

A painting of a winter scene. The ceiling is covered in snow, with light rays filtering through. Several evergreen trees are placed in clear glass containers. A large, multi-pointed snowflake ornament hangs from the ceiling. The overall color palette is dominated by whites, blues, and greens.

Yuletide Season

The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago

January 29 – April 9, 2006

The Renaissance Society

at The University of Chicago
5811 South Ellis Avenue
4th floor
Chicago, IL 60637

Museum Hours

Tuesday - Friday: 10am - 5pm
Saturday, Sunday: 12- 5pm
Closed Mondays
<http://www.renaissancesociety.org>

Yutaka Sone

Forecast: Snow

January 29 – April 9, 2006

Opening Reception: Sunday, January 29, 4:00-7:00pm

Featuring a talk with the artist from 5:00- 6:00pm

Cold Play

How full of the creative genius is the air in which these are generated! I should hardly admire more if real stars fell and lodged on my coat. Nature is full of genius, full of the divinity, so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand.

Henry David Thoreau
journal entry, January 5, 1856

With a structure whose geometry appears to speak confidently of purpose and intent, the snowflake will forever beg the question, who makes these things? As Thoreau's journal entry makes clear, inside every snowflake is the proto-language of Intelligent Design. Over the centuries, the snowflake has been read as the means through which the divine reveals itself, taking exquisite care with something as seemingly infinite in number and variation as it is ephemeral. Its beauty aside, the snowflake remains a fundamental metaphor for the complexity and transience of all living things. Just as soon as the snowflake impresses upon us the idea of a kaleidoscopic order whose harmony is derived through the union of sameness and difference, where one is seen through the other, the snowflake disappears, becoming a sign for that which is in fact elusive.

Proof of the snowflake's infinite variety was borne out after the camera's invention. We owe the certainty with which we are taught "no two snowflakes are alike" to Wilson A. Bentley (1865-1931), a Vermont farmer whose interest in meteorology led him to photograph more than 5,000 snow crystals. These, along with copious notes about the atmospheric conditions when the photos were taken, form a genuine scientific study.

But under Bentley's aegis the subject of awe became the victim of inventory. Each page of *Snow Crystals*, Bentley's two hundred page magnum opus, features twelve hexagonal snowflakes, all of equal size, arranged in grid formation on a black background. Stripped

of sentimentality, they amount to the *ne plus ultra* of modernisms, namely an archive. Bentley's singular obsession was beyond doubt a labor of love. As a visual document, it is the culmination of a cultural discourse while being extensive enough to fulfill the scientific imperative of objectivity. Bentley's photographs present the snowflake as a work of art that the camera only serves to reveal as such. His efforts made the snowflake a part of popular consciousness to the extent that it became a definitive staple of kitsch, placing it outside the purview of the fine arts.

Forecast: Snow is Yutaka Sone's paeon to the snowflake. A mixed media extravaganza, it features painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, and last but not least, a forest of roughly 100 pine trees. Nestled within this winter wonderland are a series of marble snowflake sculptures ranging from several inches to a few feet in diameter. Sone is interested in a range of idyllic associations with snow, be they remote and dramatic mountainous landscapes such as the habitat of the elusive snow leopard, or activities as homespun and humble as making a snow man. A pair of handmade skis and a charming vignette of a wintery ski lift scene hewn in marble reveal Sone's tribute as that of an unabashed thrill seeker. For Sone, the simple pleasures offered by the great snowy outdoors are a source of nature's inexhaustible spiritual currency despite an ever-burgeoning recreation industry.

Born in Japan in 1965, Sone has been based in Los Angeles since 2000. His work is anything but medium specific. Painting, photography, video, performance, sculpture are present throughout his oeuvre in equal measure. For the past three years they have all been put at the service of themes inspired by snow. This includes his stint as the frontman for his rock-n-roll outfit, *The Snowflake Band*. As one could easily surmise from this exhibition, much of Sone's work, to put it plainly, is fun, often

entertaining in the performative sense. In 1993, Sone gained international notoriety for *Her 19th Foot*, a performance/sculpture featuring a string of modified bicycles hitched together so as to accommodate 19 riders. Since 1996 he has worked with craftsmen in China to create a striking body of marble sculptures whose subjects have included the island of Hong Kong, roller coasters, and Los Angeles freeway interchanges. Marble is synonymous with sculpture in its honor/memorial guise. Using Sone's marble freeways as a terminus, one could narrate the history of Western Civilization through carved marble statuary, from its cradle in Greece to a Los Angeles taken to be its current gravesite.

Not only is marble a standard bearer of the fine arts, it imparts nobility to its subject. Marble's opacity and density make it a geological metaphor for purity and eternity. Subject matter carved in marble is no longer of its present, it belongs to the Ages. Paradoxically, Sone's marble roller coasters and expressway interchanges privilege the momentary over the timeless, motion over stasis. They are sites where the thrill and hustle of contemporary life at their most extreme yet quotidian achieve expression in the form of the arabesque. More subtle but just as intriguing is his marble sculpture *Hong Kong Island*. Executed in 1997, the year the island reverted to Chinese rule after its 99-year lease to Britain expired, *Hong Kong Island* is less a monument to the place and more a monument to historic political change. Ultimately Sone's marble works are monuments of and to the present, allowing us to see ourselves in flattering archaeological terms as a civilization that cherishes living in the moment, whether that moment is of historic proportion or as fleeting as the life of a snow flake.

The previous century, however, was noted for having adopted industrial materials and methods of fabrication as a direct challenge to two of

sculpture's pre-modern paradigms: the artisanal handling of noble materials, and the breathing of life into inert matter. Although we are two generations removed from minimalism, resuscitation of either sculptural paradigm still seems a conspicuous indulgence. For Sone to render in marble a subject taken as proof of God's handiwork, albeit one reduced to kitsch, is to consciously pit a bankrupt form against an equally bankrupt content. The result is that both the marble object and its trivial subject matter are redeemed as guilt free pleasures.

