

DORA

Dialogues on Women's Creative Practice and Thinking
Hosted by Dorich House Museum

Dora: Dialogues on Women's Creative Practice and Thinking

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Edited by David Falkner, Fiona Fisher and Jeanine Richards

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Dora Gordine, *Self-Portrait/Purple Head*, 1930-1
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Foreword

“To be able to see figures inside an architecture designed by the sculptor herself is really a remarkable opportunity...negotiating that space, between modernism and abstraction and realism, in the architecture she designed, is absolutely unique.”

Penelope Curtis

Speaking at Dorich House Museum, October 2015

Dora Gordine’s practice as an artist encompassed diverse disciplines, from sculpture and drawing to architecture and design. A striking individual who was passionate about creating the best possible domestic and working environments to successfully enable her career, she accomplished what is arguably her most significant artistic achievement in the exquisite art, architecture and interiors of the 1930s studio home, Dorich House, that she designed and had built a ‘Deer’s Leap’ from Richmond Park, on Kingston Vale in South West London. Dorich House is now owned by Kingston University and is open to the public as a fully accredited Museum dedicated to this singularly fascinating artist and her husband, a scholar of Russian art and literature, the Hon. Richard Hare. In the spirit of Gordine’s exemplary life and career, the Museum operates as an international centre to promote and support women creative practitioners, with artist Hilary Lloyd appointed the inaugural Dorich House Fellow in Autumn 2015.

Talented, charismatic and dedicated to her art, Gordine was hailed in 1938 as ‘possibly the finest woman sculptor in the world’ and remained a major presence in European sculpture until the late 1960s. Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Latvia, she grew to adulthood in Tallinn, Estonia, where she first exhibited her work. She moved to Paris in 1924, where she was employed to paint murals for the interior of the British pavilion for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (1925). She also began to show work and in the summer of 1926 was invited to exhibit at the Salon des Tuileries, where she achieved critical acclaim with her bronze portrait head of a young Chinese student, Chia-Chu Chang, which is now on display at the Museum.

Gordine pursued her career in London in the late 1920s, holding solo shows at London’s Leicester Galleries and the Flechtheim Gallery, Berlin. Her growing success allowed her to commission her first studio home in Paris, from Auguste Perret, one of the leading architects of the day. In 1930, encouraged by more far-flung artistic opportunities, Gordine left Europe for Singapore, where she was married later that same year. The marriage failed, but her time in south-east Asia was productive and her work of the early 1930s cemented her reputation as a sculptor of considerable talent. On her return to Europe, marriage to Richard Hare opened up a new social world and brought public and private commissions. Exhibiting at the Festival of Britain on the South Bank in 1951, Gordine continued to enjoy professional success until the 1960s, but after Hare’s sudden death in 1966 withdrew from the busy

public life they had enjoyed together. She continued to work until her failing eyesight brought an end to her professional life in the mid-1970s and lived on at Dorich House until her death in 1991.

Dora is a collaboration between Dorich House Museum and research centres within Kingston School of Art at Kingston University. Inspired by and reflecting upon Gordine's personal and professional legacy, this volume aims to provide an intellectual space for framing and disseminating ideas, images and words that consider the breadth of women's creative practice, and a platform from which to generate an open dialogue within an international context. Papers for the volume will be released in loosely curated series, both physically and online, allowing the content to accumulate, through the contributions of individual researchers and collaborative partnerships, as these emerge and develop over time.

David Falkner, Fiona Fisher & Jeanine Richards

Editors



Dora Gordine and Richard Hare in the Modelling Studio at Dorich House, c. early 1950s. Courtesy National Monuments Record, Historic England.



Dorich House Museum Exterior.
Photography Ellie Laycock © Dorich House Museum

Editors

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Collaborating Research Centres

The Modern Interiors Research Centre (MIRC) is the leading research centre dedicated to the study of interiors and their contents from the mid-19th century to the present. MIRC evolved from a series of conferences held at Dorich House Museum between 1999 and 2004 that addressed themes related to the house, its interiors, Gordine's professional status and women's creative practice. MIRC's researchers share an understanding of the interior and its contents as a key site of modern experience and identity formation and the centre's intellectual focus remains linked to research undertaken in response to Dorich House and its interior spaces. MIRC has hosted international conferences; worked on numerous publications, among them, *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior* (Ashgate, 2013), *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior* and *Designing the Modern Interior* (Berg, 2011 and 2009); curated exhibitions; and welcomed international academics and students to work alongside its members in London. The Centre fosters international links with interior design historians, educators and practitioners and, through the Museum's membership of the Iconic Houses Network and Artist's Studio Museum Network, maintains connections with

historic house museums and artist's houses around the world.

The Contemporary Art Research Centre (CARC) engages with research across the practices of painting, sculpture, performance, film, photography and drawing, with particular emphasis on new and emerging forms of practice. CARC has a strong track record of internationally recognised exhibitions, screenings, performances and publications, supported by public funding from, among others, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and the Henry Moore Foundation, and has collaborated with major cultural organisations such as Tate, the ICA, the BFI, and the Venice, Shanghai and Sydney Biennials. The Centre's dynamic mix of senior and early career researchers and research students are situated within five distinctive research groupings that make up the Centre For Useless Splendour. Taking its identity from André Breton's articulation of the imagination, the Centre for Useless Splendour draws on the legacy of surrealism to imagine and enact possibilities of contemporary art in contingency with social politics, technology, models of knowledge and modes of experience.

The Visual and Material Culture Research Centre focuses on modern and contemporary histories and theories of art, design, architecture and media, cultures of display, archival practices, and curating. Working across a range of disciplinary methodologies, the Centre has a shared emphasis on Modernity and its futures encompassing local, national and transnational practices and formations, and the spaces and places of culture. Collaborative research on Dora Gordine, funded by the AHRC, Heritage Lottery, the Henry Moore Foundation and Paul Mellon Foundation, established the significance of her contribution to 20th century art, design and architecture, and to the wider cultural and political arenas of Europe and Empire. In 2009,

the first retrospective exhibition of Gordine's work was held at Dorich House Museum and Kingston Museum, and in 2012 travelled to the Adamson-Eric Museum, in Tallinn, Estonia. Publications include *Dora Gordine, Sculptor, Artist, Designer* (2007, Philip Wilson), *Subtlety and Strength: The Drawings of Dora Gordine* (2009, Philip Wilson) and *Embracing the Exotic: Jacob Epstein & Dora Gordine* (2009, eds. MacDougall and Dickson). Ongoing research focuses on Gordine's networks, and émigré artists in Britain and Singapore.