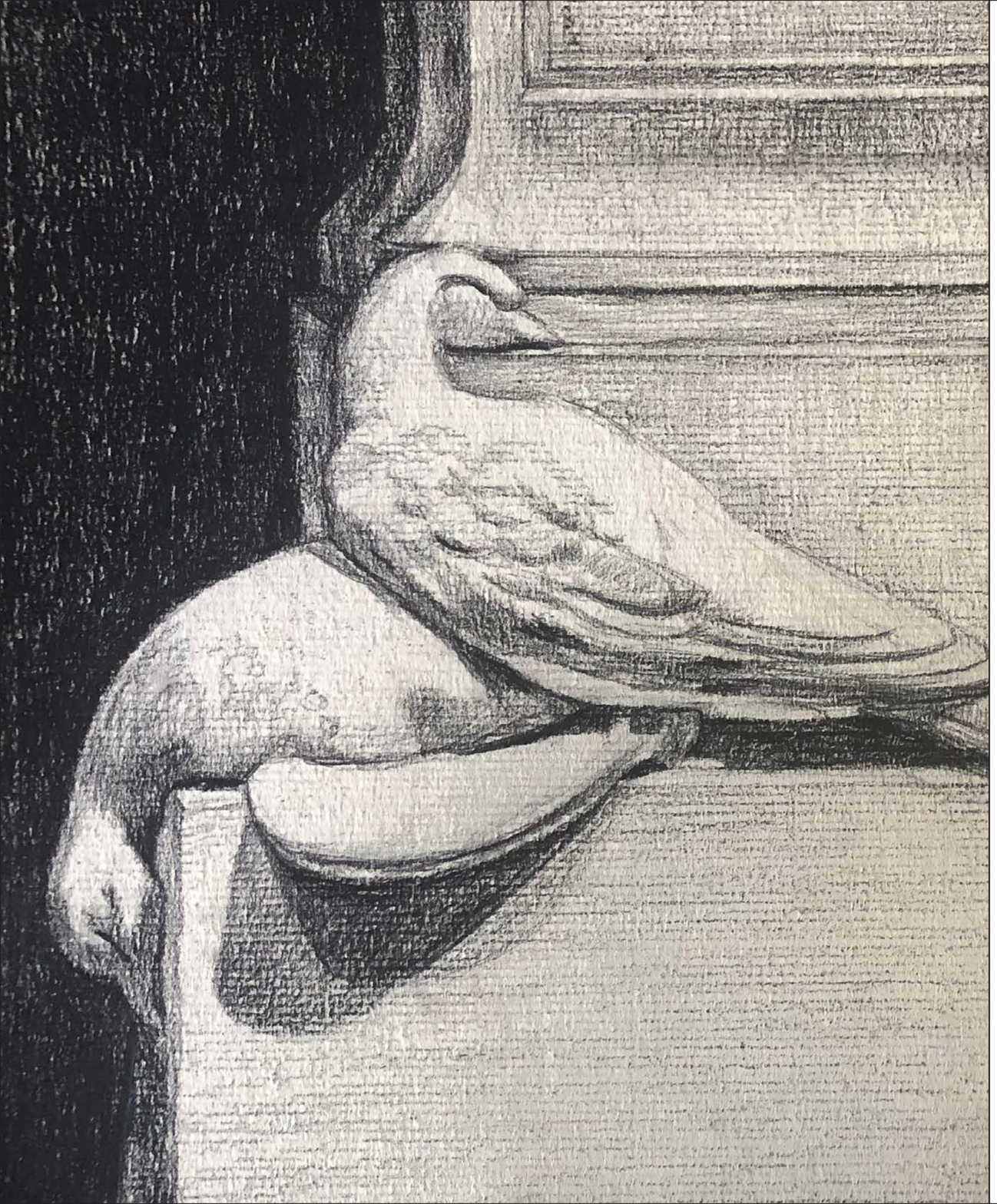
A

Mind Weighted

with

Unpublished Matter



A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter

Rebecca Fortnum

Slimvolume

Preface

'There's no art', says Shakespeare's Duncan, 'to find the mind's construction in the face'. But most of the playwright's contemporaries would have disagreed, and much of the history of portraiture constitutes the relentless pursuit of that elusive 'art'. The work presented in the present volume, Rebecca Fortnum's *A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter*, marks an exciting new development in this ongoing search. Most of it was undertaken during her residency at Merton College, Oxford as our first Visiting Research Fellow in the Creative Arts. The programme was designed to promote synergies between practicing artists and academia and it was clear from the outset that Fortnum's project would achieve just that. Portraiture inevitably raises questions about the relationship between sitter and painter, issues of authority and control, social attitudes and prejudices. And female portraiture in particular. On his various visits to court in the 1590s Shakespeare must have noticed the disparity between the aging queen and the icons of youthful sovereignty that were supposed to represent her. This woman, at least, was in control of her image. Very different was *L'Inconnue de la Seine*, the nameless, inglorious victim dragged from the river in the 1890s whose death mask has been endlessly copied, photographed, and interpreted. What, we can only ask, were her last thoughts before, Kubrick-style, her eyes closed wide shut in death? She remains one of Fortnum's strongest sources of inspiration. The eyes were commonly imagined as windows to the soul, but closed eyes have an uncanny power to suggest and occlude interiority simultaneously. They capture the personality in moments of reflection, retreat, aversion, or sleep; they invite engagement with the imagined, the remembered, the unconscious.

As Merton is soon to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of its admission of women, Fortnum's title seems particularly apt. 'A mind weighted with unpublished matter' is excerpted from George Eliot's description of Mr Casaubon, the fusty old scholar who excludes Dorothea Brooke from intellectual companionship in *Middlemarch*. Eliot's heroine is a victim of how her husband 'sees' her, and is herself much concerned with the ways in which women are represented. Looking closely at a portrait of Casaubon's aunt she remarks, 'it is a peculiar face … those deep grey eyes rather near together - and the delicate irregular nose with a sort of ripple in it - and all the powdered curls hanging backward. Altogether it seems to me peculiar rather than pretty. There is not even a family likeness between her and your mother'. The story behind that portrait entails many levels of familial 'peculiarity', but the episode is just one among many that focusses attention on the nature of the mimetic impulse. In recent years Fortnum has specialised in drawing from sculpture, reimagining female images done from life by redoing them from art, revisioning with a female eye what was envisaged by a male. This is the sort of 'copying' that paradoxically reveals difference in all its many forms. It makes us search for what portraits conceal through what they show. It makes us reassess the act, and the motives, of representation itself.

Fortnum's residency at Merton engaged the whole community in a reassessment of the imagery surrounding us, from the portrait of Queen Henrietta Maria that hangs in the Senior Common Room - an early 'copy' that differs markedly from the Van Dyck original - to the splendid drawings of young female fellows that Fortnum contributed to the Junior Common Room. I trust that the publication of this volume will promote the same level of engagement in a wider community and afford as much pleasure.

Professor Richard McCabe, FBA
Fellow of Merton College, Oxford

‘In time the likeness will become apparent’: Rebecca Fortnum’s Feminist Copies

Musée de Cluny, Paris

On 28th August 1902, the young Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) arrived in Paris to begin work on a monograph devoted to the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917).[1] It was his first time in the city and it would prove formative. From February 1904 to January 1910, a period in which Rilke travelled widely, criss-crossing the borders of France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary, he made both real and imagined returns to Paris, piecing memory, diary and correspondence together to form the autobiographical novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.[2] Based on Rilke’s own experiences of walking around the city, *The Notebooks* comprise lyrical descriptions of the death, madness and poverty his vulnerable young narrator, Malte, fears is but a hair’s breadth away. Watching people, penning portraits, Malte is irresistibly drawn to those who are similarly on the brink of something life-changing, whatever that may be: marriage, ruin, spinsterhood, suicide.

In the Musée de Cluny, in the Latin quarter where Rilke stayed on that first visit to Paris, Malte observes the young unmarried women of good family, newly arrived in the city, independent of the parents who couldn’t quite afford to keep them, as they gather for the drawing classes they left home to pursue. Finding themselves before the medieval tapestries of *La Dame à la Licorne (Lady with the Unicorn)*, they hurriedly take out their sketchbooks and begin to draw, forgetting themselves for a much needed moment. Alone in their private hours, homesick, bewildered by the uncertainty of their newfound liberty, they are, Rilke writes, as undone as the buttons on the backs of their dresses that they cannot reach to fasten. (‘The thing would be to have a girl friend; but girl friends are in the same

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin* (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1903). Rilke’s book was translated into English by Jessie Lemont and Hans Trausil and published in 1919 (New York: Sunwise Turn). For the most recent edition, introduced by Alexandra Parigoris, see Pallas Athene, London, 2018.
2. Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1910). All quotations are from the translation, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, introduced by Michael Hulse (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

situation, and they would end up fastening each other’s dresses. That would be ridiculous, and would remind them of their families, which they do not want to be reminded of.’)[3] Intent, obedient, heads bent over sheets of paper, drawing any one of the woven, silken details they are directed to copy, they reassure themselves, ‘No, it is really better to be drawing, anything at all. In time the likeness will become apparent. And art, gradually acquired in this way, is an enviable accomplishment, after all.’[4] A flower, ‘a small, contented animal’, any detail, it does not matter, ‘it really does not matter’.[5]

Time Flies

When Rebecca Fortnum (b. 1963) was seven or so years old, her mother, the sculptor Eve Fortnum (b. 1936), would take her and her twin brother to the Natural History Museum, London. She describes how her mother would borrow the little sketching stools they used to provide, sitting them down in front of an animal of their choosing: ‘She must have trusted that the challenge of trying to commit a three-dimensional object onto two dimensions would keep us occupied indefinitely, because she’d then nip across the road to the V&A to draw by herself.’[6] For a single parent, teaching sculpture to schoolgirls, time to select a work of art, to study it, copy and absorb it, must have been a precious thing. In time, Fortnum would graduate to the Victoria & Albert Museum herself, and would draw alongside her mother, wanting more than anything to emulate her ability ‘to use a delicate yet precise outline to somehow depict the invisible inner structure of the Buddha, small Indian or Egyptian figure or Rodin that she would return to again and again’.[7]

Time flies. Drawing from sculpture in public collections has become increasingly central to Fortnum’s work, especially over the last decade, though this is at a single, studied remove from her early education. Working from copies of her photographs of sculptures which allow for continual, extended returns to the object, for the type of close, careful looking that leads her towards the noticing and depicting of every surface detail, Fortnum’s practice is a rumination

3. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 86.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Email exchange, Rebecca Fortnum to author, 6 January 2020.
7. *Ibid.*

on how we look and how we draw, on 'what mental and dexterous conjuring is required in the translation from sight to mark'.[8] More than this, it is a rumination on how representation is mastered, on the 'accomplished', intrinsically feminine status of the copy of the work of art in comparison to its inventive, ingenious original wrought by male hands, on the value-laden history of creativity as an inherently masculine endeavour, and of copying as its submissive, secretive other. (There is something shameful about the act of copying; it induces a sense of not being enough, of a lack of imagination, courage, conviction; it is furtive, leaning towards its longed-for object, whilst willing itself out of sight because a copyist does not like to be noticed as a copyist, to be *found out*. Copyists, we are led to believe, are forgers, cheats, frauds. In the visual arts, they are also 'amateurs', attempting yet eternally failing to learn by imitation. This is what lies behind the hands that hide the drawing completed by the museum visitor on their stool in front of the object or motif when another member of the public peers over their shoulder to look at what they're doing; the apologetic, weary smile.)

Fortnum describes her drawings from photocopies of her photographs of original sculptures and casts in museums as 'drawn-copies'. They are not duplicates of these reproductions, despite the immensity of their technical precision. She is interested in the striving for imitation, as opposed to the realising of imitation, in the lip-biting, brow-furrowing effort to know the sculpted work of art from the inside-out by devoting time to the outside-in (remember her early wonder at her mother's ability to 'somehow depict [an object's] invisible inner structure'). Her drawn-copies might be theorised through Carol Mavor's analysis of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden's Victorian photographs of her corseted and buttoned adolescent daughters standing by mirrors, doubled, as 're-duplications'.[9] Pondering different usages of the word 'duplicate', Mavor fixes upon a dictionary definition of the verb 'to reduplicate' as to make or perform again, which gives to the process what she describes as

8. Rebecca Fortnum, 'A Haunting', *Drawing - in and outside - Writing (cahier)*, (Leuven: Uitgeverij Acco), pp. 11-19, p. 14. Fortnum is interested in what she describes as the 'inbuilt, frustrated promise' of the process of working from the digital photograph, which enables her to zoom in on every detail, getting ever-closer, until the image begins to break down and she has to pull back, continually returning to the surface. Email exchange, Fortnum to author, 12 March 2020.
9. Carol Mavor, 'Reduplicative Desires' in *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 35-79.

a '(re)performative character'.[10] Such a concept of re-duplication creates the space for difference, for subtle deviations, for the expression of another form of artistry and authorship through the human as opposed to machine-led repeating of a process and this brings us close to Fortnum's method. Re-making a duplicate through the drawing of a photograph of an original or a cast, to produce a copy-which-is-not-a-copy of a copy, she is concerned with the often unexpected results of such a process. How might the attempt to imitate constitute a creative practice in and of itself? What other, singular 'likeness' might emerge through the diligent, dilettantish task of copying? And how might these likenesses, completed many, many decades after the originating sculptures, engage with what it means to be female and creative, to live and work both in and with the legacy of 'amateur' women artists' thwarted ambitions? Such questions also engage with Rebecca Schneider's concept of re-enactment and 'the warp and draw of one time in another time': Schneider is, she writes, 'invested […] in the curious inadequacies of the copy, and *what inadequacy gets right* about our faulty steps backward, and forward, and to the side'.[11]

Fortnum's practice is an inherited one, inextricably linked to former teachers, her mother included, as well as to the unbuttoned young women described by Rilke in the museums of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, who both find and forget themselves in front of the work of art. She is deeply interested in such women's lives, and the ways in which they have and have not been committed to the historical record, an interest which extends from an engagement with the history of art to literature, with modern fiction often providing her with ways into thinking about the formation of female identity through such processes as self-narration.[12] Malte speaks both of and for the women in the Musée de Cluny, observing them from afar, circling above their studious heads before swooping into their interior worlds to tell of their supposed fears and desires, their crises of confidence and moments of hand-wringing worry. ('If they could only have been religious, with all their heart, in step with the others.')[13] Fortnum, by contrast, speaks with them, engaging in a conversation across time and place through the creation of her

10. *Ibid*, p. 41.
11. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.
12. See for example Fortnum's letterpress works that use text fragments from the governess' monologue in Henry James' novel *The Turn of the Screw* of 1898.
13. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 86.

cross-temporal drawn-copies which is both intimate and empathetic, which we might interpret as a sisterly fastening of those buttons that proved so hard to reach. Reenacting women's early arts education, repeating their many returns to objects and images in her own representations of sculpted female heads and masks from the modern period, *re-performing*, Fortnum reflects upon the sexed and gendered connections between copying, training and accomplishment that Rilke's young women embody, and upon the place of the subjective in historical research for a resolutely contemporary art practice.

Feminist Copies

In the nineteenth century, one of the guiding principles of art school education was learning by practice and imitation, by close looking and careful copying, especially of ancient and classical examples, and particularly of sculpture. Schools developed their own collections of plaster casts of iconic works of art, which were usually studied in advance of taking the life drawing class, and intensively so. Drawing from casts, and from original sculptures in public collections was part of every student's development, encouraging an appreciation of drawing as the acquisition of deep knowledge as well as dexterity. Drawing and erasing, measuring and adjusting, working and reworking, the making and unmaking of decisions about line and form, tone, scale and space over a prolonged period of time were considered the means by which the work of art was truly seen, experienced, understood. Through such processes, art practice became entangled with art history, with students engaging with the work of the past through the production of the copy, continually moving across time, between the then and the now, the then and the now…

Whilst instruction in observational drawing was central to all students' early curricula, women, admitted to art schools for the first time in the nineteenth century, could struggle to transcend it, becoming, in effect, forever tutored. Representations of women drawing from casts of the male body, eyes lingering, returning, longing, were very much a part of the visual culture of the art school, with copying becoming synonymous with femininity, suppressed desire and frustrated creativity. Images of female copyists as ardent amateurs, devoted to a drawing practice they would never truly master, recur in popular and literary fiction of the modern period,

as well as in newspapers and magazines. In the satirical pictures that circulated through the press, they are startled from their stools by bearded tutors who have come to stand a little too close; disapproving maiden-aunts tut-tut at their copies of muscular male thighs and heavy-lidded eyes, heroic heads thrown back in an ecstasy their nieces ought not dwell upon. Copying is the gazing, the touching, kissing and caressing they cannot do; the desire to draw is the desire to *know*, and such knowledge, it is feared, will prove their undoing. These are the deeper significations of Rilke's buttons.

