New York-based artist Sto Len returns to his hometown of Alexandria, VA as the first artist in residence at AlexRenew. During his residency, Sto will create a new series of artwork entitled RENEWAL that will use Alexandria’s water as his subject and sometimes even his medium. As a printmaker, Len collects the imprints of the world around us, from the natural patterns in water to the abstract shapes of trash picked up along the Potomac River. Employing traditional analog print techniques such as marbling, block printing, and cyanotype, Sto Len updates these methods by using pollution, bacteria and waste as art materials. This repurposed visual language documents the landscape and begins to unpack the environmental impact of humans by revealing what often goes unseen or ignored.
RENEWAL aims to renew our relationship to local water by providing an opportunity for the public to engage with waterfront sites in new ways that both raise awareness and engagement around the city’s water. In this spirit, Sto Len will host pop up events that will be held throughout the year at locations such as Hoof’s Run, Jones Point, and Oronoco Bay. These are environmentally impacted sites that RiverRenew plans to remediate by creating new tunnels to intercept the outflow of waste that currently runs into the Potomac River. There will be group printmaking workshops where participants can make art to take home as well as help create a larger work with the artist. Live music, video screenings and performances will also accompany some of the events, which will all be free and open to the public. The culmination of these events will be held at an exhibition by the year’s end.

Growing up in Alexandria, VA, Sto was influenced by the art and activism of the Washington DC punk scene, which he continues to embody through artwork that combines those ethics with experimental takes on traditional craft. Sto has exhibited his artwork internationally, including exhibitions in NY, Vietnam, Japan, France, Germany, Australia, Denmark, and Canada.
RENEWAL POP UP ACTIVATIONS

The RENEWAL pop-up events will take place outdoors at locations including Hoof’s Run, Jones Point, and Oronoco Bay. The aim of these events is to activate often overlooked public spaces near environmentally impacted waterways and create new connections between the public, their local water, and the upcoming work of RiverRenew.

At each event, an art workshop will take place where participants can learn different types of printmaking such as suminagashi paper marbling, gyotaku printing, and cyanotype. Participants will create art that they can take home while collaborating on a larger work of art with the artist.

Other events will include impromptu video projection throughout the city, live radio broadcasts, readings, music, video screenings, and more.
WORKSHOPS

Potential Locations: Hoofs Run, Jones Point, Oronoco Bay, + more including joining existing event sites by AlexRenew and the Office of the Arts

Suminagashi Workshop
Suminagashi (or floating ink) is a traditional Japanese printmaking technique that creates a marbled design on paper or fabric. This is a meditative practice that allows the participant to work with water and get to know it as an unpredictable material that requires patience and improvisation to create the desired effect.

Materials: Sumi ink, white and colored paper, white fabric, water, 2-3 buckets, jars, trays (or aluminum pans), sumi brushes, sponge, paper towel, dish soap,
**Site:** (Oronoco Bay) Access to water and a way to dispose of the water afterwards. A place to dry prints - printing rack or just lay them on the ground.

**Description:**
Participants will learn about the history of suminagashi and the site of the workshop. We will collect water from the nearest source and walk back to the Mobile Art Lab to create the works. This walk is a chance to reflect on the privilege we have to access clean water and how many others have to walk as far as 3 miles for 1 bucket of clean water. Automatic drawing with sumi ink on paper gets each participant used to the ink and brush. Then we fill our trays with water about a fingertip deep and proceed to paint on the water’s surface slowly and meditatively. Each participant will have time to make several prints to take home and will create at least one on paper and fabric for me to keep and use as part of RENEWAL quilt, a community-created work of art derived from prints at each workshop.
Gyotaku Workshop

Gyotaku (or fish impression) is a traditional Japanese printmaking technique used by fishermen to document the fish they caught. Dating back to the mid 1800s, it utilizes the fish’s actual body as a printing block. The fish is inked with sumi ink and then paper is laid on the body, gently rubbed and then slowly removed.

Materials: a fish (model and/or real), rice or washi paper, sumi ink, brushes, water, sponge, bucket, jars for ink, flat surface or tables + chairs, trash bags, gloves, trash pickup arms.

Site: (Jones Point) Access to found materials along a waterfront. A space to sit and work.

Description: Participants will learn the history of Gyotaku as well as the site we are using. We will take a walk around to collect trash and other things we find of interest,
putting them in bags. We will bring the objects back to the work area near the mobile art lab and lay them out to look at what gets washed up along the waterfront. A fish model (or perhaps a real fish) will then be used to demonstrate the technique as well as some of the trash. Participants will make prints with both, bringing home several and contributing to the group collaboration, RENEWAL Quilt.
Cyanotype Workshop

Cyanotypes are monochromatic photograms dating back to the late 1800s. These blueprints are created by placing objects over paper or fabric that has been coated with light sensitive fluid. The sun is used to expose the print onto the paper and fabric. The developing process takes only a few minutes and then each print gets washed out and has to dry.

**Materials**: cyanotype fluid, pretreated paper + fabric, trash bags, gloves

**Site**: Access to plants near water. (Wetlands at African American Heritage Park)
Collaboration: with a member of Earth Sangha or another native plant expert

Description:
Participants will learn the history of cyanotypes as well as the site we are using. We will go on a nature walk with a plant expert and identify the plants that are growing near water. We will take samples to use for cyanotype prints and write about each plant. Trash and other debris we find can also be used to make prints. Participants will go home with several prints and some will be kept for the RENEWAL Archive as well as the ones on fabric for the RENEWAL Quilt.

