

Harper's BAZAAR

WHO IS NINA MAE FOWLER?

Meet the artist loved by Jude Law



Portrait by Anthony Lycett

Sharon Walker gives Bazaar the lowdown on everything you need to know about the artist beloved by Jude Law and Jonny Lee Miller, Nina Mae Fowler.

There aren't many artists beyond the YBA usual suspects that can command an A-List turnout quite like Nina Fowler's hotly anticipated London show this week. That's Right Mister, and How's your Fairy Tale Coming Along? opens on Thursday, hosted by the Cob and Guts art collective at Camden's Cob Gallery.

Despite the fact that this is her first large-scale installation in her home city, Fowler has already wracked up an impressive following for her exquisitely drafted Golden Era Hollywood drawings. Jude Law loves her work; Jonny Lee Miller collects her drawings and Sharleen Spiteri is an even bigger fan. So who is this Shoreditch-based artist whom the Saatchi Gallery are currently promoting as 'one to invest in'?

Fowler grew up in North London's Hampstead and partied at the Colony Rooms through her mid-twenties, making her less than the usual six degrees of separation from her Primrose Hill Set fans. Though perhaps more relevant, is her fascination with the "dark underbelly of stardom" inspired by stories from Kenneth Anger's iconic expose, Hollywood Babylon, which likely struck a chord with her glittering clientele.

"I love that era, because it still feels relevant to celebrities today," says Fowler, "though then the actors had a much grander façade." At the centre of her current exhibition, Fowler has created seven life-size cut-outs of Hollywood starlets, propped on replicas of studio 'leaning boards', the props routinely employed by the studios to prevent actresses from crumpling their clothes. "I'm working on making something 3-D out of something 2-D; to create sculptural pieces and a new scenario. The leaning boards act as props for the drawings," explains Fowler, who says people often remark on the cinematic quality of her work. Indeed, guests at the Cob Gallery show can expect a "cinema experience" with darkened walls and plush carpet, as they enter a "semi-circle of glamour" midst seven Hollywood leading ladies, from Marilyn Monroe through to Katharine Hepburn.

Fowler studied sculpture at Brighton, before working with gallerist John Dunbar, helping to archive his collection of art and drawings. It was Dunbar who introduced her to the Colony Rooms, filmmaker John Maybury and the Natural Nylon actors. "I was still teaching part time, but amassing collectors along the way," says Fowler, whose first large scale installation was commissioned by a Parisian Gallery, Galerie Dukan, who had chanced on her work when visiting her boyfriend, the painter, Craig Wylie, in the studio next door. "They spotted a maquette of the matinee idol Valentino's 1926 funeral in my studio and asked me to make it," says Fowler, who worked day and night during her teaching job holidays to hit their deadline. The installation depicted the silent movie star's open casket and movie star mourners. "The public went crazy with queues to see the body going on for days," says Fowler. "It was the first time something like that had happened after a star's death." Her work paid off and the installation was immediately snapped up by a public collection in the States.

Those keen to see her new installation, *That's Right Mister, and How's Your Fairy Tale Coming Along?* should head to the Cob Gallery on Camden's Royal College Street before November 9th.