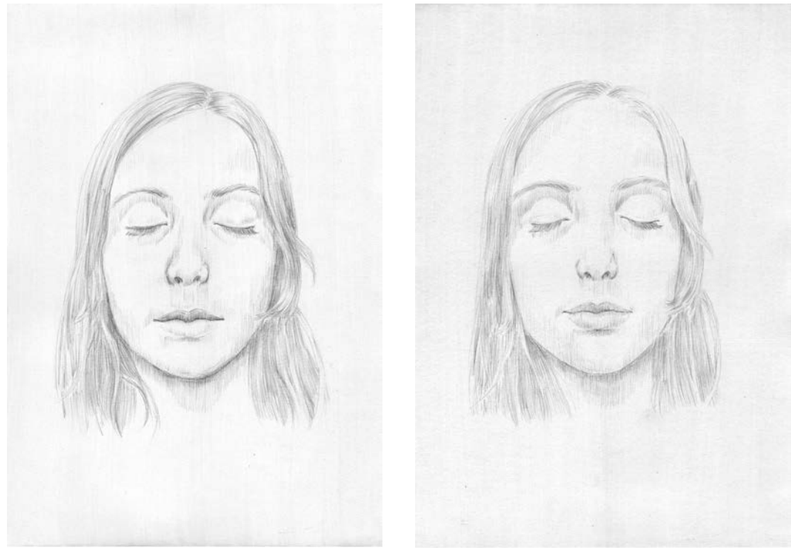
The distrust of female achievement in the arts finds its way into Rilke's description of the women carefully copying the flora and fauna from the tapestries of *The Lady with the Unicorn*: 'And in their intense absorption in the work they have undertaken, these young girls, they never have a moment to look up. They do not realise that all their drawing serves only to suppress within themselves the immutable life revealed before them, radiant and infinitely inexpressible, in these woven pictures.'[14] Too immersed in study to absorb the tapestries' mysteries of courtly, medieval love, the women, to Rilke's mind, bury their femininity deep in the ground of modernity.[15] Refusing the still, virginal splendour of the Lady at the centre of the tapestries through the very act of drawing, the women seek a pleasure in their progressiveness which will be their downfall: 'They are on the verge of giving themselves up, and of thinking about themselves as men might speak of them in their absence. This they take for progress they have made.'[16] Unbuttoned, unhappy if not now then imminently, the women should not engage in such a search, 'they whose strength always lay in being found', a view which sheds some light on Rilke's own often fraught relationship with his wife, the sculptor Clara Westhoff (1878-1954), as well as the strained marriage between their friends, the painters Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907) and Otto Modersohn (1865-1943), to give but two examples.[17]

14. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 86.
15. The meaning of the tapestries has been debated since their rediscovery in 1841. They are widely thought to offer meditations on the five senses, accompanied by a sixth which either starts or ends the series, which bears the motto 'À Mon Seul Désir', meaning to (or of) my only desire. They can be interpreted in a number of ways: as a virgin taming or seducing a unicorn, in accordance with the myth that if a virgin sits in the woods, it will lay its head in her lap; as a woman turning her back on the life of the sinful, pleasure-seeking body to embrace that of the soul.
16. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 86.
17. *Ibid*, p. 87.

These are the sexed and gendered politics of modern creativity and collaborative partnership that Fortnum overturns in her drawn images of eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth-century sculptures. We might interpret these sheets as *feminist copies*, as works which reenact in order to reclaim precisely those processes disparaged by the Rilkes and the maiden-aunts of the past. Their feminism lies both in their reclaiming of history and of process, and in their assertion of a different kind of value and attention. Remarking on the 'perversity' of her choices when considered in the wider context of contemporary art practice (to draw; to make copies; to work from art and literary history; to select sentimental subjects), Fortnum argues further that such politics are expressed through her desire to 'own the undervalued'.[18]

18. Email exchange, Rebecca Fortnum to author, 12 March 2020.

Unknown; Un-knowing



Dream (Stella), Silverpoint on paper, Each work 30 × 21 cm, 2013

Fortnum's works on paper take a long time to realise. Working in fine, pale pencil, in silver point, and in pencil combined with wax and oil, the drawings are composed primarily of vertical lines of varying lengths. They are precise, even painstaking; they emerge detail by dutiful detail, inch by inch. They are labours of love. Though shifting in size from the small 30 × 20 cm silverpoints and fine pencil-work to the large drawings under translucent washes of oil paint on sheets of 100 × 70 cm, they are all as attentive, as *close* to the faces and heads she depicts from reproductions of existing representations, as well as from photographs of living subjects, especially girls and young women. Interested in how the process of copying another image, with its continual returns to the original and corrections to the sheet, affects the immediacy and expressivity of mark-making, Fortnum writes: 'I am looking for a way of making a mark that is somewhat mechanical and devoid of the autograph but I suppose I am also hoping that, in this reiteration, something else might arrive on the paper, a certain quality that is always just out of reach.'[19]

19. Fortnum, 'A Haunting', p. 14.

Something strange happens through the process of re-sizing and re-drawing. Copies are never, and can never, be originals; the closer they come, the more uncanny they appear, and this unnerving sense of the familiar becoming unfamiliar, of a disquieting 'other' emerging through the re-representation of a face, is the atmosphere Fortnum seeks to create. She is interested in the discomforting nature of comparative visual analysis, of the affects (emotive, cognitive) of the shifting of the eyes between the original and the copy, the copy and the copy of the copy, back and forth from image to image. Often displaying different drawn versions of the same original alongside each other in her exhibitions and publications, Fortnum asks that we look carefully, even forensically, noticing the details and the deviations, that we settle within the feeling of being unsettled, unsure of exactly what or who we are looking at. Our feeling of uncertainty is heightened by the fact that the vast majority of Fortnum's sitters have their eyes closed, frustrating our desire for knowledge of them. Playing with the conventions of portraiture, her drawings become ways of un-knowing the subject they depict. Are they who we think they are? How can we tell? In her *Dream series* of 2010, two drawings from the single photograph of the child with their eyes shut are displayed within the same frame.[20] When, she writes, such doubled drawings 'are placed side by side, even small shifts in the lines' placement and length create the curious paradox of dissimilar twins'.[21]

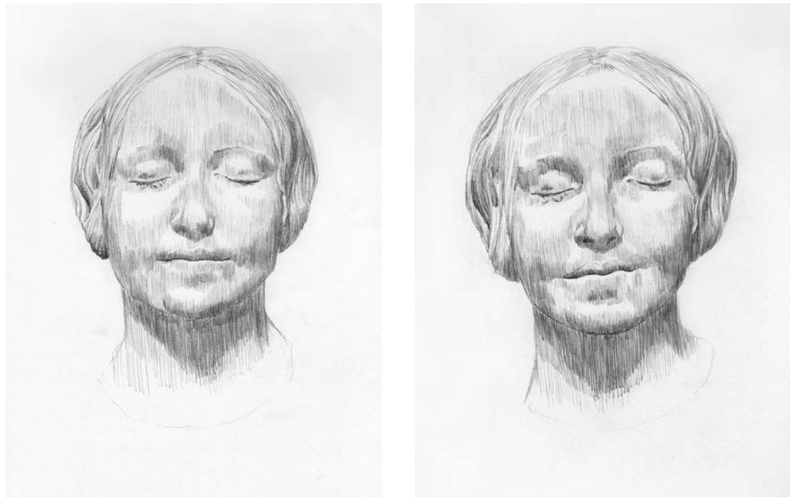
Fortnum's interest in the essential ambivalence of the image, and especially of the portrait, lies behind her turn to the mask of the *Inconnue de la Seine (Unknown Woman of the Seine)*, the cast of the face of a young woman reputedly pulled from the river after she had drowned, eyes forever shut, which first became an object of cultish devotion in Paris in the 1890s. Reproduced as a decorative death mask around 1900, collected by artists and writers, displayed on studio walls and in drawing-room shrines to femininity, love and loss, the *Inconnue* was the embodiment of the copy. Reputedly first used in Paris as a model for observational teaching at the *École des Beaux Arts*,[22] sufficiently well-known to be reproduced as 'No. 13525: La Belle Italienne, from life' (referencing the mask's first production

20. The *Dream* series was displayed in the exhibition *Absurd Impositions* at V&A Museum of Childhood, London, 2011.
21. Fortnum, 'A Haunting', p. 16.
22. Anne-Gaëlle Saliot, *The Drowned Muse: Casting the Unknown Woman of the Seine Across the Tides of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 2.

by an Italian mould-maker) in the American *Catalogue of Plaster Cast Reproductions from Antique, Medieval and Modern Sculpture* of 1901,[23] the *Inconnue* also functioned pedagogically in the teaching of art school students' mimetic skills in the realisation of head studies.

The identity of the woman with the enigmatic smile and the matted lashes is not known, and this suits Fortnum, with her interest in the conditional, ever-changing nature of identity, and of how people become objects of sight, and resist becoming objects of sight. Endlessly reproduced in mask upon mask, photograph upon photograph, postcard upon postcard, the features of the supposed suicide, the lover wronged (how else to explain her fate?), have lost any definition they might once have had, with the visage of the individual being transformed into the image of the icon.[24] Untraceable, unidentifiable, the *Inconnue* appears only in the depictions of others, becoming ever more elusive, and ever more rich in potential for imaginative projection; 'Representation,' as artist Louisa Minkin has noted in an essay on Fortnum's portraits of children with their eyes closed, 'somehow exceeds identification'.[25]

23. *Catalogue of Plaster Cast Reproduction From Antique, Medieval and Modern Sculpture: Subjects for Art Schools* (Boston: P. P. Caproni & Brother, 1901).
24. See for example Vladimir Nabokov's poem, *L'Inconnue de la Seine* of 1934, which stages a conversation between the poet and the Inconnue, whose face he holds whilst seated on the edge of a mattress, and who will not (cannot) answer his jealous questions: 'Immobile and convex the eyelids. Thickly matted the lashes. Reply - can this be forever, forever? Ah, the way they could glance, those eyes! … Who was he, I beseech you, tell me, your mysterious seducer?' Reproduced in Saliot, *Drowned Muse*, p. 335.
25. Louisa Minkin, 'I close my eyes and count to ten', in *Rebecca Fortnum: Self Contained* (Sheffield: Research Group for Artists Publications, 2013), pp. 45-54, p. 45.

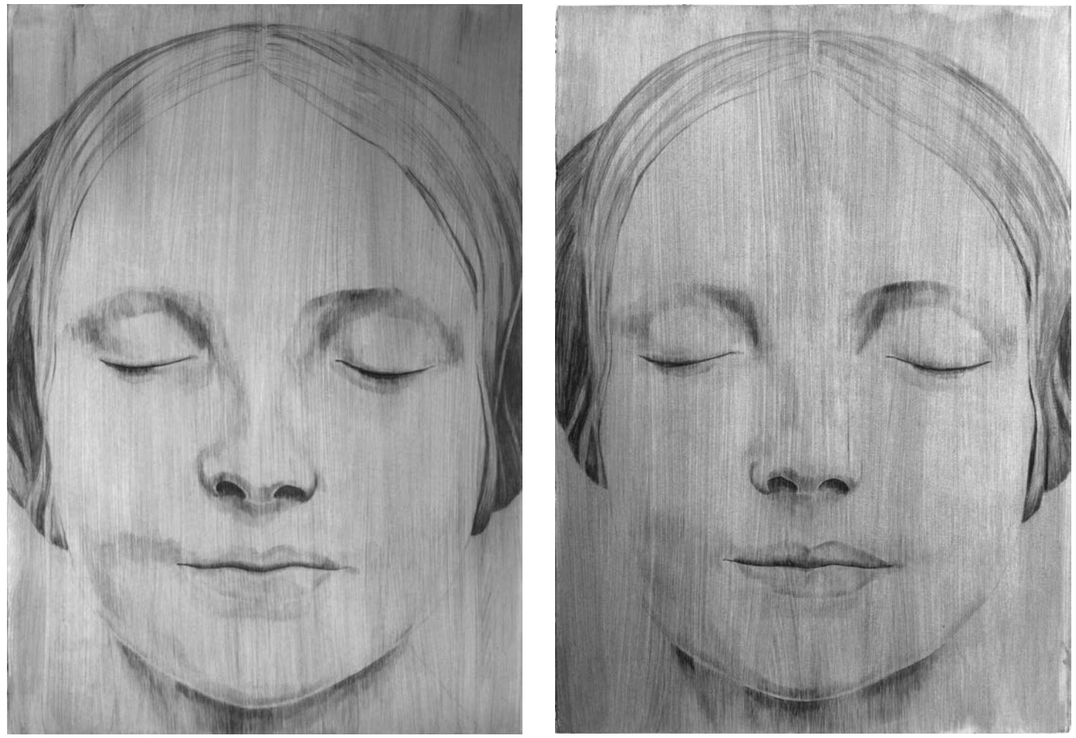


L'Inconnue de la Seine iii, Pencil on paper, Each work 42 × 30 cm, 2010

A copy of endless copies, that can never be traced back to its original, which calls into question the very notion of a search for a subject, historical or otherwise, the *Inconnue* appeals to Fortnum because of her refusal to give herself away. She has drawn from many different pictures of many different versions of the mask of the *Inconnue*, at a remove from an already-removed object, on a number of occasions since 2010, revelling in their subtle differences, realising her features in pencil, head tilted this way and that, and in mixed media, with those same features appearing through watery grey-blue paint as if emerging from (or returning to) the filthy water she was supposedly dragged from. Is the *Inconnue* smiling at our frustration in our search for her personhood, at our desire to look into the eyes she will never open? Is this *what she knows*?

The *Inconnue* appears in Rilke's *Notebooks*. Referring to the *mouleur* (moulder of masks) of *La maison Lorenzi*, a family of Italian cast-makers who established a shop and studio on the Rue Racine in Paris' *Sixth Arrondissement*, and who were the first to produce the mask of the *Inconnue*, Rilke's young hero Malte observes: 'The *mouleur* whose shop I pass every day has hung two masks beside his door. The face of the young woman who drowned, which they took a cast of in the morgue because it was beautiful, because it was smiling, smiling so deceptively, as if it knew. And under it, his face, which

did know.'[26] *His* face refers to Beethoven's face, to the face of poetic genius, of masculinity as meaning and as monument. Women, in Rilke's world, could not attain such knowledge or significance (copyists, we should remind ourselves, not artists); in response to Rilke, we might interpret the smile of the *Inconnue* as a wry one, as one that *did* know, and only too well. Fortnum writes of her drawing of the mask as 'an act of resuscitation', a reviving through the movement of the pencil, a waking to life.[27] Restoring her potential for such subjectivity, for speech, Fortnum's drawings of the *Inconnue* are liminal images, both silent and full of words, historical and contemporary, dead and alive.



L'Inconnue de la Seine (large ii), Pencil, oil and wax on paper, Each work 100 × 70 cm, 2012

26. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 49.
27. Fortnum, 'A Haunting', p. 11.

Prosopopoeia

Did Rodin, the subject of the monograph Rilke had travelled to Paris to research in 1902, know of the *Inconnue*? It is unimaginable that he did not, such was her acclaim. Though there are no references to the mask in his correspondence, in the same year of Rilke's visit, Rodin created a marble bas-relief of a sailor's last vision: the serene face of a young woman, her cheeks cupped with another's hands, which rises like a wave above the drowning man's head.[28] In its symmetry and tranquillity, its broad forehead and high cheekbones, the woman's face may very well be Rodin's copy of the *Inconnue*, the theme of the shipwreck and the transposal of the drowned subject providing his own elaboration on the mask's supposedly watery origins. An assemblage of many elements, typical of Rodin's late sculptural practice, the hands that surround the faces came from Rodin's vast inventory of such fragments, carefully arranged in shallow drawers in his studio, which he sculpted more than any other part of the body. The discrepancies in scale between such composite body parts were one of the many signifiers of Rodin's modernism, though they have other resonances when considered in relation to the *Inconnue*. In the case of this bas-relief, the hands which surround the woman's face are too large for her, and this suggests the presence of another body. This other body evokes a further aspect of the mask: its importance as a three-dimensional object which summoned the holding of the deceased's face, which was touched, even kissed, as well as gazed upon, willed to life.