RENEWAL Archive
This archive is a collection of all of the art created at the residency and workshops including ephemera, sketches, photographs, and research to be displayed at the final exhibition.

RENEWAL Community Quilt
The quilt is a way to literally stitch together artwork created by the public and myself at workshops over the course of my residency. The final piece will be hung at the exhibition.
Performances TBD
Closing out some events, depending on site, schedule and budget, can be a performance including poetry readings, live music, lecture, or panel discussion on related topics. Potential performers include Hammered Hulls, Park Snakes, Sneaks, Gauche, Coup Sauvage and the Snips, KaNikki Jakarta, Northeast Groovers, Messthetics, Sto Len and more. These performances aim to bring out different crowds to each event, increasing audience and exposure.

"Live Streaming"
A guerilla-style pop-up video intervention around the city using the Mobile Art Lab. Offering up an impromptu visual space amidst the usual clutter of advertising billboards, these interventions provide respite with relaxing video of water in unsuspecting places. The videos are culled from kayak trips on the Potomac River, walks along the water’s edge, and close up footage of the combined sewage outfalls around the city. An info desk is set up at the mobile art lab with a communiqué about the footage, detailing the site and including information about the upcoming work of RiverRenew and the necessary reasons behind it. The videos are prerecorded and NOT live streaming but it is the title of the series.
W.O.W. Radio
Works on Water Radio is a radio show that I do where I play only water-related music and have guests on the show to share their water stories and discuss local water issues. Each show is live and recorded for future online streaming as a podcast. This is the type of pop-up event that I can do on the fly as long as there is a fairly quiet area to record our conversation. Using the Mobile Art Lab, I could use the sound system to allow for passersby to listen.
Bacteria Dye
The World Bank estimates that 17 to 20 percent of industrial water pollution comes from the textile industry. More than 8000 chemicals are used in various processes of textile manufacture and many of these chemicals are poisonous and damaging to human health, not to mention the environment. Factories discharge millions of gallons of this effluent as hazardous toxic waste, full of color and organic chemicals from dyeing and finishing salts, while using large quantities of water for textile processing and printing.

As I researched Anammox and was able to look at various bacteria under the microscope at AlexRenew, I became fascinated with the idea of a type of collaboration with bacteria. What else could bacteria be used for? I’ve been taking microscopic photographs in order to give visibility to these unseen laborers but I also have begun reaching out to biologists who have been experimenting with creating dyes out of bacteria. I’m currently in conversation with the group Vienna Textile Lab who have been successful in this process.

They are beginning to look into using Anammox to create a new dye as well as other commonly found water bacteria. If they succeed, I would use the dyes for textiles and paper to create artwork that speaks to the innovative use of
bacteria in the water treatment process. This work promotes knowledge of bacteria and highlights the act of finding alternatives to water polluting processes. I’m allotting some of the budget for “microbial research” to cover any costs that will result in these experiments but obviously we won’t know what will happen until we go forward with this. Regardless of their outcomes in creating dyes, bacteria will be used for imagery in artwork made this year and the experiments and information gathered will be shared accordingly. I believe this is a valuable investigation that can lead to further research and applications and would be great to begin as part of my residency here at AlexRenew.

RENEWAL EXHIBITION

**Location**  TBD: New Project Studio at Torpedo Factory, City Hall, others? Potentially multiple locations.

**When:** Late Fall - End of 2020 / Beginning of 2021? TBD

**Featured artwork:**
- Framed photographs and water prints created on site at AlexRenew.
- Water prints on paper from various sites of the Potomac River + outfall areas.
- Video of kayak trips, ambient footage used in “Live Streaming” activations
- A large community quilt as well as a collection of prints on paper created at the pop-up activations.
- Documentation of public engagement throughout the year
- Archive of ephemera from all activations
Book: A publication documenting the year of residency with photographs, writing, artwork, and more. This book will act as both a catalog for the show as well as a document of what the AlexRenew Residency was like for the first artist. I have found that a book is an intimate way for people to see and own a part of the artwork’s process. It is a wonderful way to disseminate information about art, water, and the residency program.

Water Walk
(A potential end project at the end of the Summer or in the Fall)

A public participatory performance event that brings awareness to wastewater in the form of a group walk along the sewage outfalls of lower Alexandria.

Description

*Water Walk* is a communal, inclusive, and participatory performance that reimagines a group walk as an empowering ecological walk for water.

This group will meet at African American Heritage Park and mindfully walk through the city to Jones Point and then finally to Oronoco Bay. The walkers will be clothed in blue with potentially dyed fabrics created with bacteria dyes. Workers from AlexRenew as well as the general public are invited to join in on the slow-paced walk. Walk helpers guide us through the city safely and motion for us to stop for traffic and go when it is clear. Other helpers are on hand for support and to hand out information about the walk to the public.

Walking together, the participants move as one large organism, creating a bonding experience. This moving body of people acts like a moving body of water, organically relying on group flow and navigation as they walk, slowly moving through the city and eventually taking everyone down to the actual water.

*Water Walk* brings the public together for an outdoor performance event that uses a participatory spectacle to create awareness about urban water issues in their area.
Documentation along with the dyed clothing and fabric will be exhibited at the end of the residency.

**HOW / WHO / NEED:**

An open call for participants is advertised in the local papers, flyers and through Office of the Arts and AlexRenew, as well at each workshop event. Workers at AlexRenew / RiverRenew are asked to join as well as other local water enthusiasts and the general public.

Consultation with Alexandria Office of the Arts, and RiverRenew on best walking route.

Needs:
Interns/helpers/guiders during walk who are outside of the performance to help with traffic, direction, the public and unforeseen obstacles.