

## Dora Gordine and Barbara Hepworth: Connections across time and space

Encountering Dora Gordine's work in her studio-home - now Dorich House Museum - immediately evokes comparisons with Barbara Hepworth's studio home in St Ives in Cornwall, now the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden. As the only two studio-home museums of women sculptors in the UK, they represent the significance that both artists attached to the intimate environment in which their work was created, displayed and experienced, and their determination that their work be preserved for future generations. The two studio-homes that include the largest collections of each artist's work could not be more different in their location, inception and concept. Dorich House was Gordine's third purpose-built studio-home, incorporating architectural and spatial elements from her former Paris and Singapore studio-homes of 1929 and 1934.<sup>1</sup> Overlooking Richmond Park in Surrey, on the outskirts of London, Dorich House was designed by the artist in consultation with the builder and surveyor Henry Ivor Cole and completed in 1936. In striking contrast, Hepworth bought the large shed and greenhouse that would become her Trewyn Studio in the centre of St Ives at auction in September 1949. Securing additional land and workspace over the years, she lived there from December 1950 until her accidental death in a small fire in her studio-home in 1975 aged seventy-two. Just one year after her death the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden - a gift by the artist to the nation - was opened by her family in 1976 and has been managed by the Tate since 1980. Gordine, by comparison, fought hard to secure the future of Dorich House from 1966 (after the death of her husband, Sir Richard Hare) until her own death in December 1991 from a stroke, aged ninety five. In a letter to her executors, dated 14 September 1980, Gordine wrote:

Whilst I am at the moment considering approaches to various charitable organisations, if these are not completed you should certainly approach the Greater London Council, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Trust in that order...<sup>2</sup>

On 6 October 1983, Gordine secured the Grade II listing status of Dorich House by the Department of the Environment. Significantly, the description noted: 'The building was designed as a sculptural object to be seen in the round and has no one principal elevation.'<sup>3</sup> In July 1987, Gordine temporarily opened Dorich House to the public but it was only in 1996, five years after her death, that the restored studio-home (acquired by Kingston University in July 1994) was opened to the public, and in 2004 awarded museum status.

The two studio-homes are indicative of the artists' differing studio practices, creative preoccupations and personal circumstances. The priorities for Gordine who worked from the live model were the large, high-ceiled north-facing modeling-cum-painting studio and the extensive display gallery on the first floor, and the plaster room on the ground floor linked to the studio by a hand operated sculpture hoist.



Fig. 5.1  
Dorich House c1949, Historic England

For Hepworth, operating in dramatically different financial and family circumstances, her priority as a carver was for 'a studio, a yard and garden where I could work in open air and space.'<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 5.2  
Barbara Hepworth by Peter Keen, glossy unglazed bromide print, mid 1950s,  
11 3/4 in. x 9 3/4 in. (298 mm x 247 mm). Purchased, 1991, NPG x36003  
© estate of Peter Keen / National Portrait Gallery, London

Unlike Gordine's purpose-built studio-home made possible by her marriage to Hare, Hepworth's evolved as finances permitted in response to public commissions and accompanying shifts in her sculptural practice. In 1956, for example, she established a plaster studio marking her return to bronze alongside carving; she substantially extended the height of her ground floor carving studio to enable the production of larger works in 1957, and developed the garden as a site for her sculpture. In early 1961, as demand for her sculpture increased, Hepworth acquired the Palais de Danse, a former cinema and dance hall opposite Trewyn Studio for use as an indoor workshop, especially for works to be cast in bronze, a display space and store, and an outside working area. She also acquired further land from her neighbour and former assistant the sculptor John Milne in 1965 to extend the garden.<sup>5</sup> While the large window's of Gordine's studio allowed natural light to permeate her working space there is no indication that she either worked outside like Hepworth in the extensive garden or the roof top terrace of Dorich House, or that she choose to display her sculpture outside in its grounds.

For both sculptors the intimate nature of the studio-home provided a base for combining their roles as professional artists and as women: in Hepworth's case as a single mother of four children after her divorce from Ben Nicolson in 1951 and in Gordine's case as wife.<sup>6</sup> For Hepworth this also entailed employing a small group of assistants to help with the production of her larger scale work once she had acquired Trewyn Studio.

