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 connection with others, and it was with 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 Museum 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 Ren'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
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 custom-built 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 shelter-in-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
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?”

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
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.

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.
Camille Norment: *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.

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 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.

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

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.

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
**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

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**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

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**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.

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  
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The MacArthur Fund for Culture,
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The Provost’s Discretionary Fund
at the University of Chicago

$10,000 - $24,999

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up to 999

Marcelle Alix
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George Newall
Michael and Sandra Perlow
George and Holly Stone
Ursula Storb
Anne Tobey

Camille Norment and Hamid Drake performing Untitled (blue heat), 2019. Photo: Meg T. Noe
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.
### Statements of Financial Position

#### Years Ended June 30, 2020 and 2019

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<th>ASSETS</th>
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