

PATRICK ROBIDEAU • Hallway • March 15 to May 3, 2013

Patrick Robideau was born in Orlando, FL in 1965. He received his BFA from Purchase College, State University of New York. His work, often installation based, has been exhibited widely in Western New York and beyond, including at the Burchfield Penney Art Center; SPACES, Cleveland, OH; the Carnegie Art Center, Tonawanda, NY; the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University; and the University at Buffalo Art Gallery. His work is part of several collections, both public and private, including the Burchfield Penney Art Center and the Castellani Art Museum. Robideau has previously exhibited at Hallwalls in 2000, as part of the group exhibition Great Lake Erie: Imagining An Inland Sea and as early as 1992 in a group sculpture exhibition.

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PATRICK ROBIDEAU
HALLWAY



Physicality and Deception

A key ingredient to Patrick Robideau's artistic practice is the manipulation of the built environment. Sometimes the work is an oversized diorama into which the viewer is intended to peer; sometimes his spaces are passageways that direct the viewer along predetermined paths; and sometimes these built environments operate as sets within which performative actions are staged. His new installation, *Hallway*, includes some of all these characteristics, as well as stand-alone sculptures incorporated both inside and outside the main work.

Robideau's work is always so thoroughly and impressively constructed it's easy to be distracted by its intense craftsmanship and life-sized scale. Its physicality aggressively asserts itself and whether you are in the work or near it, it evokes a quality of permanence even as we remain aware that it's a temporary and transient display. So much so that Robideau's settings also suggest a suspension of time, as though the thing we know to be temporary has, in fact, been sitting here for ages waiting for us to happen upon it.

Viewers are invited to access *Hallway* through a centrally-built and darkened passage that moves deeply into the work, turning quickly enough in a couple of directions to create an almost immediate disorientation. It's a sensation likely more pronounced for anyone already familiar with *Hallwalls* gallery, whose underlying and actual space is almost entirely hidden, as though the work were erasing all possible recollection to any work that had previously been exhibited there. Even more perhaps, it aspires to temporarily erase all notion that a gallery is even here.

This enclosed and directed space concocts its own claustrophobia through its configuration, its material nature, and its controlled lighting. Intimate, with a darkness that requires our eyes to adjust, there is a subtle but pervasive sense that we are exploring, or intruding upon, a personal space that has recently been occupied or may be occupied again soon. While its psychological terrain is expansive, the work creates this effect within a relatively modest physical footprint. Windows and portals are in evidence, but perspective is tightly managed. As if to underscore what we will never know or resolve about the space and the emotions it stirs up, a ceiling balustrade hints at a space above us through its expansive portal, but gives us no more than a tantalizing suggestion of wider possibilities. In the same room, a dimly lit tunnel at floor level suggests something else to discover through a quality that is half lure and half dare. Camouflaged in the nearby corner, an old speaker horn transmits ambiguous bits of old

sermonizing, like a looped memory—not specific enough to articulate a narrative, but ever present throughout the close confines of the piece and fuel its anxious atmosphere.

Metaphorically, the physical nature of the installation directly mimics the psychological space concocted by the work—Robideau is often directing viewers into a passage of memory, a terrain of half-remembered dreams whose pull may be strong but which can only be partially accessed. A rabbit hole of the artist's devising, it's not clear that he is inviting us into some dark recess of his own mind. No doubt, some of it is drawn from the personal reservoir of the artist. But it's just as likely that, once immersed in the darkness, we quickly forget about Robideau and wonder what half-forgotten artery of our own mind we have plunged into.

In combination with the larger installation, Robideau also includes architectural models—at different scales and with their own specific interior sight lines—that refer to and play against the larger construction. Models, because they are diminutive representations of that which we know, often contain a quaintly cute aura. Robideau's models are, in their own way, as striking as the larger work that engulfs us. Materially and psychologically, they seem to be appendages of the larger scene, repeating its sightlines, its darkness, and its ambiguity. Standing outside a model, we might presume to encounter greater clarity but Robideau keeps them effectively vague and inaccessible. In playing with various scales, it also becomes a question not merely of what work we are looking at, but what work we might be inside.

Robideau's work toys with the emotional residue of memory as a space that mixes sentiment, anxiety, and desire into a complex and not easily resolved state. Physicality operates in opposition to the more ephemeral qualities to which it alludes, but these opposing impulses also work in tandem. There is a repeated reminder throughout the work that what we presume to be solid and certain is nonetheless a space of tenuous certainty.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

