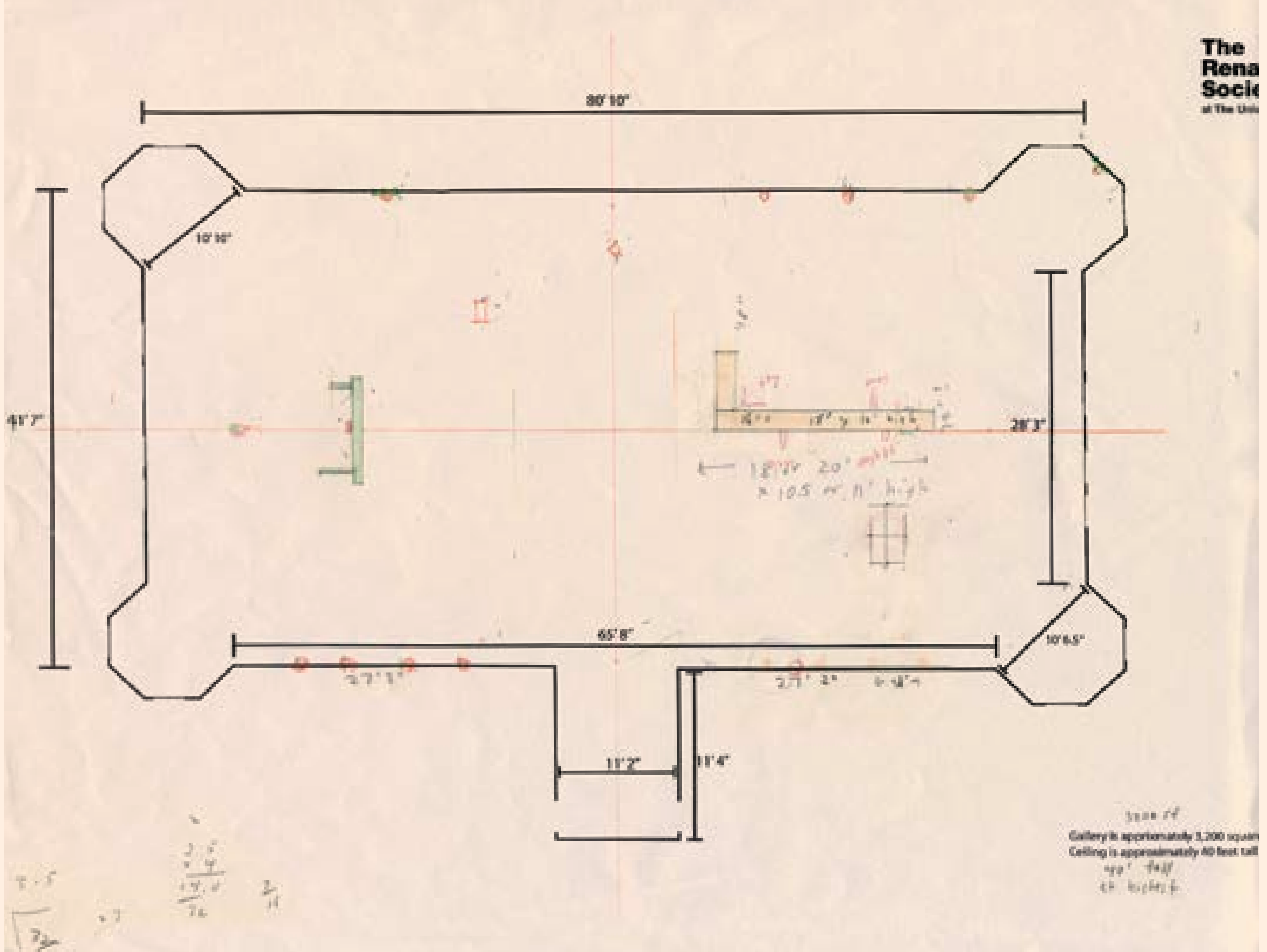
Running the Angles

A Conversation between Richard Rezac and Solveig Øvstebø



Artist's working plan for the exhibition

SØ When we met here at the Renaissance Society gallery after I had invited you to present an exhibition, what kind of thoughts did you have about the space and its possible connections to your work? What were your first intuitions?

