

The practice of practice

CANNON SHOTS

R.J. MARX



To capture a collagist in words is a real challenge for a writer, much less a newspaper writer.

Rex Amos “cannot pass a scrap of paper on the sidewalk without stooping over to pick it up and examine it for collage possibilities,” reads an introduction to his work. “His friends have been embarrassed repeatedly by his stopping to rip years’ worth of pasted posters from public walls, layers of glutted paper and glue so heavy they wrapped themselves around him as he fought them into submission.”

But lest I linger on the image too long, with Rex Amos, it’s first things first. Or maybe it’s first things before first things.

There’s enough to write about Amos to fill a few storage rooms at a university, and that’s where they keep his memoirs, images and miscellany. (In his case “miscellany” gains wide berth from his imagination.)

When I saw Amos at Cheri’s over the holiday (see “Stammtisch,” View From the Porch, this page at right), he told me his colleague Graham Patrick Conroy died on Dec. 21. Amos and Conroy — a fourth-generation Oregonian, war veteran, longtime member of the Baha’i faith and a philosophy professor at Portland State University — co-founded Preliminism, the philosophy they described as “the theory and practice of practice.”

‘Practice Preliminism’

Amos studied at Portland State University, majoring in philosophy and literature. He and Conroy became friends in the 1960s, when Portland was a fertile creative melting pot where philosophy and literature often converged. Bud Clark was still years away from becoming mayor, but his Goose Hollow Inn tavern provided a gathering place for young creative types.

According to a 1985 profile of Amos and Conroy, the initial Preliminist observations were recorded in a small notebook. The notebook was washed with Rex’s shirt. One word remained legible, “Nothing.”

Preliminism, which could be defined as a contemporary philosophy or an ongoing joke, posits that “practice makes practice.” Preliminism’s central truth, wrote Conroy in “Tentative Notes Toward an Archive of Preliminism,” is that everything is preparation for the real thing, but the real thing never comes: “Rehearsing for the stage, but there is no stage, only the rehearsal.”

According to Amos in a remembrance, Conroy lived this philosophy, including sporting “PRELIM” vanity plates on his car, and wearing a “Practice Preliminism” button on his sport coats.

The richness of their friendships crossed cultural and social boundaries, charting a path dotted with characters as diverse as the King of Sweden and the mythically reclusive author Thomas Pynchon.

According to Amos, Conroy spent a



PHOTOS COURTESY REX AMOS

Graham Patrick Conroy and Rex Amos, founders of Preliminism.

Preliminist Time
by Graham P. Conroy

1. The Preliminist knows that the speed of reality is zero.
2. In Preliminism it’s earlier than you think.
3. The Preliminist says, “I’m only dying” to remind himself that life should be considered in terms of what is a waste of precious time, which is to say, there is plenty of time when you know you are always beginning.
4. When asked about time running out for him, Satchel Paige said, “Don’t look back, something may be gaining on you.”
5. Preliminism is like setting your clock for daylight savings time — you jump ahead to catch up.
6. I was always on time, then I realized how late I was.

See it

The work of Graham Patrick Conroy and Rex Amos is part of a larger retrospective presented by the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University for conceptual artist MK Guth. The installation presents books, manuscripts, letters and diaries from Willamette University’s Archives and Special Collections at the Mark O. Hatfield Library, including those of Amos and Conroy. Featured from Amos’ collection is the document “Tentative Notes Toward an Archive of Preliminism.” The first 10 pages from “Tentative Notes” have been selected to be read aloud during the performance component of the opening. Amos’s original document, along with related newspapers and other notes from the collection, will be on display in the Hallie Ford Museum of Art as part of the exhibit, which is on display from Jan. 23 to April 1.

night on a Persian carpet in Lake Oswego with Pynchon on the condition that he didn’t write about it. They met up with the Dalai Lama at the Shilo Inn in Seaside in 1984, Amos recalled, where they waited among hundreds of faithful before each received a blessing.

“Conroy also took great pride in being the oldest member of the Jackie Chan Fan Club,” Amos wrote. “He traveled to China and Hong Kong several times to meet with Jackie Chan including joining the crew during filming of ‘Rush Hour 2.’”

