

THE
RENAISSANCE
SOCIETY
ANNUAL REPORT
2019-20



2019–20 SEASON LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

The last year at the Renaissance Society has been nothing short of historic. A monumental exhibition that set new attendance records, a leadership transition for only the second time in nearly 50 years, and a once-in-a-century global pandemic, all made for a year of celebration, sadness, adjustment, and resilience.

Through it all, we sought and embraced the power of art, discourse, and connection, never losing sight of the singular and esteemed role that the work of the Ren occupies in our cultural landscape. I am proud of and grateful for the ways that the Ren has surmounted this last year, buoyed by the support of our community and unwaveringly focused on our commitment to artists and their ideas.

The season opened in September with an unforgettable project with LaToya Ruby Frazier. The Last Cruze is the Ren's most ambitious exhibition to date, and it transformed the gallery in a new and bold way. The dark blue walls and the orange assembly line-like structure created a powerful setting to showcase Frazier's moving and achingly relevant photographs. The opening night of this exhibition particularly stands out in my memory because more than 30 members of the United Auto Workers Union and their families made the trip to Chicago to celebrate with LaToya, each other, and the Ren community. The distances they traveled and the time they put into the making of the work in Lordstown, Ohio, as collaborators with LaToya, illustrate to me the impact that an artist's work can have.

The gallery transformed once again

in January for Silke Otto-Knapp's beautiful In the waiting room. A return to white walls and bright light from windows on three sides, the exhibition featured a new series of large-scale paintings hung on artistdesigned freestanding wood structures. That two consecutive exhibitions can make such distinct use of the Ren's unique gallery is a tribute to the potential of the creative process and the surprising flexibility of the space. At the centerpiece of the exhibition was a magnificent watercolor-on-canvas screen depicting trees and the moon in Silke's diaphanous, ethereal style. Much to the excitement of both the artist and the institution, this exquisite piece was acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago after the exhibition's close. We're delighted to see this piece stay in Chicago in a major public collection.

Though the Ren is an organization characterized by a savvy adaptability, some change is especially bittersweet. After seven years of leading the institution, Executive Director and Chief Curator Solveig Øvstebø bid farewell to the Ren in February, returning to her native Norway to take up the directorship of the Astrup Fearnley Museet in Oslo. During her time at the Ren, she curated many significant exhibitions by artists including Mathias Poledna, Josef Strau, Nora Schultz, Irena Haiduk, Jennifer Packer, and Richard Rezac, Solveig is known for her stellar institutional vision, her collaborative relationships with artists, and her ability to make genuine connections with others, and it was with heavy hearts that we sent her off from Chicago and on to her next chapter.

After an international search, in April we were thrilled to announce the appointment of Myriam Ben Salah as the Renaissance Society's next Executive Director and Chief Curator. Myriam is a Tunisian curator and writer who most recently co-organized Made in LA. 2020 at the Hammer Museum and The Huntington Library. She is poised to bring her singular curatorial vision to the Ren. drawing on an international experience and a decompartmentalized approach to art making. Through exhibitions and public programs, she will pursue her work with emerging artists and experimental practitioners in Chicago and beyond. The Board of Directors and Staff are delighted to welcome her to our community.

Finally, as if the beginning of 2020 didn't have enough in store for the Ren, the pandemic forced us to close our doors on March 15 and reevaluate everything that had been planned for the rest of the year. Luckily our nimble staff and program partners were able to adjust and reframe much of our work for a world of coexistence with COVID-19, limiting the interruption to our programming. From pre-recorded and live-streamed events on our website, to the fully digital opening of Miho Dohi, the Ren made the best of a historically difficult situation and navigated a rapidly changing set of restrictions and guidelines. Through it all, we've been grateful for the creative thinking of the staff, the leadership of the Board of Directors, and the unwavering support of our community.