RR Well, to begin, by living in Chicago and seeing the majority of shows at the Renaissance Society since 1985, I had a familiarity with how the architecture of its interior can change with each exhibition. The characteristics of the artist have reframed the space each time. So when your invitation was given, I had that impression of the latitude that the architecture can take, and so I was pleased that I would, I suppose, have the ability to do that sort of thing, too. Then the question was, in what way, of course. When we first spoke, and also when I saw the space again, I knew I wanted to leave it completely natural, and as unchanged as possible. When you removed the architectural grid from the space in 2014, it revealed this very tall and complex upper area, opening that upper space to the light from the windows in a greater sense, so it was more illuminated. It's always been a dilemma for me to see spotlights on my sculpture because of the dark shadows they create, so altogether the shift to having only the natural light from the windows and the fluorescent ceiling lights in the space I knew would be very beneficial to my work. Most of what I do is mounted on the wall, so then the next question that arose was, how do I accomodate wall sculpture with the completely open architecture of the Ren.

SØ Early in the process, we talked about how we didn't necessarily want to make a retrospective. We decided to do more of a survey, but with a focus on making new works for this show, which is why we allotted quite a long planning time – a span of two years. How did that decision affect your approach to production?

RR You're right that the size and the nature of the Ren's space was not appropriate for a retrospective going back several decades. And I knew it was not in my nature to show only very recent work. As you know, I work fairly slowly and deliberately. I can't count on various works, as I set out making them, to actually succeed. So that degree of expectation would have been counterproductive. But as you say, two years – actually more than two years by the time the show opens – that's a long time to deliberate and to feel comfortable with the selection of new work I have made. I figured early on there would probably need to be about fifteen to seventeen sculptures in the show. It ended up being nineteen or twenty. I also decided not to include drawings – only sculpture – to offer a focus for myself and the viewer, because to look at a drawing adjacent to an object is a switch, and this concentration gave permission to include sculpture that becomes more free-ranging. The solution then is something like a survey but with less emphasis on older work. So it would be mainly new work with select earlier works meant to complement, to function as prescient, as informants to the new sculpture. I recognized an attitude or treatment in some earlier sculpture was present in the new work; either I had come back around to a certain idea, or it was always there.

SØ Connecting those previous works to new works, or rather, to the work you envisioned making, was a crucial point of departure. Did you have a set of ideas for new sculptures and then you thought about which older works related to them? Or was it the other way around, that the ideas for the new work grew out of previous sculptures?

RR It was both. There was a single work titled **Cremona** (p. 111), which early on I decided to include. I knew that it would be a linchpin, and in a way, was the starting block for the other works. There was sculpture recently finished that I felt good about which had not been seen in Chicago, so those were immediate candidates for the exhibition as well. In the first few weeks, as I thought about this, there was **Cremona** and probably four or five others, including two of the **Zeilschip** sculptures (pp. 113–114). I was yet to make the last **Zeilschip**, but I needed to do a set of four, as in the cardinal points.

SØ Did you always know that you were going to make four of the **Zeilschips**?

RR Initially, I thought the first was the only one, and then I realized that I was interested enough in this dynamic to find another solution. Then with the second, I knew there would be four, determined by the four directions, which goes back to sailing, navigation, navigational instruments, and seaworthy ships. That set of four seemed important as a cohesive series in this exhibition. Most everything else is relatively independent from the other work.

SØ Let's talk about these four directions, which is something that came up very early in our discussion and is very much tied to how you have considered the space. It seems to me that you've thought about the presentation in a holistic way – not just as a collection of individual sculptures, but more like comprehensive installation that relates specifically to its setting. The works together create an entity we can enter, if you will.

RR I think it's a consciousness I have that the beauty of the Ren space is its basic symmetry. It's not purely symmetrical, but by all appearances it is. If I was to preserve as much as possible the existing open space, that symmetry would be in clear evidence. I began with the floorplan, the axes, which do, as far as I can tell, point north, south, east, west. And I'm cognizant it is a springtime show, with the sun in the morning coming through one set of windows and in the afternoon the other set of windows. That directional light confirms, for me, the east/west alignment of your space. And in fact, this light in the space made me decide on a treatment of some of the bronzes and where to place them to capture maximum effect.

SØ That's amazing.

RR So the space did in fact dictate some decisions. Not the initial decision, maybe not the essence of the sculpture, but certainly aspects that hold within the work.

SØ You could have approached it completely differently – you could have made your work in the studio without any fine-tuned plan, and then you and I could have taken two weeks moving the pieces around in the gallery to decide where they should be installed. That's also a very common way to make a show. But in your particular way of working, you factor the space into the equation much earlier; the new sculptures were accounted for in the space long before they even existed.

RR Yes, but it was not a master plan; it developed from the consideration of knowing a sculpture had to occupy a certain place in the gallery. And so I filled that spot. I knew that near the screen, there needed to be a hanging sculpture. It had to be smaller, reflective, and more delicate than the other new hanging one. And in the northwest alcove, those three works really could not be anywhere else. One by one, they began to fill the spaces in demand.

