

Artist Talk: Renee Stout

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Dallas Museum of Art
Horchow Auditorium

Roslyn Adele Walker: Good evening everybody. I'm Roslyn Adele Walker, the Margaret McDermott Curator of African Art. As you are aware, my curatorial specialty is tradition-based African art and the artists I study have long gone to their rewards.

The focus tonight is contemporary American art. The wonderful thing about working on contemporary art is a possibility, probability, that one will interact with a living artist. Happily, that is what we're going to do tonight. Renee Stout is the artist and she's very much alive.

Ms. Stout is so associated with Washington, D. C. that most people think she was born and raised there. Not so. She grew up in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. After graduating high school, she received the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Carnegie Mellon University in 1980. She moved to D.C. in 1985 where she has had a remarkable career as a practicing artist.

Once in Washington, Renee Stout began to explore the roots of her African-American heritage. As you will see, her work reflects the results of her explorations into the belief systems of African peoples and their descendants throughout the African diaspora, as well as the world and her immediate environment, which is at the moment in northwest Washington at the intersection of Rhode Island, used to be Florida. She expresses her visions in painting, mixed media, sculpture, photography, and installation.

Renee Stout is a recipient of numerous awards including the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, that's as in Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation.

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And she has held artist-in-residence, fellowships and visiting professorships at George Mason University in Virginia, the Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington, the McColl Center for Visual Arts in Charlotte, North Carolina and the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia.

To date, Renee Stout's work has been shown and at least 20 solo exhibitions and at least 45 group shows. I first became aware of her work in 1993 in an exhibition entitled *Astonishment and Power: Kongo minkisi and The Art of Renee Stout* that was held at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian

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Institution. Her work was first shown in the Dallas Museum of Art in Alvia Wardlaw's *Black Art, Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art* 1989.

Two of her pieces, *Fetish #1* [1989.128] and *Fetish #2* [1989.27], were featured in this exhibition and ultimately entered the Dallas Museum of Art collections. One of them, *Fetish #1*, which was donated by a group of several people – I was hoping some of them would be in the room tonight, so I won't list all of their names – but I'll just tell you that it is on view in the African gallery very near the big Congo nkisi, the nail figure.

We are honored to lend or were honored to lend *Fetish #2*, which was acquired with funds from the Metropolitan Life Foundation, to the Africa Museum in Bergen Dal in the Netherlands for an exhibition called *Roots and More: Journey of the Spirits*, and that was last year.

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Clearly Renee Stout has become an accomplished, successful artist. In fact, she's one of the rare artists who really does live – is just sustained by her art. It's hard but yes she does. So she will be taking commissions at the end of the evening. So with that, let's welcome Renee Stout to Dallas and to the Dallas Museum of Art.

[Applause]

Renee Stout:

Thank you Dr. Walker for that introduction. And thank you all for being here. I have about 30-some slides to show you. Some I'll talk about and some I'll just kind of go through a little fast. But I want to start with this one which is called – and I don't always remember the names of my pieces but this is actually three views of the one of the ones that Dr. Walker was referring to, this is *Fetish #1*. And this is the one that was donated by the wonderful group of people back in 1989. And it's about a foot high I think, like yeah, it's not that big at all.

And while I'm speaking, if you have specific questions that might help me along, just raise your hand because it'll make the talk more lively and then I won't be just talking at you. (So, I'm trying to advance this. Let's see if this works. I don't want to push the wrong thing. How does this advance? I want to push this arrow but I don't want the pictures to disappear. To the left, okay – to the right I mean, okay.)

[00:06:01]

All right, this is two views of *Fetish #2* which is the other one that's in the museum's collection. It's the front view and the side view and this is as tall as I am because I used plaster on my own body to make the piece.

This one was called *Fetish #3*. So this is a series of fetishes that I did. That's what I called them, but I didn't really know the correct term for the pieces of traditional African art that I was trying to sort of pay homage to. But after doing this series of fetishes, I realized that these pieces were supposed to be called – they were sort of inspired by the *minkisi*, which is the plural for *nkisi*, if you're familiar with the nail fetishes and things, the nail objects, that you see in the museum's collection. That's my own hair on top of the piece. These were chicken bones. This one's also about a foot high.

Female: Renee, can I ask you question?

Renee Stout: Sure.

Female: As you're creating these things, are they supposed to represent an idea, an emotion, a thought, a cultural view? What's going on inside of you?