The figurative bronze sculpture of Gordine and Hepworth's carved or cast forms are usually perceived as occupying different spaces within the rich histories of modern British sculpture. Yet, it is striking that Gordine and Hepworth were born within just eight years of each other. Their work became known at the same time in late 1920's Britain, and they subsequently exhibited together in various pre and post-war group exhibitions. It is interesting therefore to reflect on some of the moments where their trajectories as sculptors intersected. This is not intended as a detailed analysis of their work or of their differing approaches to sculpture. Instead, it seeks to draw out some of the connections they shared as successful women artists in the highly competitive and often polarised spaces of modern sculpture in Britain from the late 1920s to the early 1950s.

### First Encounters

The work of Gordine and Hepworth came to the attention of British collectors during the late 1920s. At this point Latvian-born Gordine (1895–1991), who first trained in Tallinn in Estonia in the late 1910s and in Paris in the early 1920s, was living in Paris and visiting London. Hepworth (1903–1975), born in Wakefield in the north of England, trained at Leeds School of Art (1920–21) and the Royal College of Art in London (1921–4). In November 1926, she returned to the metropolis with the sculptor John Skeaping (her newly-wed husband) after an eighteen-month scholarship period in Italy.

George Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939), the high profile Anglo-Greek collector of oriental art and modern European painting and sculpture, was the first to publicly champion their work as Gordine and Hepworth acknowledged. In December 1927, Eumorfopoulos visited Hepworth and Skeaping's joint studio exhibition at their flat in St Ann's Terrace in St John's Wood and purchased Hepworth's recently completed marble and stone carvings of *Seated Figure* (1927), *Mother and Child* (1927), and *The Doves* (1927), alongside the work of Skeaping.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, Eumorfopoulos became acquainted with Gordine through her Bloomsbury contacts and in the following year he wrote a brief preface to the catalogue of Gordine's exhibition of seventeen bronzes held at the Leicester Galleries in October 1928.<sup>8</sup> Most likely through the support and contacts of Eumorfopoulos, both artists were shown together with seven other contemporary artists in the comparative 'Modern and African Sculpture' held at the Sydney Burney Gallery at St. James Place in London in November 1928.<sup>9</sup> Here Gordine exhibited two of her female 'ethnic' heads - *Mongolian Head* (1926–8) and *Breton Head* (1926–28) alongside three carved works by Hepworth: the onyx *Toad* (1925–28), *Woman*, and *Reclining Figure*.

We do not know if Gordine and Hepworth met at the exhibition opening or, more likely, at the regular gatherings of Eumorfopoulos at his house on Chelsea Embankment. What would they have made of each other's sculpture? Hepworth's passion was in the direct carving of stone, marble and wood, produced in the Mall Studio in Hampstead where she lived from January 1928 with Skeaping. Nonetheless, she would have recognised Gordine's rich working of clay in her bronzes for, as Ann Compton has shown, Hepworth continued to model in clay until at least 1928.<sup>10</sup> The resulting bronzes of *Bust of a Dancer* (1927) and *Head – Kenneth Skeaping* (1928),<sup>11</sup> shown at the Beaux Arts Galley in June 1928 (alongside her carvings),<sup>12</sup> show Hepworth's ability to create both textured surfaces and bold, simplified and hieratic

forms akin to the works Gordine exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in October of the same year. These included *Guadeloupe Head* (1925-28), *Chinese Head* (1925-26) and the life-size, free-standing *Javanese Dancer* (1927-28).

As the above suggests, in 1928 Gordine and Hepworth's figurative work could be perceived as part of an overall move toward simplification of form in British sculpture often linked to a primitivising quality and a search for alternative forms of beauty beyond the previously dominant canons of western art. Through her subject matter and handling Gordine's work could be recognised by critics as part of this re-vitalisation of contemporary sculpture that drew upon non-western subjects and sources. Her presentation of herself as a young, exotic Russian émigré, self-trained in Paris added further interest.<sup>13</sup> Hepworth's directly carved forms, seen as part of the prevalent 'truth to materials' ethos, were seen as part of a new movement of young sculptors that included Skeaping and Henry Moore.<sup>14</sup>

### Interlude

In the early 1930s it is highly unlikely that Gordine and Hepworth's paths crossed. Gordine sailed for Singapore in January 1930 and in August was commissioned to produce six figurative sculptures for the interior of the recently completed Municipal Buildings (now the former Parliament Buildings). She also travelled widely in South East Asia before returning to Paris to complete works for her forthcoming exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in July 1933.

