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MBS ([00:00](#)):

The previous guest on this podcast, Two Pages with MBS was Dave Ball, who I met at Oxford when we were both newly minted Rhodes Scholars there. And thinking of that time in Oxford, one of the things I remember is that there were signs everywhere. Don't walk on the grass. Entry forbidden. Don't bring a naked flame into the Bodleian Library, and fair enough, I understand that last one. We don't want to burn down all the books. You've already done that enough times in our past. But I do remember how most of those signs made me feel, which is I wanted to rebel against them. I see the sign, don't walk on the grass, and I do a little tap dance on the corner of the grass. I would test the door that says no entry to see if it was actually locked. See if I could stick my head around the corner and see what was there. And maybe this is what this conversation I think plays with, maybe this was the artist in me, maybe this was the maker in me. There's something about transgression that can be extremely powerful.



(01:09):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, the podcast of brilliant people. Read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Now, Stuart Temple is a British artist who never really had a choice about what he wanted to be when he grew up.

Stuart (01:27):

It's always been like that since I was a kid. I was eight, nine years old and the thing that made sense to me was making work. And through all the weird wonky teenage years, it was a thing that made sense. And I had quite a weird, well, very frightening near death experience at art school. Actually in part of my recovery, my mental health journey was making art. So art's, something that I need to feel alive and normal, and it's just something that I do. I just am one of those.

MBS (01:56):

But Stuart's not just an artist, he's also an activist. And I love how similarly these two words sound, someone who creates conversations and debates around fairness and justice.

Stuart (02:09):

I remember the first time I felt inequality as an artist, and that was when I was a teenager and my art college took me up to a very posh gallery. And I remember putting my hand on the wall to get closer to this artwork and the gallerist screamed, get your filthy hand off my wall. And I felt really humiliated and I really wanted to see this artwork and I thought I was really unfair and kind of unjust and the art should be for everybody and it really stuck with me emotionally.

MBS (02:37):



Art should be for everybody even, or maybe especially for grubby handed teenagers. Stuart was sticking his hands where society and curators said he shouldn't from the very start. And according to him, that's par for the course. When it comes to artists.

Stuart ([02:54](#)):

I think artists naturally are disruptors, right? Because we're outside the normal social norm. At least in my day, you wouldn't choose to do this. You're a bit of a weirdo, you're doing something differently anyway. But I think that really my work where it analyzes society and culture, I started to see problems and the cracks in that. So I actually wanted the work to be useful and actually have some impact in making things better.

MBS ([03:19](#)):

Artists do sort of live on the fringes of society in many ways, and Stuart believes that position gives them a unique opportunity.

Stuart ([03:27](#)):

I think if anything, I've realized just how much power artists really have and how much freedom in the West. I mean, I'm very lucky we have freedom of speech here. We have a human rights act. I can make work about things that move me. I'm very lucky and I don't take that for granted. So that's an amazing thing. As the years have rolled on, I've started to realize the art is a very powerful form of activism actually. And I started to realize more about what artists can do, not just me, but as a collective, as a community, how we can use our voice. So that's evolved.

MBS ([04:05](#)):

Yeah, it's really interesting the sense of, you used the phrase power and freedom. I'm just wondering, there's a question there. I'm just trying to find it. What power do you feel you have and what power do you feel you don't have?



Stuart ([04:23](#)):

Well, I don't think I'm very lucky because I have an audience. Some people know my work now. So that gives me a platform, if you like. So I don't say that lightly. That's a responsibility. So I have the power to communicate to a lot of people very quickly. That's partly due to technology. So I feel very grateful for that. And I have some experiences that I've developed through practicing my work for 30 years. So I have that. The power I don't have really is a power over, I don't know what you could call it. Maybe authority or the powers that be if you like. I still feel like in the society I'm in, artists are to some extent sort of looked down upon that there is prejudice around what we do. So I hit that quite often.

MBS ([05:16](#)):

You talk about the audience you've developed. There's a question here, Stuart, around how your audience influences what you do. My experience of being a maker myself is the first things I make. I don't have an audience, so I'm not thinking about who my audience is because I have none. But at a certain point there's this sense of expectation, which is like, "Okay, my audience is thinking this from me." And I'm wondering how your audience is a source of freedom for you and how it's a source of restraint for you.

