

RevisitingGenesis.net

Written and directed by artist Oreet Ashery, *Revisiting Genesis* takes the form of a web-series in twelve episodes that explores the philosophical, sociopolitical, practical and emotional implications of the processes surrounding death and withdrawal, digital afterlives, outsider communities, social networks and reincarnations of women artists.

Revisiting Genesis follows two nurses, both named Jackie, who assist people actively preparing for death to create biographical slideshows serving as their posthumous digital legacy. The slideshows become a tool for reflection on cultural and social loss, friendships and memory as identity. When a group of friends request this treatment for Genesis - an artist who is dying symbolically and otherwise - Nurse Jackie attempts to activate Genesis' memory through the making of her slideshow, which draws from elements of Ashery's own autobiography and explores the disappearance of social and educational structures under contemporary neoliberalism. Jackie concludes that it might not be Genesis who is vanishing, but the structures she had relied on. Presented in parallel with Genesis' story, the twelve episodes are intercut with improvised interviews between individuals with life-limiting conditions and Nurse Jackie, played by a practising GP.

Developed in consultation with medical and death online experts, including researchers at Kingston University, and produced with a range of artistic collaborators, *Revisiting Genesis* responds to diverse influences spanning from feminist art practice to outsider and minority politics, as well as the emergent online death industry.

The following extract from the original script of *Revisiting Genesis* was partly filmed on location at Dorich House Museum during December 2015.

Biography

Oreet Ashery is a UK based interdisciplinary artist whose politically charged and socially engaged practice includes exhibitions, performances, videos and writings, in an international context, that explore issues of gender materiality, potential communities and biopolitics. Recent presentations include *Revisiting Genesis* (Stanley Picker Gallery 2016), *Fig.2* (ICA, London 2015), *Animal with a Language* (waterside contemporary, London 2014), *The World is Flooding* (Tate Modern, London 2014) and *Party for Freedom* (Artangel 2012-13). Awarded the Stanley Picker Fellowship in Fine Art at Kingston University in 2014, Ashery is represented by waterside contemporary.

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Dora Gordine *Black Orchid* (1956) Bronze
Photography: Ellie Laycock

Episode 5

Dora's head

Friends hanging around in the space in an easy manner

Nurse

What is this?

Friend 3

This is a bronze head made by Dora Gordine
(pronounced Gordeen).

Nurse

Who is Dora?

F4

That is a good question.

F5

No one knows exactly.

F2

Dora was an extremely talented artist who kept reinventing her
identity.

F4

Self-mythologizing, more like

F6

She gave at least three different dates of birth, moved around a lot
with her family, but when she emigrated to London she described
herself simply as a white Russian, which sounded exotic. She claimed
that English people would not understand the complexity of her
identity and upbringing (gap)

so she said what she thought that they wanted to hear.

F4

Typical artist, I like her

F1

Typical immigrant, having to simplify your story

F6

She also hid her Jewish identity to the degree that the Russian
Orthodox Church orchestrated a lavish funeral for her, (laughing) the
absurdity of it! Her father was killed by the Nazis, and her sister was
sent to work camps in Siberia.

F5

So she was alone?

F6

One of her brothers lived in Pimlico. Although in an interview with the BBC, she said that she had no one

F4

She made some anti-Semitic remarks, saying that Jacob Epstein didn't edition his works properly, like a Jew.

Friends respond to the word Jew

Nurse

How is Dora connected to Genesis?

F1

(to the nurse)

That is a good question

(Turning to Genesis)

You visited Dora's house quite often, didn't you? You always went alone

F6

(V.O.)

Dora's house is just by Richmond (ex) Park. She designed it herself! Even though she is not an architect. The neighbours called it a Stalinist Jam Factory! It is Dora's planet!

F3

No one built domestic houses with flat roofs, it was radical.

F6

Most of the house was her studio. The living quarters she shared with her partner Richard Hare were right at the top.

Nurse

Back to Genesis, for what purpose did Genesis visit the house?

