

Rosanne Somerson
Honorary Doctor of Organizational Leadership

As President of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Rosanne Somerson is an accomplished leader and advocate for the arts. She has made significant contributions to advancing art and design throughout her career as a practicing designer, professor, and distinguished academic leader.

Ms. Somerson led the RISD community in developing a visionary strategic plan which recognizes the collective role of artists, designers and educators as cultural innovators and agents of change. The plan articulates a vision for advancing just societies and contributing to environmental solutions, along with impact at the intersections between social and environmental justice. She also worked with the RISD community to establish the school's first Social Equity and Inclusion Action Plan and provided leadership for significant fundraising gains which have dramatically increased student access and support for financial aid, endowed scholarships and faculty positions, and support for innovative strategic initiatives.

Before serving as RISD's president, she previously served as Provost and as a member of the faculty, founding the Furniture Design Department in 1995. Ms. Somerson also runs a successful design studio, designing and creating furniture for exhibitions and commissions. Her work is represented in many private, corporate and museum collections and has been prominently featured in many publications and exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the world, including at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs at the Louvre, Paris.

Ms. Rosanne is a frequent speaker and author on the power of art and design as core elements of critical thinking and making. She has been recognized with many honors including a 2019 Pell Award for Outstanding Leadership in the Arts, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the James Renwick Alliance Distinguished Crafts Educator Award. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Rhode Island School of Design.