Renee Stout: Well, when I first saw the *minkisi* when I moved to – well actually I saw my first *nkisi* at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburg where I grew up and I didn't know what it was. And back then the museum didn't really have much information next to the pieces. When you would go to the museum and see it all what it say was, "Kongo, Nail Fetish."

And so, that's where I got the name *fetish* from, from actually – seeing these things in the Carnegie Museum. But when I was living in Washington, D.C. and I was going to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, they had so much detailed information around the pieces as well as books and other things at that time that I became aware that these things were about power and making things happen and change and protection.

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And so, what I was doing was trying to create pieces that were based on my own life that would help me in my own circumstances. So, I knew I wasn't creating actual *minkisi* but what I was doing is work that was inspired by those pieces that I had seen, but that were tailored to my own life.

This was called *She Kept Her Conjuring Table Very Neat*. At some point in time, I decided that I needed an alter-ego because at that time I was very shy. And so, I created a woman named Madame Ching who was a fortuneteller and sort of like, if you've ever heard people especially in the southern United States refer to people who worked roots or knew how to create spells to create changes in people's lives. And so, my alter-ego was that woman and so I created this little table and I – this is when I think my work started to get very narrative in that I would create a piece that would have a back story to it and I would write these stories down in my sketchbooks.

So, what I would do was create a piece that used found objects as well as constructed objects, and the slippers down at the bottom were actually – I used

foam core to trace around the bottom of one of my shoes and then create the slipper and embroidered it with beads.

Now around this time, which was 1989, I took my first trip to New Orleans. Well, this picture is not from that 1989, this is actually from 2008. But I encountered a tomb inside of Saint Louis Cemetery #1 that was supposed to be the burial place of the legendary voodoo priestess Marie Laveau.

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But I didn't know that at the time. I didn't even know who Marie Laveau was at that time. But I remembered encountering this tomb as we were walking through and it had Xs all over it. And so, it stuck in my head because I couldn't figure out why somebody would go and – what I thought, desecrate somebody's tomb by putting Xs all over it.

So a couple of years later after seeing that, I encountered this book about Marie Laveau and when I started reading it I realized that Marie Laveau's tomb was functioning as a kind of nkisi or power object. So that people who would make the pilgrimage to Saint Louis Cemetery #1 to ask favors of Marie Laveau, who they considered an ancestor, they would make the Xs which was the same kind of action as driving the nail into the figures to ask for power and activating the power of the tomb in Marie Laveau's spirit. And you see the Xs.

And down in that little trough in front there was like money and things like that but some days you go there, there's like candy and beads and all kind of offerings, but the cemetery – people who maintain the cemetery, clean it up – they've actually whitewashed the tomb to try to get rid of the Xs but people just keep coming back to do it again.

And because of seeing that I came back home and I created my own version of Marie Laveau's tomb but it's kind of a mini thing. It's like, *Headstone for Marie Laveau* is what this is called. And it has the Xs but I also embedded lace into the dirt on the surface. And those little tentacle-like things are supposed to be like sort of a metaphor for the fact that her powers are coming out of the tomb. It's not – she's not dead, she's still reaching out in her own way to the living.

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This is a face pouch which I stuffed with messages and secret things. And it was actually inspired – the surfaces you'll see on some of my pieces are inspired by the surfaces you see on some of the minkisi, these accumulated materials which I don't know what all of it is. But, I love those surfaces and so I'm trying to recreate the look of those surfaces but at the same time it's a nod art history and Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*. Some of my own – I use a lot of my own hair in the work too.

This is called *Ogun*, that's the back. And *Ogun* has a lot to do with technology as Dr. Lawal brought up in his talk. So, to bring *Ogun* into the 21st century, he has computer parts from computers on the back. That's a detail. Yep! And in New Orleans, some of the places that I love to go that I'm inspired by, even though they're kind of like commercial and can be a little hokey, there's still that idea that beneath the surface in New Orleans there's still those belief systems that are operating.

So Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo is filled with all kinds of things and candles and masks and everything. The problem is they don't really identify any of the masks that they have correctly.

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If you look at some of the tags on the masks, and they're doing this specifically for tourists because they're just not going in depth about what some of these things are. Everything is labeled "money house blessing." So any mask you buy says the same thing.