The report that follows summarizes the activity of the 2019-20 year and

acknowledges the people that account for each success, great and small. In a year like this, it's nearly impossible to convey adequate thanks and recognition. The pages of an annual report are simply one way to express our gratitude; an institution like the Renaissance Society benefits from forms of generosity and kindness as varied as the ideas we foster. Whether you made a major financial contribution or liked a post on Instagram, we thank you.

With appreciation, Richard Wright

2019-20 SEASON DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In an interview with the ICA Philadelphia in 2018, I was asked about how I understand the Renaissance Society's current place in the contemporary art ecosystem. What role do we see ourselves playing and what, exactly, gives the Ren its unique identity?

I found my answer, not in the museum's storied history nor its unconventional model, but in a mindset. The Ren is an institution with an incredible attitude of openness and flexibility. We encourage artists to experiment, to push the boundaries of their practices and take risks with their work. The outcomes can be unpredictable when you work in this way; sometimes you may even fail. But we are at our best when we are working with artists to imagine new possibilities and addressing each challenge with creativity and drive.

This past year has been nothing if not filled with unpredictability. From the conclusion of my time as Executive Director and Chief Curator and the Ren's transition to new leadership under the brilliant Myriam Ben Salah, to a global pandemic destabilizing all our familiar ways of working as a cultural institution, it has been a challenge at times to keep our balance atop shifting ground. But moments like these also serve to demonstrate just how valuable the Ren's adaptability truly is. Amidst it all, we managed to not only sustain our efforts, but to thrive, producing a truly memorable season of programming. As bittersweet as it may be to know it as the closing chapter for my time in Chicago, I could hardly be prouder of what we accomplished.

"At the Ren, if an artist just wants to

paint the space blue, we'll paint the space blue," I told the interviewers from the ICA. I was making the point that whatever ambitious ideas an artist might dream up, we put everything behind bringing their vision to life. Little did I know that somebody would take me up on it so soon! When my curatorial colleague Karsten Lund and I invited LaToya Ruby Frazier for a solo exhibition at the Ren, we knew it would become something incredible. The Last Cruze was a monumental undertaking, the product of countless hours of labor by the artist and our own team. The work was so timely, so important, that we knew we needed to do everything in our power to give it the best presentation possible. Our ingenious Chief Preparator Pierre Sondeijker and his crew created from scratch a custom display armature stretching the length of the gallery, and yes, they painted the space blue. The scope of this undertaking was unprecedented for us; to make it possible, we decided to shift our exhibitions schedule to include three shows instead of our usual four. This allowed us to focus our resources and help LaToya create something genuinely historic. On another level, it also demonstrates something crucial about the Ren, as we allow ourselves to value investing in an artist we believe in over rigidly maintaining our own comfortable rhythms.

In contrast, Silke Otto-Knapp's solo exhibition *In the waiting room* seemed to flood the gallery with light, washing over her large-scale watercolor monochromes and their display structures, also custombuilt for the space. Silke's is a profoundly painterly practice, and her works seem as attuned to subtle variations in the density

of pigment on a surface as they are to their sense of presence as objects in a room. In hindsight, it feels like a fitting last show before we were forced to close our doors at the start of the pandemic: paintings you could share space with, consider in relation to your own body, zoom in on and pore over inch by inch. When I found myself longing for these kinds of encounters during lockdown, it was a comfort to have such an experience so fresh in my mind.

Miho Dohi's exhibition was the Japanese artist's first solo presentation in the United States. As the pandemic took hold across the globe, it quickly became clear that the show couldn't take place in the form we first envisioned for it. So we reimagined it as the Ren's first digital exhibition, with an extensive photo gallery of Dohi's breathtaking sculptures, complemented by a robust series of public programs conceived specifically for virtual contexts. In those early days of shelterin-place, it felt energizing to focus not on what seemed impossible, but on what we could accomplish despite those limitations. And in doing so, we gained new tools and insights for making our work accessible to a wider audience, not just those with the ability to physically enter our space. These are lessons the Ren will continue to apply moving forward, pandemic or not.