F2

I reckon, to visit Dora. She's still very much a presence in the house. Anyone who's been there will tell you that.

Nurse

This bronze, did Genesis buy it?

F3

I am not sure, one day it was just here.

F1

Thinking about it I never got a straight answer to that question. This is actually when it all started... her symptoms, I mean.

Nurse

Could she have stolen it from the house? Taken it without permission?

Nurse

(speaking loud and directly)

Genesis! Did you take this head from Dora's house? Did you bring it here?

F1

(Other friends also respond defensively)

Hey! Hey! (shouts)

Leave her alone! What are you doing? Are you the police now?

F3

She didn't bring it here.

Nurse

How do you know?

F4

It's too heavy (dead pan)

Pause

Nurse

There is a lot of energy and heat emanating from this head, it is consuming her. Can you see that?

F5

I don't see it. I don't see anything unusual ...

Nurse

Can't you feel the heat?

F5 and other friends reaching towards the head then retracting hand quickly. Responding to the new discovery, Friend 4 does it later in her own time

Nurse

(cutting into the responses to the heat)

Did Genesis tell you anything more about Dora?

F1

(to Genesis)

You sometimes said how you would have liked to be more like Dora; flamboyant, a socialite, a relentless networker.

F4

But she struggled with some facts, like the bronze memorial plaque that Dora made of Mihailovich (pronounced Micha-elovich), you know, the Chetnik commander in former Yugoslavia.

F2

The Chetnik committed ruthless massacres.

F5

Why did she Dora make the plaque then?

F6

Remember, (gap) The British government supported the Chetniks at the time (gap, friends repond) until they started supporting the Partizans instead, who got better at killing Nazis. Dora supported the British Government, she admired the British aristocracy.

F2

It is the immigrant malaise, admiring the institutions of your host country.

F4

At the same time as being in bed with the Bloomsbury group (can change the wording to make it feel more natural)

F2

Genesis used to admire the fact that Dora cast the bronzes herself. Hardly any women did that. Barbara Hepworth was carving at that time, many artists were carving, but casting was unusual.

F3

She also loved how Dora was self-made, Genesis herself could never quite shake off her class barriers.

F4

That's a big problem if you're an artist...

F1

Stop talking in the past tense! She did this! She did that! She was like this or like that! As if she is not here. She can still hear us, even if she is quiet.

F4

She is a bit more than quiet (deadpan).

Nurse

So Genesis is a fan of Dora?

F5

Not exactly a fan.

F3

She disappeared into her, she disappeared into other artists in the past too, but with Dora it seems totally persistent, obsessional.

Nurse

You mean she was jealous of Dora?

F1

(to Genesis)

You feel that Dora was everything you aren't, don't you Genesis? You put yourself down and you look up to Dora (can be a bit improvised here)

F5

She projected a lot into Dora, but then a lot is projected onto dead women artists.

F1

You feel empty. You always say that you are not a proper woman, not a proper artist.

F2

Dora seems like a real woman and a real artist

F4

There is no point imagining yourself as a male artist. It never works. Women artists are just less visible and too much hips.

F3

Not a real woman, nor a real man; no man's land. Superstructure is a reflection of the structure, so do you take part in the art patriarchy or withdraw?

F6

Dora faced severe gender discriminations, especially as a modernist figurative sculptor. So she climbed the social ladder befriending powerful people who became supporters and patrons.

F4

There is no such a thing as a real woman, all women are invention (gap) Invention in process

BANNER/SLOGAN FRIEND

Invention without Protection

F2

If women are not real at least they are limitless.

F3

Is limitless desirable?

F2

It is for dead women artists

F4

(animated with hand gestures like flashing lights)
They are coming back to take control over their art

F5

Genesis also started to design furniture and lamps using ropes like Dora

Nurse

Did Dora ever stop making work?

F6

Yes! When Richard, who some say was a homosexual, suddenly died from a heart attack in 1966, Dora found it hard to make work again or socialise. She hasn't left the house much.

