



Unearthing a Masterpiece

Pat Renick's famous but long unseen 'Stegowagenvolkssaurus' is back

MATT MORRIS // JAN 21, 2009

In the 1970s, Cincinnati's Patricia Renick was one of a generation of women sculptors who came into their own as wildly influential artists who broadened the possibilities of what sculpture and art could look like. It could even look like a cross between a stegosaurus and a Volkswagen, as one of her most famous monumental sculptures, 1974's "Stegowagenvolkssaurus," or "Stego" for short, in fact did.

Since Renick passed away in 2007, Laura Chapman — her longtime companion and executor of her estate — has begun to find places for some of the enormous and historically significant sculptures that Renick made in her lifetime. This Friday, at a gala event from 5-7 p.m., “Stego” will be reintroduced to the public — after being restored — on the third floor of Northern Kentucky University’s W. Frank Steely Library. The work is on long-term loan to NKU.

“Stego” is a 12-by-20-foot hybrid that attaches the body of an adult stegosaurus dinosaur around a Volkswagen car. In her artist statement, Renick explained that her creation — made from a car widely regarded as fuel-efficient — “is a commentary on the possible fate of the automobile in a society unwilling to give up some individual freedom of movement in order to conserve energy resources. As a consequence, even the fuel-efficient automobiles of the future may become as obsolete as the stegosaurus of the past.”

When it was first presented at the Cincinnati Art Museum, a media storm gathered around the exhibition, commenting on its relevance to political and world events of the day. But like most masterpieces, its relevance continues on, and if the issues it raised were scary in the 1970s, around the time of the first oil embargo, they are fast reaching another crisis point now. It also was shown at Contemporary Arts Center.

Although it was exhibited prominently throughout the '70s, “Stego” was severely damaged by a de-installation crew following an exhibition at the Dirksen Federal Building in Chicago. When Renick was awarded a check for damages, she put it toward other new ambitious projects and, as Chapman said in a recent interview at their studio, the work “languished in the garage” at their home in Clifton.

When two friends of Renick, Mark Schlachter and E. Pope Coleman, found an appropriate space at NKU for the work, Chapman began the restoration. Arne Almquist, associate provost for library services at NKU, chose a vaulting atrium space inside the Steely Library for the display.

“It’s a perfectly beautiful location for the work,” Chapman said. In fact, the space seems almost intended as a context for such a giant sculpture. A base similar to the one it was originally presented on has been constructed and adorned with the work’s original plaque. (Renick meant to conjure up some of the tropes of a natural history museum.)

Awaiting the unveiling, the sculpture has been draped in red felt borrowed from NKU’s theater department. Renick was an educator for 31 years as well as being one of the most important contemporary artists to work in Cincinnati, so a university library seems like a spectacular

home for one of her sculptures. There it might act as a reference point in research, inquiry and speculation.

STEGO's Friday unveiling ceremony is open to the public, but reservations are required. Parking will be provided on the NKU campus in lots I, W and D. To RSVP, call 859-572-5810.

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