

**'Uterine Dreams' a collaboration between Sarah Danays and Professor Ludmilla Jordanova, CVAC, Durham University
Durham University IAS Fellowship 2020/21 Proposal : Supported by Durham University Museums**

2020/21 IAS Sponsored (connected) Projects 'Threshold Worlds: an interdisciplinary project on dreams, narrative and liminal cognition' & 'Representing Memory'

Uterine Dreams

A new body of sculpture, photography and writing from Sarah Danays in collaboration with Professor Ludmilla Jordanova addresses the emotive subject of fertility – and dreams of gestation.



Typical of her practice, Danays will again work with ancient objects – in this instance Egyptian New Kingdom pottery and Graeco-Roman travertine both from Durham University's Oriental Museum archives.

These ancient objects – potent conduits across millennia – lose none of their meaning or sentiment between the time of their manufacture and their twenty-first century re-viewing. The universal, timeless poignancy of the lone woman on her bed, hand on heart, with her still child beside; the sexuality of the fragmented female abdomen. Invested in these totems are the desires, hopes, prayers – dreams and memories – of sex and birth; of fertility.

This work, inspired by essays from Professor Jordanova's 'Sexual Visions' (Wisconsin University Press, 1989); Durham University Museums' archive and the artist's 'Uterine Dreams' sculpture (in progress since 2013) will comprise two large

“More than anything Sarah Danays’ work impresses me because of its ability to gain sweeping significance through a meticulous care for detail applied to idiosyncratic particulars.”

Dr Ken Arnold, Director Medical Museion Copenhagen and Creative Director, Wellcome Trust, London

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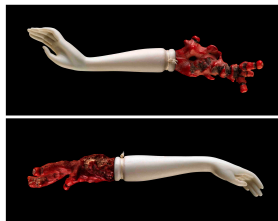
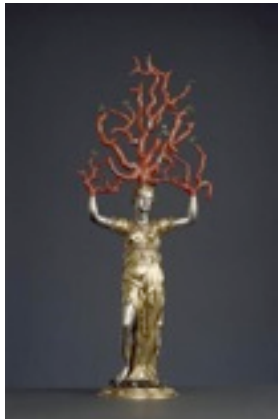
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format photographs and three new sculptures. A final exhibition will include Durham's two archived objects, and an accompanying catalogue essay/paper by Professor Jordanova. The artist began work on **'Uterine Dreams : I decided for us that you wouldn't have a child'** in 2013 (bottom left). At the conclusion of a Fellowship, Danays would deliver a final Fellows public lecture on this most personal new body of work – the loss of a marriage, the loss of a pregnancy. Into this talk, and her own catalogue essay, would be woven the findings of her formal Fellowship research. Plans are in progress with Dr Craig Barclay, Durham's Head of Museums and Exhibitions, for a 2021 exhibition hosted by either the Oriental Museum or The Gallery, Palace Green Library.



Work will now resume on the sculpture 'Uterine Dreams: I decided for us that you wouldn't have a child'. The finished piece will have antique Victorian branch coral held in the position of the uterus by an especially made gold hoop or chain.

The sculpture will not be lying down, but mounted in upright position. Jordanova's essay 'Body Image and Sex Roles' notes that of all the remaining female "Venuses" – wax anatomical models of the later eighteenth hundreds – only one is upright; not lying down. While all remaining truncated models of men with flesh are standing up, with a particular emphasis on musculature.



In the same essay Jordanova writes that the eighteenth century biomedical community considered women more sensitive, or sensitized, than men and that female hysterical illness was understood as nervous phenomena. Moreover, this feminization of the nervous system was positioned in her uterus.

The artist has been working with antique corals since 2007 (see 'Tourniquet' diptych, bottom near left). Classified in the early modern period (1500 – 1800) as both marine plant and animal, it is a material that has inspired artists for centuries, most notably in Nuremberg goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer's 'Daphne' with branch coral of 1550 (above, near left). Daphne, the Greek mythological nymph transformed into a laurel tree, is associated with water.

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Coral, particularly branch coral, has had powerful and complex associations since the time of Ovid, who wrote of the Medusa’s severed head turning the plants onto which it fell into coral. Coral’s ability to live underwater and on land led it to be used in the seventeenth century as both a powdered medicinal treatment for sleeping problems and, in its entirety, as a spiritual talisman – to wear in bed, protecting its wearer from supernatural attack and accompanying the sleeper as they passed from the waking world into the world of sleep. Unsurprisingly, then, from the seventeenth century coral became England’s most effective infant soother; its associations with fertility and childbirth dating back to Ancient Rome, and of spiritual protection in Christian iconography from Renaissance Europe.

