

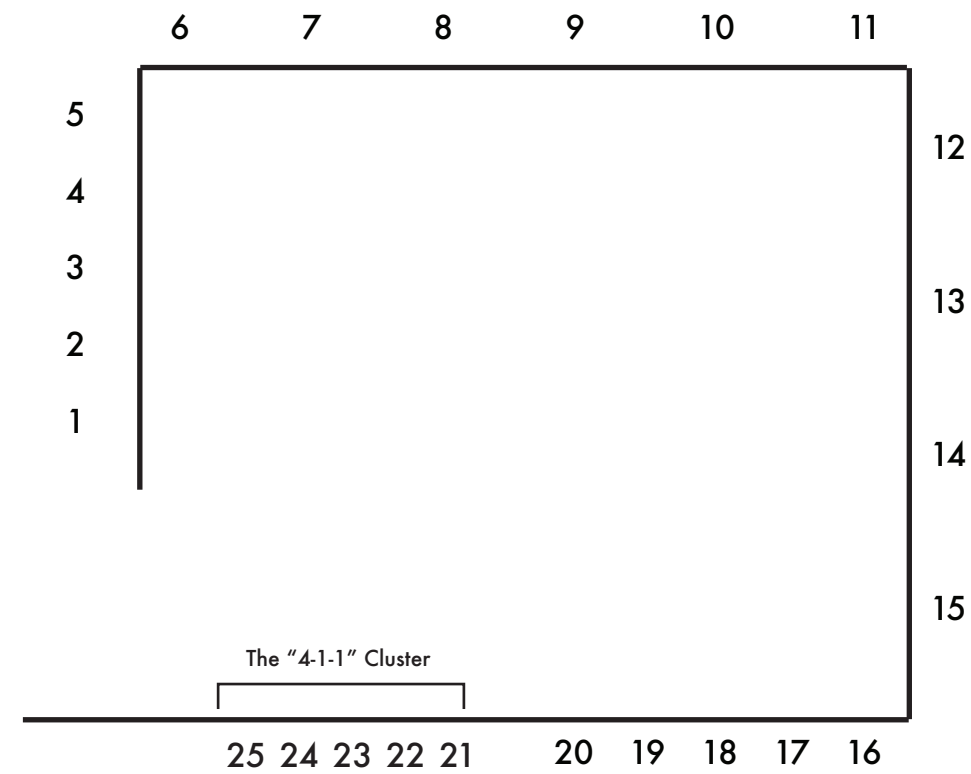


GALLERY GUIDE

SCAN CODE WITH YOUR PHONE'S CAMERA FOR EXHIBITION PLAYLIST:



OR VISIT
loganexhibitions.
uchicago.edu/truthandbeauty



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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Freedom Costs</i>, 2004, Renaldo Hudson 2. <i>Grandfathers Prayer</i>, 2001, Renaldo Hudson 3. <i>6th Grade Blues</i>, 2003, Renaldo Hudson 4. <i>Meditation</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 5. <i>Fall</i>, 2019, Renaldo Hudson 6. <i>Dream</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 7. <i>Hunger Strike</i>, 2002, Renaldo Hudson 8. <i>Real Criminal</i>, 2004, Renaldo Hudson 9. <i>Seriously Mentally Ill</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 10. <i>Death By Incarceration</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 11. <i>Life Without Parole</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 12. <i>Harriet Tubman</i>, 1996, Renaldo Hudson 13. <i>Baptism</i>, 1996, Renaldo Hudson 14. <i>Sunny</i>, 2019, Renaldo Hudson | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. <i>The View From My Cage</i>, 1999, Renaldo Hudson 16. <i>Forgotten Women of COVID</i>, after Renaldo Hudson, 2021, Tara Betts 17. <i>The Forgotten Women of Covid-19</i>, 2021, Renaldo Hudson 18. <i>Are You Ready?</i>, 2020, Tara Betts 19. <i>Think Think</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 20. <i>excerpts from the Alice Coltrane haiku and tanka series</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 21. <i>What's the 4-1-1?</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 22. <i>Ain't Really Love</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 23. <i>If You Love Me</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 24. <i>Pony</i>, 2021, Tara Betts 25. <i>I Can See in Color</i>, 2021, Tara Betts |
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Exhibition Playlist

Artists Tara Betts and Renaldo Hudson both chose selections of songs to accompany this exhibition. Their songs are paired with featured works.