Rodin valued the sculptor's ability to create hands above all other parts of the body, such was their import for his expressive representation of the figure. Camille Claudel (1864-1943), the young artist who began working for him around 1884, was so adept at articulating them that her sculpted hands (as well as feet) were often incorporated into his monumental, multi-figure pieces, bodies, practices, histories and legacies entangling. Her bonneted head was first sculpted by Rodin in what is widely assumed to be the first

28. The bas-relief was first exhibited in Prague in 1902 with the title *L'Etoile du Matin (The Morning Star)*. It was also named *Avant le Naufrage (After the Shipwreck)*. It was repurposed for the memorial for one of Rodin's friends, the poet Maurice Rollinat who had committed suicide in 1903, and renamed *Dernière Vision (The Last Vision)*. For more information see Online Catalogue Entry, 'Auguste Rodin, *Dernière Vision*, 1902 (Marble).' Retrieved from http://www.musee-rodin.fr/fr/collections/sculptures/derniere-vision on 2 March 2020.

year of her arrival in his studio. It would go on to be realised in many materials, from plaster and terracotta, the first stage, through to bronze and glass paste in 1911, many years after the end of their relationship around 1892. Leaving the traces of his working methods visible, Rodin drew attention to his manipulation of these materials, to his active representation of her as a subject for portraiture. The teardrops of clay in the corner of her eyes, the seams of the mould that criss-cross the planes of her face, the thumb prints on her forehead and hat; Claudel's head is *his* head, his artistry, his mastery. It is interesting that it has been interpreted as an ambivalent representation, an object which reveals a 'sense of estrangement', an 'underlying sadness', an 'emotional distance'; 'her gaze far away'.[29] Material innovation, it is suggested, conveyed (if not produced) psycho-sexual affects. We are back to the complexities of collaborative creative partnerships.

Fortnum's image of Claudel with a bonnet is part of a recent series of drawings and small-scale paintings of sculptures of women from the modern period with downcast eyes; eyes heavily shadowed, which do not return the gaze of the viewer, lover, creator, which refuse and resist. Entitled *Prosopopoeia*, which refers to the representation of the imaginary, dead or absent person as alive and capable of speech and of hearing, the series continues Fortnum's interest in 'speaking with', in drawing and painting as a means of listening and talking to, of engaging in conversation with the often forgotten or marginalised subjects of art history, women long-dead. Rodin's sculpture of Claudel's head features alongside Fortnum's paintings of his head of his mistress of many years, and wife of one, Rose Beuret (1844-1917) of *c.* 1880-82, as well as Claudel's own, ecstatic female heads including *The Psalm* of 1889 and *Young Woman with Closed Eyes* of 1885. Measuring 20 × 45 cm, realised in oil on board, and paired with an abstract panel which evokes the organic patterns of heavy damask fabric, a decorative 'twin' which conjures the curves of the nose, brows and lips of its figurative other, the paintings are continuations of the paired images of the *Inconnue* and of the children with closed eyes, offering further reflections on the gendered nature of looking, copying, and creating. The paint, though, distinguishes them.

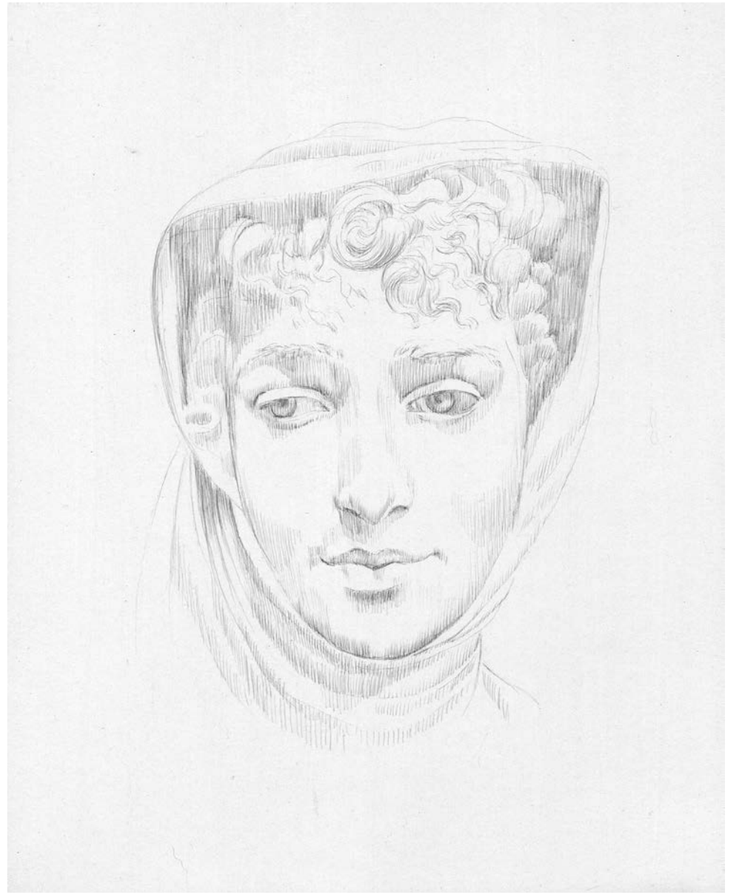
29. Online Catalogue Entry, 'Auguste Rodin, *Camille Claudel with a Bonnet*, *c.* 1884 (Terracotta)'. Retrieved from http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/camille-claudel-bonnet on 2 March 2020.

Sketchbook page, Metropolitan Museum, 2017

In her essay 'ReMembering', Fortnum reflects upon the Pygmalion story 'that is the transformation from stone to flesh, from inert to sensible matter, via desire'. She describes her wanderings around the sculpture corridors and courts in the museums of Western Europe, as 'an encounter with the dead', a mortality that sculpture, in all its visceral veracity and three-dimensionality, is constantly on the verge of overcoming: 'We see not only the representations of others but can imagine their physicality, the way they stood before their image to review it, the image that now we are also in front of.'[30] The viewer re-enacts the actions of the historical subject who was once studied so closely, *becoming* this subject for a moment in time through running their eyes over the sculpted surface as the subject would have once run their hands over the work itself, through appraising the artist's realisation of a nose, a lip, an ear, a neck. ('Is that me? Am I you?') Such a process vividly brings the sculpted subject to life. As Fortnum describes it, 'this haptic looking allows the surface to open up, to transform; terracotta or marble turned to skin, muscle, bone'.[31] Painting is a dramatisation of this

30. Fortnum, 'ReMembering', *Data Loam: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft (the Future of Knowledge Systems)*. (Eds. Johnny Golding, Martin Reinhart, Mattia Paganelli), (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).
31. *Ibid.*

process. Turning cold, white marble into warm, pink flesh, dark, curling hair and moist, red lip, painting from sculpture in coloured oils is, it is hoped, another act of resuscitation, akin to Fortnum's description of the drawing of the *Inconnue de la Seine*. She writes: 'Can fervent imagining really, in some unaccountable way, convey a touch to the brush that will conjure the ancient stone as skin, covered with soft, downy but invisible hairs?'[32] Can the selection and manipulation of pigment create a living, breathing historical subject, something *more* than a copy, more even than a work of art?



Untitled, Silverpoint from *From Mass to Form*, 25 × 20 cm, 2016

32. *Ibid.*

A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter

In his description of the young women at the Musée de Cluny, sat copying details from the *Lady with the Unicorn*, Rilke becomes a ventriloquist, speaking not just of them, but for them. We hear their muttered, interior voices, their attempts to convince themselves that all will be well, in life as well as in work: 'No, it is really better to be drawing, anything at all. In time the likeness will become apparent. And art, gradually acquired in this way, is an enviable accomplishment, after all.'[33] We can imagine their immense concentration on the matter of how to draw, sense something of their frustration in realising that the marks they were making did not convey the image they were studying. Would they ever? Perhaps, in time.

Fortnum's returns to the sculpted heads of women from the modern period are not concerned with the perfection of the likeness, however closely they resemble the original object. Rather, they comprise a method in reappraising representations of women through re-drawing representations of women, engaging with the history of art and of literature in order to re-write it, repairing its future.

Whilst Rilke's novel is not referenced by Fortnum, his unbuttoned women in museums, viewed and voiced by men, are very much her subject. The exhibition that accompanies this book is titled *A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter*, which Fortnum has taken from George Eliot's description of the cleric Mr Casaubon in *Middlemarch* of 1871-1872. Whilst literally referring to the great project he never manages to realise, Fortnum detaches it from the text to think about female experience, about the creativity which does not materialise in anything tangible. Elsewhere in the book, we encounter Mr Casaubon's wife, Dorothea Brooke, who is spied walking through the statues in the Vatican, standing close to the reclining Ariadne, but with eyes cast down at the floor. Called to the attention of Will Ladislaw by another visitor to the gallery ('Come here, quick! Else she will have changed her pose.'), the two men gaze upon Dorothea and the Ariadne, observing a distinction between marble and flesh, between antique beauty 'not corpse-like even in death' and beauty in its 'breathing life', which is altogether

33. Rilke, *Notebooks* (2009), p. 86.

tenuous.[34] Such a process of becoming, of sculpture into flesh, for Fortnum, is as psychical as it is physical, denoting the formation of female identity. She makes a feminist intervention in the text by re-enacting their looking, bringing the sculpted subject to life through paint.

In her theorisation of re-enactment, Rebecca Schneider turns to Adrienne Rich's notion of 're-vision', which Rich conceives as a political act, formulated in order to change women's lives:

> 'Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival.'[35]

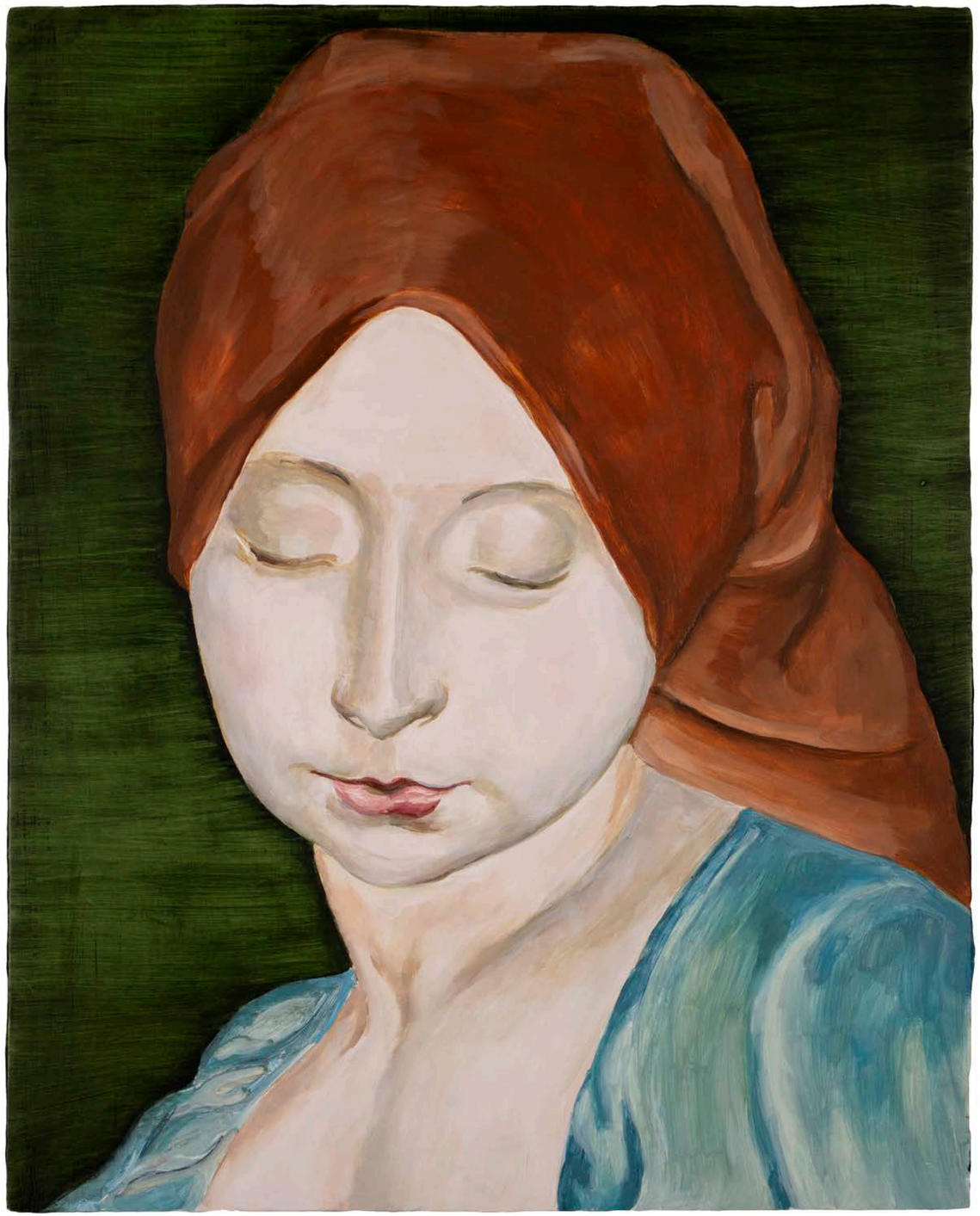
Rich is referring to the feminist critique of literature, which takes the literary work 'as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see - and therefore live - afresh'.[36] Though writing about texts, Rich's notion of re-vision is particularly compelling when considered as a method by which we might approach the creation of the work of art, especially the work of art which returns to another, which re-draws it in order to re-vision it for the future. Such 'copying', Fortnum's work declares, is an intrinsically feminist mode of critical enquiry; a fastening of buttons; a creative act.

Gemma Blackshaw
Professor of Art History,
Royal College of Art, London

34. George Eliot, Middlemarch, (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 188-189.
35. Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *College English*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Women, Writing and Teaching (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), pp. 18-30, p. 18.
36. Rich, 'Writing as Re-Vision', p. 18.