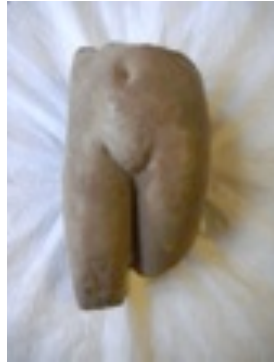


Like coral, sedimentary alabaster is also synonymous with water. The ancient alchemists, knowing of alabaster’s ability to hold water, believed it to sooth troubled hearts and minds. **‘Uterine Dreams : New Kingdom Sorrows’** will be carved with hand tools from a rare, two ton section of especially excavated English alabaster – rare, as the alabaster seams of the East Midlands famed throughout medieval Europe are now exhausted. It may be that areas of anhydrite feature in this material. If the case, it is interesting to note that the Ancient Egyptians transformed alabaster into anhydrite, a harder, more durable material, by baking it in ovens at low temperatures.

This new life-size sculpture – the artist’s largest piece to date – will be a reworking of the Oriental Museum’s 10 cms pottery, possibly votive, fertility figurine. This, and the gifted alabaster, are shown above. To the right, the artist with Mine Manager Jim Daykin of British Gypsum/Saint-Gobain, Fauld, East Staffordshire, who mined and held the alabaster for the artist, and from where the section would be transported to Durham for work to begin on campus in 2020.

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Sarah Danays and Professor Ludmilla Jordanova's 'Uterine Dreams' exhibition comprises

Two Large format mounted C-Types (30 x 50" / 76 x 127 cms x 2)

With the permission of Durham University Museums the two small stone truncated torsos will be photographed and exhibited as a diptych, each with their individual corals. Danays' carved piece (far left, work in progress) will be shot against black, and Durham's Oriental Museum Graeco-Roman torso with yet-to-be-found coral (right), will be shot against a white background. These are to be aluminum mounted and exhibited under acrylic shadow boxes.

Small Sculptures

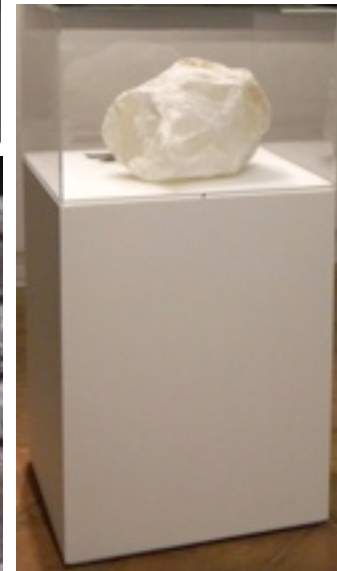
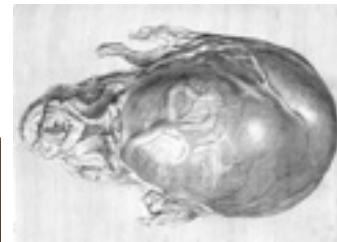
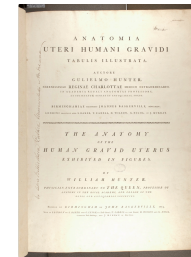
Again with the permission of Durham University Museums, the two above truncated torsos, with corals, will be museum mounted and displayed with the New Kingdom fertility pottery piece.

- 1) **'I Decided for Us that You Wouldn't Have a Child'** Danays' white alabaster piece with coral, approximate dimensions 7"/18 (h) x 4"/10 (w) x 3.5"/9 (d) cms
- 2) Durham/Oriental Museum Graeco-Roman travertine statue fragment with the artists' added coral 5"/12 (h) x 3"/7 (w) x 2"/4.5 (d) cms (both unmounted dimensions).
Oriental Museum archive no: EG3974 (statue fragment)
- 3) Durham/Oriental Museum New Kingdom pottery recumbent woman (see previous page), approximate dimensions 4"/10.5 (l) x 2"/4.5 (w) x 2"/4.5 (d) cms
Oriental Museum archive no: EG5277 (fertility figurine)

Larger Sculptures

- 4) **'Eleven Weeks'** carved from Fauld opaque deep red alabaster block – block dimensions 16"/41 (h) x 6"/15 (w) x 7"/18 (d) cms (shown on previous page)
- 5) **'Uteri Humani Gravidi'** carved from Italian ice alabaster boulder – boulder approximate dimensions 20"/51 (l) x 15"/38 (w) x 15"/38 (d) cms (see top right for William Hunter's Titlepage and engraving XI from his 1774 book 'Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidi' [with thanks to the Wellcome Library])
- 6) **'New Kingdom Sorrows'** life-size sculpture carved from the rare 2 ton section of English alabaster especially excavated for the artist from British Gypsum/Saint-Gobain Fauld Mine (see previous page)