Stuart ([05:56](#)):

Well, I think in some ways I'm really lucky because I wouldn't be here if people didn't connect with what I make. So I'm so grateful that people understand what I'm doing. So I have a duty in a way to that, and I take that very seriously. But at the same time, there's different types of art. My work has become less about me and less about making myself feel good and more about how I can serve and be useful. So I believe an artwork isn't truly finished till it meets an audience. I think art happens when people connect with the things that we make. So I half finish it, the audience bring their life experience, their story, their



interpretation to the things that I put out there. And really I can't really control that process. However, I do really care about them and I feel like I fail if it misses the mark. So I don't really do it to please me. I feel like it's a bit more than that.

MBS ([06:56](#)):

Yeah. Stuart, you've read our appetite for the book that you're going to read from. What book have you chosen?

Stuart ([07:05](#)):

I have chosen Patti Smith's book, Just Kids.

MBS ([07:10](#)):

Fantastic. How did you come up with this book? I know you're a reader. How did you end up choosing this one?

Stuart ([07:14](#)):

Okay, so this was really hard. I read two, three books a week and I've done for years, and this is weird. I could have read anything. But this book, this is going to go quite deep, quite quick, well quite emotional, quite quick. My mom died of cancer during the pandemic.

MBS ([07:35](#)):

Oh I'm sorry.

Stuart ([07:35](#)):

Which meant I couldn't see her, but I decided I'd connect with her on Zoom every day and read her some of this book. And the two pages I'm going to read, it's completely random. You see the bookmark?

MBS ([07:50](#)):

I see that. Yeah.



Stuart ([07:51](#)):

That's where my mum passed away and this has been on my shelf ever since. So this is a really important book to me. And I want to read the next two pages of this book as some sort of weird, cathartic thing that I feel like I need to do because no other book that matters to me as much as this book.

MBS ([08:13](#)):

What a gift for us. And I so appreciate you choosing this for us with that story behind it. It's amazing. So thank you. So Stuart Semple, British artist reading Patti Smith's book, Just Kids. Over to you, Stuart.

Stuart ([08:27](#)):

And a random two pages, in fact-

MBS ([08:30](#)):

I know which I love as well. So let's see what he's got in store for us.

Stuart ([08:41](#)):

I implored him to quit his job and scant paycheck were not worth the sacrifice. After nights of discussion, he reluctantly agreed in return, he worked diligently, always anxious to show me what he'd accomplished. While I was at Scribers, I had no regrets taking on a job as a breadwinner, my temperament was sturdier. I could still create at night and I was proud to provide a situation, allowing him to do his work without compromise. At night, after trudging through the snow, I found him waiting for me in our apartment ready to rub my hands, to make them warm. He seemed always in motion, heating water on the stove and lacing my boots, hanging up my coat, always with one eye on the drawing he was working on. He would stop for a moment if he noticed something. Most of the time it seemed as if the piece was fully formed in his mind.



[\(09:37\)](#):

He was not one for improvising. It was more a question of executing something he saw in a flash. Existing in silence all day. He was eager to hear my stories of the bookstores, eccentric customers of Mr. Edward Gory with his big tennis shoes or Catherine Hepburn wearing Spencer Tracy's cap covered with a green silk headscarf or the Rothschild's with their long black coats. Afterwards, he would sit on the floor and he'd spaghetti while examining his new work. I was attracted to Robert's work because his visual vocabulary was akin to my poetic one. Even if we seem to be moving towards different destinations. Robert always would tell me Nothing is finished until you see it. Our first winter together was a harsh one. Even with my better salary from Scribers, we had very little money.

[\(10:33\)](#):

Often we'd stand in the cold on the corner of St. James's Place in eyeshot of the Greek diner and Jake's art supply store. Debating how to spend our few dollars a toss up between grilled cheese sandwiches and art supplies, sometimes unable to distinguish the greater hunger. Robert would keep nervous watch on the diner. While I filled with the spirit of Gannet pocketed the much needed brass sharpener or colored pencils. I had a more romantic view of the artist's life and sacrifices. I had once read that Lee Krasner had lifted art supplies for Jackson. I don't know if it was true, but it served as inspiration. Robert fretted over not being able to provide for us. I told him not to worry that committing to great art is its own reward. At night, we played the records we liked to draw to on our battered player. Sometimes we played a game called Record of the Night. The album cover of the chosen record would be prominently displayed on the mantle.