Reverend Zombie's Voodoo Shop. That's a detail of Reverend Zombie's window. Once again, Marie Laveau's tomb. I keep going back. I showed that again because when I go to New Orleans, it's sort of a ritual. I have to go back to Marie Laveau's tomb and put something down there in front of it. And I've just stuck this picture in here because I'm supposed to be in character right there. That is my new alter-ego and her name is Fatima Mayfield and, once again, she's a root worker and a fortune teller. But the reason why I put this picture in there, there's something about New Orleans that is so different than any city in the United States. I mean, it's such a mixture of Spanish, French, Caribbean, I mean, just so many things going on and it's just, I just feel at home there and it's just like, I love sitting in the courtyard where I stay and that's supposed to be the character Fatima Mayfield feeling pretty much at home.

Now, I tried to recreate a sort of interior in my home that functions as an ongoing installation and I call it *Fatima's Room*. And in there it's a combination of New Orleans interior and then the visual overload of some of those shops that I showed you where you walk in and there's just so much visual information that it's overwhelming. I have books in there. That's a Haitian Vodou flag for the Gede. Masks are there.

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Books on the occult and everything else. This is another view.

This is an installation that I did based on the earlier alter-ego who was Madame Ching and this was an installation that I did at the Belger Arts Center down in Kansas City. But sometimes when I do an installation I want it to be almost like a stage set where at any moment you could expect this Fatima Mayfield or Madame Ching to walk in. And I want the viewer to, in a sense, feel like a

voyeur when they're walking around like you're viewing her objects. You're inside this person's space and the way I want it to function is I'm sort of like this person who loves to collect all these interiors magazines. I have *House Beautiful*, *World of Interiors*. And why I like looking at these magazines is that you're looking at a person's interior. You never see the person. They don't show the people who live in the interiors. But just by looking at these interiors you kind of get a sense of the person that may live there by the objects that they choose to live around and collect. So that's the way I want the viewer to feel when they're walking in one of these installations that I've done that they may not see who Fatima or Madame Ching is but they kind of can sort of draw a conclusion about this person based on the things that they have around them.

Now, in New Orleans there's a place up in Adams Morgan, if you're familiar with – I mean not New Orleans – Washington, D.C., there is a place called the Yemaya & Chango Botanica where they sell some of these roots and things that I like to collect and put into Fatima's room. And this is a detail from one of the cabinets in the room. And as you can see there are these strange soaps and bath salts and all of these things are designed to bring you either, love, or luck or draw money.

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Here's a close up. Go Away Evil, Don Juan Deniro – El Deniro. We all need that one. And if you look over on the right, the Amansa Guapos, it's a soap and just look at that because you'll see it later on in one of my paintings. So I collect these things because I like the packaging. I think the packaging is pretty interesting visually and it makes a visual collage in that room that I'm putting these things in but I'm also using them as things that come up in my painting like props you know in the still lives and things like that.

I've also decided that I wanted to make my own bottles that I set around in the room with herbs and things like that inside. So I collect old bottles and I put strange seed pods in them, too, and all of this adds to the sort of mystique of the room when the viewers come in. I did a residency at Pilchuk Glass School and I got the glass artist, Dante Marioni was the gaffer there and the gaffer is the person – they usually like to invite artists who don't normally work in glass. And you are allowed to design things and the gaffer, which is the artist that's an expert in the medium of glass, will make that object for you.

So I drew these bottles that I wanted and Dante blew the bottles for me. And then I took them and sand blasted the words in them. So, if you've ever listened to blues music, you've heard High John the Conqueror Root come up in say like Muddy Waters' tunes and things like that. Well, these three roots on the left are actually High John roots, if you ever wondered what they look like. And on the right, those are two orris roots and they're used in love work. This is one of my paintings called *Herbal Remedies*.

[00:20:07]

Male: Renee?

Renee Stout: Yes?

Male: Which came first, the art or the experience? Did you become intrigued in this voodoo culture first and then you developed your art off of that? Or was it as you did the art that you got more and more fascinated—and I'm assuming fascinated—with the sculpture.

Renee Stout: What happened was when I was – early on when I first moved to D. C. and I was going back and forth to the Museum of African Art and I was just focusing on the African Art, after I went to New Orleans and started to realize that there was a connection between Hoodoo and Voodoo of Haiti and religions in Central Africa and the Yoruba religion in West Africa, I started to make these connections like connecting the dots between all these things and the more I realize the connections, the more the art started to be inspired by those things. Because I'm continuing to try to connect those dots and make those connections. Does that answer your question?