All measurements are approximate



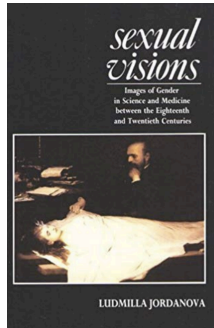
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Durham University IAS Fellowship 2020/21 Reviewer, Referees and Personal Associated Research:

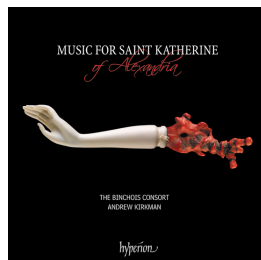
Durham Academic/Reviewer: Professor Ludmilla Jordanova. Professor Jordanova becomes Emeritus at the end of October 2019, but will remain active in the University thereafter. Janet Stewart, her CVAC successor, will be formally briefed and involved as the project, and hoped-for Fellowship, rolls out. Also, if appointed, the artist would explore synergies with the IAS Sponsored Projects '**Threshold Worlds: an interdisciplinary project on dreams, narrative and liminal cognition**' and '**Representing Memory** (notably the "Transmission of memory across individuals, groups and generations" and anthropological element of this research). In discussion with Dr Craig Barclay, the artist anticipates work starting on campus for 'New Kingdom Sorrows' in 2020, so is applying for a Michaelmas Fellowship from 1st October – 16th December 2020.

First Referee: Professor Anthony Corbeill is currently the Basil L Gildersleeve Professor of Classics at the University of Virginia, USA. He is a celebrated Classicist and author of several books including 'Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome' (Princeton, 2006, right). He was one of two* consultants for 'Sarah Danays' Arms of the Portland Vase' (Harley Gallery, Nottinghamshire 2016) and will suggest directions of research into the themes of this project, notably ancient Roman and Egyptian attitudes to, and understanding of, fertility and fertility totems and dreams and dreaming, and their overlap – the dream in ancient Egypt functioned as a liminal zone between the land of the living and the afterlife. (*Second consultant, Dr Susan Walker FSA, formerly Deputy Keeper of Greek and Roman at the British Museum, and after Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean. Dr Walker wrote the definitive text on the Portland Vase, published by BMP 2004).



Second Referee: Professor Andrew Kirkman is currently Peyton and Barber Professor of Music at the Department of Music, University of Birmingham. His specialism is sacred music from the fifteenth century and in 1995 founded the vocal ensemble The Binchois Consort, which he also conducts. Danays is Sculptor in Residence with The Binchois Consort/Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham/Edinburgh research project on Medieval English sacred music and alabaster sculpture. The first fruits of this collaboration released on Hyperion Records June 2019. The accompanying booklet to 'Music for Saint Katherine of Alexandria' showcases the sculptor's work, most notably her 'Arms of the Martyrs: Saint Katherine'; a replacement arm to the broken arm of the V&A's c1450-70 panel 'The Beheading of Saint Catherine' (archive A119b-1946). This carving was photographed and composited into a transposed image of the original panel (left).

(Livia Turnbull, Assistant Curator for the V&A's Sculpture Department, showed Danays the Museum's archived panel in the Summer of 2017 and later delivered the paper 'Reforming the Saints: Trauma and the fragmented body from medieval alabaster to 'Sarah Danays' Arms of the Martyrs' for Durham University's Centre for Visual Arts and Culture/Leverhulme conference 'Bodies Reformed', November 2018. This introduced the artist's work to Professor Ludmilla Jordanova, CVAC Director).



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Associated Research: Danays' sculpture and photography is supremely female. Unashamedly so. Her talks and papers read as an intensive mix of autobiography and academic research, inspired by the objects she chooses to work with. She delivered 'Sculptor, Heal Thyself. Sarah Danays' Metaphysical Surgery : broken works' for CVAC, Durham, in March '19. The artist intends to research past and current thought on dream states during human gestation. Scientists have identified REM in babies in the womb at 23 weeks, suggesting that humans may experience dreaming - or a dream state - from this age onwards. As mentioned in the previous page, she would also research Ancient Roman and Egyptian attitudes to, and understanding of, fertility and fertility objects, and dreams and dreaming, and their overlap. This research-based creative writing, and the project's sculpture and photography, would be monitored by Durham University's Curator of Western Art, Alix Collingwood-Swinburn (who prompted this Fellowship application and organized access in March 2019 to the Oriental Museum's archived pieces).

The project hopes to also embrace/collaborate with the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Collection, under the watch of the Museum's Deputy Director Mungo Campbell (CVAC Board Member). The artist will work from two appropriate casts - from the collection's eleven showing stages of the pregnant uterus - to inform the carving of '**Uteri Humani Gravidi**' and '**Eleven Weeks**' (see page 4). Professor Jordanova published a piece on Hunter's obstetric atlas in the 1980s, in a book on him edited by Bynum and Porter.

