

**HENRY MOORE  
INSTITUTE**



# **REBECCA FORTNUM: LES PRATICIENNES**

**3 February - 4 June 2023**



On the left:  
Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Fuller, Maxwell) 2023  
Courtesy the artist

On the right:  
Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(af Forselles, Madeleine) 2022  
Courtesy the artist



'MOST OF THESE SCULPTURES NOW ONLY EXIST IN PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTS – BY PAINTING AND DRAWING THEM I ATTEMPT TO EXHUME THEM, RUMINATING ON THE OFTEN-OVERLOOKED LEGACY OF WOMEN SCULPTORS'.

REBECCA FORTNUM

# FACE IS AN IMAGE MACHINE

AMELIA STEIN

Something I keep thinking about in relation to Rebecca Fortnum's *Les Praticiennes* is if portraits can be both real and not true. I am haunted by this possibly self-collapsing question of veracity and can't get past it. Why?

When I visited Fortnum, she told me that she likes that portraiture hasn't been considered 'real art' for a long time. 'Real' is a funny word here. Read slantwise and without quotes — no importation of contested meaning to stifle (my) sincerity — it says a lot about how meaning is made and how authenticity and criticality are presumed foreclosed if the object of a work is a credible likeness.

So what is a portrait? Or rather, what is a face? To treat them as fungible is not so silly. Think about when you see a lover again after a long time. The face is both different and the same, more and less like what you imagined. Profile becomes experience and this has more to do with the compression of layers of images in reality than with the transfiguration of image into thing. Some fiction is lost and replaced with something else. The story is overwritten but also edified by new meaning. This describes a dynamic of intimacy as well as painting.

How a face is a life is important to Fortnum. She wants to know how relationships with

friends and lovers and art and time might show up for real in portraiture or the face as work. In *Les Praticiennes*, Fortnum gets at this through a process of translation: a buildup of interpretation from live model to sculpture via the work of another artist, to images of the work on Fortnum's computer screen, to the pictures she makes of that work in paint or carbon. What translation and portraiture have in common is the slipperiness of the source. They describe an approach to reality in which speculation is possible without metaphor.

All of the artists whose sculpture Fortnum works from crossed paths with Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) but this is usually one of their lesser anecdotes. The actress and sculptor Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), for instance, nursed her dying husband, a failed actor and morphine addict, before carving a funerary bust in marble that Fortnum draws. In faces by Camille Claudel (1864–1943) and Jessie Lipscomb (1861–1952), Fortnum sees the two women's tricky friendship: Lipscomb as Rodin's reluctant go-between with Claudel; Claudel renouncing Lipscomb; Lipscomb returning to visit Claudel during her long incarceration in Montdevergues Asylum and asking her husband to photograph them standing side by side.

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Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Claudel, unknown)* 2022  
Courtesy the artist



Because Fortnum has seen very few of the sculptures in person, she relies on what is accessible to understand who she is picturing. This includes images and also writing, theses, biographies and archival papers. Otilie MacLaren Wallace's (1875–1947) letters, which her husband kept, were written under the penname Shulamith and contained rose petals. In her early ideas for *Les Praticiennes*, Fortnum planned to write in the voices of the artists. A trial epistolary piece from Wallace ends: 'Alone here at night in Paris I think of you in London and touch myself in your stead'.

This is a clue. So is the light, which seems to come from nowhere. Vision isn't durable or to be trusted. Appearance in this series is conditional, induced. Fortnum's way of



Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Claudel, Auguste)* 2022  
Courtesy the artist

## VISION ISN'T DURABLE OR TO BE TRUSTED. APPEARANCE IN THIS SERIES IS CONDITIONAL, INDUCED.

posing the problem of looking and what looking wants frees the face to a more fluid state of purpose in that the eyes point back to the hand that is at work. When, among the drawings, the head of Wallace's father bursts from material darkness like a newborn or anomaly, his eyes are empty of self-knowledge. Fortnum is working economically with history and memory while intervening in the number of subjectivities that can flow through one face.

Supposedly, dogs don't look at the faces of other dogs but are studious of human faces because they understand that's how humans communicate their intentions. This makes me think that to treat allegory as interchangeable with meaning in a portrait is to mistake something about what a face is. A face is a sign and also a surface. A face may say less about the appearance of the mind, as Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) suggested, than it does about the in-the-world-ness of appearances...

... Say how Alberto Giacometti (1901–66) fused two or more flat views in his sculptures and proved on some level — by confounding and contriving profile — what is needed to make a face. These heads are helpful as I'm trying to understand what type of appearance faces negotiate. With a portrait you have to imagine — which feels like seeing — the back of the head. Every part

of *Les Praticiennes* bolsters the fiction of my real desire to see: the artist and her subjects, who are not the people in the pictures; and the portraits, sculpture and wallpaper, silkscreened and fading as it nears the ceiling as if saying something about light and time.

