

## Dorich House Museum Studio Residency 2020

In the spirit of Dora Gordine's exemplary life and career, Dorich House Museum operates as an international centre to promote and support women creative practitioners. Having successfully piloted the Dorich House Museum Studio Residency scheme with invited artists Cathie Pilkington in 2018 and Hen Coleman in 2019, Stockholm-based artist Nadia Hebson was selected for the third annual Studio Residency through a public open call.

This essay forms part of Hebson's residency, which to date has also included a public talk at Stanley Picker Gallery and a series of virtual reading groups, *The Reading Circle*, engaging Kingston University students, staff and the wider public. *The Reading Circle* was an opportunity to read selected texts in company and to consider the emergence of the subjective female voice in relation to writing, visual art and the ever expanding field of artistic recuperation.

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has limited travel and our venues have been closed to the public, Hebson has continued to work remotely, with the ambition to present new work at the Museum as part of the 2021 programme.

The Dorich House Museum Studio Residency is generously supported through a private donation.

## Biography

Working obliquely with the legacy of women artists, **Nadia Hebson** has sought to comprehend the relationship between painting, biography, persona and clothing, through a consideration of the work of Winifred Knights 1899-1947 and Christina Ramberg 1946-95. Hebson's practice spans the mediums of painting, sculpture and relief and text which can be subjective, poetic, or academic in tone. Alongside this, Hebson also works collaboratively to realise talks, programmes and reading groups. Hebson studied at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London and the Royal Academy Schools and is a Senior Lecturer in Painting at Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm.



Dorich House Museum  
Courtesy Nadia Hebson and Dorich House Museum



## Light enters my eye when I speak as a building

An ellipse of light enters one of my eight semicircular eyes, hazed through the branches of the park's established oaks. Mornings get tangled up in this treetop eyrie that from the other side obscures certain elevations making my sudden appearance into view a surprise for the casual walker. I am an enigma, slippery in forms of taste that you would need *real* taste to appreciate - the subtlety, measured reserve that says so much in its restraint. For those that can intuit: the indulgences of family warmth instilling an abiding self-confidence, instances of architectural memory configured as recall and longing, not least artistic ambitions in parallel to treasured design cues: Tallinn (formerly Reval), Berlin, Paris, Singapore all in the details, triangulated in the fabric of my structure. Sculpture in the context of architecture, the enduring mantra, outstepping all the personal reinventions and fabulous embellishing. Émigré, artist, dvoryanstvo (дворянство), bohemian, designer, baltic emissary for Eurasia, tartar and slav, immigrant and colonial ally, aristocrat and foreigner, empath, aesthete, Jewess.

Where does *our* consciousness reside? We are a hybrid, looking out through the semicircles, tipped halfmoons, our thinking takes place up here in the private apartment, amongst the evenings of low light spent on the roof terrace in company, and the crisp summer mornings, drinking black tea from the samovar in the open air, strategising, living, collecting, shoring one another up. Childless.

In the studio and gallery intuition elides with observation, drawing friends, acquaintances, dancers, actors, models, patrons, a survivor of torture, *from life*, modelled and not carved. Even a good humoured refusal of sculptural masculinity as defined by the day equates to something in critical circles. The revered *assault* of the material, carving as - subtracting, denuding, stripping, hacking, is critically preferred, not additional, nor incremental, nor generative, not modelling. Heaving under the weight of cliché, gendered binaries of creative expression are of course to be ignored. These rooms are the public declaration. These rooms are professional assertion and creative sanity. These rooms are where all forms of loving and self-love take place.

The artistic gestures: modelling, casting, drawing, painting and building, furnishing choreographing and staging, reflect a tenacious creative vision, wearing at times in its assurance and tenacity. Outspoken against the rules of English Modernism as defined in sculpture - itself terrified of bodily presence, emotional excess, confusing sexual display. Women's bodies are to be configured as either symbol or allegory, nothing more, not to be concerned with fleshiness, patina as approximated touch, nor to owe a debt to Khmer sculpture, not as an exotic, untamed feral *other* but as an audacious artistic expression to be contemplated between sculptors across time. These are not considered to be the agreed ambitions of the artistic vanguard. To know this and name it, is to tread a tightrope. We all work under the prevailing conditions, her measure of freedom and privilege is inherited, calculated and earned by turns outstepping artistic confines and in other instances judiciously conforming to cultural mores for personal advantage. I am reminded that a person, like a building, is not one thing. And although I am of my time, my sentience marginal, my growing dis-ease at the imagined busts' racial conflations, searches for a confidante to talk through these concerns. Are you really looking if you are yet to remark?



Do I have a cultural heritage that blinds me, a position of privilege that places me on the inside of power? As a building where can I intone from? What influence do I assert?