Male: Yes.

[Laughter]

I'm just curious. It seems like a long period of time that you've been creating these pieces but they're all centered on this culture...

Renee Stout: Right. Uh-hmm, yeah. And it's interesting because see, I was trained as a painter. And yeah, and what happened was after I left Pittsburg and moved to D. C., I was so inspired by the things that I saw at the Museum of African Art, I stopped doing painting and just totally started doing mixed media Sculpture. But then, what started to happen is, about I would say maybe about ten years ago, the painter in me started coming back out. And I wanted to find a way to combine working with three dimensional objects but also painting as well.

So whenever I do paintings now, they're not just on a flat, it's not just a flat surface. The paintings even become three dimensional.

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So within a painting like this, you'll see those two sacks like up at the top that actually have herbs inside of them. But then you also see like the bottles that I actually painted. This is called *Ginseng Extract*. You see the soap over there? Yeah. So that's like a little trompe-l'œil painting I've made to look like this soap. It was on a piece of paper and then the paper was taped to the surface of the painting but it's actually painted. Even the pink slip up there that looks like it's pinned up there, it's trompe-l'œil. It's painted.

And this is a very recent painting like this was in my most recent show. But it's just a list of some of these things that you can find in these shops. This is acrylic on wood panel. This is the called *Black Room: Reverend Beach's Dream*. I'm doing this Black Room series. This is the Black Room. And in a strange way it's like what I'm trying to do is evoke a section of a wall that I imagine in this strange house where the walls themselves almost become nkisi- like. So you have, like, there's dirt on the surface, there are areas where you can kind of see beyond what's behind the wall. Like, this was done on a piece of plywood and the knot holes were used to sort of evoke a surface that would be going on behind the wall.

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And then this red little bag down at the bottom is stuffed with things, you know, of all these messages and secrets and herbs and all this things that are stuffed in and I sew the bag. I put the sequins on. That was the painting of myself that I did. This is another Black Room. This is called *Black Room with Bitches Brew* after a Miles Davis song. And this was in my most recent show and here's a close up of it.

Male: Is this chained?

Renee Stout: The chain is attached to that bottle down there. That is supposed to be the Bitches Brew with all the stuff that's inside there like seed pods and bones and all kinds of other things. But it's chained to the wall. And that's the detail. Then, the root worker also has devices that she uses. I don't know what she's supposed to be doing with them but this one is called *A Device to Stop a Man from Lying*.

[Laughter]

So the women would come to her when they're having problems and they'd stick a picture of the man in the jar and this device works some kind of way to make him tell the truth.

[Laughter]

This one is called *Cures*. And I like this whole idea of – when you see those little bottles that I have up there, I keep going back to the minkisi and if you're familiar with the ones that have the little stomach cavity with – sometimes it's a mirror and then sometimes it'll be a piece of glass that may be like a little foggy so you can't quite see what's going on inside.

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Well, I like that idea that sometimes you can see but you can't quite see everything. So I stuffed the jars with different things and I proceeded to create a surface that allows you to see somewhat but then it obscures it a little bit and

I like that sense of mystery about what's going on behind the glass. And this is the last slide. This is going back to the interiors, well, at some point in time I realized that even I wanted to know what Fatima Mayfield looked like so I bought a series of wigs. And she'll wear these different wigs for different clients like, for example, black women—

Like, for example, I have dreadlocks. When my grandmother was alive I didn't have dreadlocks. If she were alive today, she'd have a fit because this is not something that black women, older black women, would have liked. So, in the story that I have going on – I have this on-going narrative where Fatima has aunts that were root workers themselves and passed all this knowledge down onto her. Well, after the aunts died, Fatima had to take over those clients. So she would not offend the older women who were her aunt's clients who came to her for the potions and the things that they needed, remedies that they needed, she would put on a straight wig with bangs and cover up her dreadlocks.

So I have that wig, I have just a series wigs and she would wear different ones. Well, I also made a strange hat out of my own dreadlocks that I keep cut kind of short because they get really long and they're heavy. So I keep them cut. But I actually take the dreadlocks and sew them on the hat. And so she's wearing this hat and it's kind of a conjuring hat where she'd almost – the hair almost works like tentacles or antenna for the ancestors to send her the advice and the messages that she needs to help her clients.