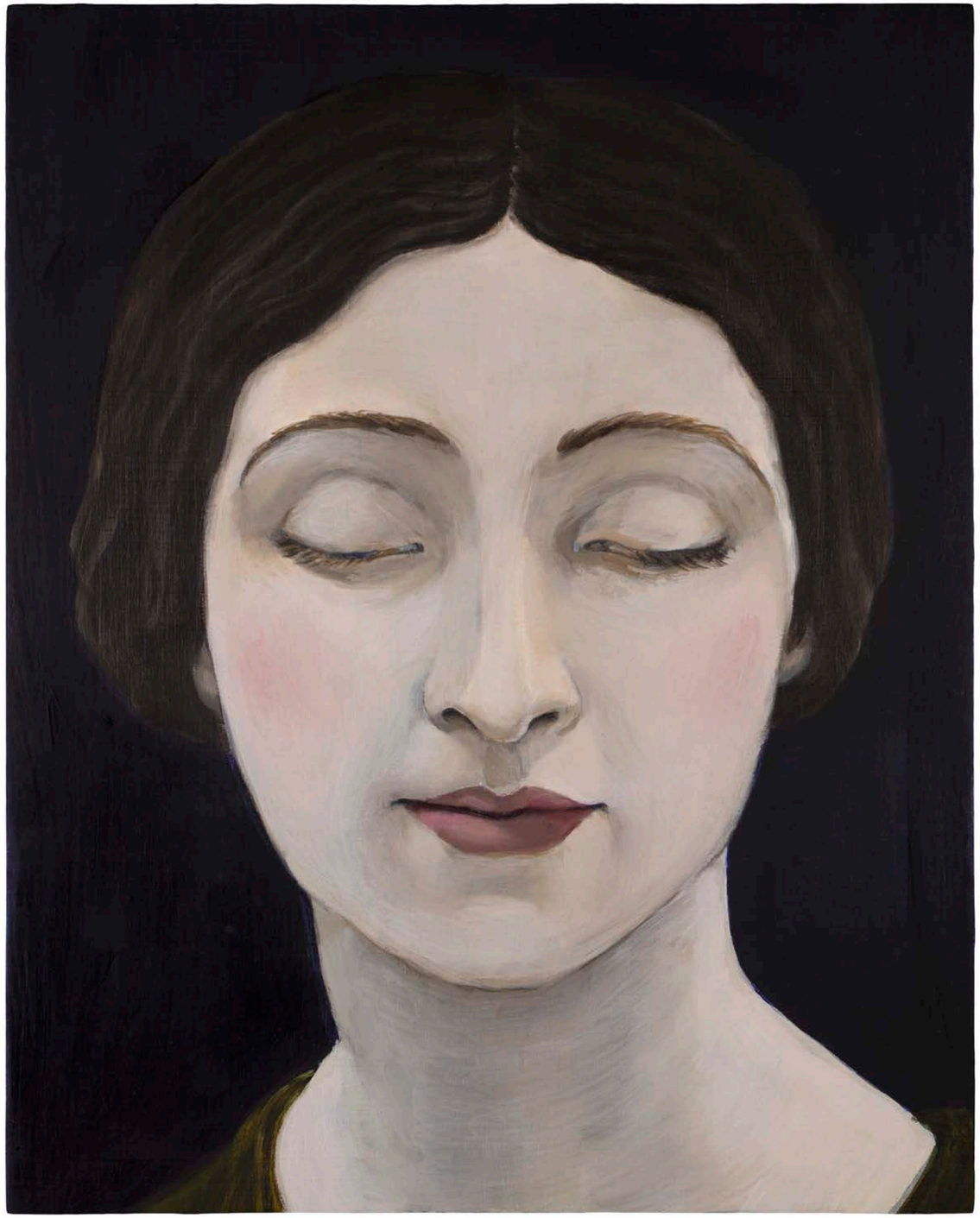
All paintings:
Oil on gesso panel, 2016–2020

Pages 23–53: 25 × 20 cm
Page 54: 25 × 25 cm

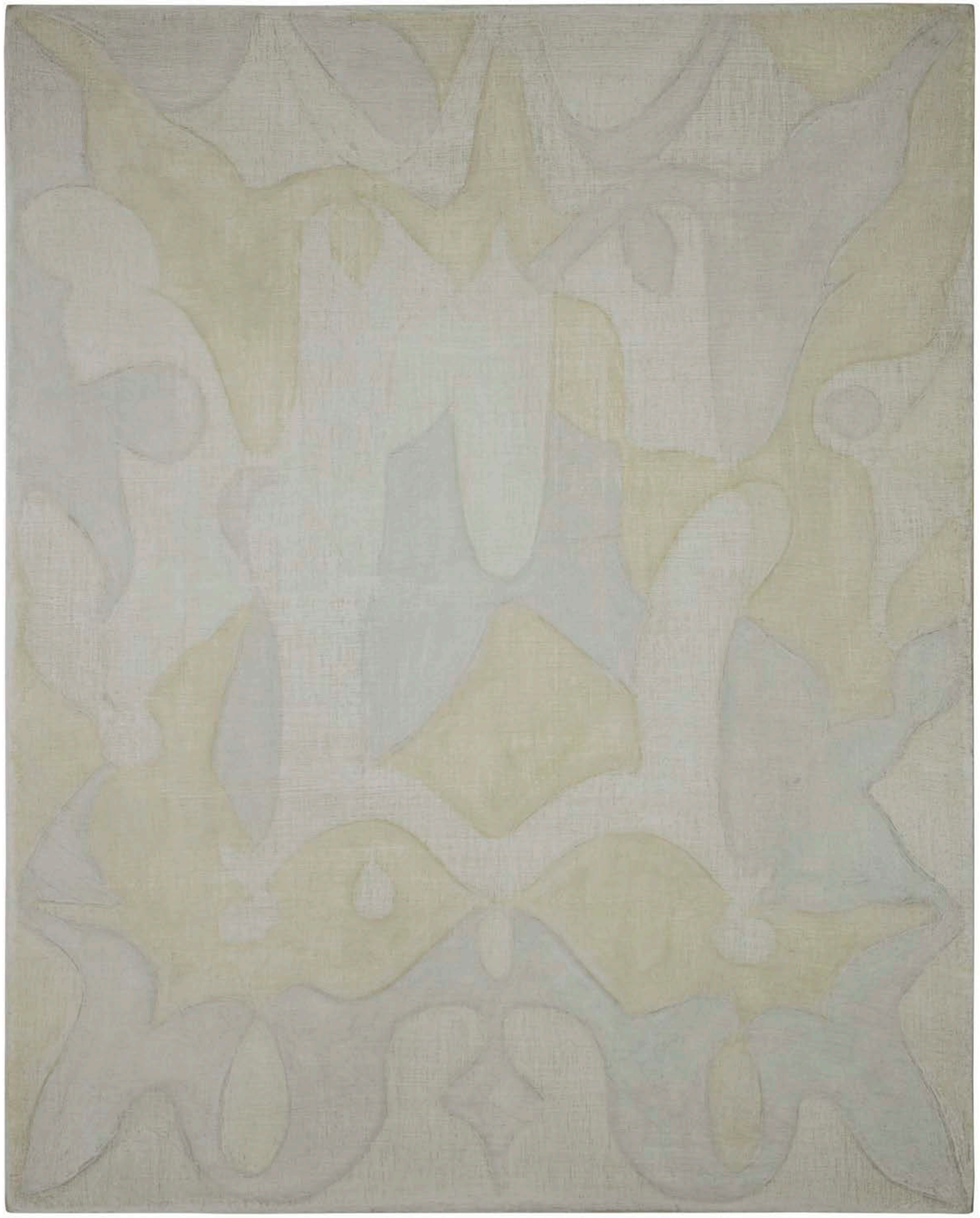


Proposopopoeia (Dalou, unknown Fitzwilliam)

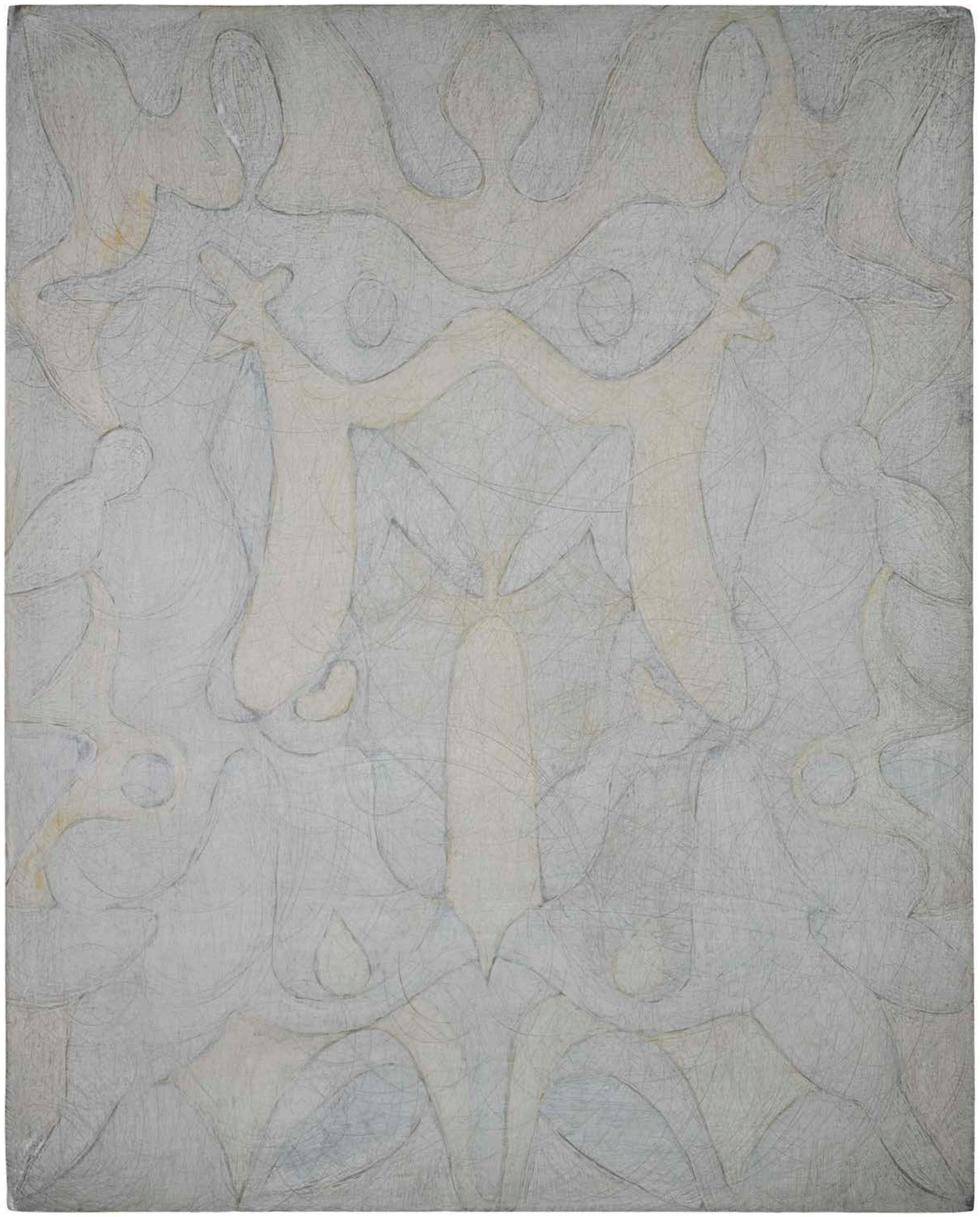
Prosopopoeia (Rodin, Camille Claudel i)

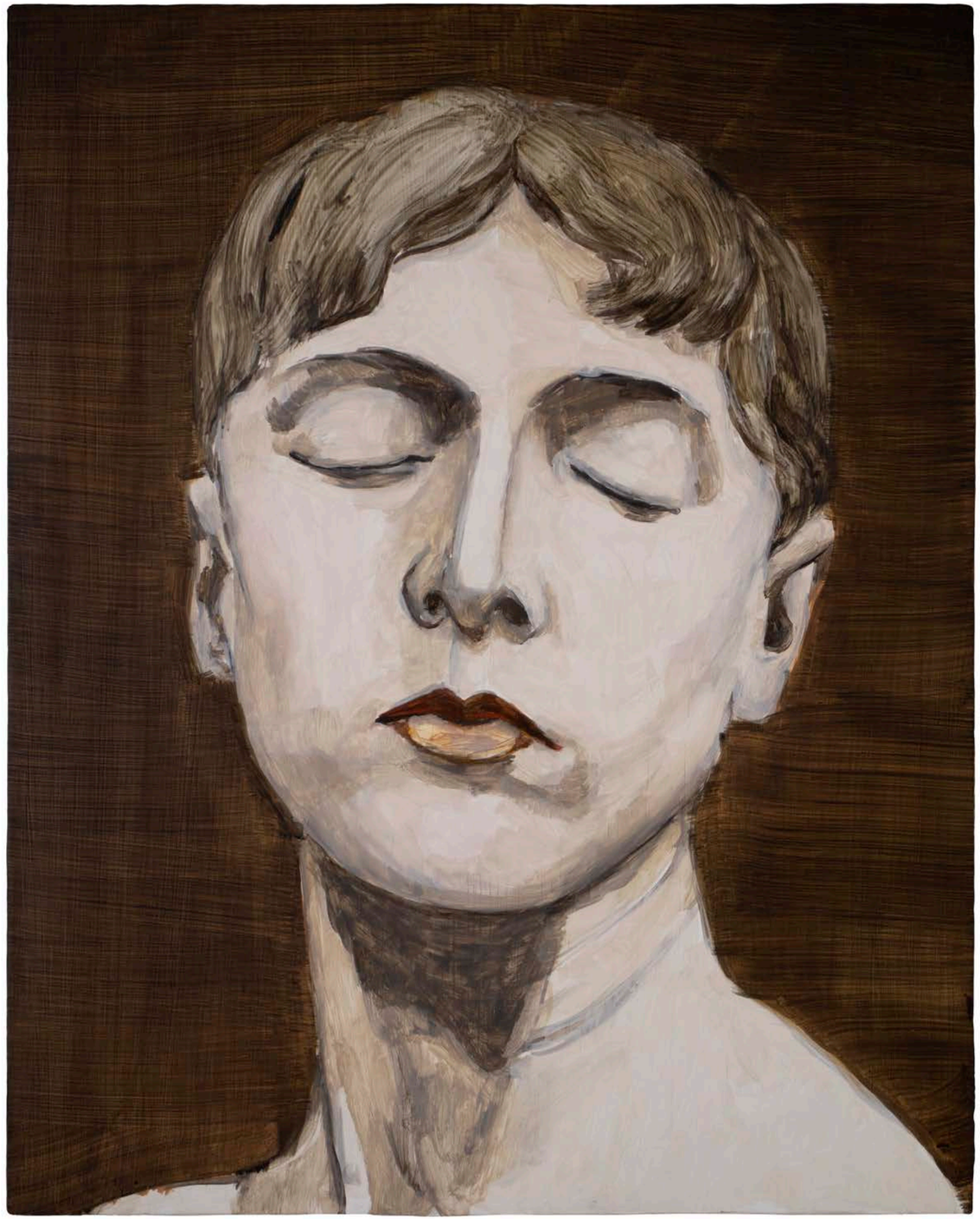


Prosopopoeia (Parc, unknown)



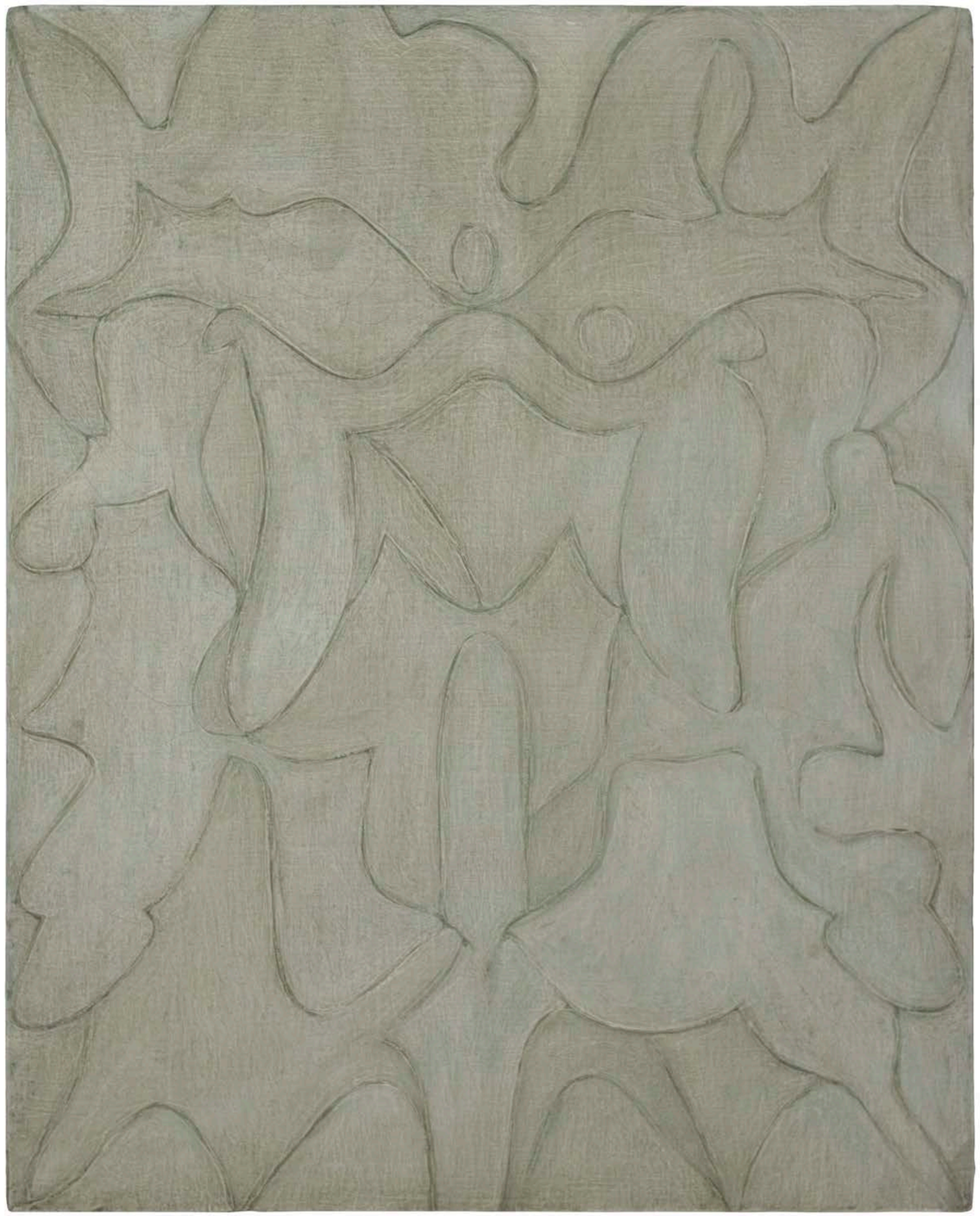
Prosopopoeia (Carrier-Belleuse, Marguerite Bellanger)