As my family and I make our own transition from Chicago to Oslo, at the end of our incredible time with the Renaissance Society, there is so much I want to say and never enough room to say it. So I will just say thank you. To my amazing colleagues at the Ren, to our endlessly supportive Board, to the artists we've had the privilege of working with, to the

supporters who make everything we do possible, to everyone who has attended one of our programs or read one of our publications. My term at the Ren has been thrilling, illuminating, at times challenging, but always rewarding, and I have all of you to thank for that. Whatever the Ren's next chapter looks like, I am happy to be leaving it in such capable hands.

-Solveig Øvstebø

8

LATOYA RUBY FRAZIER THE LAST CRUZE





Above: LaToya Ruby Frazier with members of UAW Local 1112 and their families. Photo: Michael Courier Below: LaToya Ruby Frazier and David Harvey. Photo: Karsten Lund

In The Last Cruze, the artist hones in on the vast inequities that persist in US society, as well as the tender relationships that enable survival and persistence in spite of them.

–Laura Raicovich, *Hyperallergic*

The Last Cruze, a new body of work by artist LaToya Ruby Frazier, centered on the workers at the General Motors plant in Lordstown, Ohio. After more than fifty years of automobile production and a commitment to manufacture the Chevrolet Cruze until 2021, the facility had been "unallocated" by GM in 2019. During this period of great uncertainty and change, Frazier spent part of every week in Lordstown with the workers and their families, recording their stories. Through images and interviews, Frazier conveyed their experiences of the quickly developing events, the intense disruption to their lives and their community, and the strong efforts of the local union, UAW Local 1112, on their behalf.

Timely and nuanced, Frazier's new work in Lordstown amplifies the voices of the workers who are directly affected there. Frazier asks, "What does it look like after the last Cruze comes off the line and the media is gone, when it's no longer headline news? What does it look like to see not just the plant idled, but the workers' lives idled, too?"

SEP 14, 2019

Opening Reception and Artist Talk with Karsten Lund and Solveig Øvstebø

SEP 21, 2019
Exhibition Walk-through
David Harvey and LaToya Ruby Frazier

SEP 28, 2019
Discussion: United Auto
Workers Local 1112
Dave Green, Rick Smith,
and LaToya Ruby Frazier

OCT 12, 2019

Discussion

Benjamin J. Young, Werner Lange, and LaToya Ruby Frazier

NOV 2, 2019

Discussion: UAW Women's Committee Pamela Brown, Marilyn Moore, Frances Turnage, and LaToya Ruby Frazier

NOV 9, 2019 Exhibition Walk-through LaToya Ruby Frazier

SILKE OTTO-KNAPP IN THE WAITING ROOM

You similarly move through this stage set, in a holding pattern, in solidarity with the figures in the paintings, at times inwardly empathizing with their movements, other times outwardly enacting them. You move with them beyond the boundaries of the canvas; the ending to their narratives and yours remain wide open.

-Robert R. Shane, Brooklyn Rail

Over the course of her career, Los Angeles-based German artist Silke Otto-Knapp has established a painting practice characterized by its rigorous process and remarkable attentiveness to the medium's conditions and possibilities.

In the waiting room brought together a new group of large-scale paintings, situated in an arrangement of free-standing structures to form a kind of multidimensional stage set within the gallery. In some, silhouetted bodies stretch, ambulate, and contort, in the midst of a performance or preparing for one. Others introduce more scenic elements, reminiscent of the painted backdrops used on proscenium stages to ground actions within a particular setting.

The title of the exhibition, *In the waiting room*, points towards a space of anticipation—perhaps the period before the curtains are raised on a performance. Otto-Knapp's exhibition centered this kind of experience; hinting at staged activations but never explicitly delivering one, her work invites the viewer to linger in a moment of suspension, dwelling on latent tensions and impressions as they arise.