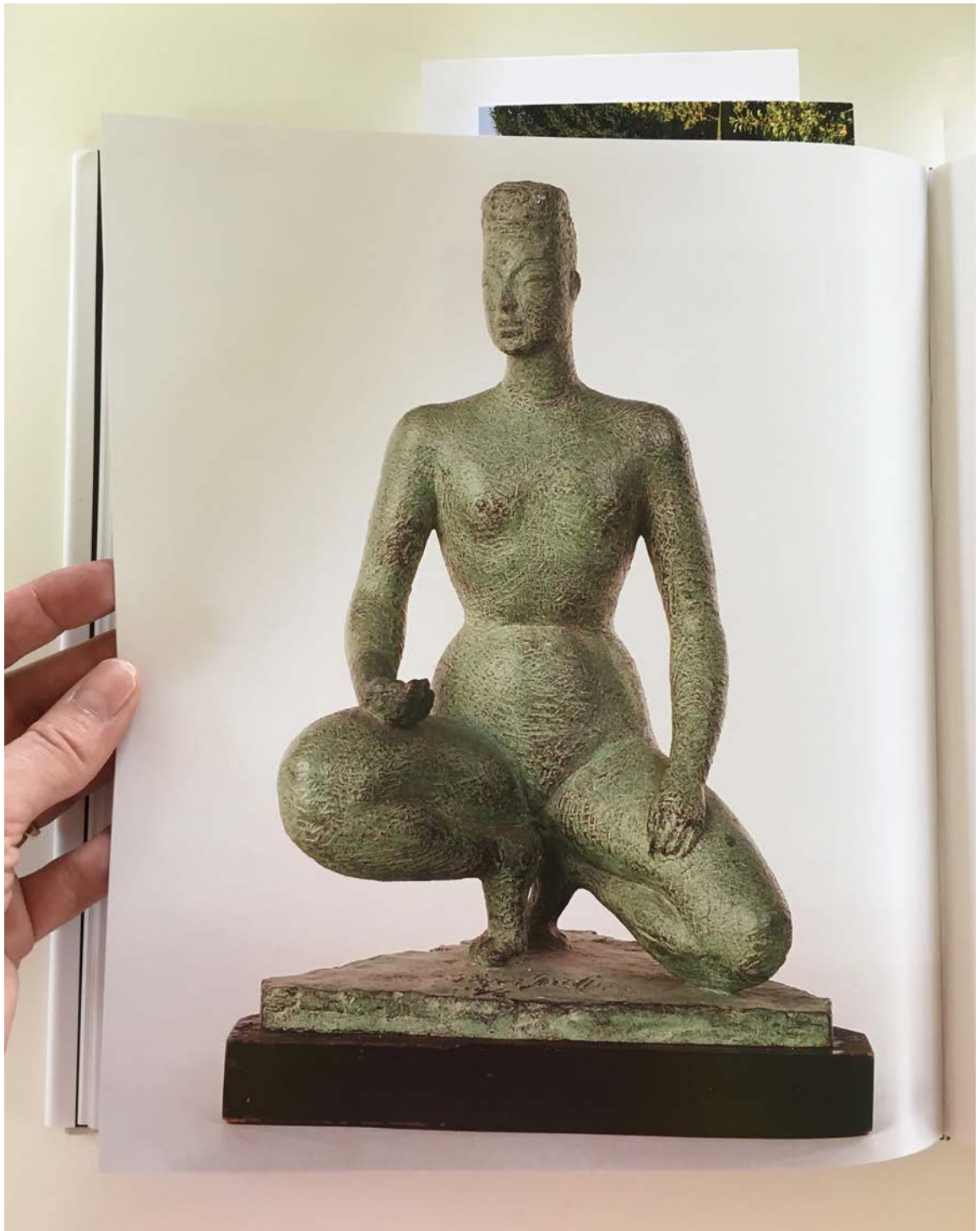
I know in my particular scale (refined) and internal configuration (public and private) I am at odds with the heteronormative mores of the modernist architect: no rooms for family, studio and gallery given primacy. I am a queer kind of vision, out of step with the movements' principles as defined by the pre-eminent cis architects. But whilst I might represent an exception, I won't accept the slights of anomaly or curios as if somehow I rebel in an unruly form against the *true* tenets of Modernist design and architecture. These shouldn't be singular, defined without nuance, or closed off to other scenarios or incantations. To hit the brick wall of convention and cultural validation remains a bore, a disservice to the imaginative possibilities, the various others. Whilst I may be a paean to class aspiration, societal validation, a demonstration of a certain artistic vision, I am other unexpected gestures as well. I am another form of vanguard little considered, built from the inside out, founded on one woman's needs, recollections, fabrications, aspirations, financial and entrepreneurial ambition. According to the conditions of 1936.

Please consider other parallels - the Viennese studio and showroom of studio potter Lucie Gomperz (Lucie Rie) and Kathleen Eileen Moray Smith's design and architectural endeavours (Eileen Gray). Each may have a more palatable oeuvre, aesthetically coherent in legible ways. (The right kind of unassailable modernism). But remember Rie also made buttons that took the eye and friendship of Japanese designer Issey Miyake to be redeemed. Valuable, creative work, not just the diversion to fund the real endeavour. Contemplate these friable boundaries and reconsider. A body of work is often more messy, more leaky, more awkward than historical and artistic convention will allow.

We will all need an advocate in our imagined futures to rethink what we do now. Whilst we may not recognise those readings nor the resonances they inspire if our thoughts and gestures don't run away from us into the future they were never really there.







Dora Gordine's *Flawless Crystal*, 1949, from *Dora Gordine: Sculptor, Artist, Designer* by Jonathan Black, Brenda Martin

Elizabeth Choy.  
(1910-2006)

Flawless Crystal  
Serene Jade.

200 days she was repeatedly punched, flogged,  
beaten with bamboo staves + given electric  
shocks.

'Elizabeth Choy never  
confessed to her resistance  
activities and was eventually  
released. Understandably, after  
the horrendous experience  
she was extremely self-  
conscious about her body and  
she later implied that she had  
found silt from a dredge, for Flawless  
Crystal + Serene Jade, highly therapeutic in  
helping her regain her footing, sense of self-esteem'

Quite a lot of patronising views?

'oriental' approach to it  
impeccable good taste, subtle ty, respect for  
tradition and essentially a resistance to ~~modernism~~ <sup>modernity</sup>

She had noticed in many 'Eastern people'  
not so much 'superior intelligence, but a certain innocent  
wisdom, peace of mind + newness to nature  
which was easily lost in the ravages of modern  
urban life of Europe'

In favour of de-colonisation  
Flawless Crystal +  
Serene Jade