

2014

Surprising Ourselves | RISD Interim President

Rosanne Somerson
Rhode Island School of Design, rsomerso@risd.edu

RISDxyz
Rhode Island School of Design, risdxyz@risd.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdxyz_fallwinter20142015



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Art Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Somerson, Rosanne and RISDxyz, "Surprising Ourselves | RISD Interim President" (2014). *RISD XYZ Fall/Winter 2014/2015*. 5.

https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/risdxyz_fallwinter20142015/5

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the RISD XYZ | Rhode Island School of Design alumni magazine at DigitalCommons@RISD. It has been accepted for inclusion in RISD XYZ Fall/Winter 2014/2015 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@RISD. For more information, please contact mpompeli@risd.edu.

Surprising Ourselves

■ a message from
Rosanne Somerson 76 ID
Interim President



THIS FALL RISD welcomed 733 new freshmen, transfer students, and graduate students to our vibrant community. I was a new student once myself and remember it well—drawing for hours and hours in studio, inventing new structures and forms, and trudging up the hill wrestling with projects too

big to carry. It was a full immersion in becoming an artist and designer, and I was nervous. But I was also excited, infused with an intensity and energy that soon manifested in my work and in my ideas. It was a rapid learning curve—I was changing, my work was changing and my sense of time was changing: fast felt slow and slow felt *focused*.

Back then I didn't fully understand what my RISD education would mean to me, and how it would inform every aspect of my life and my career as a furniture-designer and -maker, teacher and academic leader. I wasn't always confident—and the work I made wasn't always successful—but my personal growth and development was so evident that I just kept going, and the work ethic I developed in that first year gave me the confidence to continue taking on new and bigger challenges.

I spent incredibly long hours in the studio, the wood shop and the library, but I also worked at outside jobs—up to three at a time. One of my jobs was waitressing at a small French restaurant alongside two other students, another waitperson and a dishwasher. Had someone told me then that the other waitress—**Mig Perkins** 76 PT, a painting major—would become a well-known design consultant and visual display designer for Barney's stores I would have been surprised and pleased. Had they gone on to tell me that our dishwasher, **David Byrne**, would co-found the Talking Heads and become a famous author, filmmaker and



“I was changing, my work was changing and my sense of time was changing: fast felt slow and slow felt *focused*.”



cultural icon, I would have been amazed, but not totally surprised (even then it was clear that he was going places). If someone had told me that I would design furniture that would end up in corporate and museum collections I might not have believed it. And I couldn't ever have imagined that I would become interim president of RISD.

But that's the thing about a RISD education—it prepares you for life and work, but often in surprising ways. Look at yourself and your friends from RISD and think about the impact you're having on the world. The learning that happens here—the intense personal growth and transformation in the studio, the contextual richness gained from liberal arts courses, the ability to take an apparently impossible challenge and turn it into a tangible result—it is truly world- and life-changing.

With a RISD education students develop the ability to do nearly anything they can imagine—and their

imaginations are second to none. In recent years, we've spoken often about *critical making*, the relationship between critical thinking and doing—high-level making that is personally rich and also critical

“Remember that the world desperately needs what you do.”

to society. While the term might be new, it represents what RISD has always stood for, and what is so evident in the work of our alumni. You are enriching and reinventing the world every day.