[\(11:36\)](#):



We played the disc over and over the music and forming the trajectory of the evening. It did not bother me to work in obscurity. I was hardly more than a student. Yet Robert though shy, nonverbal and seemingly out of stack with those around him, he was ambitious. He helped Duchant and Warhol as models, high art and high society. He aspired to them both. We were a curious mix of Funny Face and Faust. One cannot imagine the mutual happiness we felt when we sat and drew together. We would get lost for hours. His ability to concentrate for long periods infected me, and I learned by his example, working side by side.

[\(12:20\)](#):

When we would take a break, I would boil water and make some Nescafe. After a particularly good stretch of work, we would stroll along Myrtle Avenue, searching for monomers purging on Robert's favorite treat, a marshmallow cookie covered in dark chocolate. Although we spent most of our time together, we weren't isolated. Our friends would come to visit Harvey Parks and Lewis Dellesard. They were painters. Sometimes they worked on the floor next to us. Lewis did portraits of us, both Robert with an Indian necklace and one of me with closed eyes. Ed Hanson shared his vision and colleges with Janet Hamill read us her poems. I would show my drawings and tell stories about them like Wendy, entertaining lost Children.

MBS [\(13:11\)](#):

Stuart. That was beautiful.

Stuart [\(13:12\)](#):

Thank you.

MBS [\(13:18\)](#):

What resonates in those two pages for you?

Stuart [\(13:22\)](#):



Mate. There's so much in there. I mean, I love this moment early in an artist's career where you have nothing but your art and you're pinning this hope that it can kind of take you somewhere. I think that's beautiful and I think their relationship, the way Patti Smith is sacrificing herself in a way by doing this job to support Mapplethorpe because she put so much in her work and just this beauty of this moment in New York, these two brilliant, creative souls colliding. I don't know. It's a beautiful thing. I can identify with a lot of that.

MBS ([14:00](#)):

I'm going to come back and ask you about some of the themes that we saw on the two pages, but can I just ask you, what's the gift your mom gave you?

Stuart ([14:11](#)):

Love. She loved me and she taught me about society. My mom was a sociologist and though she didn't really understand what it was to be an artist at the start, she was very proud of me towards the end. She taught me a lot.

MBS ([14:37](#)):

Yeah, I just wanted to acknowledge her knowing the role this book played as a way of connecting with her in her last days. So thank you. In the reading, which as you said, I mean, I know it was a random two pages. But wow, what an articulation of so many other things about what it means to be an artist. One of the lines was it talked about the artist sacrifices in the pages that you read. When you look back on the career you've had, what do you notice about the sacrifices you've made?

Stuart ([15:20](#)):

There are so many. There are so many. I mean, I've been homeless, I've been completely broke. I've been in trouble. I've given everything to my art. It takes everything. As I know while all the other kids went out and partied and went out



clubbing and whatever, I made art. I turned up to art school early. I stayed to art school late. I worked really hard. I did what they asked of me.

MBS ([15:58](#)):

The etymology of sacrifice, it actually means to make sacred. So what do you feel was made sacred?

Stuart ([16:10](#)):

What? Through making the things I made or?

MBS ([16:12](#)):

Well there's that connection between what sacrifices have you made, and if you think of sacrifice as I've started to try and do as not so much as a loss or a giving away, but as an act of making sacred by doing that thing.

Stuart ([16:29](#)):

Well, I suppose the work is what you get, but it feels almost too lofty to call those things sacred objects to me. But really, yes. What came out of the sacrifice were paintings, were performances, were films, were exhibitions, photos.

MBS ([16:52](#)):

Yeah. How do you find your ideas?

Stuart ([16:57](#)):

Oh, I don't know. I think this is getting a bit woo woo, but I think ideas find you. I think there's two ways of looking at this, but I like to believe in this idea of you're open to it. It lands in your head. It's not really me being clever, maybe I'm just a



bit receptive and I get a little whiff of something and then I follow it and it tends to expand and then I find something else and then it leads to something else and then it all goes wrong and then it close down that avenue and then try something else. And so it's more experimenting on a whim than coming up with something clever.