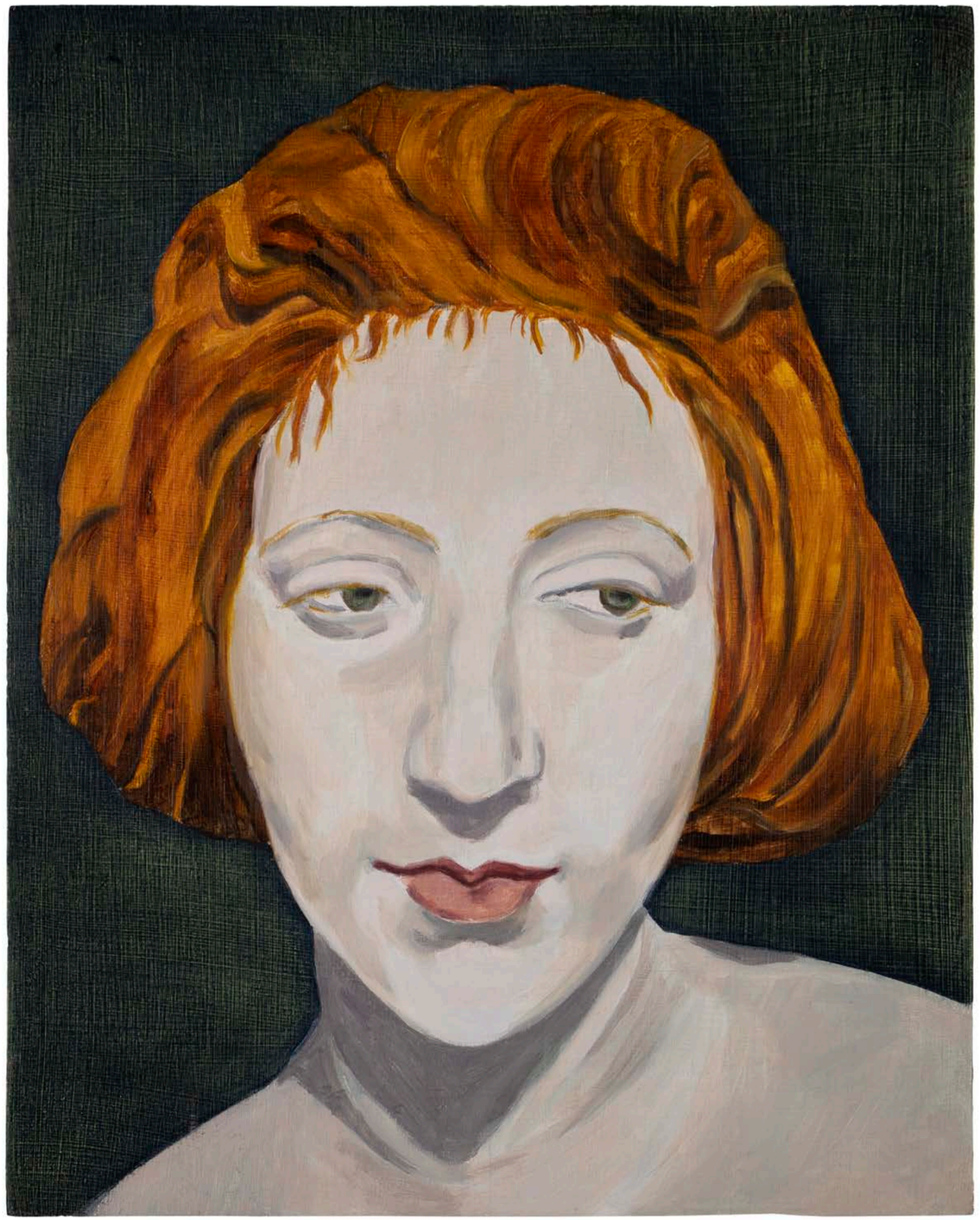


Prosopopoeia (Claudel, unknown ii)

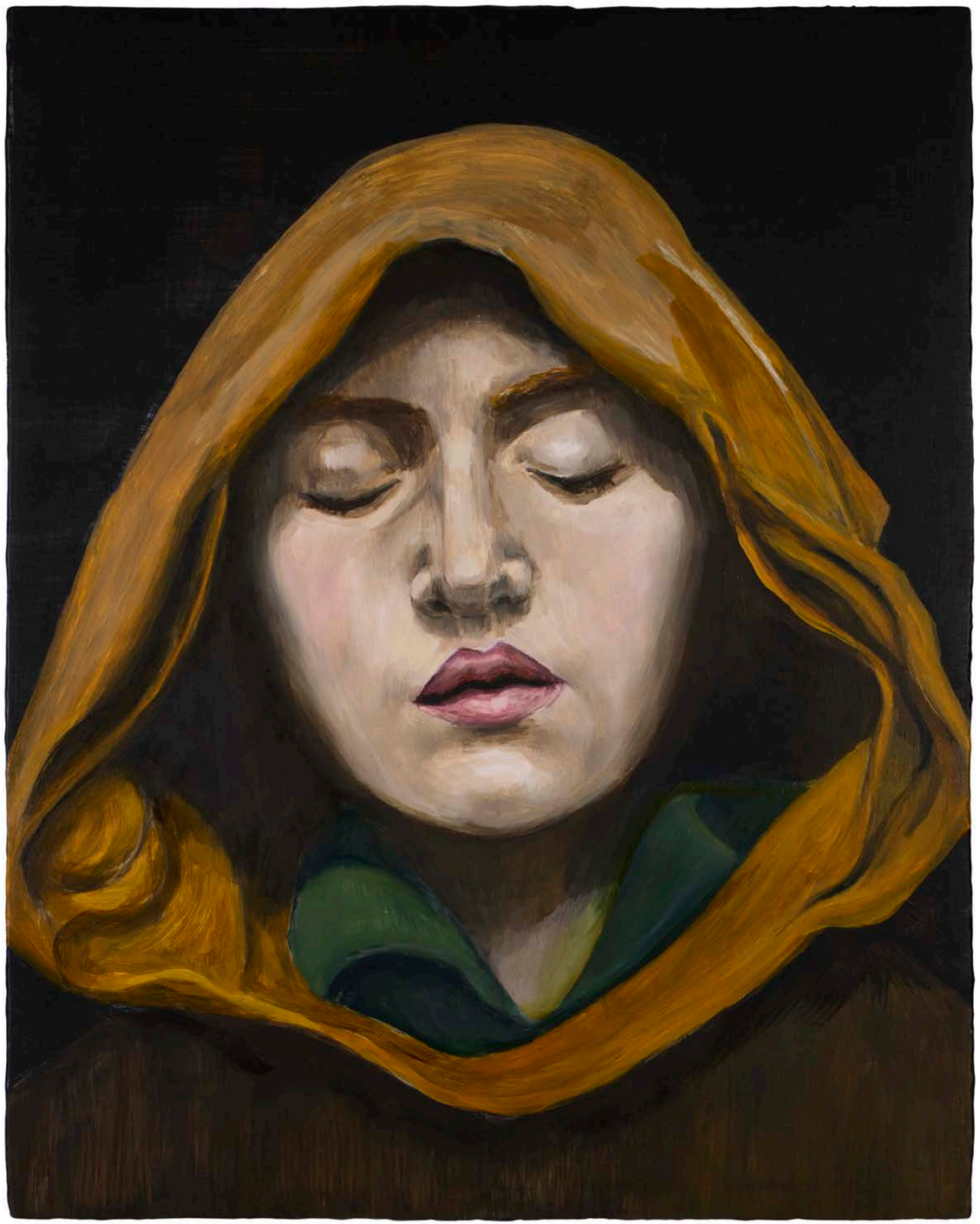
Prosopopoeia (Dalou, unknown Van Gogh)



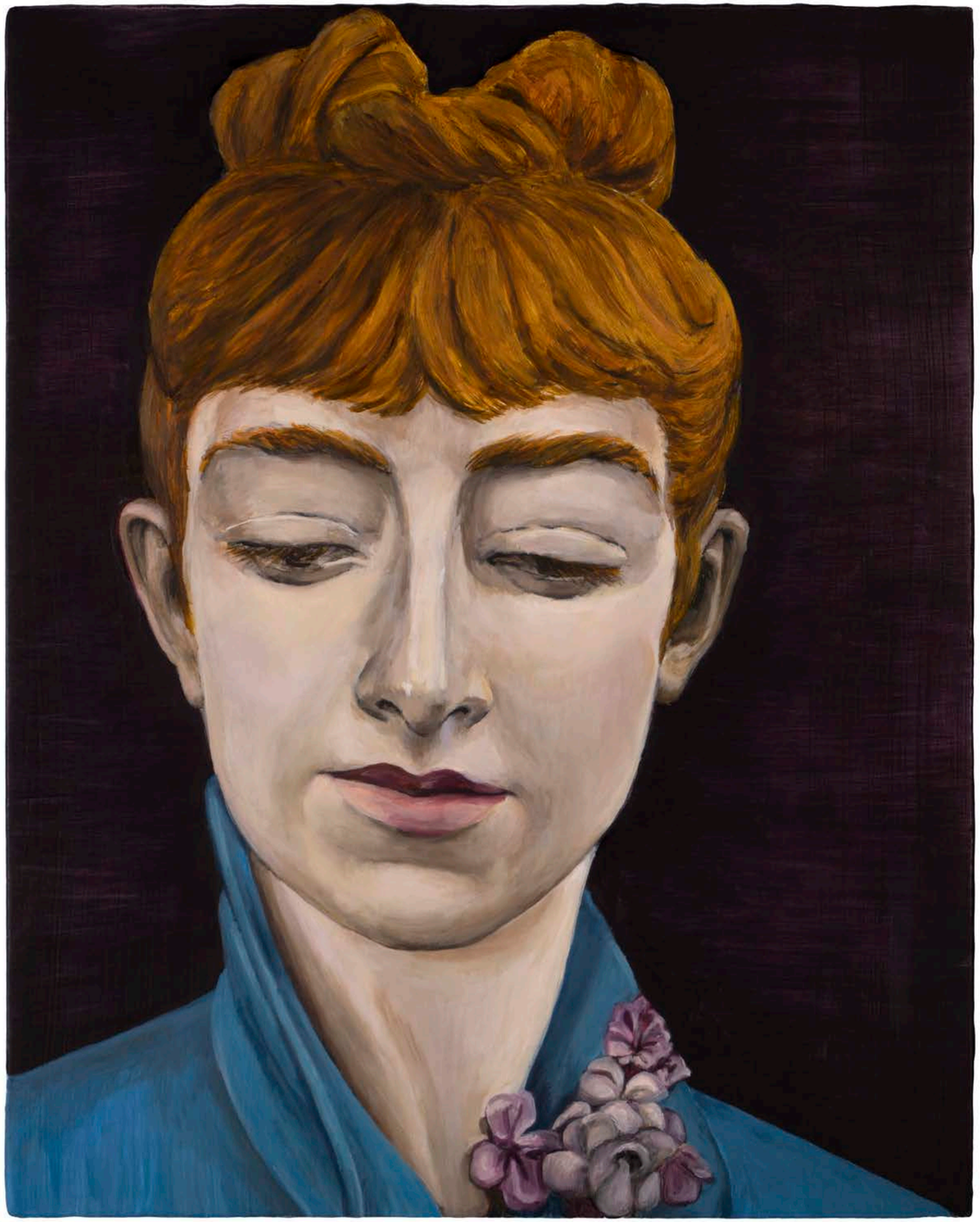
Prosopopoeia (Dalou, unknown Fitzwilliam ii)



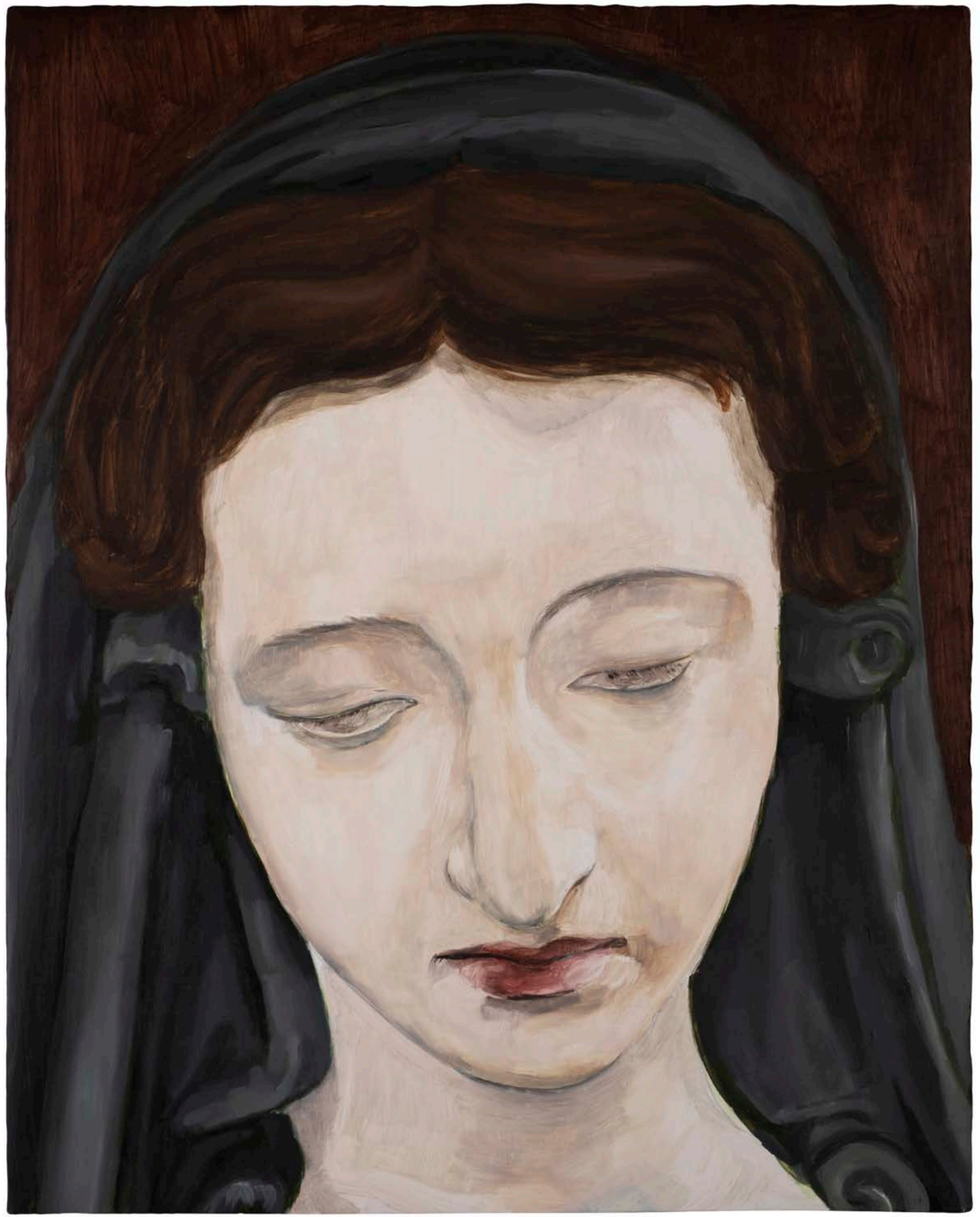
Prosopopoeia (Dressler, Nina Resch)