JAN 11, 2020

Opening Reception and Artist TalkSilke Otto-Knapp and Solveig Øvstebø

JAN 23, 2020 Exhibition Walk-through Karsten Lund

FEB 13, 2020 Exhibition Walk-through Solveig Øvstebø

MAR 6, 2020 Film Screening: Moving Images Karsten Lund and Tien-Tien Jong Miho Dohi's enigmatic, off-center sculptures... offer alluring, occasionally challenging lessons in viewing. Rhythms and textures jostle as the artist's enigmatic vernacular of squiggles, crumples, folds, and spheres is iteratively reprised in idiosyncratic ways... They simultaneously place and displace the viewer, displaying the power of transformation in a mutable world.

-Harry Burke, Mousse Magazine

Miho Dohi uses materials such as yarn, wire, fabric, sheet metal, paint, and tape to create what she describes simply as *buttai*, or objects. Compact and complex, each *buttai* brings together an idiosyncratic constellation of shapes and surfaces, conjoined in subtle or playful juxtapositions. This exhibition presents a cross section of Dohi's recent practice. Co-organized with the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, it was the Kanagawa, Japan-based artist's first solo presentation in a U.S. museum.

Dohi's works, in her own words, often find resolution in an unexpected moment: "just when it seems to become clear what is inside and what is outside, they turn completely upside down, and all of a sudden, an object appears quite naturally out of that chaos." Through this push and pull of order and disorder, artistic agency and the tendencies of materials, the creation of the *buttai* becomes a transformative act, a process of becoming.

APR 30, 2020

Virtual Exhibition Walk-through: Audio Tour

Karsten Lund

MAY 7, 2020 **Virtual Reading** Hoa Nguyen

MAY 17, 2020 Virtual Performance Lecture Shannon Stratton

This solo exhibition by Miho Dohi was originally scheduled to open to the public on April 18, but was ultimately presented in digital forms only due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Images of each work in the show remain available online, as well as documentation of a suite of online programming that took various live and pre-recorded forms.





DEC 10-14, 2019

Camille Normant: Untitled (Flame)

Camille Norment uses sound and music as means to reflect on socio-cultural phenomena or dimensions of public life. The Renaissance Society's distinctive architecture forms an unusually dynamic acoustic environment with its high ceilings, hard surfaces, and angular walls. Norment brought this space to life with an array of speakers, microphones, and effects, establishing and manipulating a number of active feedback loops shaped by the room's characteristic resonant frequencies. Over the course of the week, Norment experimented with and fine-tuned this system, inviting the public to join her in the space and listen to the process for selected open hours each afternoon. Norment's engagement culminated in an evening of live performance alongside master drummer Hamid Drake.

Intermissions is the Renaissance Society's programming series devoted to ephemeral and performative works, staged in the Renaissance Society's empty gallery in-between exhibitions.

Untitled (Flame) is co-presented with Logan Center Exhibitions.

Camille Norment and Hamid Drake performing Untitled (blue heat), 2019. Photo: Meg T. Noe

OCT 5, 2019

Sarah Davachi

For this concert developed in collaboration with the Renaissance Society and Lampo, Los Angeles-based composer Sarah Davachi premiered a new long-form work for pipe organ and two French horns in the soaring interior of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. Titled la brume jaune, the composition explores alternating experiences of gradual movement and stasis, driven by subtle yet impactful gestures within intimate musical relationships of harmony, melody, and timbre. The interplay between the organ (played by Davachi) and the two amplified horns (played by Liz Deitemyer and Matthew Oliphant) provides a further layer of acoustic counterpoint, reflecting Davachi's more recent explorations in writing for unconventional chamber ensembles. Designed by master builder E.M. Skinner in 1928, Rockefeller Chapel's Skinner Organ is among the most revered in the United States and contains over 8,000 pipes.

Presented in partnership with Lampo.