SØ So you kind of built up the presentation one piece at a time. You started in one place, where something *had* to be, as

you say, and then from there, considering the light, considering the space and the architecture, you introduced another component, another work, and another, building up the whole show in that way.

RR That's true.

SØ I think the fact that you didn't include the drawings underscores the point that this is a single unified project. One enters this space and doesn't necessarily look at one sculpture at a time, but rather experiences a space with sculptures in it, which is quite an extraordinary way for you as an artist to approach working within this architecture.

So let's talk about the title: *Address.* It's a word that can suggest many different things. It suggests location, which gets back to this spatial issue. But it also refers to speech, implying action and subject. Did you think about these different meanings?

RR Yeah, I think the multiple definitions or meanings do apply. An address is an expression, a formal expression, prepared for a given audience, whatever that constituency may be. In a general sense, obviously artists making work to be shown in public presume there's an audience that is interested in experiencing that exhibition, those works of art. So this is an address in the form of an exhibition. "Address" also involves location. In seven or eight sculptures, the titles refer to a specific location, for instance, the name of the street or site. That identification of place seemed appropriate, as the works were all made in my studio in Chicago and the Ren is in Chicago.

SØ I was going to say, it's kind of *your* address.

RR It is, yes. "Address" is an elusive word. It's on forms everywhere, after the name, and maybe it's so common it sort of suspends itself as invisible.

SØ "Address" also suggests the way you think about space and architecture, even beyond the particular space here at the Ren. You said to me once that architecture as such, as a real concrete element, did not become part of your work until you moved to Chicago. After that it became an important inspiration, or source of input, for your work.

RR That's true. I grew up in Nebraska and then studied in the Pacific Northwest, where architecture is slight – it's not old and it's not monumental. I came to Chicago in 1985 and for the first year or two I didn't pay attention to architecture, per se, but I taught at the School of the Art Institute, where I still teach today. So many times, on the way to the school, I got out of the subway and directly faced the corner of the Monadnock Building (fig. 1). And that is one of the most beautiful architectural details that I've seen, truly anywhere, where it shifts from razor sharp at street level to a quarter round at the top. Seeing that two or three days a week for years was a confirmation of how great some architecture can be. From my vantage now, the exposure to great architecture in Chicago over many decades has been influential and inspiring. Obviously other architects are famous here – Sullivan and Mies – but John Root may override those two in my mind. When I have traveled, I sought out not only museum collections but also the work of architects that I've read about, primarily in Europe, prior to that in Japan, as well as in the United States.

SØ Yes, and it's clear to me that your inspiration comes not only from what you have seen yourself here in Chicago and on your travels; you have also researched and examined the language of architecture built many centuries ago. You've said that your most intense interest stops at the mid-twentieth century. From the fifteenth century to the 1950s, that's where you move around.

RR Yes, for me that's the rich vocabulary.

Fig. 1. **Burnham & Root, architects, Monadnock building**, Chicago, 1891–93.

Fig. 2. **Jože Plečnik, Prague castle redesign, stair landing detail**, 1929–31.

SØ Can you talk a bit about that time span and some of the architecture you've been drawn to? For instance, what brought you to Italy to look at Baroque architecture, which has now become so important for you? Where did that start?

RR Well, I think step by step. It began with reading architectural history. Obviously, the Renaissance is foundational. Andrea Palladio is probably the greatest – well, I won't make claims, but for me, Palladio is at the center. His influence leads to the Baroque and to Great Britain, to Christopher Wren. But even before that direct exposure in Italy, I received a grant to study Czech Cubist architecture in Prague. I went there, saw the work of six architects who were all trained by a Slovenian architect, Jože Plečnik, a student of Otto Wagner's in Vienna. I was really struck. My visit was just after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and by chance I was fortunate to see a major exhibition of Plečnik's work. He had been hired by Tomáš Masaryk, the president of Czechoslovakia – at that time a newly founded democracy, in 1918, after World War I – to redesign what had been the royal castle, reconfiguring it as a democratic house of government (fig. 2). What Plečnik achieved was, I think, profound. He looked back to Greco-Roman architecture and, you could say, what he was doing in this work on the buildings and the gardens in the twenties anticipated post-modernism. He took what was there and retrofitted it for the purposes of a different function. I then made a subsequent trip to Ljubljana, Slovenia, to see much more of Plečnik's work. These experiences in Central Europe were set between looking closely at American architecture, including the Shakers' existing buildings in New England. It's become a series of rings, from Greco-Roman to the Renaissance and Palladio, to the Baroque, and within those rings are other cultures' use of architecture. Plečnik was important because he was making work in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, looking at cultures that were newly independent and needing to define for themselves their own identity, but of course he was looking to Greco-Roman tradition for that language.