Prosopopoeia (Claudel, unknown Boucher)

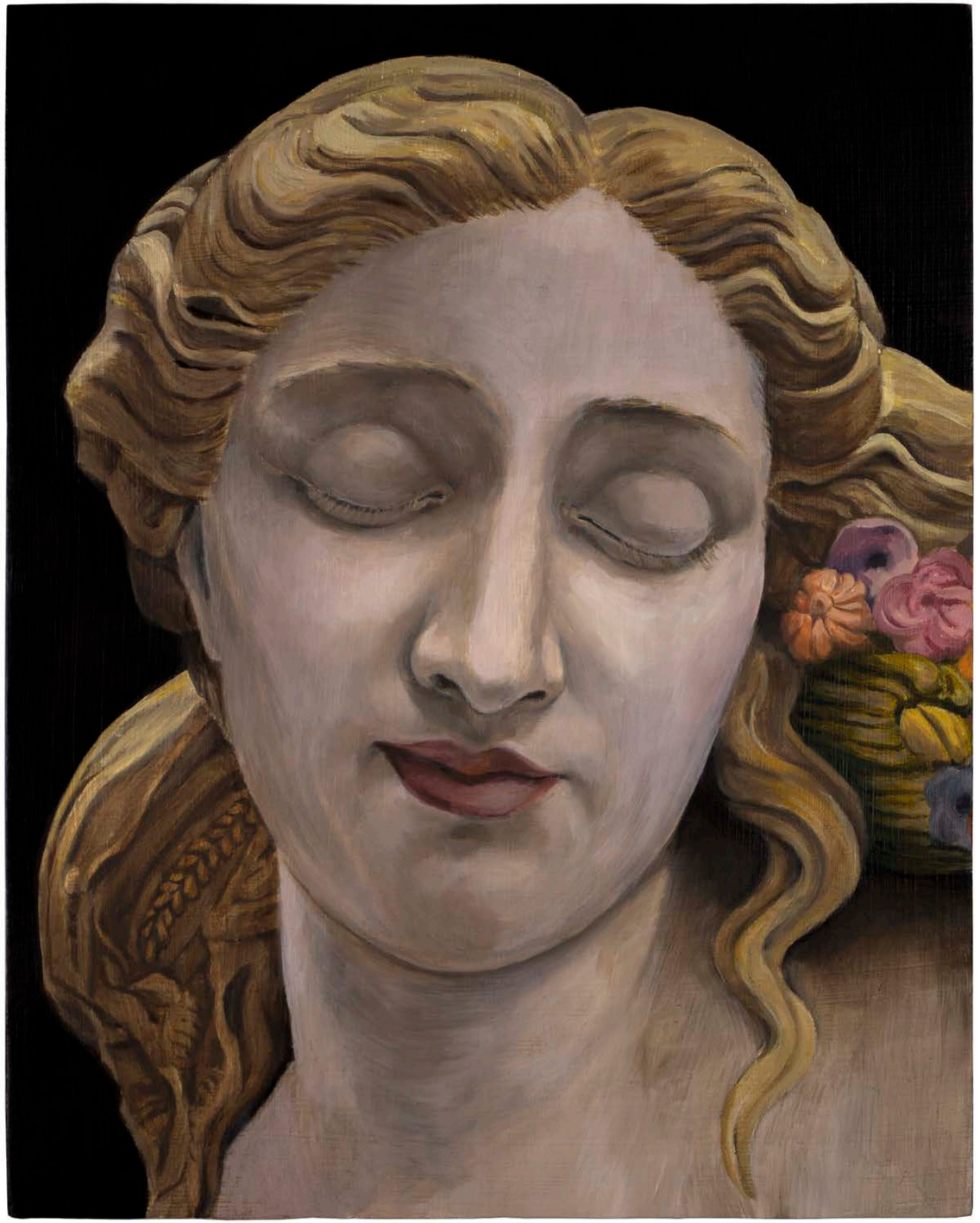


Prosopopoeia (Bernhardt, Louise Abbéma)



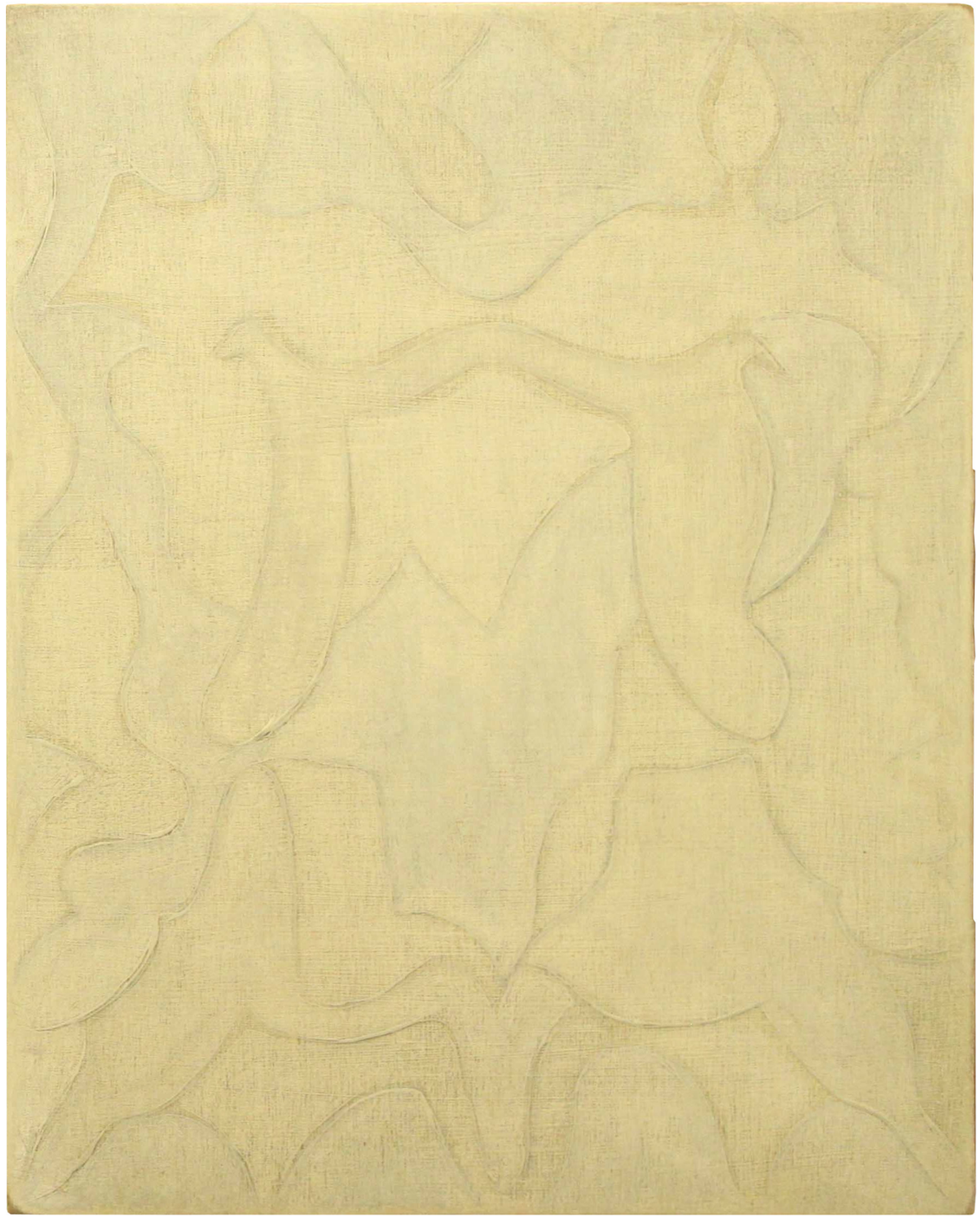
Prosopopoeia (Chantry, Martha St Vincent)

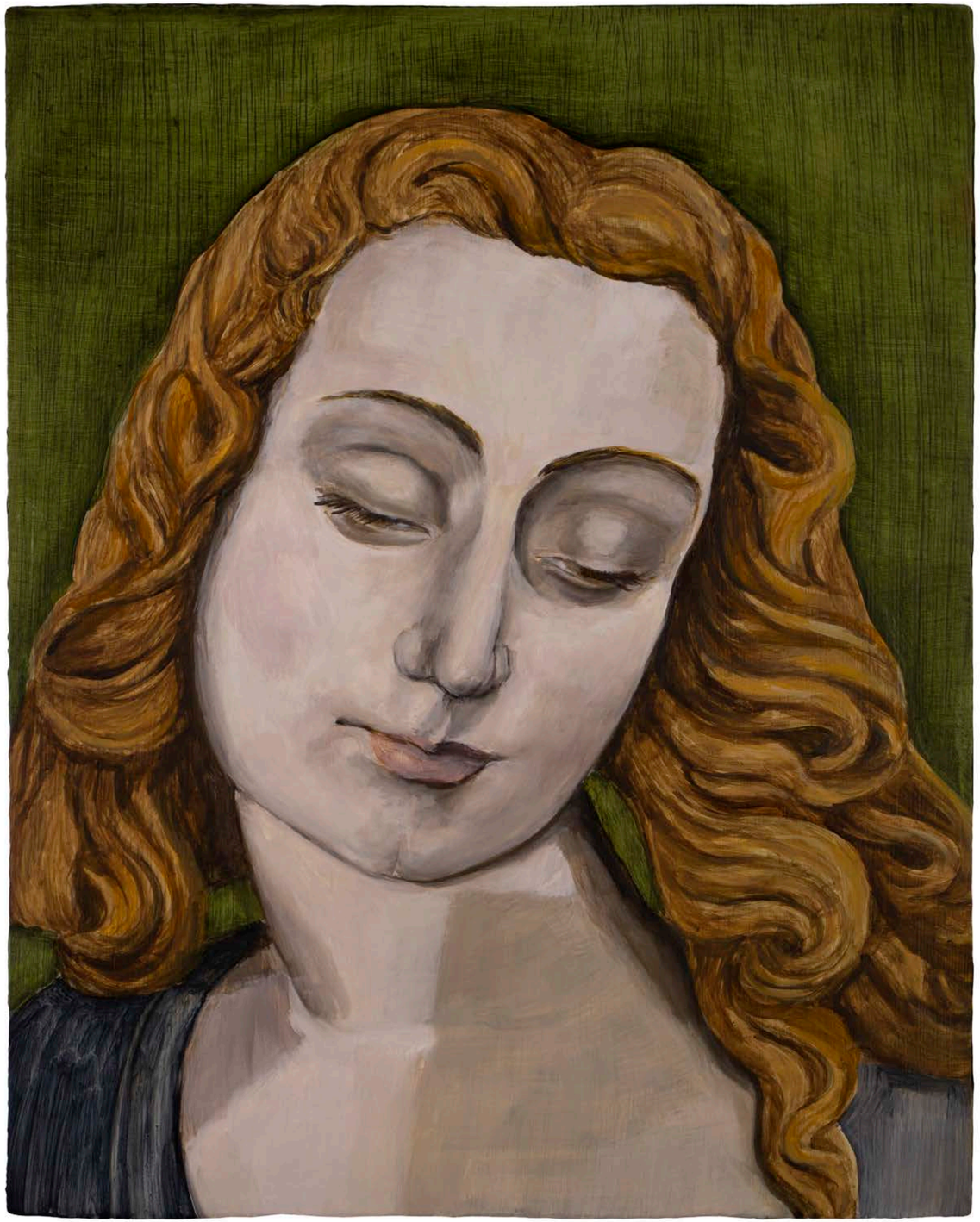
Prosopopoeia (Parodi, Cleopatra)



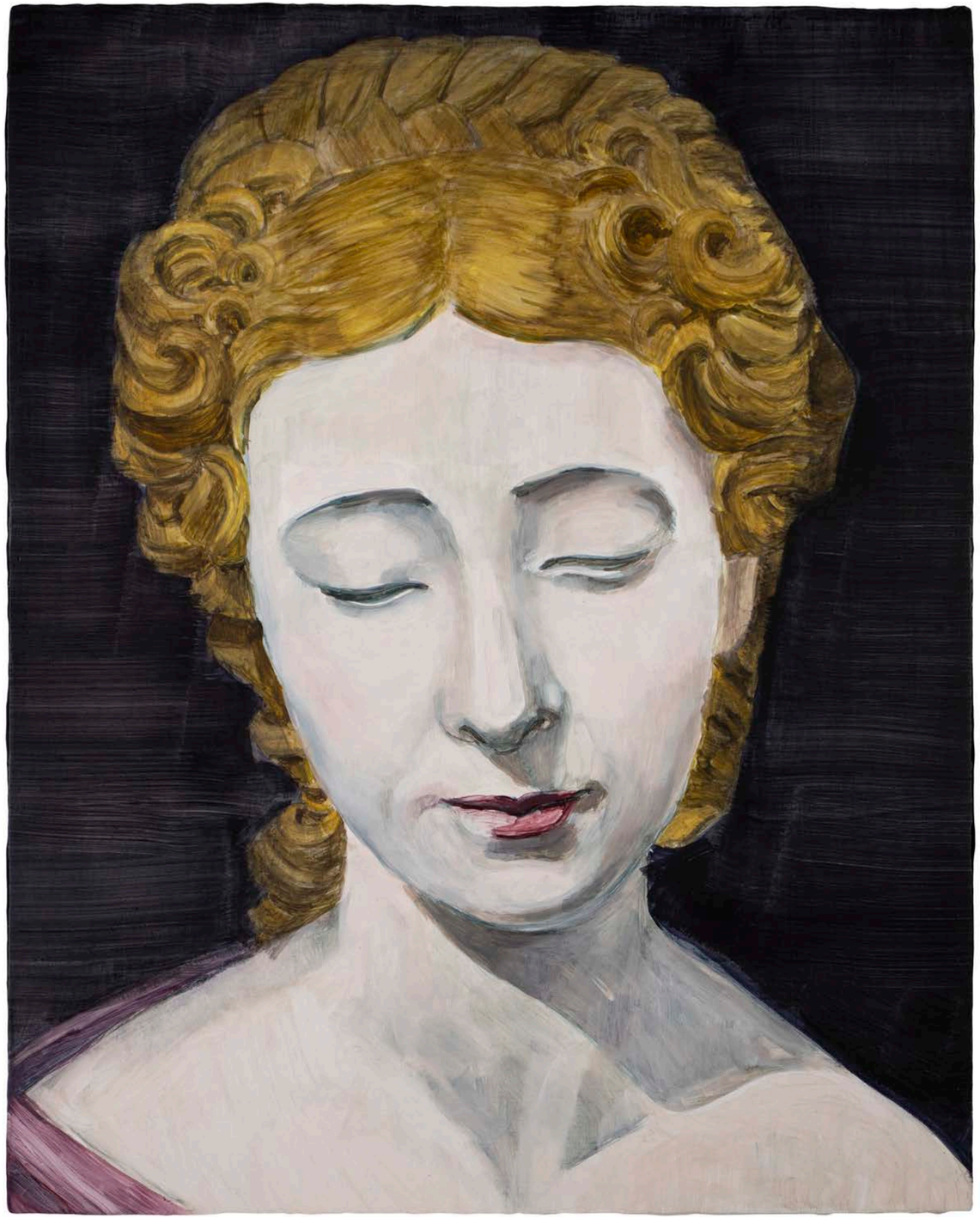
Prosopopoeia (Veray, unknown)

Prosopopoeia (Dalou, unknown V&A)