Giacometti conceals profile in the round. Fortnum brings faces about through similar gestures of pressing, prying, pinching and the idea of composition as a provisional state, but backwards. She searches, collates, zooms and so on to approximate first-hand seeing and at the pixel limit, invents. What is allowed to come through in her facture is historical proprioception or a sense of where she is in time. The little porcelain hand, derived from 3D modelling, is a cipher. Painting and drawing become kinds of impossible touching. The effect is very tender without being familiar at all.

I want to write 'who is Fortnum painting' to use reading's reflexivity to link these artists — Fortnum and her group of fifteen — with the faces in the portraits in the way that the poet and essayist Joan Retallack (b. 1941) describes using 'I' to index the transformation of medium and subject matter (which may include herself) through the activity of working. Disarticulating the subject feels appropriate because Fortnum employs identity to trace material collisions. She doesn't want to be right. A student looking at a self-portrait once asked Fortnum whether Rembrandt (1606–69) was a nice person. The first and best mistake is to compare the creation with what is made by God. How much of this is a Pygmalion story? All these layers of time, attention and matter are condensed here. Maybe it's not so eucharistic. I'm thinking of the large,



Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Wallace, John)* 2022  
Courtesy the artist

painterly blots on the (probably erotic) sections of MacLaren Wallace's letters. Fortnum is working with occlusions that can't be transubstantiated. She chose these artists for their extraordinary and sometimes catastrophic lives as well as for the patchy afterlives of their work in words and images. And here the subject, I, a woman working, is intending something about time's treachery and incarnation as a resource —

The artist Luc Tuymans (b. 1958) once said that he was 'uninterested in renderings of people where the meaning comes from "the inside out"', but when does that ever happen? Possibly the worst thing you could say about a Tuymans painting is that it is real. Or beautiful, confusing the surface of the artwork with that of the face. But manner or way of looking in Fortnum's work



encompasses such apophatic blind spots. The face as a composition or sequence of gestures is the face that converts source into sign open-endedly. These pictures that are sensate truths are speculative appearances. They are about portraiture in the way that Tuymans's work is about painting but the face remains an extended thing.

Am I looking for sly facticity or to gain access to a feeling? One drawing that stands out is from a work by Bessie Potter Vonnoh (1872-1955), who met Rodin only once and was allegedly disappointed. Fortnum drew from images of Vonnoh's maquette of Sarah Bernhardt which is missing a face. The head without one is like

a door or mirror in that I see my own desire to look or move. Vonnoh was known for her small bronzes but Fortnum's drawing is larger than life, sort of like Rodin's *Monument to Balzac* 1898 except that Bernhardt seems nonplussed. Expression without appearance. This is one of those moments where I am thinking about reality meaning what is possible. Something else Fortnum told me from Maclaren Wallace's diaries is that she wanted to be happy but she also wanted to be a good artist.

*Amelia Stein is a writer, editor and teacher living in London. She is a Contributing Editor at Real Review and teaches at Glasgow School of Art.*

**'I'M WORKING FROM WOMEN'S DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN (OFTEN A FRIEND OR PEER) WITH THEIR EYES DOWNCAST OR CLOSED OR LOOKING AWAY. I ENJOY THE AMBIGUITY IMPLICIT IN BOTH THE SIGNALLING OF EMPOWERED ABSORPTION OR SELF-CONTAINMENT ALONGSIDE A READING OF SOCIAL CONFORMITY AND FEMALE MODESTY'.**

REBECCA FORTNUM

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Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Bernhardt, Louise)* 2022  
Courtesy the artist

# LIST OF WORKS

## PAINTINGS

Top row, from left to right:

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Fuller, self) 2023  
Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877–1968)  
America  
*Self Portrait* n.d., unfired clay,  
The Danforth Museum, Framingham State  
University, Massachusetts  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Lipscomb, Polly) 2022  
Jessie Lipscomb (1861–1952) England  
*Day Dreams* 1886, terracotta,  
whereabouts unknown  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Bernhardt, Louise) 2022  
Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) France  
*Louise Abbéma* 1878, marble,  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(af Forselles, Madeleine) 2022  
Sigrid af Forselles (1860–1935) Finland  
*Madeleine Jouvray* c. 1887, plaster,  
Loviisa Town Museum, Finland  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Jouvray, unknown) 2022  
Madeleine Jouvray (1862–1935) France  
*La Pensée* 1899, marble,  
Musée Jean de la Fontaine,  
Château-Thierry, Champagne  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Rilke-Westhoff, unknown) 2023  
Clara Rilke-Westhoff (1878–1954) Germany  
*Einer Bauerin* 1902, bronze,  
most likely in the Gernsbach Rilke Archive,  
Deutsches Literatur Archiv Marbach  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Bottom row, from left to right:

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Beveridge, unknown) 2022  
Kühne Beveridge (1879–1944) America  
*Sleep* 1910, stone (marble?),  
whereabouts unknown  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Hoffman, Anna) 2022  
Malvina Hoffman (1885–1966) America  
*Mask of Anna Pavlova* 1924, tinted wax,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Golubkina, unknown) 2022  
Anna Golubkina (1864–1927) Russia  
*The Mist* 1899 (moulded 1940), bronze,  
The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Claudel, unknown) 2022  
Camille Claudel (1864–1943) France  
*Young Woman with Closed Eyes* c. 1885,  
terracotta, Musée Sainte-Croix, Poitiers  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist



Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Weyl, unknown) 2022  
Emilie Jenny Weyl (1855–1934) France  
*Quinze ans* 1888, marble,  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*  
(Flodin, Gwen) 2023  
Hilda Flodin (1877–1958) Finland  
*Gymnast* 1904, bronze, Finnish National  
Gallery / The Ateneum Museum, Finland  
Oil on gesso board  
25 x 20cm  
Courtesy the artist

# LIST OF WORKS

## DRAWINGS

Top row, from left to right:

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Bernhardt, Jacques)* 2022  
Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) France  
*Funerary Portrait of Jacques Damala* c. 1889, marble,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Carbon pencil on paper  
63.5 x 60cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Lipscomb, unknown)* 2022  
Jessie Lipscomb (1861–1952) England  
*Giganti* c. 1885, bronze, whereabouts unknown  
Carbon pencil on paper  
52.5 x 51.5cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Golubkina, Karl)* 2022  
Anna Golubkina (1864–1927) Russia  
*Portrait of Karl Marx* 1905, bronze,  
Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow  
Carbon pencil on paper  
61.5 x 55.5cm  
Courtesy the artist

Middle row, from left to right:

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Fuller, Maxwell)* 2023  
Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877–1968) America  
*Negro Poet (Portrait of Maxwell Nicy Hayson)*  
c. 1920s, painted plaster,  
The Danforth Art Museum, Framingham  
State University, Massachusetts  
Carbon pencil on paper  
70 x 53cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Caudel, Auguste)* 2022  
Camille Claudel (1864–1943) France  
*Bust of Rodin* 1892, bronze,  
Musée Rodin, Paris  
Carbon pencil on paper  
78 x 61.5cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Jouvray, unknown)* 2022  
Madeleine Jouvray (1862–1935) France  
*Vieil homme* 1890, plaster,  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau  
Carbon pencil on paper  
56.5 x 45cm  
Courtesy the artist

Bottom row, from left to right:

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (af Forselles, unknown)* 2022  
Sigrid af Forselles (1860–1935) Finland  
*Kneeling Man* c. 1887, plaster,  
Loviisa Town Museum, Finland  
Carbon pencil on paper  
50.5 x 47cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Wallace, John)* 2022  
Otilie Maclaren Wallace (1875–1947) Scotland  
*Judge McLaren* 1920, marble,  
The Advocates Library, Edinburgh  
Carbon pencil on paper  
51 x 41.5cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Rilke-Westhoff, Rainer)* 2022  
Clara Rilke-Westhoff (1878–1954) Germany  
*Rainer Maria Rilke* 1901, bronze,  
Private Collection  
Carbon pencil on paper  
65.5 x 55.5cm  
Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Vonnoh, Sarah)* 2022  
Bessie Potter Vonnoh (1872–1955) America  
*Memories of Sarah Bernhardt* c. 1912, terracotta, whereabouts unknown  
Carbon pencil on paper  
154.5 x 95cm  
Courtesy the artist

## SCULPTURE

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (A Gesture to Genius)* 2023  
after Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) France  
*Study of a Hand (Le Main Gauche: Le Pianist)*, n.d., bronze, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford  
Four versions in porcelain, resin, clear resin and plastic with acrylic paint  
3D scanning by Scan The World.  
Printing by Glasgow School of Art.  
Casting by Martha Todd.  
12 x 7cm each  
Courtesy the artist

## WALLPAPER

Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Untitled)* 2022  
Screen printed wallpaper, 7 shades of pink  
Printed by Glasgow Print Studio  
50 x 40cm (each sheet)  
Courtesy the artist

# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rebecca Fortnum is an artist, writer and academic. She was Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University and the Royal College of Art and is currently Head of the School of Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art. Her books include *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (2008), *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* (2013) and *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing* (2020). She has exhibited paintings and drawings in solo exhibitions at the Freud Museum, London and the Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood and was the 2019 inaugural Visiting Research Fellow in Creative Arts at Merton College, Oxford, where she developed her project, *A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter*, published as a book by Slimvolume in 2020. She was a 2021-22 Senior Research Fellow at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

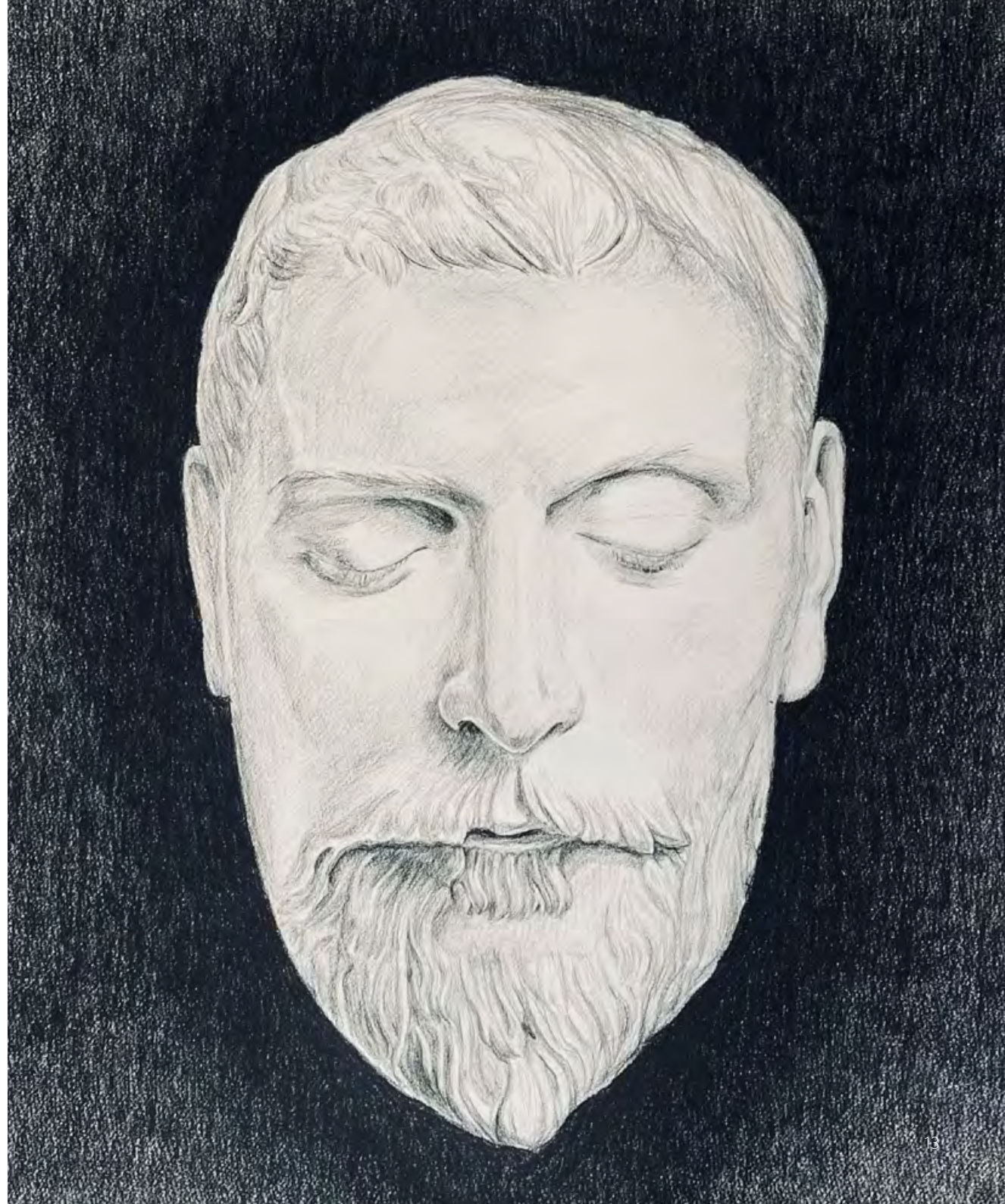
Visit the **Sculpture Research Library** on the first floor to find further reading related to the exhibition.

This exhibition is supported by Research awards from The Glasgow School of Art.

**THE GLASGOW  
SCHOOL OF ART**

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Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes (Bernhardt, Jacques)* 2022  
Courtesy the artist







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