SØ As I recall, the fascination with Japanese aesthetics came before your interests in architecture. Japanese minimalism has been with you for quite a long time, together with the formal elements of Shaker and Native American traditions.

RR Well, yes, in their art and functional objects. As an undergraduate, in art school, I was exposed in an important way to Asian art through coursework and museum collections, along with access to fine collections of work by Pacific Northwest indigenous peoples. These various strands reinforced each other. They struck a chord with me because so much of traditional Japanese and Native American art is obviously handmade, and frequently symmetrical and functional. There's a simplicity, it's not extravagant, the materials are natural, and they're not adorned heavily or disguised. And my work in sculpture, especially in the beginning, I think, embraces those basic principles.

I think all artists go through a similar formation, which has a lot to do with their background and their education, and the time in which they work. And while Asian and Pacific Northwest Native American art had a great impact for me as a student, the third leg of influence was contemporary Minimalist art, which I saw firsthand during that time in the 1970s, at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts. This exhibition and performance space was a kunsthalle that operated for about twelve years and presented many dozens of substantial solo exhibitions, so I saw new work by artists from across the United States, including most, if not all, of the well-known Minimalist

artists. I was also involved as a volunteer at PCVA for about half my time in Portland, helping to install some of those shows. For me, in my twenties at the time, this was especially important (fig. 3).

SØ It seems to me that their shared focus on geometry is something that led you to those artistic or design traditions. What else in their work did you find compelling?

RR I saw a connection between Minimalism and traditional Japanese art, and eventually Shaker design. Each of the three brings a certain approach, a respect for a material as it's given to us, and incorporates forms that are both simple and based in geometry. For that matter, Native American as well. There's a world of difference culturally among these four, but as a young artist trying to find my footing, I was persuaded by their similar formal approach to materials.

SØ But you weren't looking at architecture at this point, right? The Japanese and Shaker influences came more through the shapes and forms of objects and furniture.

RR In Japan, it was certainly temple buildings, but more than that, it was gardens. And it was objects: screens, ceramics, and sculpture. It wasn't so much the architecture. The introduction to architecture here in Chicago made me more interested in seeing architecture in other places, including continental Europe and Great Britain.

SØ You've mentioned that a greater complexity came into your work with this more expansive or diverse inspirational framework. I want to ask you about the Baroque because, initially, at least, the aesthetic of this epoch is something that one might think seems very far away from your work. What do you find so inspiring in the Baroque architects, and what are the links to your sculpture?

RR Well, there's a complexity I think that we ascribe to the Baroque. I'm sure it's largely true when you do a comparative study. Baroque paintings, sculpture, architecture have great movement and expressiveness – and if you assign the European Baroque to Catholicism, often those subjects evoke great passion and emotion – but I'm looking more at the formal aspect of complexity. It is, I guess, just that basic engagement or principle about complexity and how it is held in an organized way. The larger question might be in the evolution in my work, from something relatively simple and singular to something that is based on complexity, with a number of parts that ultimately integrate, in my mind at least.

SØ So it is the structural part of the Baroque attracts you? The compositional elements, more than its affect?

RR It's geometry gone to a higher plane, or more layers than what I had been understanding and working with prior. And maybe it was just that after years of looking and absorption and wanting to try something different, that was the direction I was headed in anyway: beginning with a very simple form of one material, and moving towards something that had more parts, even two or three materials, with color, something more skeletal, where the space was within and amongst the parts rather than shielded outside of it. As I look at my work, there is a progression from something like a dense sphere to something that is much more angular or linear, with several materials, some of which are colorful or reflective. Just inherently the complexity of comprehending this subject, and understanding its relationship to the space around it, is quite different. There

Previous page
The Renaissance Society gallery space

Fig. 3. **Jorasan**, 1982, plaster and wood, 12 × 40 × 12 inches

Fig. 4. **Pillow**, 1997, cast iron,
5 × 23½ × 14½ inches

is a massive difference between elemental architecture and the Baroque. Maybe sitting in between is the Renaissance, in which complete order is borrowed, ostensibly, from Greco-Roman traditions, with its pure symmetry and repetition of forms.

SØ But you stop at the Baroque. You wouldn't take it any further, would you? What about Rococo?