FEB 26, 2020

Éliane Radigue: Occam Ocean

Widely renowned as an electronic music pioneer, French composer Éliane Radigue has written primarily for acoustic instruments since 2004. Occam Ocean, a series of meditative pieces developed in close dialogue with their original performers, emphasize what Radigue refers to as "the intangible contents of sound"-nearly imperceptible harmonic and timbral complexities that can only emerge through compositional restraint and virtuosic instrumental precision. Here, musicians

Julia Eckhardt and Nate Wooley performed Occam IV for solo viola and Occam X for solo trumpet, as well as the duo Occam River XXVI for viola and trumpet, all works generated through their own collaborations with Radigue.

Presented in partnership with the Frequency Festival, and in cooperation with Goethe-Institut Chicago.

MAY 22, 2020

The Quarantine Concerts: Karl Larson, Theodore Cale Schafer, and C. Spencer Yeh

The Quarantine Concerts are a collaborative endeavor organized and hosted by Experimental Sound Studio, meant to provide musicians a space to share their work and continue to earn a living during a time when most live performance opportunities had been cancelled due to COVID-19.

On Friday, May 22nd, the Renaissance Society guest curated a night of live performances on this platform, featuring Karl Larson performing the hour-long piano composition "SOVT" by Sarah Hennies, as well as solo sets by Theodore Cale Schafer and C. Spencer Yeh.





Unthought Environments

This 2018 group show explored the meeting of infrastructure and the natural elements, such as water, earth, and air. This substantial catalogue reflects on the exhibition and develops its central questions further. The book delves into various works in the show and invites insights from scholars in different fields.

Contributors: Marissa Lee Benedict, Ina Blom, Nina Canell, Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen, Keller Easterling, Peter Fend, Karsten Lund, Nicholas Mangan, John Durham Peters, and Robin Watkins Softcover, 214 pp.

Designer: James Goggin and Shan James, Practise

David Maljković: Also on View

Throughout an ever-shifting body of work, David Maljković returns to "the question of form," asking how considerations of form itself might illuminate the ebb and flow of ideologies, for example, or the overlaying of past, present, and future. Along with every exhibition, Maljković translates his work into the form of a book, which becomes another lively medium for the artist. For Also on View, he collaborated with designer Toni Uroda to channel the queries of his solo exhibition at the Renaissance Society, which brought together elements from different projects to create a new presentation tailored to the architectural space.

Contributors: Karsten Lund, David Maljković Softcover, 80 pp. Designer: Toni Uroda

Liz Magor: BLOWOUT

In 2019, the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University co-organized an exhibition of a newly commissioned body of work by the Canadian artist Liz Magor. The accompanying publication, Liz Magor: BLOWOUT, is the artist's first US catalog in ten years. Each written contribution responds in its own way to Magor's new installations, which feature altered stuffed toys, bits of paper, and rat skins-sculptural "agents"-suspended in transparent Mylar box forms, and thirty pairs of secondhand shoes each displayed within its own box amidst elaborate embellishments.

19

Contributors: Dan Byers, Sheila Heti, Liz Magor, Solveig Øvstebø, Mitch Speed Hardcover, 136 pp.

Designer: James Goggin and Shan James, **Practise**

LaToya Ruby Frazier, The Last Cruze

LaToya Ruby Frazier Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome

Silke Otto-Knapp, In the waiting room

Silke Otto-Knapp Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome Galerie Buchholz, Cologne/Berlin/New York greengrassi, London Regen Projects, Los Angeles Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo

Miho Dohi

Miho Dohi Crèvecœur, Paris Hagiwara Projects, Tokyo Collection Séverine Peyret



22 23



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\$25,000 and above

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The MacArthur Fund for Culture,
Equity, and the Arts at Prince
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\$10,000 - \$24,999