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So in this particular picture she's giving a reading to somebody. So now I've started performing the alter-ego by setting up a camera and setting up – like in my house, that one room that I was showing you scenes from, that functions as one of my backdrops for several photographs that I have done. So these are staged photographs where I'll setup the camera and then run in. But this is one of the ones that I did in New Orleans. And so that's the end. So if you have any questions?

Male: Did you [inaudible]?

Renee Stout: Uh-hmm. And if you remember the other photographs I did where I was standing next to Marie Laveau's tomb, I have to have one then.

Male: [Inaudible].

Renee Stout: Hmm?

Male: I recognize the [inaudible].

Renee Stout: Yeah. It's just that I got my mother to crochet this black, this cap, for me and every time I cut my hair I keep it and then I sit down and I just start sewing it on.

I have so many more locks that I have to put on there but it's like really tedious work to do it so pretty soon it's going to be really full, really full. And some of them are going to be longer so it's going to be probably end up coming a way out like that eventually. So I'm going to keep adding to it.

Female: I have a question on the face that was like lying sideways, I don't remember the name of it...

Renee Stout: Face pouch, uh-hmm.

Female: Face pouch, what was that? Was it made of fabric? What was that made off?

Renee Stout: It was actually made of leather on the top and the face itself was – you know those Styrofoam wig stands? Well, because the face is so stylized I didn't really like it so I took a mat knife and started carving it to make it look more human like. And then I started layering it with dirt and acrylic paint and paper.

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Like paper and then acrylic paint and then dirt and then it had that kind of rough surface when I was done and I peeled it off of the Styrofoam mold so it kind of – the Styrofoam wig stand acted as a mold for me. And so then I had the face and I sewed the leather around it and made a pouch so it actually is a pouch that I then put things in and it made a draw string and then put all the hair around it.

Roslyn Adele Walker: [whisper] Would you tell them about your first encounter with African art?

Renee Stout: Dr. Walker wants me to tell you about my first encounter with African Art and it was when I was ten years old in Pittsburgh and I was in the Pittsburgh public school system and in the fourth grade my teacher was asked to suggest children that she thought would be good for a program that they were having at the Carnegie Museum on Saturdays for kids who were talented in drawing. And so she told my mother that she had put my name in for that so on Saturdays my father would drive me to the Carnegie Museum.

And we would sit in a lecture hall like this and there were kids from all over the city and so there was a man named Mr. Fitzpatrick who had been an art teacher in the Pittsburgh public school system for a really long time. He had retired so he was doing these Saturday art classes, he was conducting them. So he would talk to us for a while about art and then he would lead us into the natural history part of the museum where we would draw from some of the cases with the animal displays and anthropology displays and things like that.

So one day I was passing a case and there was this figure in there and it was about that high and it was made out of wood and had all these nails stuck in it and I was fascinated by it and I kept wanting to see it all the time and I remember there was a little boy in back of me one day and he's like, "Look at that voodoo doll!"

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So I really don't know what that meant but that image of that piece stuck in my head for the longest time and I think that's why, when I finally moved to D. C., I was so fascinated by the Museum of African Art there because there were many more figures like that. And this time they were explained. I got an idea of what they were actually about.

Any more questions?

Male:

I don't know how to phrase this as a question, I would like to say that I'd love to know more about the connections you're making between – you mention everything from the Diaspora to New Orleans culture to the Congo, the Yoruba, Nigeria, all these different cultures and peoples obviously very diverse. How are the connections—how are you making them? How they're influencing you? If you wouldn't mind talking about that...

Renee Stout:

Yeah, you know what? That is the hardest thing to explain. It's almost an intuitive thing where when I went to New Orleans suddenly the things that I had seen in the museum, I saw in the culture, just happening in the culture and I could walk in these stores and even though a lot of the stuff was geared towards tourism and pretty commercial, I got the idea that there was something more going on below the surface in this city. I started going to New Orleans in 1989 and the more I started going there, the more I started meeting people who were actually explaining more to me about the culture of New Orleans.

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And some of the traditional practices that were related to the religions that the Yoruba and the Congo people had brought with them as they were brought across the Atlantic and so it's connecting those kind of dots and even though it's like fragmented, it's like you understand that there is a connection and within the diaspora these things continue to live and so when I went to Jamaica, and Cuba I saw more. So it's kind of hard to explain because as an artist I react visually to things, whereas Dr. Lawal can articulate it on a different level.

