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She wanted to breed a foal, knowing where the mare and stallion had come from, so she knew the horse's history and could be there from the very beginning. It is, of course, a huge responsibility. As The Guide Horse Foundation explains, "blind people entrust their lives to the horses".

A large proportion of Katy's work with Digby focuses on desensitisation, getting him used to people and noises, training him to be calm in situations that could cause alarm.

"He has to be 100 per cent OK with everyday things," she says. "At the moment, he is proving that he is fine with everything. "Obviously there is always that chance [of being startled] and you have just got to think what it might be. It could be a cat running across the road, it could be a bird coming out of a hedge. It is just thinking about everything and getting that situation in place so that they have gone through it and when it next happens, they are fine with it."

Digby "just seemed to want to learn" and is picking things up quickly, says Katy, who uses voice command, clicker training and lots of praise and rewards to train him. "Digby has got something that I can't put my finger on. I think he knows that he has got a job to do and he has thrown himself into it." If at any point Digby showed signs he didn't want to do something, she wouldn't force it.

Once with Helena, Digby will be in her house and garden, where he will have a stable. He will also be taken into the office with her while she works. He will probably spend most of his time standing.

"Obviously he will need comfort breaks and feeding breaks," says Katy. "But like any firm now, more often they are willing to accommodate people's needs. I'm sure everybody will want to take him out for a nibble on some grass."

Digby's characteristics also make him suitable, says Katy, who has already begun training a second guide horse to help another person and a more independent life. "He is very loving. He is like a dog, very friendly. He wants to be with you."

"[Digby] is a total sweetheart," Helena says. "He is so patient, so gentle. I have got high hopes for him and me and a good partnership."

The fashion guru who now turns heads as a sculptor

Nicole Farhi tells **William Cook** why she is determined not to waste a moment

In Gainsborough's House, the large terraced home where Britain's greatest portrait artist was born in the Suffolk market town of Sudbury, there's a bust of him that captures his personality as well as any painting. His expression is quizzical and there's a hint of mischief in his eyes. Seeing it for the first time, you might suppose it was made 500 years ago, the result of numerous painstaking sittings. In fact, it was made just a few years ago by the sculptor Nicole Farhi.

Wait a minute - you thought Farhi was a fashion designer? Well, yes and no. It's true that she made her reputation with her chic yet cosy clothes. But although her name remains a byword for casual elegance, she's not involved in fashion any more.

Instead, she's now making sculptures full-time and in February she will have a new show in this most artistic of venues. I know nothing about fashion, but I liked that Gainsborough bust a lot. It was conscientious and unpretentious. The focus was on the subject not the sculptor, the way such sculptures ought to be.

Meeting Farhi at the doorway of her own home, a Georgian house in Hamstead, north London, you wouldn't know she's 72. Her huge mass of wavy hair is as thick and wild as ever - and even dressed simply in white pampas, blue jeans and a blue jumper, she looks stylish.

She was also an interior designer and so, as you'd expect, her home is pretty stylish too: lots of brightly coloured drapes; lots of paintings on the walls; lots of books and clunky bric-a-brac; and lots of sculptures too.

She shows me a bust she made of a friend, sculpted when he was in deep despair, a face misshapen with pain and grief. "He looked so torn," she says. "His wife had left him." It's a world away from her



Nicole Farhi's sculptures are to be displayed at a new show in February

Gainsborough bust, so discreet and delicate by comparison. Farhi has been sculpting for more than half her life. For over 30 years she had to fit her sculpture around fashion, but then in 2002, she walked away. "Now I sculpt every day," she says.

She takes me to her studio, an orangery in the garden. There are rows and rows of busts in here, of famous friends: Bill Nighy, Julie Dench, Anna Wintour, Wallace Shawn, Stephen Frears - all the busts are full of character.

She sculpts hands too, and the torsos of voluptuous women, some of which will be shown at the Beaux Arts London gallery next month. "Large women are beautiful - Beah is wonderful," she exclaims.

These Rubenesque women are a world away from the models she worked with during her previous career. "It's about the sensuality of the flesh, the beauty that large women have," she says.

"For me, it's a complete antidote, obviously, to everything I did before, to work on larger bodies. But it's

also very important for me to show that you expect to see beauty in a slim person, when beauty is in everything and everybody".

Discovering sculpture later in life has made her determined not to waste a moment. "I don't have 50 years in front of me," she says. "I work every single day, but I don't mind. I'm so happy that I have been able to stop fashion and just sculpt."

It was in Paris, in 1972, that Nicole-born Farhi met the founder of French Connection, the London fashion retailer Stephen Marks. They started working together, because a couple, and had a child together - Candice, now a photographic agent in the US.

She came to London when Candice was four, so her daughter could study here - and brought with her a continental flair that influenced British fashion.

"I designed looser clothes because that's what I liked wearing," she says. "I didn't do very short dresses, because I didn't think that was nice, to look at a girl and only see the thighs - when she's dressed, of course. When she's naked it's a different thing."

She remains good friends with Marks, but in 1992 Farhi married the playwright David Hare, with whom she shares this splendid house. For seven years they shared the house with her mother - who moved in with them at the grand old age of 95 - until she died six months ago, aged 102.

It was a poignant epilogue to a turbulent relationship. "She did tell me, perhaps for the first time in her life, when she was 90, that she loved me," she says. "Because we fought so much, I was never sure."

While Farhi sculpts in the orangery, Hare writes in his studio down the road. "We don't meet during the day - he doesn't come home for lunch," she says. But they're obviously besotted with each other.

For two creative artists in their early seventies, including one finally getting deserved attention for her second career, it sounds like an idyllic life. THE INDEPENDENT

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