

October 3, 2010 – December 12, 2010

**The  
Renaissance  
Society**

at The University of Chicago

October 2, 2010 – April 3, 2011

**The Art Institute  
of Chicago**



Rebecca Warren



# The Renaissance Society

at The University of Chicago  
5811 South Ellis Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60637

**Museum Hours**  
Tuesday - Friday: 10 am - 5 pm  
Saturday, Sunday: 12 - 5pm  
Closed Mondays  
[www.renaissancesociety.org](http://www.renaissancesociety.org)

## Polychrome Knead

Granted, it's a polemical question, but what isn't sculpture these days? In the wake of sculpture's transition from pedestal to place, "to be or not to be" is indeed the question as sculpture can be any and everything, including nothing. Its paradigms—from readymade to social practices, from institutional critique to earthworks, from assemblage to minimalism—are historically and ideologically overlapping, simultaneously complementary and contradictory, making sculpture a hopelessly unwieldy category. The once-upon-a-time discrete object has been dissolved in site-specific/installation practices and sculpture's historical paradigms offer no solace. What does breathing life into inert materials mean in an era of mannequins? Likewise, the class of materials dubbed "noble"—bronze, marble and wood—has been reduced to flotsam and jetsam in a Euclidean space/time in which language, performance, video and photography are as dense as any palpable form of matter. In this ever-expanding universe of artistic ways and means, all media potentially fall prey to the rubric of sculpture.

But being an artist who makes work qualifying as sculpture is one thing and being a sculptor proper is arguably another. Rebecca Warren is the latter. Her work is marked by the appropriation (a polite way of saying chewing up and spitting out) of a squarely object-based tradition. Hers is first and foremost a discipline-specific language whose object-centeredness trumps the paradigms of abstraction and figuration. The work operates within and partakes of the ecstasy of limits only to come again as sculpture for sculpture's sake. In the face of her woman-handled hunks of polychromal joy, the vague figurative element—buttocks, breast, limb—emerging on occasion from a pedestal-based work, is neither here nor there relative to the clay's registration of an unbound and urgent energy. Between these unfired clay works and her geometric abstractions, Warren's Renaissance Society exhibition will be a very calculated ratio, some part funk-based ebullience to some part formal constructivist elegance.

Although the work has morphed stylistically, Warren is still guided by her initial impulse to work steadfastly within a tradition and yet do so in an exploratory, intuitive fashion. Accordingly, her current body of work is an extension of concerns stretching back several years to the two concurrent bodies of work for which she garnered international attention: the outlandishly playful, unfired clay female figures, and the vitrine works sparsely composed of mundane studio detritus. In tandem, they are reminiscent of a mind/body disparity in which the vitrines represent a disembodied, hermetic and impoverished consciousness in the vein of Samuel Beckett, while the clay figures, whose breasts, buttocks, hips and thighs heed their own separate appetites, flaunt a carnivalesque excess worthy of Bakhtin.

In their vulgarity and aggressiveness, the female figures pegged Warren as a latter-day bad girl of sorts. Yet, in their hyperbole, Warren's unfired clay figures could be read as a loving parody of a 1970s iteration of feminism she was in fact trying to escape. As a result, the figure sculptures speak less to feminism than to the appropriation of a tradition in wholesale need of a woman's deconstructive touch. This includes its legacy of abstraction as well as figuration.

A year ago, in what appeared to be an about-face, Warren produced a body of unabashed geometric abstractions that, in all its rectilinear glory, was exhibited under the title *Feelings*. Diametrically opposed to the unfired clay figures, this more recent body of precision-wrought, yet generic steel work fulfilled the ideological parameters of an abstraction seeking to achieve universal, i.e. rational, expression. Historically, abstraction's prohibition against representations of the body doubled as a means of silencing culturally-specific voices, including those of women. Warren, however, challenges this aspect of abstraction through its wholehearted embrace, constructing bona fide specimens whose discrete objecthood, rendered at conspicuously human scale, bring them hopelessly within the sphere of the body, casting it in a figurative, and by default potentially feminine, light. To say nothing of the pompoms.

From this perspective, Warren did not appropriate a singular tradition, but two historically over-determined sculptural paradigms between which she continues to negotiate. Comprised of new unfired clay works and several steel geometric abstractions, Warren's Renaissance Society exhibition is an extension of what has proven to be an increasingly deft navigation. The tension between abstraction and figuration has been reinscribed into a dialogue between form and antiform. Working through and within tradition, as opposed to against it, Warren continues to keep her options open for the sake of singing the body eclectic.

## Rebecca Warren

### THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

October 3, 2010 – December 12, 2010

Opening Reception: Sunday, October 3, 4:00–7:00 pm

### THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

October 2, 2010 – April 3, 2011

#### Related Events

OPENING RECEPTION  
Sunday, October 3, 4:00 – 7:00 pm

CONCERT  
Saturday, November 6, 2:00 pm  
Marc Unternaehrer, Tuba  
Sculpture with solo tuba accompaniment

Classically trained Swiss tuba player Marc Unternaehrer has performed in a range of contexts throughout Europe and the United States. Certainly no stranger to Chicago, Unternaehrer has performed at The Society in a number of different configurations including the Chicago-Luzern Exchange, and as part of Ensemble Noamnesia. In each instance he was a stand out, not only by virtue of his chops, but because he had an uncanny knack for finding the precise frequency at which the windows rattle. Set amongst Warren's sculptures, this solo improvised set will be a sight to behold. This concert will take place in the gallery. FREE

POETRY READING  
Sunday, November 14, 2:00 pm  
Joanna Fuhrman and Suzanne Buffam