Explore the playlist and the song pairings here: bit.ly/GalleryPlaylistBlogPost

Cover: Renaldo Hudson, "Forgotten Women of Covid-19" Opposite panel: Isiah ThoughtPoet Veney.

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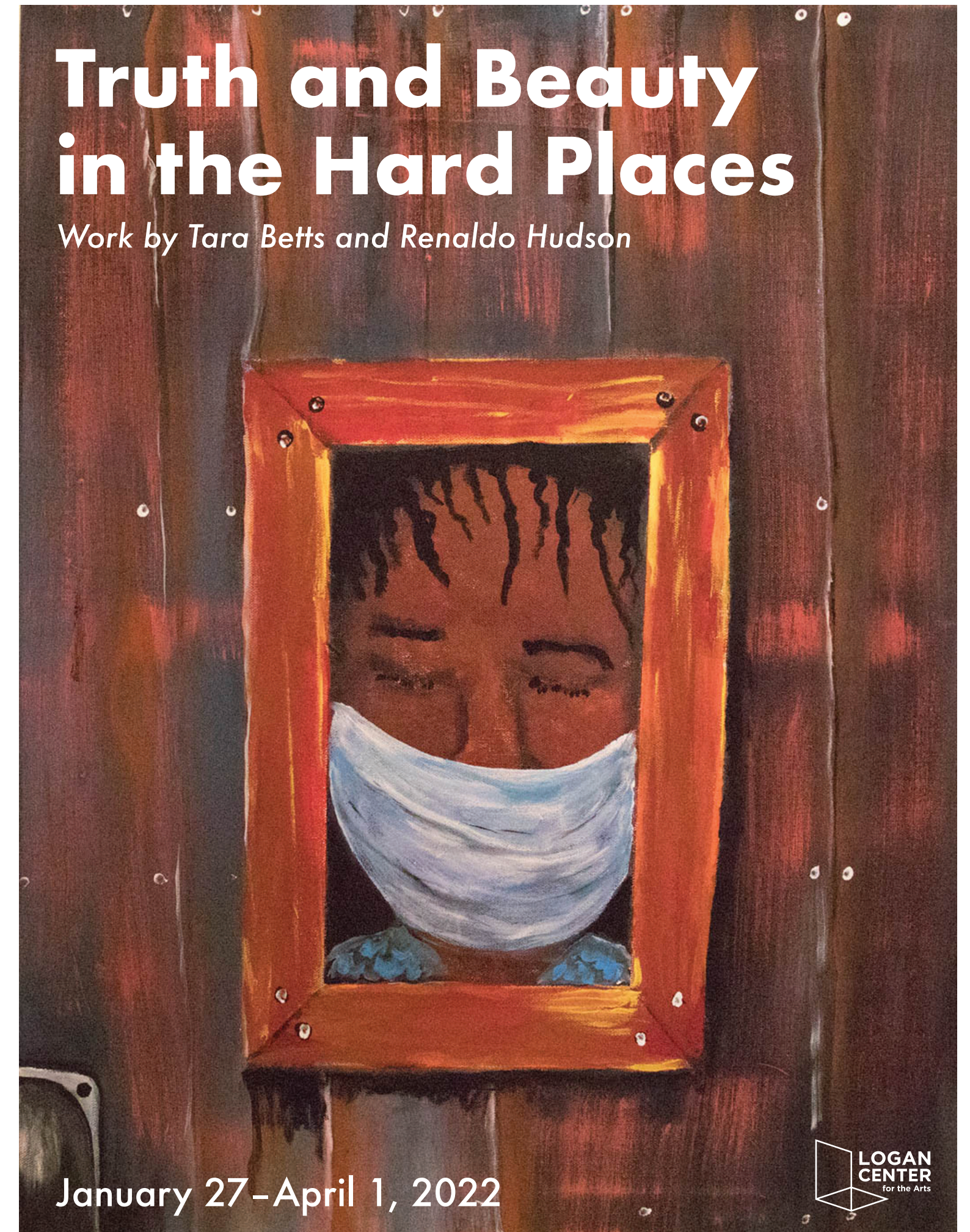
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Dr. **TARA BETTS** is the author of *Break the Habit*, *Arc & Hue*, and the forthcoming *Refuse to Disappear*. In addition to working as an editor, a teaching artist, and a mentor for other writers, she has taught at several universities. She is the inaugural 2021 Poet-for-the-People Practitioner Fellow with the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at The University of Chicago and founder of Whirlwind Learning Center. Betts is currently teaching poetry classes at DePaul University and Northwestern University.