F2

You think Genesis might be copying this too? Stopping everything? Is that where you are going with this?

Nurse

Who were Dora's friends?

F6

The cultural and political elite

F2

Members of the Royal Ballet School have also modelled for her.

F5

Elsie (pronounced El-see) De Wolfe bought her work.

Nurse

Who is she?

F6

Elsie was part of the Lady Decorators, the first women to be professionally recognised as interior designers rather than home decorators. Elsie de Wolfe was seen as the inventor of interior design. A glamorous socialite! She called herself a rebel in an ugly world

—

F3 speaks while F2 performs

(V.O. — while this is performed, style: OTT, camp)

'She ran in ... and looked at the walls, which had been papered in a Morris design of grey palm-leaves and splotches of bright red and green on a background of dull tan. Something terrible that cut like a knife came up inside her. She threw herself on the floor, kicking with stiffened legs, as she beat her hands on the carpet ... she cried out, over and over: "It's so ugly! It's so ugly."'

Credits - De Wolfe, Elsie (1935). *After All*. New York and London: Harper and Brothers.; (Reaction to Morris wallpaper, p. 2-3)

F6

Bessy was Elsie's life partner, one of the first women to be a Broadway producer and a theatre agent.

F2

Extraordinary! Openly living as lesbians in the 19th century!

F4

Female sex for kids.

F3

Social status can afford you a fair bit of transgression.

F1

Elsie made embroidered taffeta pillows saying 'Never complain, never explain'. Probably the first pop pillows!! Genesis made one like this, too. I have it.

F6

There is also Syrie (pronounced siri), she was also part of the Lady Decorators, Syrie Maugham (pronounced moaun) was a legendary British interior designer, credited for designing the first all-white room. Born in Victorian times where the interiors were so darkly decorated, her white rooms were ground breaking.

F3

Did Elsie and Syrie hang out together?

F6

Oh yes, at some point they travelled to India together, saying that they

F1

(finishing the sentence)

They wanted to paint 'the black hole of Calcutta white'

F5+F3

I'd love to hang out with Elsie and Syrie... it would be fun hanging out with those two

F4

Covering the world in white (dead pan)

Nurse

Ok, Ok, Back to Genesis, you mentioned that Genesis had other fixations with women artists ...

F3

Yes, there was always Amy Winehouse in the background, but that seems like a normal fandom in comparison,

F5

Yes like a standard appreciation

Nurse

I have reason to believe that Genesis is not simply a fan of Dora, or jealous of her, or would like to be her, or projected herself into her. She's not imitating Dora, or disappearing into Dora, Genesis is a reincarnation of Dora Gordine.

Episode 6

F4

And after Dora also-known-as Genesis died, Dora
A-K-A Genesis comes back as Amy Winehouse?

Nurse

In fact, consciousness exists outside the constraints of time and space. It is able to be anywhere: in the human body and outside of it. In other words, it is non-local in the same sense that quantum objects are non-local. It believed that multiple universes can exist simultaneously. In one universe, the body can be dead. And in another it continues to exist, absorbing consciousness which migrated into this universe.

F1

In my universe we are all multi - local

F2

So it's possible she could be caught between Dora and Amy? Look at the beehives!

BANNER/SLOGAN FRIEND

'Caught in a Feminist Death Cycle'

F5

So Genesis is kidnapped by the spirits of Dead Women Artists???

F2

Genesis wants to be flamboyant, visible!

BANNER/SLOGAN FRIEND

'Long Live Dead Women Artists'

ALL friends marching and holding banners

Nurse

I believe that Dora's reincarnation did not have proper closure.

FRIENDS

(All together)
What?!

Nurse

Genesis had been trying to go back to Dora, to be Dora again, to make those works, to live in that house, to love and be adored by Richard, in order to find closure and complete the reincarnation. If we want to help her we must take the head back. We must take the head back.
(friends react)