MBS ([17:38](#)):

Well, is there a lot of it all goes wrong because when you look at artists and their output, you don't tend to see the dead-ends and the cul-de-sacs. You tend to see the finished outcome. In your video behind you, you've got the Happy Balloon, which is, I imagine, a reference to Happy Cloud, which is one of your more famous installations. And I'm like, okay, I'm reading up about Stuart and I'm like the Happy Cloud. And I'm like, how did that happen? I'm curious to know what's the role of failure in making art and in your success?

Stuart ([18:16](#)):

Oh, it's everything. It's absolutely everything. Because otherwise, if I'd have made the perfect painting when I was 18 years old, I'm done. So I'm always deeply unsatisfied. Some degree of the work is always going to be unresolved, problematic and require more work. So there's two things. You can be scared of that or you can just lean into that and embrace that. And I love it. I love it, I love it, I love it. Because that's the source of it all. So pretty much they're all failures, which is why I haven't really shown anyone any of the new stuff for about five or six years now, because it's just me and the work. People don't need that at the moment. So yeah, there's more failures, way more failures than assets.

MBS ([19:10](#)):

Right. Well, how do you know when a piece can be finished, as you said, every piece is unfinished, but it's ready to be released into the wild.



Stuart ([19:27](#)):

Well, I don't know. I mean everything's different. So if it's a sort of social intervention here in the UK, we had a thing where the culture minister had said, or chancellor of the X jackers, sorry, had said artists should retrain and get a different job during the pandemic. That wasn't a job. And there's this huge thing artists should retrain and reskill. And I thought-

MBS ([19:51](#)):

And to interrupt you, the chancellor of the executor is basically the finance guy, right?

Stuart ([19:55](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MBS ([19:57](#)):

Minister for money.

Stuart ([19:59](#)):

The money guy who's actually now the Prime Minister, by the way, in those days it was the money guy. He basically said, artists should retrain and reskill and get a job in cyber. We should all learn how to do internet stuff now. And we all thought that was terrible. So I opened an artist job center in the center of London and it parodied a job center. And it had all these weird and wonderful jobs for artists. It was installation happening, and that was just off the moment. That just came out in a week or two. It was a response. So that just the time for that dictated when it happened. But then with something like a painting, that's really hard because they just get put in the back room and come back out five years later and get fiddled with and then go back in again.

MBS ([20:48](#)):



Yeah, I'm not a painter, but I am a writer. And this idea of, "Okay, when do I let go of this thing that I'm writing to offer it up to the world and the audience?" Is that when you see it published or whatever, you're like, ah, that's a little disappointing, or that's a typo. Or I could have just phrased that better.

Stuart ([21:22](#)):

There's always that though. I mean, but I think maybe we are the only people who see that in it. I believe that most people don't notice. But I also think with the work, and I don't know when to catch it. But there's a peak when it is going to be the best it's going to be. And if you fiddle about with it anymore, you're actually doing damage.

MBS ([21:22](#)):

And it's about-

Stuart ([21:48](#)):

Catching it at that bit. And I don't know, it is normally way earlier than I think it is, and I often go too far with it and regret it.

MBS ([21:57](#)):

Knowing that you are a perpetually unsatisfied with the work as the nature of being the artist who is Stuart Semple, how do you care for yourself a way that criticism of the piece can become criticism of you?

Stuart ([22:21](#)):

Okay. Well, I think partly it's that idea that it's an inspiration that's come to me, so I'm not that attached to it. So that works both ways. So it wasn't really, so it goes both ways. So when it comes out really well, it's not that I'm clever, but also when it goes badly, it's not really holding my fault. It just wasn't working.

MBS ([22:43](#)):



I love that you hold that because so often people do it the other way. They're like, "If it's good, I got lucky, and if it's bad, I'm a shit person."

Stuart ([22:49](#)):

Yeah. No, no, no.

MBS ([22:50](#)):

There's a way you can beat yourself up with that.

Stuart ([22:52](#)):

Yeah, it's not about me either way. And there's always tomorrow, right? There's always another painting.

MBS ([22:59](#)):

It's another painting. So knowing that the work is coming to you, it's not really about you. I want to come back to this something about where do you find the courage to release it to the world? Because there is that moment of take a breath, put it out there. Take another breath. Is courage the right word?