Conroy was recognized upon his retirement with an official city of Portland proclamation of “Practice Preliminism Day” on March 9, 1990. The celebration held at Goose Hollow Inn has been recognized annually ever since. “Mayor Clark’s official city seal with its red ribbon has gone missing but its memory is held in perpetuity,” Amos recalled.

Seeing the tunnel

In this day of big and bigger nuclear buttons, bully-bluster and true lies, we

need pacific — in the lowercase sense — and quick-witted believers like Conroy and Amos.

“Life is art and it is in the world of art that philosophies of living abound,” Conroy wrote in Preliminist Time. “The purpose of practice is more practice.”

The secret of a lasting philosophy is its ability to reach out to future generations with enduring truisms.

And what more appealing philosophy that always puts us at a new beginning? That is the essence of an optimist.

Add to that a cold beer from the Goose Hollow and you’re in Portland Nirvana.

“We are all practicing for our role in the drama of life,” wrote Conroy. “Preliminism is seeing the tunnel at the end of the light.”

Contributions in Conroy’s memory can be made to: Portland State University Alumni Association Scholarship Fund, PO Box 1326, Portland, OR 97207.



EVE MARX

A German word can be used to describe the camaraderie in Cannon Beach.

So what is ‘Stammtisch,’ anyway?

During the winter months when the chance of crowds is low, we like to hit our favorite Cannon Beach coffee shops on the weekends, tourist style. That’s when you can really stretch out and take your time lingering over your latte at *Insomnia* or *Sleepy Monk*, or tear off a hunk of that terrific baguette they make at *Sea Level* to go with your Americano, a la the perfect Parisienne petit déjeuner. I admit in the winter months I sometimes wonder if I’ll ever get off this coast and visit once again *Tortolla* or *St. Barts*. Then I remind myself I don’t have to go far to have a vacation-like morning coffee right here in Cannon Beach.

We hadn’t seen some arty friends of ours in awhile. They are ambitiously early-risers (or insomniacs, I haven’t asked)

who set out in all weathers on long walks before dawn. I’m intrigued by these ghostly pilgrimages they make

around a big loop. Through their telling, I learn about out baby seals and other flora and fauna they observe, things only really seen before sunup.

We exchanged a brief volley of messages about a meeting place. It was determined our meeting would take place at *Cheri’s Café* because that is their only place.

Cheri’s is open every day except Wednesday. That’s the day they are closed. They open at 8 a.m. It was about 10:30 a.m., when we met up with our friends, which for them was more like time for lunch. He ordered the soup of the day, a chowder, while Mr. Sax and I had Americanos. I ate a cookie while Mr. Sax also had *Cheri’s* signature breakfast sandwich.

I asked about them about that morning’s walk and heard they’d made friends with some dogs despite not really being dog people. I found out they walk in sun, rain, sleet, hail, wind, nothing deters them. They sometimes walk in pitch dark. Quite understandably, they object to overnight outdoor lighting because it spoils the picture.

We had to wait for a table to open because they sit only at one. It’s the table with a sign on it that says *Stammtisch*. To read what that meant, I had to put my glasses on.

Stammtisch, I learned, is a German term describing an informal group meeting that takes place held on a regular basis at the same table and the same spot. A *Stammtisch* is not a structured meeting, but rather a friendly get-together that can occur quite randomly. Traditionally, the meeting table is marked with a somewhat elaborate sign reserving it for regulars. The table of our friends is the *Stammtisch* table at *Cheri’s*.

So it’s a big deal we get to sit with you at this table, I said to our friends. We’re getting the royal treatment. I’m not sure, but I think behind me, *Cheri* might have been rolling her eyes. Our man friend even has a particular seat he always takes at the table. I think there should be a plaque on it that says “Reserved.”

This is where it all happens, he said. We all laughed and lifted our soup spoons and coffee cups to the spirit of *Stammtisch*.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



Taking a look at some of our favorite wines from last year

As we bravely journey forth into 2018, it’s a perfect time to pause and reflect on those wines which made 2017 a year which include both new favorites and long-time favorites that delivered another exceptional vintage.

My staff and I selected our 12 favorite wines of the past year. Here are *The Wine Shack’s* “Best Wines of 2017.”