I'm seeing it in a visual way and trying to sort of digest it that way and let that influence come through in the art of what I'm seeing and the connections that I'm making. So I don't know if that helps you understand but it's kind of a – it's hard to break it down, it's too complex, it's just –

Male:

[inaudible]

Renee Stout:

Right. Yeah, because it is the way I express what I'm seeing and feeling but all of these things are just so complex that I just can't give you the answer about how I'm connecting these dots and why.

Male: Is the fact that these are literally living cultures integral or just a side note? You have these personas that you create. You put parts of yourself into your art. And I think in so many different forms of art today there's a distance, right? But the whole premise of yours, let me know if I'm wrong as I ask the question, is that it's still there. It's still very much alive, very much living.

Renee Stout: Yeah, and it's like in some ways like I went to visit a gallery the other day in New York because I used to be represented by a gallery in New York who'd moved to Florida.

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So I hadn't had a New York representation since about, I think it was like 1999 or something like that, 2000. But one of the things he said after looking at a series of my work and I know that it looks like it's all over the place, although there are these threads that run through the work so if you see an exhibition of my show it does make sense even though you're seeing painting, drawing, sculpture and everything.

But one of the things he said is, "I noticed there's a kind of nostalgia," and that wasn't the word that I felt applied to my work, in a sense, even though I am kind of dealing with things that can look like they're from the past because I am trying to sort of make these connections between the past and the present because I think these are living religions and they continue to live and sort of adopt to the changing lives of people. They're not static. They change with the needs of people. And I think that that's what I'm trying to focus on in the work that I make and I'm not that New York type of artist where the work is all about sarcasm or it has to be the big shiny new thing.

It's like I'm always wanting to examine things that were and how they connect to things the way they are now, if that make sense. Always trying to find this kind of continuity between the past, the present, and then hopefully what indication and what does it mean for the future as an artist. That's what I'm interested in.

Male: Continuation of tradition.

Renee Stout: Exactly. Because if it's a living thing that can grow and change with people's needs in the 21st century, that's how it lives. It's not just something that— it can't change and it's static and we don't need it anymore.

[00:37:59]

Especially as we live in times like this where we are looking for meaning and I think that that's why I continue to do what I do because I'm looking for meaning and hopefully the questions that I'm asking or the questions that I'm posing help people to have a dialogue about this, like we are right now.

Male: [Inaudible]. [Laughter]. About the picture [inaudible], is that just like a picture you did for yourself or are you going to make a print of it? I like it because it's like – I might be wrong, I don't want to misunderstand you by any means – but it's just like getting the reading that [inaudible].

Renee Stout: You know what? Actually that was a print in my show. I did it as digital archival, what do you call it? Archival pigment print, and it was 30 x 40, so it's pretty big. And I'll tell you an interesting story about this piece. This is an artist friend of mine. I went down to New Orleans and of course I have a series of photographs that I've been taking and I recruit my friends to be characters in this ongoing narrative and I don't tell them who they're supposed to be. I say, "Who do you want to be, who's your alter-ego and how does that alter-ego interact with Fatima Mayfield?" Are you a client of hers or are you a friend?

So he was one of my friends, so I went down to New Orleans and I said, "You have to pick the character you want to be." So he said, "Okay." He said his name was Seth[?] Angel. So I said okay. So I set up the tripod and ran back and took the picture and so when I got home, when I was looking through the images, I really liked this one and this is why I chose to use this one as the one that I created for the show.

[00:40:00]

Well, this was taken in 2008 but it was printed in 2010. Well, what happened was this was March of 2008, my friend died in April of 2009, and when I looked at this photograph it was like oh my god, and without me even saying anything you just looked at that and you said it looks ghostly. And this time I visited was the last time I saw him.

Male: [Inaudible]

Renee Stout: [Laughs]

Female: I love your art because it takes a subject that was powerfully dismissed in my household, that this....[inaudible] voodoo was antichristian and discarded as significant or even acceptable and as I look at your work, your pieces, they give credence not only to the function, the depth of meaning, behind this tradition and understanding [inaudible] is changing...

