative mind. I find that when I'm not working, I need to take in, or sponge-up art and inspiration. Last night I ran up to the Guggenheim after work to see the Hilma af Klint show, and wow, it really jolted me with new ideas about color and scale.

I would say that any input whether visual, or musical or even travel can inspire new work, so when I'm not actively creating, I'm taking in ideas for whatever will come next.

HOC: The '10 years ago' challenge is all the rage on the moment, what advice do you have for the 2009 you?

Rodney: My best advice for the 2009 me would be stay focused!.. or more specifically, to make a plan with more specific goals. Ten years ago, I was doing too many things and chasing too many dreams. I think I would have been a little less crazy if I had stuck to maybe one or two ideas instead of three or four. In the end, it's all good, I've created a successful nonprofit organization with both domestic and international projects, and started to make headway in the artworld. My interest in branding and design is also alive once more and I've begun to do projects again in that realm.

I guess the truth is, as a creative soul, we are restless and always looking for the next thing. I've come to terms with that part of me and I've got a lot of gratitude for my sometimes childlike excitement for whatever's next.

We're sure you'll love to find out more about Rodney's work – see the links we've thoughtfully scattered throughout the interview and go to [RodneyDurso.com](#) and follow [@RodneyDurso](#)