RENALDO HUDSON identifies as an artistic expressionist committed to ending mass incarceration. His art is reflective of the pain and the beauty of resisting the status quo. While on death row, Hudson learned to express himself with oil and acrylic paints to escape its horrors. Now that he is free, he makes art to expose the inhumanity of death by incarceration facing people with life sentences, also known as "the other death penalty." Hudson is the inaugural 2021 Artist-for-the-People Practitioner Fellow with the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at The University of Chicago. He is also the Education Director of the Illinois Prison Project.

"Even if you're not ready to begin, it cannot always be the end."

—Tara Betts



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

CAFÉ LOGAN

REVA AND DAVID
LOGAN CENTER
FOR THE ARTS

915 E 60TH ST
CHICAGO, IL
60637

JAN 27 -
APR 1, 2022

MON-FRI
8am-8pm
SAT-SUN
12pm-8pm

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This exhibition represents the culmination of year-long residencies by creatives Tara Betts and Renaldo Hudson, inaugural “Poet/Artist for the People” Practitioners-in-Residence at the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture and the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab at The University of Chicago.

The works featured in *Truth and Beauty in the Hard Places* excavate the brokenness and resilience evident in our shared humanity. For Tara Betts, “poetry has always been the wellspring of hope, where I could hew words into affirmation, analysis, metaphor, and storytelling.” Betts’s poems in *Truth and Beauty* explore what it means to live deeply, especially during a pandemic.

For Renaldo Hudson, art serves as a vehicle for truth telling. He began to paint while he was on Illinois’ death row to “escape” his harsh surroundings and the death sentence that had been imposed on him by the state. His paintings are illustrations of the hard truths that he believes the world needs to see. “Beauty can come from ashes,” Hudson says, and his paintings reflect his unique lived experiences as a once condemned man who found his way to freedom.

Together, these works by Betts and Hudson invite viewers to consider who we are as a people and who we want to be by facing the truth and beauty in our past, present and future.

THANK YOU

This exhibition is presented by the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, and the Pozen Center Human Rights Lab. The “Poet/Artist for the People” Practitioners-in-Residence Fellowships are supported in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s grant to the Centering Race Consortium (CRC), a collaboration between UChicago, Brown, Stanford and Yale Universities. This exhibition was organized by Leigh Fagin, Alice Kim, Tracye Matthews and Indigo (Madi) Wright, with support from Beth Awano, Yazud Brito-Milian, Scott Campbell, and Juelle Daley. We would also like to thank programmatic and promotional collaborators Clare Austen-Smith, Ronia Holmes, Emily Hooper Lansana, Illinois Humanities, and Tierra Kilpatrick.

Several works on view were generously loaned by Alice Kim, Katie Nordine, Joan Parkin, Thomas Powers, and Jenny Soble.



RELATED EVENTS

Artist Live:
Renaldo Hudson
in conversation
with Indigo
(Madi) Wright
Fri, Feb 25,
12pm / Zoom

Artist Live: Tara
Betts in
conversation with
Eve Ewing
Wed, Mar 2,
5pm / Zoom

Closing
Reception, ft. a
conversation
between Tara
Betts and
Renaldo Hudson,
moderated by
Alice Kim and
Tracye Matthews
Fri, Apr 1,
6pm / Café Logan

“Yes, the morning” by Tara Betts

In December 2021, I found myself at the Illinois Prison Project at the Monadnock Building in Chicago’s bustling downtown hub. Visual artist Renaldo Hudson was putting the finishing touches on a painting of a landscape with fine brushes of greenery, a hilltop, delicate birds, and shimmering strokes of dew, but what caught me most was this quality of light that reminded me of the morning, yellow and glorious like the sun should’ve arrived with trumpets blasting. I noticed it in some of his other paintings and commented on it. Renaldo said to me that the morning always reminds him of hope. It made me think of Gwendolyn Brooks’ line from “Speech to the Young: Speech to the Progress-Toward” that’s become popular as a sample in Kanye West’s “Praise God” where West’s mother Dr. Donda West recites “even if you are not ready for the day, it cannot always be night.” I also thought of James Baldwin’s letter to Angela Davis from *If They Come in the Morning* where the visionary writer says to his sister:

“If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impossible with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night. So, yes, the morning is a site of hope and new beginnings, but it also about renewed resolve and strength upon waking.”