Stuart ([23:26](#)):

I don't know. I mean the thing, it depends what it is because I'm not scared of the reaction. I'm absolutely fine if people don't like it. I feel like I haven't served them properly and I've communicated wrong, but I can live with it. I'm not scared of that.

But it depends what I'm doing. If it's a series of paintings, maybe when I've got 12 of them and they make sense together and they've got some sort of semblance of it being an exhibition. It feels right that there should be a show of them that makes sense. So I'm not scared of the releasing it or the sharing it. I mean, I started off when I was a teenager putting my work on eBay and I put three pitches a day up on eBay, and I started when I was 19 after my near death thing that I went through. I put three pitches a day up for three years. So I put



3000 artworks out into the world anyway at the start. So some of them were awful. I mean they were terrible and they couldn't have been worse. So I got out over and was done with.

MBS ([24:26](#)):

Oh, I love that. Stuart, one of the products that I love most about yours is Black 3.0.

Stuart ([24:35](#)):

There it is. Yeah.

MBS ([24:36](#)):

There it is. I've got a jar of it and I love it for the story. Okay, yeah. Can you tell us the story about it?

Stuart ([24:47](#)):

Of course I can. So the story around Black 3.0 comes about because back in 2016, the British Indian artist, Anish Kapur, very important guy. If you don't know who he is, he's probably worth about half a billion pounds. He's a very important artist, Anish Kapur. He bought the exclusive rights to process to coat things in the blackest material ever made, which was called Vanta Black. And that stuff makes things, you paint it on look like a black hole in specs, it's 3D things go flat. It is weird. Anyway, he was the only artist in the world who could use that. And I thought that was really, really. Well, just not going nice, really. So I have always made my own paints bit like Patti Smith. Really, they couldn't afford them. Same with me. I made my own and I had this stuff that I made called the Pinkest Pink, and it's the pinkest thing you've ever seen, and I thought I-

MBS ([25:44](#)):



It's right here.

Stuart ([25:47](#)):

So that's the stuff I thought I'd put on the internet as a piece of performance art. And you had to agree that you weren't Anish Kapur and you weren't going to share it with Anish Kapur to buy it. And I saw it more as a little sculpture I made in my studio, like a little multiple, like an artwork. But anyway, loads of people bought in, they got behind it and they agreed. And then they started saying to me, "Look, you've got to make a black. You've going to make a black as good as [inaudible 00:26:11] an affordable black, a better black and accessible black. So a lot of work went into it and it ended up in black three, which is collaboration with about a thousand artists around the world. We formulate and then we share it on a not-for-profit basis on my website. And anyone apart from Anish Kapur can use it as much as they like. And that's the end the story.

MBS ([26:32](#)):

Yeah, I'm actually a secret agent of Anish Kapur. I'm finding my way around this.

Stuart ([26:39](#)):

What can I tell you?

MBS ([26:42](#)):

Love the story. I love how it speaks to early on you talked about why fairness and democracy important themes to you. And this feels like an action for the sake of fairness and democracy.

Stuart ([26:56](#)):

I hope so. I mean, I remember being a kid and secretly drooling over art materials in the shop window. And actually I remember coming home one day and my mom actually put on my bed this set of water because know the proper grownup ones in tubes. She must have saved up for them. We were a poor



family. So God it meant so much. And to tell people, I'm the richest artist in the world. You can't use this pain. It's just horrible. It's not nice.

MBS ([27:23](#)):

It's not nice.

Stuart ([27:25](#)):

No, it's not nice.

MBS ([27:28](#)):

You talked about Black 3.0 being a collaboration with a thousand other artists. What have you learned about what it takes to be a great collaborator?

Stuart ([27:40](#)):

Well, that's to do with listening and understanding that you're not always right. And it's very easy to go into collaboration with a fixed idea of what you want, but there needs to be a dialogue because you're there to learn. And I've collaborated with loads of people over the years, like quite famous pop stars and fashion labels and things like that. And the ones that really work, the ones where it's a true meeting of the minds and both of you leave with more than you came with. And that's when it works. And then when it goes wrong is when one person's telling another person wants do, nobody grows. It's rubbish, it's pointless.

MBS ([28:21](#)):

How do you know what's there to be fluid on and what you need to stay firm on? Because that give and take is great, but there's a sense that you can lose yourself or lose what you bring or lose your magic if you give too much away.



