

HENRY MOORE
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REBECCA FORTNUM:
LES PRATICIENNES

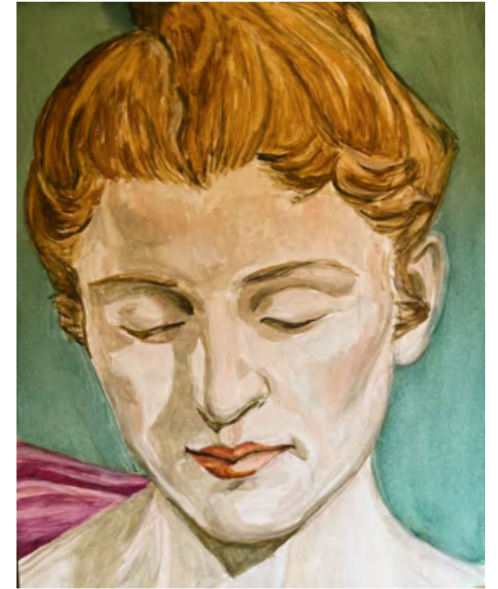
3 February - 4 June 2023



On the cover:
Rebecca Fortnum, *Les Praticiennes*
(*Vonnoh, Sarah*) 2022
Courtesy the artist

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.

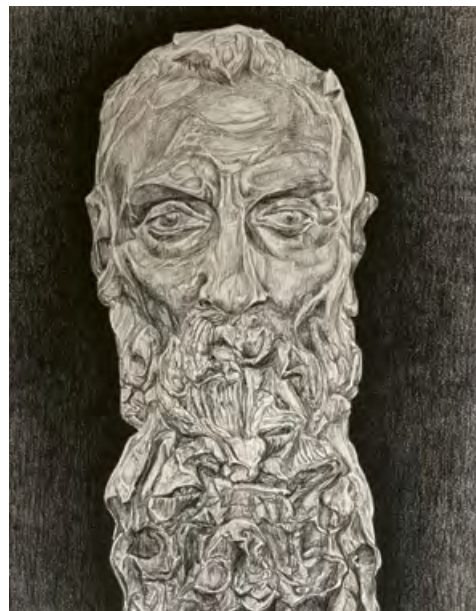
All of the artists whose sculpture Fortnum works from crossed paths with Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) but this is usually one of their lesser anecdotes. The actress and sculptor Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), for instance, nursed her dying husband, a failed actor and morphine addict, before carving a funerary 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

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



Asylum and asking her husband to photograph them standing side by side.

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. Ottilie 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'.



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.

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 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.



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

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, painterly blots on the (probably erotic) sections of 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 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

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
Ottilie 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

Large drawing:

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

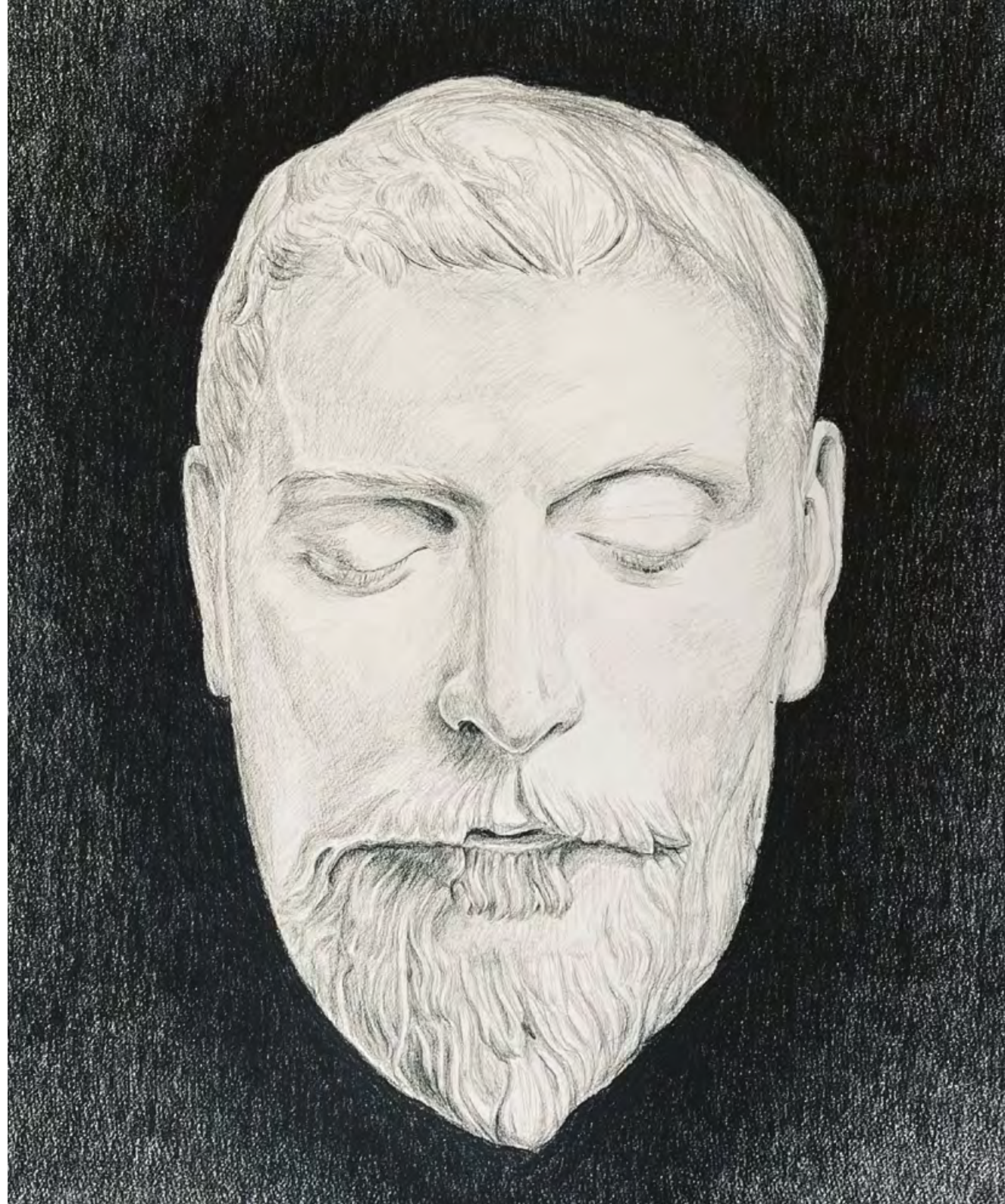
Rebecca Fortnum is an artist, writer and academic. She was Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University and the Royal College of Art and is currently Head of the School of Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art. Her books include *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (2008), *On Not 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**

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



HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE

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