

## ARTS &amp; LIFESTYLE

# Nicole Farhi On Her 35-Year Love Affair With Sculpture

Models, studios and collections are the stuff of **Nicole Farhi**. But fashion, no more. Seven years after selling her eponymous label, the French-born, 72-year-old is wholly dedicated to her longest love affair: sculpture. Over green tea, and in sight of her immaculate conservatory-cum-studio in her north London home, *Vogue* sat down with Farhi to discuss her new exhibition FOLDS, being mentored by the late sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, and closing the book on fashion.

by LOUISE LONG

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Nicole Farhi at her home in north London.

CREDIT: LOUISE LONG

## What is a typical start to the day for you?

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objects and artists, to trigger the imagination. I never finish a piece in the evening, always leave something to do," he would say. Such good advice.

## Tell me about when you first met Paolozzi.

We met at the foundry over 30 years ago, around Christmas time. He loved good food, so would be here almost every week to enjoy my French cooking. He was my friend and mentor for so many years. He is in my soul, I still hear him.



CREDIT: LOUISE LONG

## **Your approaches, as sculptors, are very different.**

He was instrumental – not by telling me what to do, but in opening my eyes. And he never criticised, he simply taught me to express myself. He encouraged trying different mediums, but it turns out I only like clay! When I first touched clay, I thought, ‘This is it. This is my medium.’

## **This new collection, FOLDS, comprises casts directly from the model. What led to you this new process?**

Lifecasts are a different way of working, but I have worked before with fragments – of busts, then hands. First, I do maquettes, then take photographs, blow them up, and cast the model in that little room at the back of my studio. One of my models is Susan Tilley, who is a painter, but sat for Lucian Freud. We had simply met for a cup of tea, but she was curious about my process.





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## Is there still a nod to fashion in your work?

FOLDS is really my antidote to the world of fashion. I believe there is beauty everywhere, and wanted to show parts of the body you don't even know you have. The fold of the back, for example, is so beautiful and harmonious, the lines become abstract. And the works are sensual, too. I am interested in the rough against the smooth. It is like the beginning of a dress where the edges are rough; or like tearing a limb... but not in a frightening way!

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**For 35 years you were sculpting on the side of a full-time career in fashion. Is being wholly dedicated to sculpture how you imagined it might be?**

I never thought I would be so happy. So fulfilled. I don't know what to expect anymore, but I just keep going. I talk to the to the clay, and eventually a recognisable form emerges... It is a miracle! A wonderful thing. Certainly, you don't feel that miracle in fashion!

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## Do you miss anything about your former life?

I miss nothing. I turned that page, but I still see my assistants – I would hate to lose contact. I was lucky when I started in fashion. Back then, it was practically the beginning of prêt-à-porter, so everything was allowed. When I came to London, it was mind-blowing to go to the Kings Road. In Paris, women were much more conservative, they only wanted to be chic. I was lucky, too, to meet Stephen Marks who gave me total freedom. Nobody today would tell that to a designer.

CREDIT: LOUISE LONG

*FOLDS will be on display at **Beaux Arts London**, 48 Maddox Street, from January 31 until March 2 2019. Farhi's first museum show, **Nicole Farhi: Heads and Hands** opens February 23 at **Gainsborough's House** in Sudbury, Suffolk.*

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ART

NICOLE FARHI

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