Currently teaching in the creative writing program at Rutgers, Joanna Fuhrman is the author of four volumes: *Pageant* (Alice James Books 2009), *Freud in Brooklyn*, *Ugh Ugh Ocean and Moraine* (Hanging Loose Press 2000–2006). "Fuhrman is a leader in the particular, in 'infra-surrealism.' She taboos nothing; no form impedes her complete wit. This full poetry is not only 'feminine, marvelous, and tough,' but subtle, searching, and wounded—sexual, social, and smart. Fuhrman celebrates new truth-telling, an art of the spectacular pageant." DAVID SHAPIRO

Currently teaching in the creative writing program at The University of Chicago, Suzanne Buffam's first collection of poetry, *Past Imperfect* (House of Anansi 2005), won the Gerald Lampert Award for the best first book of poetry published in Canada in 2005, and was named one of 2005's Books of the Year by the *Globe and Mail*. Her most recent collection is *The Irrationalist*, (Canarium Books 2010). "Buffam's often deadpan tone is like a magical dustpan that sweeps up the strangest observations and ideas, all worlds to themselves. Her 'Little Commentaries'—'On Piñatas,' 'On Fountains,' and 'On Vanishing Acts' (to name only a few)—are absolute gems, kin to Anne Carson's town poems and Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*. Buffam's poems tug at new corners of the brain. They're marvelous." MATTHEW HARVEY

This event will take place in Swift Hall Room 106. (Swift Hall is directly east of the gallery.) FREE

POETRY READING  
Sunday, November 21, 2:00 pm  
Kim Rosenfield and Karen Weiser

Kim Rosenfield is a poet and psychotherapist. She is the author of three books of genre-blurring language: *Good Morning—Midnight—* (Roof Books 2001), which won Small Press Traffic's Book of the Year award in 2002, *Tràma* (Krupskaya 2004), and *re: evolution* (Les Figuees Press 2008). "Rosenfield's part collage, part suede and suave therapeutic technique creates a 'voice' that wavers, furtive yet spikily resonant in the amplified tick of the second hand, as the carnal 'self' is further contaminated by the freezer-burn of a world run by patents, portents, and hawkish impatience, yet begs to extend its lease with the mirror stage. Read this book for its honey and ash, and sleep easier." BRIAN KIM STEFANS

*To Light Out* (Ugly Duckling Presse 2010) is Karen Weiser's first full-length collection. "The poems in *To Light Out* enact a kind of mystical belief—call it a faith—that language is the means by which we conjure the self and its relationship with others. In Weiser's hands, poems are language illuminated by grace, and the world, in light of such sudden sight, becomes 'The distance into versions of itself / whose miles begin to resemble pale maps / old photographs with studied shadow / inside each female self / composed like a nineteenth century diorama / all heft and movement of hands.' The meditative variation at play in this ambitious collection shines forth brilliantly, at any hour of the day or night." SUSAN HOWE

This event will take place in Swift Hall Room 106. (Swift Hall is directly east of the gallery.) FREE

FICTION READING  
Sunday, December 5, 2:00 pm  
Alissa Nutting

Nutting's writing has appeared in *Tin House*, *Fence*, *BOMB*, and the fairy tale anthology *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me*. Her short story collection, *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*, was selected by Ben Marcus as winner of the 6th Starcherone Prize. "Alissa Nutting's stunning debut collection, *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*, reanimates the dearest of dead pans to a state of enameled kabuki solar veneer—a sanctified, sublime, full-throated and full-throttled static panic. These fictions are panoplies of syntactic semantic seismic wonders. Don't look now but you are looking at a sun raised to a higher power, and it's not blinking." MICHAEL MARTONE

This event will take place in Swift Hall Room 106. (Swift Hall is directly east of the gallery.) FREE

FICTION READING  
Sunday, December 12, 2:00 pm  
Bhanu Kapil

Bhanu Kapil lives in Colorado where she teaches writing at Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, as well as Goddard College in Vermont. She has written three full-length works of poetry/prose: *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Kelsey Street Press 2001), *Incubation: a space for monsters* (Leon Works 2006), and *humanimal [a project for future children]* (Kelsey Street Press 2009). "Wet, wet, green, green. I mix with them and prosper. A baby! Sticky then my mummy licks me clean. Best is brown next to yellow. Best is blue, then brown. Best yellow. Where will the sun go when it's finished?, I ask my mother. Through her skin. So red she is. The sun goes into the ground." *humanimal*

This event will take place in Swift Hall Room 106. (Swift Hall is directly east of the gallery.) FREE

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Please sign up to receive our newsletter at [www.renaissancesociety.org](http://www.renaissancesociety.org), and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

*Rebecca Warren* is organized by The Art Institute of Chicago and The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago. The Renaissance Society presentation is generously funded by the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, The Henry Moore Foundation, and The British Council. The presentation at the Art Institute of Chicago is generously supported by the Bluhm Family Endowment Fund, which supports exhibitions of modern and contemporary sculpture on the Art Institute's Bluhm Family Terrace.

Ongoing support for programs at The Renaissance Society is provided by Alphawood Foundation; the CityArts Program of The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, a municipal agency; Christie's; The Danielson Foundation; The John R. Halligan Charitable Fund; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation; Nuveen Investments; the Provost's Discretionary Fund at The University of Chicago; Pritzker Foundation; The Siragusa Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; and our membership.

This Renaissance Society presentation, which inaugurates The Society's 50th season and its 31st in the Bergman Gallery, is dedicated to the memory of Edwin Bergman. Through his commitment to new and provocative art, Ed championed all The Society stands for. We remain grateful for his outstanding example, friendship, service and support.

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
**The Renaissance Society**

[that side]  
Rebecca Warren  
*A Culture*, 2008  
Reinforced clay on painted MDF plinth  
Artwork: 57 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 21 1/2 inches  
Plinth: 22 1/2 x 20 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches

Image courtesy of Maureen Paley, London