Hepworth, meanwhile, was establishing a reputation as part of an international avant-garde interested in abstraction through her increasingly undulating and exquisitely finished biomorphic figure-based sculpture (including pierced forms and two and three part sculptures), her involvement with Ben Nicholson, the Seven and Five Society from 1932, visits to the studios of Brancusi, Arp and Picasso in 1933 and her membership of the Paris-based group Abstraction-Création.

The marked difference between the work of Hepworth and Gordine is evident in the 15 bronzes that Gordine exhibited at the Leicester Galleries in 1933. Modelled in her attap palm studio in Johore from 1930 to 1932 and cast in the Valsuani foundry in Paris, the majority were 'ethnic' heads and Asiatic portraits. These included the first cast of the dark-brown patinated *Malay Sultana*, a portrait of the elder sister of the ruler of the Malay State of Johore, that was purchased by the poet and art critic Arthur Symonds (1865-1945) and later



Fig. 5.3

Gordine in her Paris Studio at 21 rue du Belvédère, Spring 1933. Historic England

donated in 1937 to the Tate (then the National Gallery of British Art on Millbank) and casts of four heads commissioned for the Singapore Municipal Buildings: the female *Chinese Head*, *Malay Head* and *Javanese Head* (1930-31) and the male *Hindu Head* (1930-33). The exhibition was highly acclaimed with Gordine praised for her 'true sculptural qualities' in the simplification of form, the surface texture and rich patination of her heads.<sup>15</sup> However, Gordine also exhibited three larger figurative works that were to have unexpected future lives in exhibitions where Gordine and Hepworth's paths crossed again in the revitalised public spaces of post-war Britain.



Fig. 5.4

Malay Sultana, 1930-32

Bronze, 33 × 36.5 × 22.5, edition 2/8, dark brown patina  
Dorich House Museum

### Post-War Encounters

One of the fascinating aspects of Gordine's creative practice from 1946 was her ability to re-purpose or re-present her existing figurative sculpture in the newly created outdoor exhibition spaces of post-war Britain. Here she exhibited in large group exhibitions alongside Hepworth and other British contemporary artists. Notably, in each case Gordine elected to show earlier figure works that had been created in her Johore Bahru studio in the early 1920s rather than to create new works.

Since returning to live in London permanently from July 1935 and her subsequent marriage in November 1936 to Richard Hare, the majority of Gordine's commissions were portrait heads of notable London figures such as those completed in 1938 of the architect Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendel (1887-1959), the art critic and curator Dougald Sutherland MacColl (1859-1948), the actress Dame Edith Evans (1888-1976) and her long-standing friend George Eumorfopoulos (1937-38) who donated the portrait to the Victoria and Albert Museum on his death.

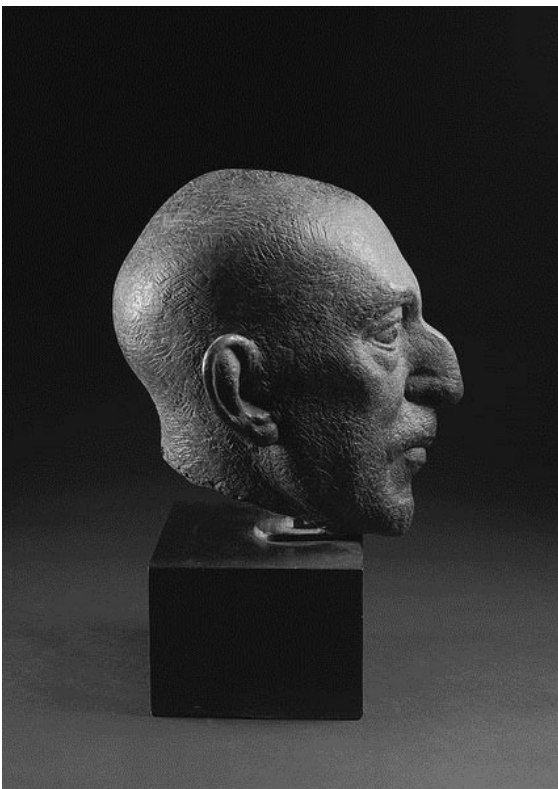


Fig. 5.5  
Portrait of George Eumorfopoulos, 1937-38  
Bronze, 40.2 x 18.5 x 24, edition 1/8, brownish black patina  
East Asia Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum, London,  
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



In the mid-1940s, Gordine also focused on smaller scale bronze dancing figures and although she did undertake some major public commissions these were few and far between. If Gordine's choice to show her earlier Johore Bahru work in the post-war exhibitions was therefore partly a matter of pragmatism given the demands of scale required for outdoor settings, it was also an opportunity to revisit some of her most significant figurative work, first shown in the Leicester Galleries in 1933, as part of a wider history of modern and contemporary sculpture in Britain.