Renee Stout: Well, what I always thought was interesting is like when you look at the Civil Rights movement and how all of a sudden like "Okay, well black is beautiful." We're going to have – wear Afros and then now with dreadlocks and things like that, and you can put on a dashiki and you can wear kente cloth but you better not talk about any African religions. You can do the surface thing but what about the spiritual – don't touch it – and I could never understand that. And so in doing the work that I'm doing I would never show my grandmother. My mother's mother would have a fit if she saw the kind of work I was doing.

[Laughter]

While my mother, on the other hand, she may not understand but she's like you know, my daughter's happy and that's all that matters even if I don't understand. It's like she sees that I'm enjoying my work and getting something from it and so it's okay with her.

Female: ...Do you have a particular piece that resonates the most...[inaudible]...

Female: I think that the first pieces that I showed, which it was one of the pieces that's here in the Dallas Museum. There are two that I showed there are here. There was a body of work that I did between 1988 and 1995 that I think I really, really liked because – and I think that the event that really – it was moving to D. C., I think, and moving away from home and just being on my own and a lot of self-discovery. I think that the work that I was doing back then was very liberating for me and I think that that's probably one of my favorite periods in the several bodies of work that I've done but I also felt like there's something coming.

[00:44:06]

My last show I think was a really good cohesive show and I think it was the best one I had since that time so I'm thinking that something else is brewing now. It's like I'm going to another level. I don't know what it is, I just feel it but that period I think was one of my favorites.

Female: How do you know or what inspires the new personas?

Renee Stout: Here's what happened.

Female: Ok. I'm just curious.

Renee Stout: Yeah, I can tell you what happened. Madame Ching was one that I created when I was in my 30s and it was because, like I said, I was shy. I still am but I've gotten over it and I have to talk about my work all the time so I don't worry about it anymore. But I projected this woman who I saw as in her 60s because I felt in my 30s, yeah, when I'm 60 I'm going to say whatever I felt like saying and I'm – so Madame Ching was 60. Well, what happened was I got to be 40 and realized – I don't know if other women in here felt this way but once you hit 40 it's like wait a minute, I can say anything I want to say.

You know, you've always been the good daughter, the good mother, the good this, but who do you want to be for yourself? And I hit that at 40 thinking, "wait a minute," and I think that I needed a new alter-ego for that new person that I was and that – where I was in my life and I think Fatima Mayfield came out then and she's actually my age but she's the woman that I wish that I could be. I think that – well, people say to me what happened to Madame Ching? I said she was absorbed. I became that and it's like I moved on and then Fatima Mayfield came out. She's a little bit more bolder than I am but I think, I'm

realizing that the things that come out of my mouth these days, I think I've already turned into Fatima already.

[Laughter]

[00:46:07]

So that's what the alter-egos were about, projecting the person that I needed to be and that I could act out through.

Female: What's the typical creative day like for you?

Renee Stout: I do a lot of goofing off because I work at home. I do a lot of goofing off but what starts to happen, I say it's goofing off but I think I'm always absorbing stuff and thinking about work that I want to do and I have notebooks filled with pieces that I want to make and ideas I want to explore and what starts to happen is like for example, I have a show every two years because I show with this gallery and my time to have a show there comes around like every two years. And I may do some reading, piddling around, but then all of a sudden stuff starts to gel and I switched into high gear.

And all of a sudden it's like I'm working, working, working, working that's when I have a show approaching. But in between time like right now because I just had a show there's a lot of just exploring things and reading and researching and playing around on the internet and just moving stuff around in the house. Objects that I have that all of a sudden I'm like – I drove past some place the other day, found all this rusty metal where somebody was doing some construction, put all of it on the back of the truck, took it home, lay it up in the studio.

So it's like gathering, gathering things, reading and just information, just gathering stuff. So that's pretty much a typical day between going to the store and cleaning up the house and all the other stuff.

[00:48:08]

Thank you.

Roslyn Walker: Gosh, conscious schizophrenic comes to mind.

Renee Stout: That's exactly what it is. I like that.

Roslyn Walker: Well, this has been wonderful. Thank you so much, the night is still young. I think at 10:30 the Dallas Black Dance Theater is going to come into this room and perform, I think they're going to perform the suite of dances inspired by *African Masks*, *the Art of Disguise* and you're welcome to enjoy everything else that's going on. They're may still be some Sara Lee cheese cake too. It's really

sweet. So enjoy. Thanks so much for being part of this evening. We really appreciate it. We love you. Thank you.

[Applause]

[00:49:10]