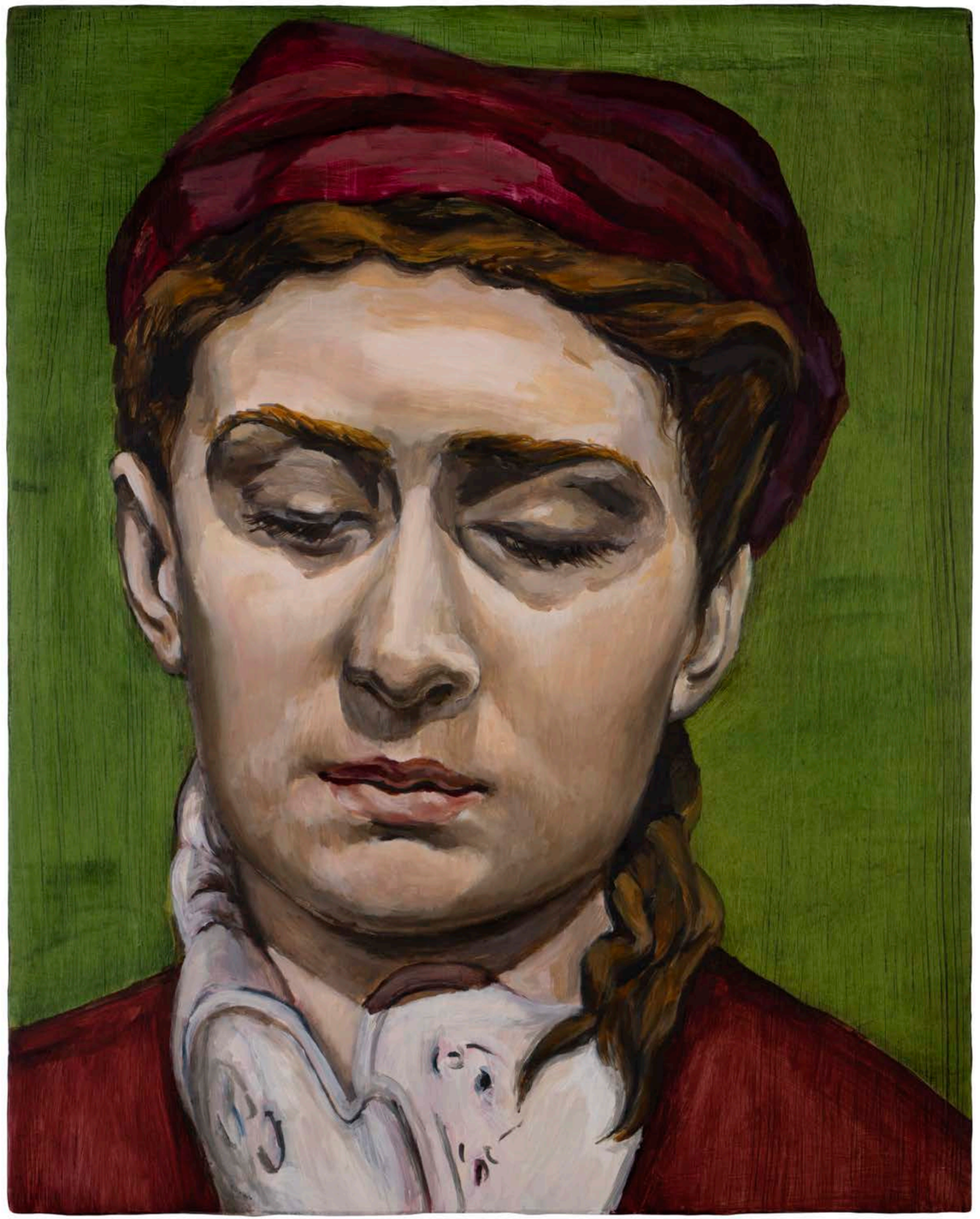


Prosopopoeia (Dieussart, Judith)



Prosopopoeia (Joseph, Hamilton Lady Belhaven & Stenton)

Prosopopoeia (Chapu, Princess Victoria)



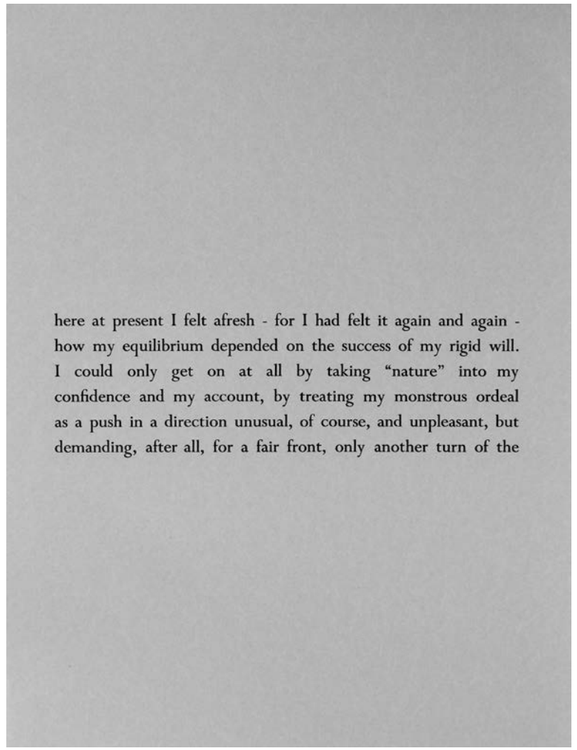
Prosopopoeia (Rodin, Rose Beuret)

Prosopopoeia (Rodin, Camille Claudel ii)

Rebecca Fortnum and Melissa Gordon in conversation, February 2020

Melissa Gordon: I would like to start a discussion on your recent drawings and paintings by referring to the Victorian short ghost story *The Turn of the Screw*, which you recently sent to me. How has this informed the process by which you arrived at the portraits you've been working on?

Rebecca Fortnum: In 2012 I took two stories with me on a residency in Belgium; one of them was by Joseph Conrad called *The Secret Sharer* (1909), which is about the captain of a ship, who sees a body alongside the ship at night, when he is on deck by himself. He rescues and hides the man who becomes his doppelgänger. The other story, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James, is about a governess who arrives at a country house to look after two exquisitely beautiful children. The implication throughout the story is that the children are corrupted, that there's something very bad about them, something that you can't see from looking at them. The themes of the double and appearance were present in the drawings of children I produced at the time. I was interested in the face as a portal, a communication between an internal sense of self and the outside world, in the way that we read faces without even knowing we do, even just walking down the street. So, I was really curious about these two *fin-de-siècle* stories that have a gothic, supernatural edge to them, which is particular to this moment in history. For example, James' brother was William James, a psychologist interested in spiritualism who wrote about emotion and was a member of the Theosophical Society. I ended up making a series of letterpress works (*Self Contain*) from the governess' story that demonstrate her use of self-narration to form her identity. Around the same time as my residency, I had also amassed a number of photographs of sculptural heads that I encountered on various trips to museums, taken over several years.



Self Contain, iii (here at present…), Letterpress on paper, 86 × 50 cm, 2011

MG: Why do you photograph sculptures of heads? In your drawings from these photographs, there is a sense that these objects are not 'of this world'. Would you call your works 'heads' or 'portraits'?

RF: My mother was a portrait sculptor, so growing up, there was always a head that she was working on in our kitchen, and I suppose I was used to having these disembodied effigies around. I now have two carved wooden heads in our kitchen positioned near the ceiling. I remember lifting up my son as a baby to look at these objects and he took one look at them and started wailing. I know babies are supposed to recognise faces but I found it curious that at such an early age a disembodied head induced such an extreme response in him, perhaps it was fear, I don't quite know what it was.

MG: That makes me think of the uncanny valley: that our brains can read minute movements as clues that point to whether something is dead or alive. Perhaps children, like your son, can pick up on

the 'dead-ness' of objects. I hadn't thought about the uncanny in relationship to your drawings but actually the gesture of doubling something is in itself uncanny. I am a mother of identical twins, so thinking in pairs is part of my life. Where did your urge to double the portraits come from?

RF: When I exhibited *Self Contained* in 2013 at the Freud Museum, I came across photographs in the Museum's archive of Anna Freud and her sister dressed in exactly the same way. I displayed these photographs on her desk with a doubled drawing of her from when she was a child. There's one photograph that shows them both sat with dolls. They both look the same and so do the two dolls; they're mirror images of each other. Initially, I chose these photos to draw from, but I realised I didn't need to add to them in any way. As a twin myself, I had a constant companion through my childhood. In relation to my work, the doubling of the image asks if it is possible to produce a single image of someone to fully represent them.

Self Contained, Anna Freud Room, Freud Museum London, 2013

MG: Your paintings use sculptures of long-dead women as source material. Is your interest in the supernatural wrapped up in the history of ghosts, which speak of a presence that is sometimes not seen? In this work you research female sculptors with histories of being 'overlooked'. For example, you drew from a sculpture by Camille Claudel, who was close to, and worked alongside, Rodin. There's a dark history to these silent sculptures of dead women. When I read *The Turn of the Screw*, I was fascinated by the fact that Victorian audiences condemned the nanny in the story, who is in fact blameless. She is simply a narrative device - a stranger arrives to a mysterious situation. However, readers lay the blame firmly on the female character, which is where it lies in so many novels. I'm curious about how you became interested in the characters portrayed in your drawings. Are their stories a motivation for the work?

RF: Initially, I photographed sculptural heads quite randomly as I encountered them in museums. Busts are normally exhibited at head height, which creates a face-to-face confrontation. To begin with I was more curious about the subjects than the artists who made the work. Although, obviously many of these objects were commissioned to record the rich and powerful, some, particularly the women, are now completely unknown but somehow, over a hundred years later, here I am having a relationship with their effigies. I became interested in the direction of the head's gaze, especially those that looked away or down. I began to explore the idea of absorption. I had thought about this with the children I'd been drawing with their eyes closed. Initially I saw closed eyes as a refusal of the adult world, or a retreat into dreams or imagination. However, I quickly came to realise that this image is double-edged because a person with their eyes closed allows the viewer to look at them with impunity, so notions of 'power' come to the fore. For me, Michael Fried's discussion of absorption in eighteenth century French painting, (Chardin, Greuze and others) can also be considered in relation to nineteenth century French sculpture, in sculptors such as Jules Dalou, Carrier-Belleuse and then through to Rodin and his circle, which includes Claudel and even perhaps Sarah Bernhardt. Dalou's work of the 1870s is particularly relevant, especially his images of women breastfeeding, washing, reading and generally going about their daily life. I am also interested in the translation of sculptural form and material to paint, thinking through my response to marble, terracotta or bronze, for example.

MG: This internally focused gaze could be a new genre. Have you arrived at a reason why these busts have their eyes averted? This can't just be a depiction of modesty. Is there a difference between the sculptures of women and those of children?

RF: There is an interesting book by Kathryn Brown who has written about images of women depicted in the act of reading in nineteenth century French painting. She suggests that such representations are ambivalent. The averted gaze is simultaneously read as a performance of a woman too modest to look at the viewer, as well as one being engaged in intellectual life and having a sense of their own interiority. And this is often displayed in public place, many paintings depict women reading outdoors.

MG: So, this could be a new public figure for the modern era, different from the heroic muse. A self-absorbed woman?

RF: Yes! I'm also interested in an ambivalence that revolves around narcissism that both conforms to a female stereotype, but also subverts it. There's a great painting by Marie Bashkirtseff, *Young Woman Reading* from 1880. Bashkirtseff wrote a famous diary, in which she declared: 'I am the most interesting book of all'. Her ambition was legendary but she died tragically early in her twenties of tuberculosis. Her paintings are often sentimental, which is something else that I'm interested in, the genre of material that is discarded because it's deemed too sentimental.

MG: Do you mean a sentimentality that comes specifically from the Victorian era? Or that sentimentality itself is a Victorian construct?

RF: I'm curious about our sense of that era's degrading of sentiment. What is 'affect' if it is not sentiment? Coming back to the painting by Bashkirtseff, the young woman is reading Alexandra Dumas' *La Question du Divorce*, which had just been published at the time. So although the image conforms to stereotype, you have to re-think what's going on.

MG: Okay. So the downward stare can be a gesture of misbehaviour. I was reading something by Norman Bryson on the idea that the idea of the gaze comes from a singular, patriarchal viewpoint in perspectival Renaissance painting. The gaze is one eye, not two eyes, so not ocular, but rather is a God-like-eye. This makes

me think about how the characters you examine fall between the cracks of history, and how your series of work relate to the genealogies that Helen Molesworth writes about,[1] which you mention in your essay *Baggage Reclaim*.[2] I would say both you and Molesworth question how women artists now, not just re-insert, but live in and behave in a world in which these genealogies, as Molesworth says, are made of shadowy absences. Of silent women. Or rather women who are not spoken about.

RF: When I left college, I went to work for the Women's Art Library from 1989 to 1990, when a lot of scholarship was just coming into play. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker wrote *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* in 1981, and their *Framing Feminism* was published in 1987, as was Rosemary Betterton's *Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*.

MG: And Christine Battersby wrote her book *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* in 1990.

RF: Yes, there was a lot of great art historical recovery at that time. Even Frida Kahlo wasn't that well-known then! So, there was a lot of research involved in finding these women and trying to piece together their lives. And that's an ongoing job.

MG: Yes, I would like to talk more about placing women back *into* history, and how this act functions at this point in time, when work by older women artists is suddenly so valued. I feel there is still a lot of hidden labour to do in fully contextualising the careers of women like Vivian Suter and Lubaina Himid, not to mention someone like Carolee Schneemann, who identified as a painter just as much as a 'performance artist'.

RF: This process won't ever be finished I suppose and it's great to see this turn in action for living artists. Although I have a particular interest in the late nineteenth century, I'm also curious about the first generation of women who went to art school and the creative

1. Helen Molesworth, 'Painting with Ambivalence', *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Eds. Cornelia Butler, Lisa Gabrielle Mark), (Los Angeles and Cambridge: Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 2007), pp. 428-439
2. Rebecca Fortnum, 'Baggage Reclaim: Some Thoughts on Feminism and Painting', *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, Vol. 3 No. 1-2 (London: Intellect, 2017) pp. 209-232.

dialogues some artists have produced with these women's work, such as Nadia Hebson's work around the painter Winifred Knights.[3] It is very interesting to see how legacies are built and what strategies artists invent for recovering them.

MG: The art historian Sue Tate, who also worked on the re-discovery of the British Pop painter Pauline Boty, wrote about contemporary women artists in the mid-2000s, who searched for women of past generations to commune with.[4] I am right now interested in where the conversation between women artists goes, what language it creates around old and new work. Something I'm currently working on is looking at 'un-language', or the fact that so much contemporary discourse around female abstraction is wrapped up in the notion that there is no language to describe it. So, when we talk about the gestures and pictorial decisions of female abstract painters such as Laura Owens, Charline von Heyl, Jacqueline Humphries and Amy Sillman, it is the enigma of their practices that becomes interesting, alongside the question: how can we quantify abstract painting that doesn't speak singularly? There is something about an 'un-language' in the 'shadowy absence' that Helen Molesworth describes. I am quite frustrated by this, and I asked Amy Sillman about it in a recent interview. She answered by pointing towards a positive:

> 'I understand your resistance to the idea of "unknowability" - it's definitely super-problematic. It re-inscribes the female gender as some kind of darkness, or 'inscrutable' - in other words, the "other". But what I'm interested in, is *knowing differently*, articulating the act of perceiving as a way of *knowing*. That's what Simone de Beauvoir wrote about too. She insisted on the subject's position. I take my cues from that.'[5]

RF: What you're saying about the de-languaging of painting is very interesting. I recently wrote about how the painters Jenny Saville and Sue Williams have talked about painting as doodling, positioning it as regressive, like a child making marks. And I think that is useful

3. See https://nadiahebson1.xhbtr.com/moda-wk-publication for further information on this project.
4. See Tate's essay '"Making" History in the feminine: Genealogical encounters at the Berlin Biennial 2008' https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/997521
5. 'Amy Sillman Interviewed by Melissa Gordon', *Girls Like Us*, Issue 12, Winter 2020. (Brussels: Jessica Gysel, 2020), pp. 106-113.

for the market. It puts a wedge between thought and painting and reduces it to a childish impulse. Of course, in many ways, this is true because most people who paint have quite a primal connection to its materiality and the actions of painting as a process. Nevertheless, this is not the whole story, and it's particularly worrying when you attach that thinking to women, because they're already infantilised. It's all very well for artists I admire like Chris Ofili or Peter Doig, to say: 'I make paintings and prefer not to talk about them', but as a woman, you're entering dangerous territory when you adopt that stance, because you're likely to be either co-opted into someone else's agenda or ignored.