The first of these opportunities was the inaugural 'Open Air Exhibition of Sculpture' at Battersea Park in London from May to September 1948, organised by the newly founded Arts Council of Great Britain in conjunction with the London County Council (LCC). The purpose of the exhibition as noted in the catalogue forward, was to re-ignite an interest in sculpture by showing: 'Representative works by well-known international sculptors of the last fifty years ... seen here in an ideal setting, against a background of lawn, lake and coppice.'<sup>16</sup> Patricia Strauss, a newly elected Labour committee member and then vice-chair of the LCC Parks Committee of the London County Council had first proposed the initiative in 1946, writing: 'My idea is not merely to exhibit the work of Royal Academicians but also of Moore, Gordine, Epstein etc., and thus show our public and the world the trends of modern sculpture'.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of the forty-three exhibited sculptures were lent by artists with the exception of 14 works loaned by the Tate Gallery and three from private collections. One of these three was Gordine's dark green patinated bronze *Cingalese Girl*, re-named *Reclining Figure* and loaned by Strauss herself. Strauss may have purchased the work from Gordine's immediate post-war exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in October 1945 or the Arts Council's first *Sculpture in the Home* exhibition of 1946 (where Hepworth also showed). A photograph of the clay model of *Cingalese Girl* was taken in Gordine's Johore Bahru studio and reproduced on 16 May 1931 in the *Malayan Saturday Post* as an example of her latest work. Photographed from behind and close to, the dynamic pose of the half-reclining figure resting on one hand, appears to look out on to her surroundings. Similarly, a mid-1930s photograph of an edition of the bronze set in the middle of a pond in the garden of her studio-home in Singapore captures the figure from behind.

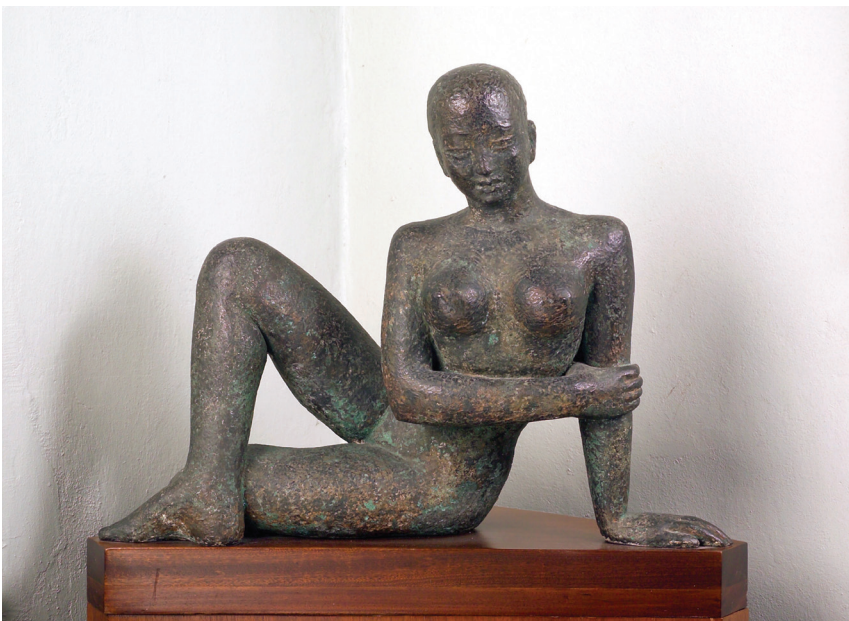


Fig. 5.6  
Cingalese Girl, 1930-1931. Bronze, 60.9 x 74.5 x 40.6, edition 1/8, dark green patina  
Dorich House Museum

Although no photographs of the work in situ in Battersea Park exist, it was presumably shown on a plinth where visitors could view it from all sides. From the front, the movement of the body is more architectonic than fluid, with the gaze of the figure unusually turned downward rather than looking into the distance. From the side view, the figure is unexpectedly dynamic.