RR I arrived in Italy with the Baroque and for some reason it still seems profound. I think the Baroque, along with Islamic architecture, extensively relies on geometry because it is so far afield in its elaboration. Unless you have the underlying principle that keeps it in control, it's just a mess, it's chaos. Rococo, for me, is less about structure and more about surface treatment. Ultimately, I'm still intrigued by the basic structure that allows an interior form to speak, that it be felt as whole from the inside out, as with a human body.

SØ You've mentioned the human body many times in connection to your work. You think carefully about human scale, and about the geometry of the human body. I would be interested to hear your thoughts about how the human body relates to the architecture or the art object.

RR In art school I drew from the figure extensively, and it was formative, but at a certain point, I realized there was a road parting, and observational drawing and representation were not my priority. But I do have the need to draw for a sculpture before I make it, on a sheet of paper, by hand. Consider the size of a pencil, the range of movement, in that construction. I feel the necessity to make the sculpture by myself and not wanting to limit myself by working on a sculpture for an overly extended period of time. These are factors contributing to the sculpture as body-sized, or partial body-sized (fig. 4).

SØ So you're talking about the body in the making, the process – that's an important aspect of it also.

RR Yeah, I make seven or eight sculptures a year. I don't want to make just one. And I don't care about making thirty.

SØ Exactly [laughter].

RR I would say virtually all of the sculpture I've made I can physically pick up and move. That's important to me. So there's that physical, controlling aspect. And then for the viewer, there is the experience when something is our size – torso size. You walk up to a wall and see an object, a relief sculpture that is not so large. In that situation, you can step back and see the totality, and you can also step up close to the surface, just as you can with a painting. Really, an easel-size painting is ideal in many ways: you can grasp the entire thing within peripheral vision and you can get close enough to understand the construction or the brushwork. So I equate it to that kind of intimacy. Whether a work of mine is on the wall, on the floor, or suspended, a viewer can move close enough to comprehend its form and entire silhouette, but also at the same time see the surface. When a work becomes so large, the surface hardly matters, and its complete regularity matters less.

SØ Definitely, and the surface is also very significant in your work, in addition to matters of structure.

RR It is. The choice of materials and color become quite instrumental, yes.

SØ So perhaps referring back to architecture, you are preoccupied with the overall impression of buildings, but your work also revels in the details, noticing and highlighting small pieces of a bigger whole.

RR Well, in fact, a priority in my looking at architecture *is* the detail. Is something at eye-level. It's the fascination with the resolution by the architect for the adjoining of two materials, what their seam is, what that overlap is, that choice.

SØ So you look at the actual materials in the architectural entity?

RR Yes, the choice and the texture. This certainly reflects the significance of, for example, the distinction and size of a door, the proportion, the door frame and its moulding. Of course it's important for any architect to conceive of the building and then integrate all these parts, large and small, so that they reinforce their total plan. What I comprehend at street level, or inside of a building, even in its upper reaches, is only partial. It's fascinating and useful then to understand the whole by way of a model, or to see a larger complete section of the building through photography. With the earlier architecture I talk about, say, pre-nineteenth century, some are only in part original – some are in ruins, or we have only the foundation visible. And most of those buildings are much shorter to begin with. So even if it's well-preserved, say, a masonry building in New England or a temple in Japan, one is able to comprehend it more readily – you could lean a ladder against those buildings and reach the roof if you want.

SØ You can take in the whole building at once, visually. Is that something that informs your interest in architecture up to the 1950s, but not necessarily beyond, because buildings are so much bigger today and made out of different kinds of materials?

RR Well, I'm generally interested in new buildings. There are some architects in particular that emphasize handwork or show added care for detail, like Peter Zumthor, or Renzo Piano, or Alvaro Siza. Certain architects have the opportunity, with ample budgets and concerned clients, to exercise a great deal of care in design and innovation. Understandably, they rely on new technology, computer programs, and glass and steel. Sometimes those materials can be handled beautifully, but it's unlike the laying of brick or the laying of stone.

SØ Does the substance of these buildings directly inform your chosen materials? It's quite a distinct set of mediums that you use. There's no wool or lace, for instance [laughter]. You don't experiment for the sake of experimenting; you have certain materials that you most frequently work with. However, you did work with glass for a sculpture in this show.

RR Right. I've used plate glass three times. There are periodic forays into an odd material. I have used silk a few times, actually (fig. 5). I've used canvas with a sculpture and polyurethane maybe seven or eight times. But these examples extend over twenty-five to thirty years. What I always go back to is wood, hardwood lumber and structural plywood. And cast bronze, cast aluminum, cast iron, aluminum plate. Those are the handful of materials that I'm almost always using. The first time I used plate aluminum was twelve to fourteen years ago, but I've used it often since then. I first used cast bronze in 1985, and I'm still incorporating that today. Occasionally, I use plaster. So I do choose a material for its character and color and surface. But as I said, it always begins with a drawing and the drawing points toward the material.