The eye-opening work of Renaldo’s paintings are a series of works done mostly in acrylics and a few oil paintings ranging from the 1990s to 2021, and offer visual counter-stories to how people have been trained to view people within America’s prisons. Hudson says that he prizes expression

over perfection, and his ideas are visually engaging as you spend more and more time looking. The contrast of brown and red in burnt sienna, rust, and other shades as elemental as blood in his paintings is evocative. I thought about the vertical orientation of lines that look like bars, even in paintings where there are no bars, an officer’s hand grabbing a man’s head like a claw as blood begins to gather around each fingertip, a faceless man inside a cell with a noose around his neck, and how a child looks out of a classroom doorway. These images tell us so much about how humanity is undermined, yet it still peeks out, like weeds breaking through the edges of pavement. Even as Hudson offers these works, there is a willingness on his part to continually question who he is, what he could be, and in a larger view, who are the rest of us?

In this exhibit “Truth and Beauty in the Hard Places,” there is a stark and sometimes celebratory display of images and words that explore mass incarceration, policing, music, Blackness, gender, and resilience. The work here explores the dark places that Hudson has witnessed and has sought to expose, not just to reveal the truth, but to stress that beauty can and does exist in those hard and horrifying places too.

For me, poetry has always been the wellspring of hope, where I could hew words into affirmation, analysis, metaphor, and storytelling. The poems here reflect some of those truths in lyrical and metaphorical adventures, but I drifted toward some poems that resembled the dawn and how miraculous an unbroken spirit can be. I listened to Alice Coltrane’s albums throughout 2021 to

bolster my spirit throughout the pandemic after I had witnessed the January 6th attack on the Capitol by Americans who were not happy with Trump’s exit from The White House after Biden’s electoral victory.

As I saw people smash windows and rush into the halls, I questioned why I was exposing myself to this and exacerbating the palpable anxiety that I was feeling with other people I knew across the country and the globe. It wasn’t just the pandemic, the fretting about how to pay rent and get groceries when we can’t go to work, endless zoom meetings (if you had technology), grieving for friends, family members, and incarcerated people lost to COVID, the trauma of witnessing George Floyd’s death and the cut short beauty of Breonna Taylor on repeat. The exhaustion of isolation paired with overstimulation and constant stress was enough.

I started meditating and listening to Coltrane. I thought about how R&B signaled the inklings of love and heartbreak. I buoyed myself with the words of Gwendolyn Brooks, Angela Jackson, and James Baldwin. I pored through Nicole Fleetwood’s *Marking Time* and how she lovingly tended to the analysis and scholarship of art because of family members who experienced incarceration and how it impacted the ecosystem of her own family. I found myself writing from that and exploring short forms like haiku, tanka, and a new form that I call “the 4-1-1” because we need to give each other that information from living deeply, not just what we read, watch, or listen to as consumers of creative work.

When I interact with Renaldo Hudson, I sense healing from trauma, but a strong spirit engaged with self-care, thoughtfulness, and a hope that stays

consistently accountable to exploring who he was and who he is still becoming. Every time we talk it is a joy because Renaldo will cut so quickly to what really matters in this finite time that each of us has on this planet. Renaldo’s office is so different from my home where I was writing for most of 2021. There are big, broad windows letting in so much of the morning sun, a desk busy with papers, and a full calendar on his desktop monitor, chart paper is stuck to the walls for a storytelling workshop, an erasable wall calendar is also packed with appointments, but the long table is covered with tubes of paint and brushes. The typical tools of his busy life where he undertakes so many roles.

I was struck by how ordinary this office might seem until I looked at the objects on the windowsill just behind his desk—copies of Dudley Randall’s *The Black Poets* (which I’ve taught at Stateville Prison), Ronnie Kitchen’s memoir *My Midnight Years*, a reproduction of the Civil Rights Movement declaration “I AM A MAN,” and a small American flag. This gathering reminded me of how there is so much beauty in the ugliest situations and places and that there is beauty in the truth too. That America is our home, but it is also a dysfunctional home that needs to amend its toxic behavior to do and be better. Until then, we are all figuring out how to help each other and heal ourselves.

Hopefully, these works encourage you to explore the possibilities of hope, truth, and beauty, even in those places and moments where we think none of those concepts seem possible.