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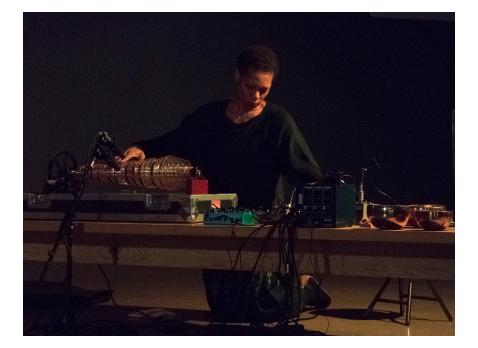
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RenBen 2019

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\$10,000 and above

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Our annual gala returned in October with our biennial art auction to benefit the Renaissance Society's 2019-2020 program. In support of this mission, more than 300 members of the Ren's generous community came together to raise crucial funds that support the next year of exhibitions, publications, and programs.

These funds result in ambitious new artistic production; open scholarly and creative discourse; beautiful, lasting publications; and opportunities for us all to consider new ways of experiencing and understanding our contemporary moment.

We are grateful for our event chairs, sponsors, table hosts, attendees, contributing artists and galleries, and the teams of people behind the scenes that make an evening like this possible.

and Zaid Abdul-Aleem

UChicago Arts / the Smart Museum Anne Van Wart* and Mike Keable David Williams* and Eric Ceputis

^{*} Indicates member of the Board of Directors



THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2020 AND 2019

ASSETS 2020 2019 Current assets: Cash 553,516 \$ 377,311 9,004 Accounts receivable 7,956 578,956 Contributions and grants receivable - Current portion 558,728 27,076 35,191 Inventory Prepaid expenses 28,428 32,946 Total current assets 1,176,752 1,032,360 Property and equipment - Net 2,762 4,519 Other assets: Investments, at fair value 6,961,021 6,700,894 Contributions and grants receivable, net - Noncurrent portion 704,798 900,450 7,665,819 7,601,344 Total other assets 8,845,333 8,638,223 Total assets LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS Current liabilities: Accounts payable and accrued expenses 26,690 124,099 Deferred revenue 2,500 5,000 29,190 129,099 Total current liabilities Noncurrent liabilities: 143,096 Refundable advance Net assets: 7,454,947 7,032,624 Without donor restrictions 1,218,100 1,476,500 With donor restrictions 8,673,047 8,509,124 Total net assets Total liabilities and net assets 8,845,333 \$ 8,638,223

THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES AND CHANGES IN NET ASSETS YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2020 AND 2019

	2020			2019		
	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL
Revenues						
Grants	\$ 155,715			\$ 84,240	\$1,100,000	
Contributions	194,375	50,000	244,375	134,590	95,000	229,590
In-kind contributions	30,000	-	30,000	210,000	-	210,000
Benefit revenues, net of expenses of \$141,116 in 2020 and \$125,551						
in 2019, respectively	390,471	_	390,471	250,925	_	250,925
Art sales		-	-	180,000	-	180,000
Editions	40,383	-	40,383	102,280	-	102,280
Education	_	-	-	95,664	-	95,664
Exhibit touring fees	25,008	-	25,008	15,000	-	15,000
Publications	31,836	-	31,836	36,956	-	36,956
Investment return	541,567		541,567	586,093	-	586,093
Miscellaneous	11,772		11,772		-	-
Net assets released from restriction	345,400	(345,400)		352,000	(352,000)	
Total revenues and support	1,766,527	(258,400)	1,508,127	2,047,748	843,000	2,890,748
Expenses						
Program services	868,926	_	868,926	1,375,853	_	1,375,853
Management and general	252,080	-	252,080	163,462	_	163,462
Fundraising	223,198		223,198	234,492		234,492
Total expenses	1,344,204		1,344,204	1,773,807		1,773,807
Change in net assets	422,323	(258,400)	163,923	273,941	843,000	1,116,941
Net assets, beginning of year	7,032,624	1,476,500	8,509,124	6,758,683	633,500	7,392,183
Net assets, end of year	\$7,454,947	\$1,218,100	\$8,673,047	\$7,032,624	\$1,476,500	\$8,509,124