SØ So you have the idea of the shape, and then from the drawing you're deciding on how to make the sculpture?

RR Exactly. What the drawing lets me do, most importantly at first, is spell out the configuration, its size and related views.

SØ Do you make the drawings at full scale, true to size to the sculptures?

RR Yes, with very few exceptions. Consequently there is considerable give and take and adjustment. When I pin the drawing on the wall, in a sense I'm creating a ghost, a "future-ghost" of that sculpture, and I can see it, graphically, as an object. It's when the drawing is close to completion that I consider the materials.

SØ You're outlining three steps – though I'm sure there are many more. The idea of what you want to make, which is in your head and has been informed by different things around you; the idea is then put on paper as a drawing; and the drawing is then translated into a sculpture. So the result, in a way, is that you make two of every shape: one sculpture and one drawing. Are the latter works in themselves?

RR Well, they are plans.

SØ Do you not see the drawings as works?

RR For me, if it's an engaging drawing, then yes, I think of it as a work of art. But often it's simply information on paper that allows me to make clear decisions about the sculpture. Because the drawings I do come in two forms: the initial drawing potentially arrives at a convincing image that I want to make into a sculpture. I then usually follow this up with a duplicate drawing, but more skeletal and efficient, so that I can assemble a sculpture on top of the paper; I use the drawing as a guide if I am aligning angles, cut precisely for joining wood or aluminum parts. The earlier drawing that persuades me to make the sculpture has a certain charge to it, a more definite meaning, like an important letter, you know, that rises above other letters that one receives, because of the language.

SØ What about the narratives or experiences that come even before the drawing, that might lead to an idea? I know these sources are important for you, and yet while they're very generative for the work, they are not necessarily something that is vital for the viewer to know in order to experience the work. I'm fascinated by how your sources or reference points can generate certain shapes, but also by how you then abstract or otherwise obscure them. Is it problematic for you to reveal that narrative, or does it provide another angle from which to approach your work?

RR Well, I don't shy away from revealing the influence or the source (fig. 6).

SØ The titles sometimes gives a sort of hint.

RR The title, when there is one, is usually clipped or ambiguous, or in a foreign language. It is, however, the most direct reference to the sculpture, but then takes further explanation. There remains a gap between the source and the visual experience of the sculpture. These are two parallel tracks: what this thing is and how it came to be. This duality is a constant; on the one hand, my desire for clarity in the final drawing or sculpture, and on the other, the matter of how I get there. This realization returns to my earlier "road not taken" feeling about representation.

SØ I like the way you describe it as a parallel track. I wonder if it is also about two different ways of experiencing art as well as making it. Some viewers look for the connection to stories, narratives, or context first. And then there's this other track that has to do with the shape, the geometry, the system, the structure, and the logic.

RR And how the object fits within our understanding of the history of art, or of the culture.

Fig. 5. **Veil**, 1987, cast iron and dyed silk,
5 × 11 × 3¼ inches

Fig. 6. **Anonymous, Jizo figure**, c. 1750, Great Buddha Hall, Nara, Japan (inspiration for **Veil**)

SØ Right. With these things in mind, what did you think about, for instance, when you made the new piece **Quimby** (pp. 104–105)? I just saw it for the first time in your studio and it reminded me of a sail. Does it have something to do with ships?

RR No, its reference is not a ship's sail. It is, rather, the appearance of a window-pane fragment. It had to be cantilevered and perpendicular for the glass to function. I made a model with translucent papers, knowing that an elongated grid was needed. This sculpture has an eccentricity to it, with the overhanging element at the top needing support – visually, not physically – so I introduced wood forms that are organic, birdlike, and seemingly like brackets or supports. I wanted to mix materials: I knew it would be plate glass with a steel frame. So one thing led to another, but I knew the perpendicular element had to be that way in order for light to interact. And it couldn't extend too far – that would be difficult and dangerous. I see this as an example of many works I make that seem logical and practical, and resolved through the details for purely aesthetic reasons.

SØ I always love to look at your work with you and to hear you speak with such a clear line of reasoning about how things "had to be." When you say it, it's completely obvious – there's such an inherent logic.