As archeological monuments to a present we are loath to recognize, let alone celebrate, the humor in Sone's work comes at the price of critique framed in terms of loss. Sone's work, no matter how much it revels in bankruptcy, is resistant to mourning, and as a result is immune to irony. It is straight-up fun, delightful even, no strings attached. Monumentalizing the snowflake in the wake of Bentley's archive is perhaps the only way to properly acknowledge the snowflake's fate as kitsch, and at the same time to rescue it from Chapter 11 so that we may once again partake of what have been frozen assets indeed.

The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago
5811 South Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637
Phone: (773)702-8870

First Class Mail
Postmarked
PAID
Chicago, IL
Permit No. 2336



Related Events

Opening Reception
Sunday, January 29 4:00 – 7:00pm

Artist Talk
in Cobb Hall 307
Sunday, January 29 5:00 – 6:00 pm

Concert
Thursday, February 16, 8pm
The Maverick Ensemble
From Japan to Greensboro
Jan Berry Baker, saxophone
James Baur, guitar
Elizabeth Brausa, violin
Shannon Budd, flute
William Jason Raynovich, cello

From Japan to Greensboro is in keeping with the MAVerick Ensemble's knack for putting together an exciting and eclectic bill of new music by composers from around the world. This concert will include works by Japanese composers Ryo Noda and Toro Takemitsu, Israeli composer Arie Shapira, and Mark Engebretson from Greensboro, North Carolina. This concert will take place in the gallery. FREE

Concert
Monday, February 20, 8:00 pm
Tuesday, February 21, 8:00 pm
Carl Stone, electronics
Yoko Nishi, koto
Gene Coleman, bass clarinet

With an astounding repertoire of traditional and contemporary works at her disposal, Nishi is one of Japan's most sought after koto players. Stone is one of the pioneers of live computer music, and has worked extensively with musicians from Japan, where he splits his time. Over the past decade, bass clarinetist Gene Coleman has developed an international reputation as a composer and performer. In 2002 –2003 Coleman organized the Transonic Festival in Berlin around the theme of intercultural exchange in the field of new music. Both Nishi and Stone were featured performers, making the first evening something of a reunion. The second evening will feature works by contemporary Japanese composers performed by this trio as well as members of Ensemble Noamnesia. These concerts will take place in the gallery. FREE

Lecture
Sunday, February 26, 2:00pm

Heinrich Jaeger
Professor of Physics, University of Chicago
The Nature of Things: Crystals and their Symmetry

Jaeger specializes in the physics of condensed matter ranging from hard to soft matter research. As head of the University's Materials Research Center, Jaeger heads a leading team of physicists studying interactions between many, more or less identical "building blocks" that make up larger complex structures and show collective effects. These building blocks include particles that are macroscopic and others that have nanoscale dimensions, such as nanocrystals. Needless to say, snow crystals fall well within his purview. Learn about the beauty and behaviour of crystals from someone involved in the most sophisticated research for their study. This talk will take place in Cobb Room 402, directly down the hall from the gallery. FREE

Concert
Tuesday, March 21, 8:00pm
Mathias Ziegler, flute

Mathias Ziegler is one of the world's most versatile and innovative flautists. He is committed to traditional and contemporary music and concepts that cross the boundaries between classical music and jazz. Accordingly, his performances take place in a vast range of contexts: he is principal flutist with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, and performs regularly with the percussionist Pierre Favre as well as contrabass player Mark Dresser. He is also a member of the "Collegium Novum Zurich", where he has worked with Mauricio Kagel, Heinz Holliger and George Crumb. This concert will take place in the gallery. FREE

Concert
Friday, March 24, 8:00 pm

Ghost Notes
Gene Coleman, bass clarinet
Marina Peterson, cello
Domenico Sciajno, electronics

Within the field of electro-acoustic music this trio is sure to be tops. Coleman and Peterson are no strangers to anyone who has come to our concerts. Specializing in contemporary chambers works, they have also played with a host of outstanding talents from around the world. The newcomer in this respect is Sciajno who has been hailed as one of Europe's most dynamic electronic music talents having recorded on the likes of Erstwhile, Leo, and Bowindo records. This concert will take place in the gallery. FREE

Concert
Sunday, April 2, 6:00pm

Nicola Sani, composer
With Ensemble Noamnesia

Nicola Sani (b. 1961) is one of the most active Italian composers of his generation. In addition to being an astute historian and critic of electro-acoustic music, Sani is the author of numerous instrumental and electro-acoustic compositions, musical theatre operas, dance operas and multimedia installations all of which have been performed internationally. This concert will take place in the gallery. FREE

Yutaka Sone: Forecast Snow has been made possible with funding from the Zell Family Foundation. Additional sponsors include Howard and Donna Stone, the Sara Lee Foundation, Bert Lies and Rosina Lee Yue, and The Japan Foundation.

Program support has been received from Alphawood Foundation; the CityArts Program of The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, a municipal agency; Christie's; The Danielson Foundation; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; LaSalle Bank; The LLLWW Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Peter Norton Family Foundation; the Provost's Discretionary Fund at The University of Chicago; The Pritzker Foundation; The Siragusa Foundation; and our membership.

The concerts have been made possible by the Argosy Foundation Contemporary Music Fund.

Sara Lee

FOUNDATION

25 years

AA
American Airlines

Exclusive Airline of
The Renaissance Society's 2005-2006 Season

[this side]
Yutaka Sone
Untitled, 2005
photograph

[that side]
Yutaka Sone
Untitled, 2005
mixed media