



## **Caroline Worthington, Director's report**

It's very good to "see" you – wherever you are and thank you for tuning into this year's AGM. A warm welcome to all of you.

I hope you are enjoying your membership and making the most of the opportunities Eilidh, Maria and I find to offer you. This year's membership satisfaction survey helped us to understand what you value, what changes you would like to see and whether your membership represents value for money.

In 2025 there was a new residency at Wick, Somerset and member visits to Coles Castings in Dorset, Messums West in Wiltshire and the Art Workers' Guild as well as a new programme of visits for Fellows.

Our Behind the Studio Doors programme so engagingly hosted by Isabel de Vasconcellos has continued to shine a spotlight on our international members. If you have missed an episode you can find the hour long films on the website.

Our 2025 exhibition programme opened on a very chilly Saturday in early February with the Gilbert Bayes Award winners 2024 cohort show curated by Clemency Cooke, Director at Cooke Latham Gallery. The show then moved to the Art House in Wakefield where the opening on Wednesday 28 May coincided with a member visit to The Hepworth to see Helen Chadwick's exhibition.

Our second exhibition of the year, In Their Space, opened in March. The show brought together work by Alison Cooke MRSS, Rebecca Griffiths MRSS and Hannah Honeywill MRSS following their residencies at the Red House – the home of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears in Aldeburgh, Suffolk between 2020-2023 – which had been organised by the Society. The exhibition originated at Dovecot Studio Gallery, Snape Maltings in late 2024.

The show coincided with the Easter holidays and we ran a number of workshops exploring clay as a material and the theme of shadows.

The 2025 summer show was selected and curated Polly Bielecka, Gallery Director at Pangolin London Sculpture Gallery with the theme of "Sculpture in the Home". With Dora House closed to enable works to be moved to the basement to begin, the show was held at Burgh House in Hampstead. Polly selected over 70 works from a bumper 417 submissions.

The winner of the 2025 Best In Show Award, once again generously sponsored by The Marsh Charitable Trust was Gabriele Risso MRSS for his work *Still Life*. Charles Micklewright, Trustee at The Marsh Charitable Trust presented the award at the opening that was attended by more than 150 guests.



*The summer exhibition opening at Burgh House, 2025*

The Royal Over-Seas League offered international members the opportunity to participate in a group show at Overseas House in Mayfair, London. The theme was “Spaceshifting” and 11 members had work selected. The show ran from July to September.

Beyond exhibitions, we offered opportunities to members and non-members alike. First Plinth: Public Art Award 2025 which is generously funded by the Mirisch & Lebenheim Charitable Foundation, received 97 applications. Bea Haines MRSS was announced as the winner in late April and receives £15,000 to produce a large-scale sculpture for the sculpture terrace at Dora House.

We were invited by the All England Lawn Tennis Club to support the competition to commission a statue of Sir Andy Murray to be located at Wimbledon.

We have also been delighted to work on two memorials for the National Memorial Arboretum working in partnership with Fighting with Pride and On the Record.

We participated in International Sculpture Day in April and in May we welcomed back Crafts On Peel to Dora House for London Craft Week. Their presentation “Embracing Craft, Connecting Culture” drew 332 visitors over six days including Fiona Chau, Director-General of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London who supported the show.

In July, we welcomed the family of Anne Acheson CBE FRBS (1882-1962) who was the first female Fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors as it was then, to Dora House. They donated Anne’s CBE medal awarded in 1919 to the archive (joining her papers which had already been deposited).



*Anne Acheson’s family at Dora House, 2025*

In 1915 Anne joined the Surgical Requisites Association (SRA), an organisation set up to supply surgical dressings for wounded soldiers. However instead of rolling bandages, Anne’s artistic talents led to her pioneering more effective treatments for wounded soldiers. Armed with an expert knowledge of the human anatomy gained from her sculpting experience, Anne invented the first anatomically accurate splints which allowed soldiers with broken bones to heal faster. In recognition of her work which healed so many; Anne was awarded the CBE in February 1919.

We continue to stay connected with our friends and in the cultural and educational organisations across South Kensington. In early April we hosted the Kensington and Chelsea Chamber of Commerce with 51 people attending.

We took part in Kensington & Chelsea Art Week in June and are members of an ambitious project called South Ken Zen+ which is working towards being a zero carbon and nature positive neighbourhood by 2030.

Much of 2025 was dedicated to preparations for our anniversary year and our capital project, Creating a Home for Sculptors. Along the way there have been umpteen setbacks and delays – I don't think anyone could have foreseen the cyber-attack which took down all of Kensington & Chelsea's systems – so I really must pay tribute to the building committee, chaired by Gordon Watson, for their patience and commitment. The committee continues to meet monthly to keep the project on track and on budget.

I would also like to applaud the Board for all their hard work. Today we say goodbye and a HUGE thank you to our Vice President of seven years, Almuth Tebbenhoff. I'm sure you don't need me to tell you how kind, generous and supportive Almuth is. She always has time for a quick message or check in and has led the international zoom group with such energy and enthusiasm. Almuth, put simply you have been a brilliant Vice President ... and Nick, you have big shoes to fill !

I also offer hearty thanks to Andrew Stonyer FRSS and Andrea Geiler FRSS who have completed their terms as Trustees. The Board really does have the Society's best interests at heart. To that end the away day this year reviewed the extent to which the board and the Society embraces equality, diversity, and inclusion and identified areas for improvement. This was followed by a Trustee skills audit in September as the Board plans for beyond the capital project.

Finally, I give my sincerest thanks to Maria Maro-Perera and Andrea Arnold who work so hard day in day out. We said a fond farewell to Lorraine Pajak over the summer, but we were joined by Eilidh McCormick as our new Residencies & Awards manager. Eilidh joined us from Everard Read where she was gallery manager, but was previously Visual Art Curator at the Royal Over Seas League.

2025 was a different year from usual, but we have laid the ground work for an important year ahead marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cecil Thomas' gift of Dora House to the Society. I'm looking forward to welcoming you back home soon.

**Caroline Worthington, Director** May 2026