MG: To come back to the God-eye-gaze, in *Baggage Reclaim* you talk about a disjunction between the expectation of a radical individuality in painting (or that one sees, via the painting, the psyche or the voice of the singular artist) and the fact that much feminist artwork comes from a collective endeavour. You have previously quoted Hilary Robinson's discussion around the lack of feminist scholarship in contemporary painting:

> 'If Painting (as capitalised act) is left undisrupted by feminist theorising in the culture, then not only will feminists who are painting remain marginal, their strategies reduced to ones of choice of medium, but also crucially, any feminist interventions into the practices of painting may well remain broadly illegible, even to other feminists.'[6]

With this in mind, what can feminist painting be?

RF: I think Robinson had a very important point. There are many different ways of thinking about collectivity in relationship to painting. Painting is one of the few contemporary mediums in which people think the discussion ends when you finish the work. With other practices, analysis of context becomes much more prominent. For me, putting work in the Freud Museum or the Museum of Childhood was really important, because it opened up particular readings and closed down others. When you arrived in Anna Freud's room and saw the drawings of children, the first question was usually: how does the work connect to child

6. Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, (London and NewYork: I B Tauris, 2006), p. 111.

psychoanalysis? For example, could you 'read' the subjects' faces in a way that allowed access to their unconscious? You wouldn't necessarily do that if they'd been placed in a gallery. I think the notion that any painting stops when it is finished being made by the artist doesn't make sense anymore.

To go back to your question about the difference between the work from statues and from children, the former is a more material enquiry. There is a sense of transforming the sculptural material into flesh. I'm interested in the power of the imagination to open up inert material into - and here comes the gothic bit again - something between the living and the dead.

MG: Perhaps something interesting exists 'between states'?

RF: Yes. *Re*membering, assembling the bodies' different members. It is a slightly doomed enterprise, if you're trying to recover something or someone from the past. On a personal level, I started thinking about this when a close friend, who has since died, had her first diagnosis of cancer. That brings you right up against …

MG: … the body …

RF: … and what we leave behind. So again, that connects to the idea of women's legacies and a notion of retrieval, of women's friendship, of women rescuing other women. It sounds a bit romantic, but I think that the women who have been involved in the scholarship we have discussed are doing a really crucial job. The statue paintings are about the power of the imagination over material, and being involved in a Pygmalion-like desire to revivify inanimate objects. Then I started to find out more about the artists I mentioned from the past, as well as their subjects and creative friendships, such as Bernhardt and Louise Abbéma or Anne Seymour Damer and Mary Berry. So that takes me off on narrative journeys, which I am very happy to go on.

MG: Do the sculptures you use feel like clues when you find them?

RF: It's a bit like that, yes. For example, there's a mad sculpture, *The Veiled Venus* (1900) in Leeds City Art Gallery that depicts a naked woman with a veil over her face. It's by the sculptor Kuhne Beveridge. I can't find Beveridge's exact birthdate or when she died,

but there are many stories about her in the newspapers of the time, so she was obviously quite a well-known figure. She started out as an actress and then became a figurative sculptor. The Leeds sculpture was made in collaboration with her mother and apparently, they used her sister as a model, who was an actress, journalist and, later on, a Nazi propagandist. Beveridge's work *The Vampire*, was written about in the *Journal of Neurology and Psychology* in 1910, but no book exists on her yet. I like the idea of going on a trail to find out if and where her sculptures exist. They are made of bronze, so they may be around somewhere.

MG: Yes, heavy evidence. There are all of these women with stories that no one knows about, right there in public spaces.

RF: And you know what it's like with public sculpture, it just gets lost in full view, as Marina Warner has said.[7] There's a sculpture that I saw recently just behind the ICA in London, by Kathleen Scott who studied with Rodin. It's of her husband the Antarctic explorer, and I've walked past that a million times and never noticed it until I was doing a bit of research about *fin-de-siècle* women sculptors.

MG: There's something in the physicality of things that gets left behind. A *thing* is needed in the first place for any rediscovery. You were the person that first told me about Janet Sobel, who influenced Jackson Pollock, and who in fact was dripping veins of paint before Pollock, which he encountered in an exhibition of Sobel at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery Art of This Century. I went on a hunt to find printed images of her work, and I found one. One! It was in the MAKE Library at Goldsmiths University.

RF: That's remarkable, it feels like we are making a concerted effort to pass on the baton. However, the images I've been working on are a more speculative form of research, as they have mostly been chosen because I've seen the sculptures somewhere.

MG: Or noticed them.

RF: Yes, exactly. There's something about sculpture that's drawn me to it. For example, over time, I've found several different versions

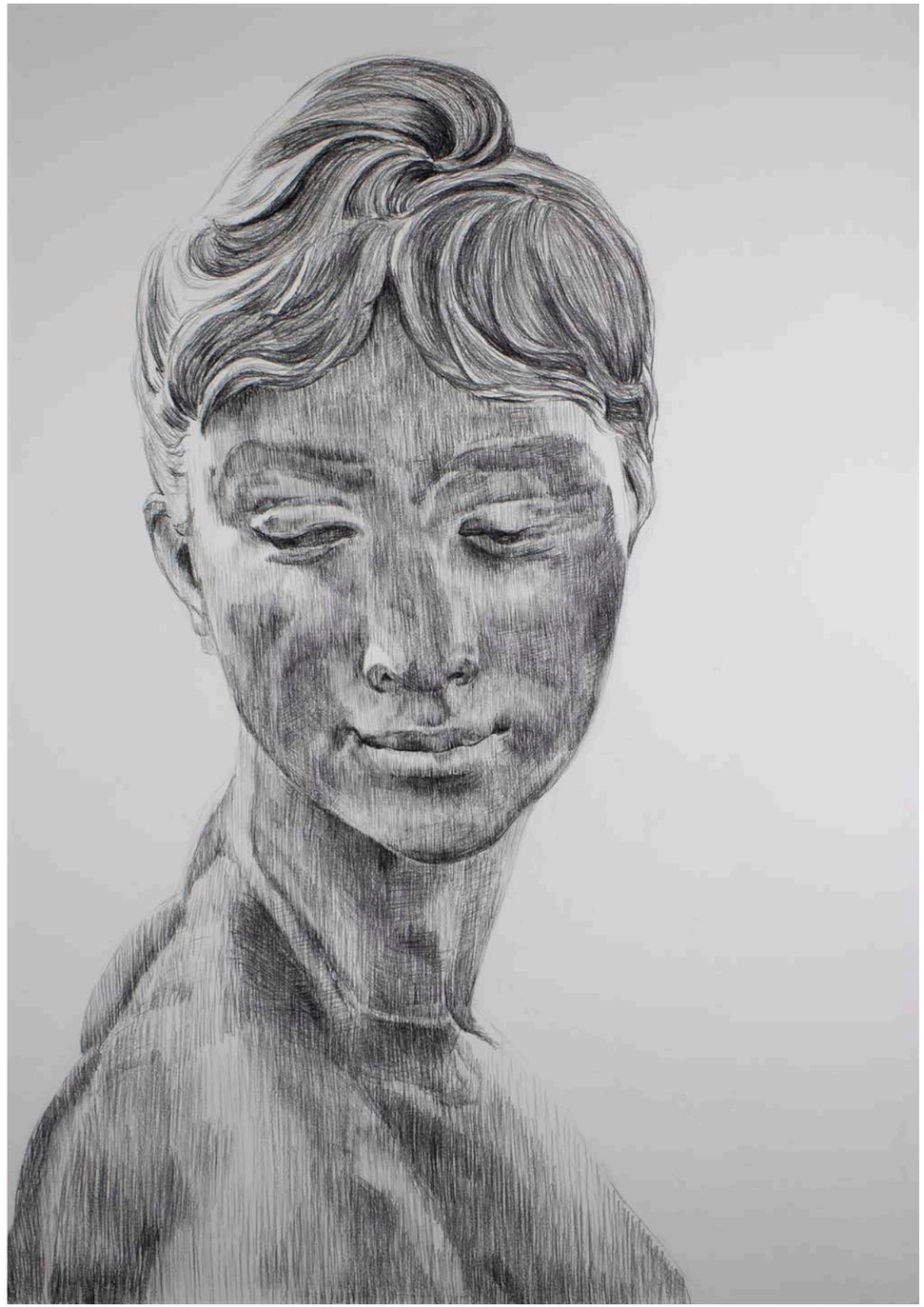
7. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)

of Jules Dalou's *Peasant Woman Nursing a Baby*. I am interested in why Dalou kept working with this image because I often repeat things myself. Museum sculptures often seem preserved in obscurity;[8] when you walk around, there's a few 'highlights' that everyone goes to the institution for, and all the rest is 'filler'. I'm interested in how these works have made their way in, and why they are allowed to stay put. What is their worth and to whom?

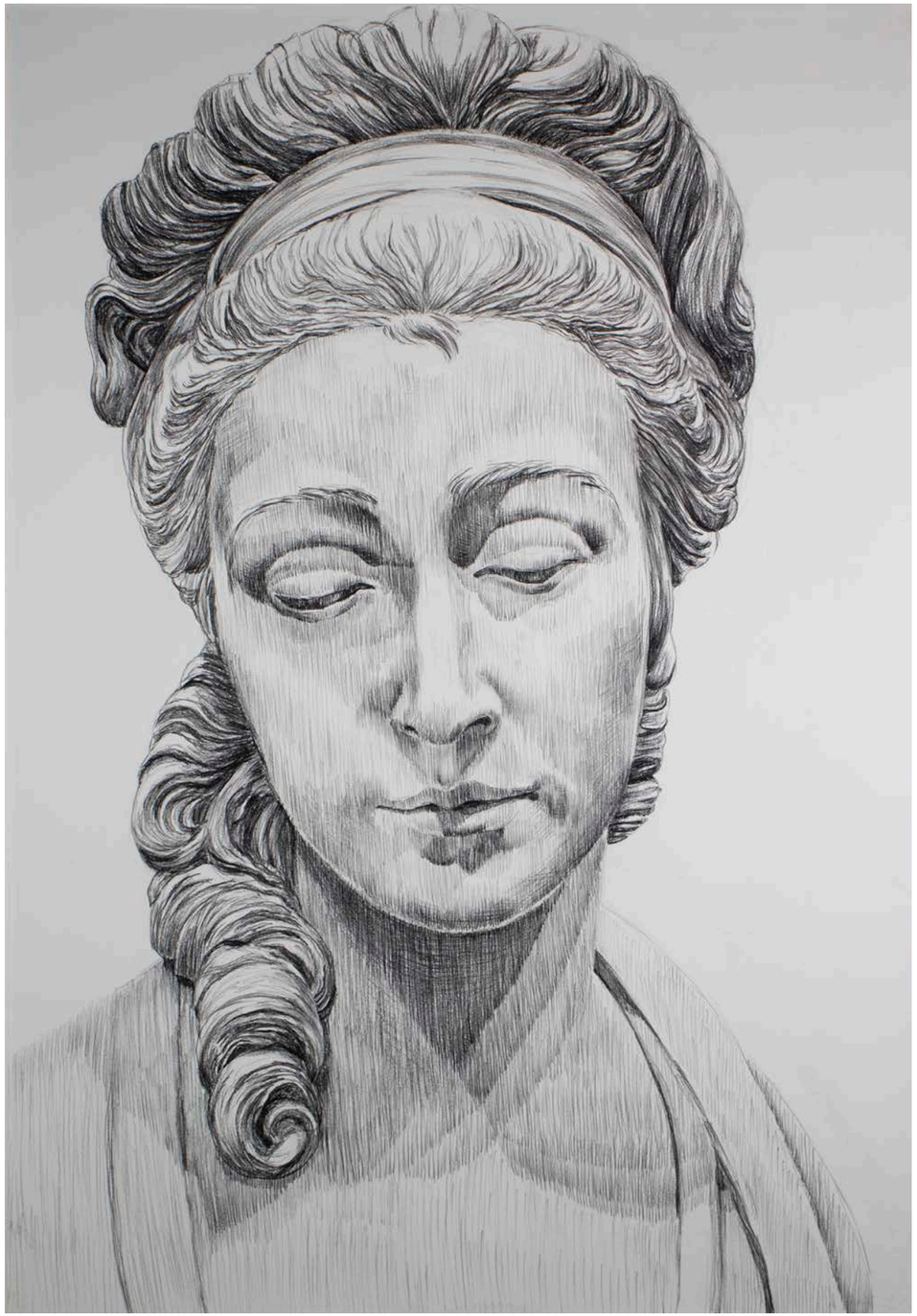
Prosopopoeia (Dalou, unknown V&A), Oil on board, 25 × 40 cm, 2016

8. This idea is explored more fully by the artists Claudia Böse, Hayley Field and Jacqueline Utley in their project 'Obscure Secure' https://www.obscuresecure.co.uk

All drawings: Carbon pencil on paper, 42 × 59.4 cm, 2019
Prosopopoeia (Joseph)



Prosopopoeia (Barrias)



Rebecca Fortnum

Rebecca Fortnum is an artist, writer and academic. Fortnum studied at Camberwell College of Art, Corpus Christi College, Oxford (where she studied English), Newcastle University (MFA) and Kingston University (PhD). She has had solo shows at the Natalie Barney Gallery (2020), Semmer, Berlin (2015, two person), Freud Museum (2013) and the V&A's Museum of Childhood (2012), as well as numerous group shows including most recently, 'Motherline', Flowers East (London), 'Sleepy Heads', Blyth Gallery (London), '49.5', 601 Art Space (New York), 'Phantom Limn', Dovecot Studios (Edinburgh) and the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (London). A monograph, *Self Contained*, with essays by Maria Walsh, Graham Music and Louisa Minkin was published by RGAP in 2013. In 2019 she was elected Visiting Research Fellow in Creative Arts at Merton College, Oxford, where she developed her project, *A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter*, published by Slimvolume in 2020.

Fortnum has held an Abbey Award at the British School in Rome, individual awards from the Arts Council of England, the British Council and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation amongst others, and has received research funding from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council and KU Leuven the Association of Flemish Universities, as well as a Space for 10 award for mid-career artists. Her book of interviews, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2007 and *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, a book of essays that examines contemporary artists' processes, which she co-edited with Lizzie Fisher, was published by Black Dog in 2013. She is the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Painting*. Her most recent book, *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing* (2020), co-edited with Kelly Chorpening, includes her chapter, 'A Dirty Double Mirror: Drawing, Autobiography and Feminism', which explores the feminist potential of the 'autographical' in work by Frances Stark, Emma Talbot and Nicola Tyson. She has been a Reader in Fine Art at University of the Arts London, Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University, and is currently Professor of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art, where she leads the research programmes for the School of Arts and Humanities.

Gemma Blackshaw

Gemma Blackshaw is Professor of Art History at the Royal College of Art, London. Specialising in portraiture and figuration, she works across the modern and contemporary periods as a writer, curator, and teacher. She has developed exhibitions and catalogues for London's Courtauld Institute, Drawing Room, National Gallery and Wellcome Collection, and for Vienna's Leopold Museum and Wien Museum. Approaching the practice of history as a continuing dialogue between the present and the past, activated for the political purpose of changing women's lives, Blackshaw's work is distinguished by her collaboration with female artists who are similarly preoccupied with the legacies of modernism.

Melissa Gordon

Melissa Gordon is a British and American artist whose work deals with gesture and gender in painting. She is currently completing her PhD on gesture and liquidity at Kingston University, and is a Professor of Painting at Oslo Academy of fine Arts. Recent exhibitions and projects include those at Witte de With, Rotterdam, Eastside Projects, Birmingham, WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art, Brussels, and Museum Tamayo, Mexico City. She currently lives and works in Brussels.

Rebecca Fortnum ‘A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter’

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Working from photographs of nineteenth century sculptures of women, Fortnum's source material allows for continual extended returns to elusive objects, a type of close, careful looking that leads the artist towards the depiction of every surface detail. This is a rumination on how representation is mastered; on the 'accomplished', intrinsically feminine status of the copy of the work of art in comparison to its 'inventive', 'ingenious' original, wrought by male hands: a critique of a value-laden history that is inherently masculine, and copying as a submissive, secretive other.

Fortnum's transcriptions strive for a form of reduplication that creates a space for difference and subtle deviations to ask what other singular likenesses might emerge through the task of copying within the legacy of women artists' thwarted ambitions. In essence, Fortnum's works engage with her female portraits' sources in a conversation across time and space, through the creation of intimate and empathetic cross-temporal facsimiles that reflect the sexed connections between reproduction, training and accomplishment.

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