I'm wondering how, what's true or what's essential and what's open to creative reinterpretation?

Stuart ([28:54](#)):

I don't know. I think it depends on what you're making, but I think in essence, I've had some experiences and I've seen some things work. So I have a strong sense of those. And I think I have quite a at least to me, moral sense. So that dictates a lot. I thought, well, we can't do that. That would be bad or wrong. So I have a sense of that, I think. So certain lines you just can't across in those terms. But really I just want to be really receptive because it's actually, I watched an interview of Steven Spielberg the other day and he said something really interesting. He was talking about making Indiana Jones, and he said that he's always really receptive to anyone on set, giving him an idea. And in that movie, Indiana Jones and the front row, he's teaching in a school and the girl in the front row closes her eyes and she's written, "Love you." On her eyelids.

MBS ([29:45](#)):

I remember that. Yeah.

Stuart ([29:47](#)):

And Spielberg says that that's his favorite moment in any of his movies. And something like the Cameraman's electrical assistant told him that idea, but he put it in and a good idea is a good idea. It doesn't need to be mine, but if I can facilitate it moving through and happening, then I'm totally up for help.

MBS ([30:09](#)):

You're reminding me of an interview I saw with another film director, Ron Howard. Oh yeah. Who said he has a, what do you call it? I think he called it the six and 12 rule, which he has his own opinion about things. And sometimes people come to him with ideas where it's clearly a no. And sometimes they come to him where the idea is clearly a yes, but his rule of thumb is that if it's six



of one and half a dozen of the other, then he'll say yes to them. Because when people see their own ideas being enacted, whether you're the actor itself or somebody else on the crew. There's some magic in it being not just me doing the director's idea, but there's more to it than that. And I thought that was a very helpful idea, which is your bias should be to say yes unless it's really a no.

Stuart ([30:59](#)):

I love that. That's really beautiful. Yeah, I mean, I try and say yes to things as well. Yeses move things forward, don't they? Nos shut doors.

MBS ([31:12](#)):

How do you have to choose what your next projects are?

Stuart ([31:18](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([31:19](#)):

You said, is it A, is it B, is it C? And if you do, how do you make that choice now?

Stuart ([31:26](#)):

Depends what you're doing and what stage I'm in. So right now I'm utterly committed to this new series of paintings that I've been working on tirelessly day in and day out. And people do, I mean, it's very, very lucky space where people write in most days with quite exciting things. And I could get really caught up in that and distracted and be all over the place doing weird and wonderful things, but my commitments to the art. And it's quite easy to say no when you're in the flow, but procrastination is a big thing because painting's really hard. So everything can be much more exciting than the hard work of that. So I've had to call myself to account on that really big time and shit.

MBS ([32:17](#)):



I love what you're saying there. I completely understand the sudden appeal of re-vacuuming the house. I don't even like vacuuming. The house is already clean, but the alternatives to try and work out a sentence that I am finding it hard to write down, so maybe I'll get distracted by anything.

Stuart ([32:37](#)):

And it's never as bad as you think once you get in the flow of it and actually sit down to write or paint, you're always glad you did it well, at least I think so.

MBS ([32:45](#)):

I find that too actually, even if it's not actually productive on an objective level, there's something about I've done the work and that's moved me along. And next time I come back to the work, I'll be in a different place and it will be in a different place and we'll see what shows up then.

Stuart ([33:02](#)):

Totally.

MBS ([33:03](#)):

Stuart, this has been such a great conversation and I feel like we've only touched on some things, but I wanted to ask you as a final question.

Stuart ([33:13](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([33:13](#)):

Is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation?

Stuart ([33:18](#)):



Yes, because what we didn't do was do my Patti Smith Mapplethorpe story, which you should ask me about.

MBS ([33:27](#)):

Do you have a Patti Smith Robert Mapplethorpe story? You could tell us.

Stuart ([33:31](#)):

That's so funny you should mention that. I do. So no, it's just really weird. So I really idolized Patti Smith and Mapplethorpe for loads of reasons. And when I moved to London, one of my dear friends, Alison runs a brilliant gallery and she represented the Mapplethorpe estate, and she was putting on a big Mapplethorpe show, obviously, sadly Robert's passed by now. And Alison said, how do you want to come to the show, to the opening, whatever? And I came to the show and it was curated by David Hockney, who's also one of my heroes. So I'm there at the opening, the David Hockney story is interesting. There's a thing there. But anyway, the Mapplethorpe photo, there's just extraordinary. And there's a video piece there, and I climb into this video and it's this blackout room. I'm sat there and I'm watching this amazing video that Robert shot.