Fig. 5.7  
Cingalese Girl at the  
centre of a pond,  
Singapore c1934  
Historic England



Fig. 5.8  
Cingalese Girl at the  
centre of a pond,  
Singapore c1934  
Historic England



For Battersea, Hepworth loaned *Helikon* (1948), a recently completed complex double helix carving in Portland stone of approximately the same height as Gordine's work (now in the Museum of Modern Art in New York). Living in Cornwall, where she had moved temporarily with her family at the start of the war, Hepworth had not yet acquired Trewyn Studio and was working on a modest scale. The next year, Hepworth loaned the carved ovoid sculpture *Eos* (1946) that represented her experimentation with adding interior colour to the Hoptonwood stone to the 'Sculpture in the Open Air' at Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow, from June to September 1949 that included thirty-four sculptors.

Gordine showed 'Dyak', now retitled as *Man* in accord with the spirit of a post-war and postcolonial Britain.<sup>18</sup> Gordine's black patinated, striding male figure was displayed again at the South Bank Festival of Britain in 1951 as *Torso* where it was situated under Hungerford Bridge.<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 5.9  
Dyak, exhibited as 'Torso', Festival of Britain, April 1951  
Historic England

Hepworth's first public commission *Contrapuntal Forms* (1950–51), commissioned by the Arts Council in 1949 for the Festival consisted of two monumental figures in polished Irish blue limestone, carved at Trewyn with the help of her first assistants - Denis Mitchell, John Wells and Terry Frost. In 1953, the Arts Council presented *Contrapuntal Forms* to the new town of Harlow in Essex.



Fig. 5.10  
Barbara Hepworth,  
*Contrapuntal Forms*,  
1950-51  
Irish blue limestone,  
305 x 122 x 925  
© Harlow Art Trust,  
installed at Glebelands,  
Harlow, Essex

"File: Contrapuntal Forms (26326481770).jpg," Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Contrapuntal\\_Forms\\_\(26326481770\).jpg&oldid=276111746](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Contrapuntal_Forms_(26326481770).jpg&oldid=276111746) (accessed April 10, 2018).

These outdoor exhibitions represent a specific post-war moment where Britain sought to engage the public in the breadth and depth of its contribution to sculpture at the point that its leading exponents Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth were achieving unparalleled success internationally.<sup>20</sup> One consequence of this success was Hepworth's return to casting in 1956, in part motivated by a desire to produce more public sculpture and work that could travel without damage. It also enabled Hepworth to cast earlier work.

Unlike Gordine, Hepworth carved rather than modelled her plasters. However, both were engaged with all aspects of the casting and shared a keen awareness of the importance of the finish and the patina of their works. During the war, Gordine who had previously had her work cast in Paris, began her collaboration with the Morris Singer Foundry, then based in Lambeth in London. Hepworth began working with Morris Singer as her principal foundry in 1959. As the surviving correspondence of both artists show, they often worked closely with the same individuals at each stage of the process. For example, in a letter of 9 April 1977 (after the foundry had relocated to Basingstoke), Gordine recounts in detail her working methods as follows:

- 1). I attend to inspect the wax and retouch.
- 2). I attend to inspect the chiselling and, possibly, at the same time supervise the fixing of the sculpture on the base, that is if the chiselling is finished at the time to my satisfaction.
- 3). After I have posed the sculpture and it is fixed to the base, I then give instructions concerning patination.
- 4). I attend to inspect the final patination and approve the work.<sup>21</sup>

Hepworth was equally as exacting. As Sophie Bowness recounts, the seven-section casting of Hepworth's massive bronze *Single Form* (1961-4) commissioned by the United Nations in New York, took ten months and was supervised closely by Hepworth at the Morris Singer foundry.<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting on some of the interconnections between Gordine and Hepworth opens up other connecting points. Their shared passion with the rich histories of ancient sculpture with Gordine looking to India and Khymer sculpture of South East Asia and Hepworth to prehistoric sites in Britain. Their shared belief that sculpture played an important aesthetic and social role in society: evident in Gordine's numerous lectures at the Royal Asiatic Society in London during the war and in Hepworth's writings and interviews. Their determination to be recognised for their sculptural achievements on equal terms with their respective male counterparts alongside equally valuing a feminine point of view and the particular insights this afforded. Indeed, for the publication of her first monograph in 1952, Hepworth chose to write extensively about her practice to date and in the last section, entitled 'artist in society 1949-1952', she directly tackles these issues in the final two paragraphs. She concludes:

It may be that the *sensation* of being a woman presents yet another facet of the sculptural idea. In some respects it is a form of 'being' rather than observing, which in sculpture should provide its own emotional and logical development of form. <sup>23</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Now a private dwelling, Gordine's Paris studio-home at 21 rue de Belvédère in Boulogne sur Seine was designed by the French architect August Perret in 1929. The now demolished Round House at 19 Garlick Avenue in Singapore is known through photographs. See Brenda Martin, 'Four Studio-Houses: A Negotiation of Modernism' in Jonathan Black and Brenda Martin (eds.), *Dora Gordine: Sculptor, Designer & Architecture*, London, 2007, pp. 97-120.
- <sup>2</sup> Gordine Letter to Lloyds Bank, Executors of Will, 14 September 1980, Dorich House Archive.
- <sup>3</sup> List entry Number: 1300092, Historic England.
- <sup>4</sup> Barbara Hepworth, *A Pictorial Autobiography*, The Tate Gallery, 1985, p.52. First published in 1970.
- <sup>5</sup> Sophie Bowness, *Barbara Hepworth: The Sculptor in the Studio*, London, 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> See Chris Stephens, 'Modernism Out of Doors: Barbara Hepworth's Garden', in *Sculpture and the Garden*, Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russell (eds.), London and New York, 2016, pp.145-156.
- <sup>7</sup> See Hepworth's account in *A Pictorial Autobiography*, p.13.
- <sup>8</sup> Gordine exhibited alongside the painter C.R.W. Nevinson. Leicester Galleries, October 1928.
- <sup>9</sup> Sydney Burney CBE, OBE (1876/77 - January 1951) was a British art and antiquities dealer and collector based in London. The exhibition (26 November to 14 December 1928) also included Bedford, Dobson, Durst, Epstein, Maillol, Skeaping and Zadkine, alongside African sculpture.
- <sup>10</sup> Ann Compton, 'Crafting Modernism: Hepworth's Practice in the 1920s', in *Barbara Hepworth: Sculpture for a Modern World*, Penelope Curtis and Chris Stephens (eds.), London, 2015, p.15.
- <sup>11</sup> The Kenneth Skeaping portrait is known from Volume 1 of Hepworth's Sculpture Albums in the Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 7247.
- <sup>12</sup> Hepworth showed alongside Skeaping and the engraver William Morgan, known through their time together at the British School in Rome. 'Beaux Arts Gallery', *The Times*, 13 June 1928, p.14.
- <sup>13</sup> P.G.Konody, 'Two Modern Sculptors', *The Observer*, 7 October 1928, p.14.
- <sup>14</sup> P.G. Konody, 'German and English Sculpture', *The Observer*, 24 June 1928, p.14.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Times*, 5 July 1933, p.12; *The Observer*, 'Art and Artists: The Leicester Galleries', 9 July 1933, p.14.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Open Air Exhibition of Sculpture', Battersea Park, May to September 1948, London, 1948, p.1. See Robert Burstow, 'Modern Sculpture in the Public Park: A Socialist Experiment in Open-Air "Cultured Leisure" ', in *Sculpture and the Garden*, Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russell (eds.), London and New York, 2016, pp.145-156.
- <sup>17</sup> Patricia Strauss, Letter to Mr Powe, 15 May 1946, London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/PK/01/054.
- <sup>18</sup> *Sculpture in the Open Air, Kelvingrove Park, Illustrated Supplement*, Glasgow, 1949, reproduces *Man and Eos* opposite each other on pages 20-21.
- <sup>19</sup> In 2011, *Dyak/Headhunter* was exhibited at the Royal Academy. Penelope Curtis and Keith Wilson (eds.), *Modern British Sculpture*, London, 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> Moore was awarded the International Sculpture Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1948 and Hepworth represented Britain in 1950. See Penelope Curtis, *Barbara Hepworth*, London, 2013 for a critical history of the reception of Hepworth's work.
- <sup>21</sup> Gordine, Letter to David Vallance, Morris Singer Foundry, 9 April 1977, Dorich House Museum Archive.
- <sup>22</sup> Sophie Bowness (ed.), *Barbara Hepworth: The Plasters: The Gift to Wakefield*, Lund Humphries in association with The Hepworth Wakefield, 2011, pp.82-86.
- <sup>23</sup> Sophie Bowness (ed.), *Barbara Hepworth: Writings and Conversations*, London, 2015, p.72. Bowness reproduces Hepworth's full text from *Barbara Hepworth: Carvings and Drawings*, with an introduction by Herbert Read, London, 1952.