Schedule:

May 2019 - The artist will resume work on '**I decided for us that you wouldn't have a child**' moving on to carve, in the round, the two uteri referencing William Harvey's 1774 'The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus' and the University of Glasgow's Hunterian casts. These elements of the project are estimated to take up until the Summer of 2020, and inform the Artist's Talk for Durham's PhD Summer School.

Autumn/October 2020 - With permission, work with the Oriental Museum's Graeco-Roman fragmented female torso (preparing for final photography of this and Danays' own carving) and undertake, live on site at Durham (a ground-level studio/space would need to be provided), the life-size carving of '**Uterine Dreams: New Kingdom Sorrows**' from the section of Fauld alabaster commencing 1st October 2020.

2021 - '**Uterine Dreams**' exhibition opens at the Oriental Museum or The Gallery, Palace Green Library

The artist will build into the exhibition a programme of Artist Talks and Workshops. In 2018 Danays was invited by The Courtauld Institute of Art, London to give a one day workshop for academics (hosted by Dr Kim Woods and Dr Susie Nash). In 2016 the artist completed her 'Arms of the Portland Vase' sculpture installation live on site at the Harley Gallery, Nottinghamshire. This performance element of her work is unique to the artist, and has proved particularly engaging for the public and for school groups. The artist would also actively participate in Durham's Oriental Museum schools education outreach programme.

(Images:top right 'Sarah Danays' Arms of the Portland Vase - Octavia' shown against the artists' drawn template and the artist carving 'live' on site).



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About the Artist

Sarah Danays is a British/Irish sculptor and photographer whose work is inspired by gesture and antiquities – notably broken ones. Her practice involves extensive research into an object's history and context to develop new interpretations for significant museum pieces – in this instance the University of Durham's Oriental Museum archives – and to inform the "treatment" of broken objects from her own collection. A practice she describes as her "metaphysical surgery".

Danays (nee Forrester) graduated with a Joint Honors Degree in Fine Art and Art History from Camberwell College of Arts in 1993 (now part of University of the Arts, London) and had her first solo show at the Adam Gallery, London in 1995. In 2003 she gained an MA in Textiles as Contemporary Art Practice from the Department of Art, Goldsmiths, University of London – where she is now considered a Gold Alumni – and later went on to study Stone Carving for Contemporary Sculptors at City & Guilds, London. In 2008 she was shortlisted in Le Prix de la Sculpture Noilly Prat as one of the UK's top five emerging sculptors.

In 2010 she relocated to Los Angeles and in 2013 was awarded a scholarship by the Los Angeles Art Association (LAAA) with her first LA solo show, Golden Bough, opening at [Robert Berman Gallery in 2014](#). In 2016 she was included in the '[British Invasion' at MOAH](#), California, showing the best of British artists working in LA since the 60s, spearheaded by David Hockney. In the same year 'Sarah Danays' Arms of the Portland Vase' was exhibited at the Harley Gallery, Nottinghamshire, UK. In 2017 she was invited to present two papers on her work for the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham/British Academy as part of her on-going English medieval music and alabaster Sculptor in Residence with Birmingham's Music Department/Binchois Consort (the first fruits of which, '[Music for Saint Katherine of Alexandria](#)' released on Hyperion Records June 2019). In 2017 she was also invited to host a workshop for academics at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London; the year concluding with her photography and sculpture included in the exhibition 'Perspectives' at the prestigious Pacific Design Centre, Los Angeles. The following year she was selected to exhibit at the Crypts of the Medici, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence, in an exhibition of emerging contemporary artists curated by NAG Gallery, Pietrasanta, Italy; and a V&A Purchase Grant enabled Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery to purchase 'Bluebird' (from 2012) for its permanent collection. In 2019 her Victoria & Albert Museum inspired work 'Arms of the Martyrs: Saint Katherine' was exhibited at the Barber Institute of Fine Art, Birmingham, England.

Danays has exhibited internationally and her work is in public and private collections in Europe, America and Australia. She undertakes invited Artist Residences and works across different studios. Her primary studio is in the hills of the Garfagnana, Tuscany, Italy.

"Danays effects such radical juxtaposition with such remarkable craft" Peter Frank

"The re-framing of artifacts relating to women's experience in past culture ... grim, poignant and graceful" John Seed, for The Huffington Post

Images: work in progress 'The Arms of the Martyrs - Saint Katherine', 2018/19. Page 5 shows finished arm photographed and composited into the V&A's panel



Sarah Danays