1. Puffin Pinot Gris 2016. Yes, it’s our own wine, but Puffin Pinot Gris earned a platinum award, double gold award, earned “best of class” and was written up in *Sunset Magazine*. This luscious pinot gris delivers a soft amber color with flavors of apple, melon, pear and honeysuckle. This wine is amazingly good. We have about 25 cases or so left, so get it while you still can.

2. Shea Wine Cellars, Shea Vineyard 2014 Pinot Noir. Made with fruit from their famous estate vineyard, “Shea Shea” offers classic Oregon pinot noir notes of red cherry, black cherry, with hints of

UNCORKED RAMBLINGS

STEVEN SINKLER



blueberry and earth. An incredible wine.

3. Roco “RMS” Sparkling Brut 2014. Not many sparkling wines stop us in our tracks, but RMS isn’t your average bottle of bubbly. A blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, RMS is made using the “traditional method,” similar to Champagne. This sparkler is crisp with gentle flavors of apple, pear and baked bread. A delicious wine for special occasions.

4. Reustle Prayer Rock “Masada Bloc” Syrah 2014. Don’t tell *Walla Walla* or *Red Mountain*, but the Pacific Northwest’s best Syrah is made in southern Oregon. This medium-bodied wine is loaded with flavors of black cherries and smoked meat.

Our staff is having a love affair with this wine and we aren’t ashamed to admit it!

5. Stoller “Reserve” Chardonnay 2015. In case you haven’t noticed, Oregon’s Willamette Valley has quickly become one of the world’s top chardonnay producing regions. Sophisticated flavors of citrus, white flowers, baked bread and oak combine to make this wine a stunner. For those of you who “don’t drink chardonnay,” that’s fine as it leaves more for us!

6. Sleight of Hand “Illusionist” Cabernet Sauvignon 2013-14. We’re not sure how Winemaker Trey Busch continues to turn out *Walla Walla’s* finest cab sauv every year (and at such a reasonable price) but we’re glad he does! Packed with flavors of black cherry and blackberry, you’ll pick up secondary flavors of black tea, smoke and cedar. You should cellar this as it ages toward perfection, but you won’t, will you.

7. Lemelson “Thea’s Selection” Pinot Noir 2015. Wow! Lemelson delivers another elegant pinot noir. A bit lighter than their 2014 which earned world wine recognition, Lemelson’s 2015 *Thea’s Selection*

tantalizes with flavors of red cherry, currant and black cherry along with hints of spice. This is the perfect wine for grilled salmon or pork tenderloin.

8. K Vintners “Milbrandt” Syrah 2014. This might be Charles Smith’s best Milbrandt Syrah ever. This full-bodied wine explodes with flavor of black cherry, black licorice, smoked meats and spice. This wine begs for pulled pork or barbecued ribs. It’s a rock star, just like the winemaker.

9. J Scott Grenache 2014. Possibly my new favorite wine! Made from Rogue Valley fruit, this juicy wine has flavors of cherry, strawberry and red licorice. If you haven’t tried Grenache before, it’s an easy drinking, food friendly wine that is a perfect companion for food. Trust me, I’m a professional.

10. Bergevin Lane “Linen” Sauvignon Blanc 2016. When does a crush become an addiction? I’m not sure when that transformation happens, but I’m there. *Linen Sauv Blanc* is my “go to” white wine

(other than Puffin Pinot Gris) and I’m not ashamed to say it. Apricot, peach, kiwi, pineapple. ... what could be better? Oh, I know, it’s under \$20. Come in now.

11. Abeja Columbia Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2014. Yes, my staff loves *Walla Walla Cab!* This bad boy combines firm tannins with flavors of black cherry, roasted meat and sage. Let the wine linger long enough and you’ll discover some late arriving notes of dark chocolate. Hell yeah.

12. Palencia Albarino 2016. My favorite wine from Victor Palencia, Washington’s newest winemaking superstar. This delicious wine has flavors of apple, pear, peach and lemon zest with a crisp acidity that just works like a champ. When we pour this wine, people lose their minds. I saw that a major wine magazine only gave this wine 88 points. That wine reviewers needs a time out.

Time for you to give them a try! They won’t disappoint, we guarantee it.

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