RR Well, yes, if the contrast is to gestural work – sculpture made improvisationally and with energy – I tend to take a slower approach and with circumspection. You can see on the wall of my studio these French curves and templates; they foster this slow process, drawing that way. I set the template on a sheet of paper, line it up, and it encourages repetition and patterning – and a predictability, I suppose. So while I'm inviting the option for latitude, at the same time, to draw a line that is predictable becomes satisfying and necessary.

SØ Were it only driven by geometry and logic, your practice would be very constrained. Instead, you connect the works to imagination in a number of ways. There is an unruly pulse in them, a playfulness – you know, a kind of poetry. It's something not so easily defined. They have a lot of force, and not only in their material and weight, but also in how they make us think about things that we don't necessarily understand. Your sculptures ignite a sort of curiosity.

RR And that's about intuition, right? Any artist working in an especially intuitive way confronts the fact that anything is possible, and so the challenge is how to identify a purpose, how to make progress, and then to have confidence in the eventual conclusion. That's one way I'm incorporating the reference, whether it's an architectural motif, or something personal, or family history, or memory: it restricts and helps me make decisions. Again, its not a representation or literal explication of a storyline. It's important to me, yes, because it generates – in a sense, circumscribes – the decisions I make.

SØ I think memory is a concept that is significant in your work. There is sometimes a personal memory that you connect to a piece that we as viewers don't have access to when we see the work. But then there's another kind of memory at play, too, maybe a kind of formal memory, that we might share. When I look at your works, they often remind me of something, but I can't pinpoint what it is. But their power to be both evocative and uncertain is essential to the sculptures. For instance, one of them might recall a part of an architectural structure that I've seen but haven't really thought about. It's not the same structure because you have tweaked it, but it resembles it, so it has a place in my mind.

RR I appreciate the distinction you make in the two ways that a memory, or the resemblance of more objective, shared experience can be manifest in my work. If the origin of a sculpture is from personal memory, I cannot expect that work to convey anything more than a hint, at best, and in that instance, the title often states the source. But for me, in relying on that recollection and respecting the subject, the outcome can be especially meaningful and unique. I recognize the other "formal memory," as you say, and often that is the response I hear from viewers as they interpret or find an analogy, for example, to one of my sculptures. We are surrounded by mass-produced, geometric forms with solid colors, as manufacturing dictates. You know, it's puzzling to me sometimes when people assume that my sculpture is made from purchased, refined material. That's never been true, but that impression speaks to the fact that those forms are ever-present in our culture.

SØ This would never happen, but as a thought experiment: what if something existed in the hardware store that was exactly how you envisioned a sculpture, or an element of a sculpture? Would you buy it, and maybe just paint it?

RR No, no. The time spent fashioning something, the luxury of rethinking my intention, and just handling it, is the reason I want to be doing this. I could find something satisfying and I could paint it, but I wouldn't have made it, so it would not be my sculpture.

SØ The surface of your work is so well prepared, always very finished or smooth. But when we look very, very closely at the sculpture, we see that this highly refined object is actually painted by hand, for example. There is this really thin line between something that we experience as industrial and something that we experience as handmade, and I really do feel that this handmade aspect of your work is crucial. It's willed from your side, even though the object you make is almost perfect – it's almost as if it's edging over to the other side. It's just one step away from appearing industrial; you take it that far.

But I wanted to ask you a different question related to the material. There is an issue that we haven't talked about yet that has to do with weight, which I think is also very central to how you present your work – hanging, standing, lying down, or on the wall. When you paint the surfaces, it obscures the material and makes it hard to guess what each sculpture weighs. When one of them is on the floor and has a shape that might look like wood, for example, it seems like you could just grab it and bring it with you, but then you realize it may in fact be very heavy. How do you think about weight as you are making your work?

RR It's a good question. I would say the understanding by the viewer of how heavy a sculpture actually is may not be so important. My interest is in its presence or authority, which certainly, to some degree, takes the perception of weight into account. When I allow a material, such as cherry wood, or cast bronze, or cast iron, or the aluminum plate to be fully visible, then any viewer can look at it and, given its size and proportion, understand how heavy it probably is. The possible deception comes only when I paint a surface, and if I paint it all over. Sometimes however, the edge is left visible, showing the material underneath. I don't want to deceive people as to the material properties, but more important to me is the sculpture's impact, first and last.

SØ Thinking about weight, I also wanted to mention how you are hanging things from the very tall ceiling here at the Renaissance Society. You have researched exactly what kind of cable you want to use for this particular purpose, so that it will almost feel like certain works are floating. I want to talk about two specific pieces, **Untitled (05-07)** (p. 127) and **Untitled (17-07)** (pp. 138–139).

RR That bronze, **Untitled (05-07)**, in fact, is very light.