([34:18](#)):

I turned to one, and Patti Smith just walks in and just literally, she sits next to me and there's no one else in the video. So I'm watching Mapplethorpe with Patti Smith in this room, and I was like, "Wow, this is so weird. It's like all my dreams are coming true." I was so young and it was just a really beautiful thing. And then I came out of the booth and Alison said, "Oh, do you want to meet David Hockney?" I thought, yeah, it's amazing.

([34:43](#)):

So I went into the back room, there's David Hockney, there's Salman and Rushdie, Patti Smith, and I'm like, what the hell is this? I've called inside my cultural daydream here. And I start talking to David Hockney about art and stuff. Obviously one of my heroes. Well, I have this huge conversation. And then his



assistant says to me, "Oh, he is turned his hearing aid off tonight." What an ars who goes out to an art show that you create and turns your hearing aid off so you can't hear anybody. I felt like a right mug. So that's my story of my very quick run in with all that world. It's beautiful.

MBS ([35:23](#)):

I'm excited to be three degrees of separation from all of those people. So thank you. I've just finished reading a Salman Rushdie book actually as we speak. So yeah, the Golden House, which was wonderful.

Stuart ([35:32](#)):

Is it good?

MBS ([35:33](#)):

It's excellent. It's truly, I haven't read Rushdie for a long time, but this is a story of... It's King Lear, but different.

Stuart ([35:44](#)):

Cool. Okay. Yeah, I hasn't read any for a while. Okay, I'll put it on the list.

MBS ([35:48](#)):

It's wonderful. I can recommend it.

([35:55](#)):

The inspiration to invite Stuart to the podcast came because I actually wrote about him in my book, how to Begin. In particular, I write about that episode with Anish Kapur, the other artist, buying the rights to Vanta Black, the blackest black in the world, and Stuart's response to that. It wasn't just making an alternative black paint, but it was making it available to everyone and anyone except for Anish Kapur. I thought this was a response that was so smart and also professional, but also funny. I think these are the characteristics of my favorite artists and activists. Smart, so finding a new way to give voice to something that



matters. Professional, doing it at a level that is appropriate to the challenge at hand. I mean, if you're going to make an alternative black paint, it has to actually be a really good black, black paint.

[\(36:51\)](#):

And finally, funny, holding something that serious, lightly provoking and teasing and being persistent in all of that. I can see now that what annoyed me about the signs at Oxford University were how they were so exclusive. No entry unless you are this person. No walking on the grass unless you are that person. What I want to do is to find ways to make hidden resources and sources of power and wisdom and influence open to everyone. You've enjoyed my conversation with Stuart. I've got a couple of other artists that actually interviewees that I might suggest. One of them is an artist, Chatney Everett, how to be an artist. He is one of the founders of a wonderful series of art installations around the US called, I've forgot what they called something wolf. It's an odd name. They literally pulled two bits of paper out of a hat to come up with the name of their collective.

[\(37:54\)](#):

And they're doing something really interesting in terms of democratizing and making provocative and enjoyable art in a way that certainly disruptive for how most art museums invite you to experience their art. And then the second conversation I thought you might enjoy connected to this one was How To Be Alive by Madeline Dore. She is Australian, but also a world traveler, nomad, really. And so thoughtful in terms of how she thinks about the world.

[\(38:23\)](#):

And in fact, back in the summer, August, exploration of the Vaults, Madeline's interview is one of the ones we bought out. So you'll find that recently. If you haven't, I heard her before. If you want to be in touch with Stuart, the best place to get to know him and see him is on his Instagram account, which is Stuart Semple, S-T-U-A-R-T S-E-M-P-L-E. And his website is the same



Stuartsemples.com. And yes, you can buy those paints. I actually have little containers of the black, the pink, and the white paints on my bookshelves even as we speak. Finally, thank you for listening. Thank you for passing the word around, for giving the podcast some love for making this one of your favorite podcasts. And I just finished by saying, "You're awesome and you're doing great."