SØ That one is light, but the other one is heavier, no?

RR Well, the other one, **Untitled (17-07)** weighs forty-two pounds. I wanted to make it as light as possible, so it's built hollow. **Untitled (05-07)** is quite small, so it weighs three or four pounds. But you're right, they're suspended and by that fact they feel light. And I think it would be grim to have a heavy object that you know is cast iron, hanging above your head. Without really being conscious of it, the hanging pieces I've made all appear to be light – whether they are or not – just for psychological and practical reasons.

SØ Let's circle back to the installation. We have talked about space, architecture, your production process, and now we're bringing it back into the Ren again. The exhibition has twenty sculptures: some hanging, some standing, some lying on the floor, and some mounted on the wall. Guide us through the show, and if you will, can you start with the **Untitled (Ren screen)**, a work that does indeed serve as a spatial screen or divider?

RR Yes, one of the first decisions, to go back to the beginning of our conversation, was that I wanted to keep the space open, and yet I needed sufficient wall space. So we are imposing one wall on the east side space, along the axis, and that wall has a turn so that it stands up on its own, but also accommodates a corner piece, **Laterano** (p. 107), containing clear glass. This wall is similar to one that you might build for any exhibition. Otherwise, I made **Untitled (Ren screen)** and positioned it so that as you enter this space, to the left you'll see a stenciled pattern on a flat geometric surface. This two-sided screen is elevated on posts and rails that resemble fencing. As you walk around it, the experience is quite different. The independent, second panel reciprocates the front, with its own vertical set of rhythmic lines. But the screen also holds a sculpture, **Cremona** (pp. 93, 95), which is the earliest work in the exhibition, dating from 1996. That smaller work is situated and framed by the back side of the screen, and shares correspondence to the sculpture from 2005 that hangs above. That work will capture light, because it's a burnished bronze, quite constellation-like. These two works are in alignment and will, I think, speak to one another.

SØ The screen is a sculpture, but equally it's a room-divider, and it's a support for another sculpture. It's connecting the different periods of your work that are presented in this show.

RR Yes, it's a new and complex construction that holds one earlier work on its verso, and above it, another more recent. So it does, in a sense, stand in for the totality of the show. It leans towards the architecture of the Ren, I think, and certainly quotes architectural form. As you enter the gallery space and look straight ahead, you'll see another sculpture that is new, painted red with aluminum ovals and details. It's suspended – three different planes capture light – the ovals are flat but set at angles. And while the bulk of it hangs askew, the ovals are oriented correctly, again going back to the cardinal points. They also relate visually to the **Zeilschip** sculptures across the way.

SØ There's a certain kind of playfulness that you introduce in this show that I haven't seen before, with this wall, with the screen, and with works like **Chigi** (p. 135) and some of the new sculptures from 2017. The colors of the screen, for example – the green and the light red – have a spring feeling.

RR You're right. Color and the differences in form and size might all contribute to that.

SØ Where does it come from, this common direction that some of the new works here seem to have?

RR I don't think it was self-conscious. They are part of a whole. And as these recent sculptures largely represent two years of working, sharing close quarters in my studio space, inevitably there has been cross-referencing. The nature of forms used in these new sculptures is not new, really, but I do recognize a greater liberation perhaps, and stronger, more pervasive applied color than in the past.

SØ Do you think about how viewers will walk through the show? Are you guiding us without us knowing it?

RR My sense is it's open enough that, at whim, the visitor will just do what they normally do, in a free way. Certainly the screen is a barrier, although somebody may be intrigued and want to see the back side right away. I think it will truly vary. But actually, as one first enters the space, the wall sculpture, **Untitled (10-01)** (pp. 136–137), will confront the viewer almost as a sign, and curiously, its profile is very similar in shape and proportion to the Ren floor plan, as an eye-level, sideways model of the gallery.

SØ So you have thought about visitors' movement in the space and envisioned what they will see when they stand in one position or another. You're not directing us in any rigid way, but you have thought through the various sightlines in terms of how you have placed the sculptures.

RR Yes, I can picture it, and from any spot in the Ren space, it will offer a partial composition, representing the whole.

SØ Exactly. This is what makes me think of this show as a whole, as an entity, as I put it before, rather than just as a collection of individual sculptures. You're thinking about what works we will see together and the relationships between them.

RR Yes, and this installation of individual sculptures, able now to be seen here together, returns to one of your first questions: my understanding, and past experience, that the Renaissance Society space possesses an inherent flexibility and open structure. This has allowed me to configure these twenty sculptures in support of one another, as familial, spatial, and otherwise.