## ART NOUVEAU

How fashioning a second career has given Nicole Farhi fresh inspiration

By CHARLOTTE BROOK

icole Farhi is in her Hampstead home reflecting on her early days as a full-time sculptor, after she swapped fashion for fine art seven years ago. 'I used to put on Maria Callas to get me in the mood... But now I don't play records in the studio. I am just with the bodies, the materials and my thoughts,' she says, her French accent still delightfully strong, even after 40 years of living in Britain.

Farhi's portrayals of individual parts of the human body can be found in two very different exhibitions this month. At 'Folds' in Mayfair's Beaux Arts gallery, she is showcasing life-size depictions of the rolling curves of two comparatively unknown women: Sue Tilley, a former muse of Lucian Freud, immortalised in his painting Benefits Supervisor Sleeping; and Tilley's friend Paola Barone. 'I see a particular beauty in fragments of the human form,' says Farhi. 'Taken out of the context of the whole body, I find the shape of a breast, the fold of a stomach or the curve of a back, thrilling.' She revelled in working with Tilley and Barone: 'They were larger than life in every sense – gregarious, funny, sensual.' Farhi chose to mould torsos out of white jesmonite, and even glass, to lend their bodies a sense of purity. Others will be cast in bronze with a matt black patina. 'I wanted to explore the drama of their physicality and sexual energy,' she explains. The results are raw, and have such presence that she was inspired to name each work after a heroine of classical mythology, including Ceres, Cybele and Hebe. I think I found similarities between my earthly goddesses and those powerful deities... particularly those that personify fertility, mother Earth, love and pleasure.'

Meanwhile, at the painter Gainsborough's childhood home-turned-museum in

Sudbury, Farhi will display busts of artists she admires, such as Bacon and Freud, alongside those of friends including Helena Bonham Carter and Judi Dench. Visitors will also find neverbefore-seen depictions of Ibsen, Chekhov and Oscar Wilde in the exhibition: Farhi creates small heads of the protagonists or authors of the plays her husband, the dramatist and director David Hare, is working on, in an endearing gesture of support.

The artist is relishing her second career, and the experimentation that comes with it. 'You have total freedom,' she says, laughing. 'And there's still so much to learn. This is what I want to do now for the rest of my life.'

Folds' is at Beaux Arts (www.beauxartslondon.co.uk) until 2 March; 'Heads and Hands' is at Gainsborough's House (www.gainsborough.org) from 23 February to 16 June.







Nicole Farhi photographed in her studio. Above: Farhi at work

### THEATRE

# OTHER EDEN The Globe's groundbreaking production of *Richard II*

From actors and musicians to lighting designers and stage managers, every member of the Globe's new Richard II production is a woman of colour. 'I wanted to create a space where we could all get on with our jobs without having to bear the weight of representation,' says the co-director Adjoa Andoh, who also stars in the title role. Performed a year on from the Windrush scandal, against a backdrop of ongoing Brexit discussions, the play asks timely questions about power, the failure of leadership and the future of our 'sceptr'd isle'. FH 'Richard II' is at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (www.shakespearesglobe.com) from 22 February to 21 April.





### **CONTRIBUTORS**



Juggling university studies in her home state of Utah with a successful modelling career – for Dior and Balenciaga, among others – Tice (above) braved Northumberland storms to reach the Holy Island of Lindisfarne for our dramatic fashion story on page 278.

Your most cherished fashion item 'My electric-green Celine handbag, a present from Phoebe Philo.'

What piece of clothing do you wish you owned?

'The Alexander McQueen moon-and-star cape and gown from the autumn/winter 2016 collection. It is magical.'

Whose wardrobe do you most admire? 'I love the clothes worn by Julia Roberts, Linda Evangelista, Patti Smith and Drew Barrymore.'

Your childhood heroine

'My mother, Kelly Frye Glasser, was a guardian ad litem, a lawyer who represents a child's best interests in abusive and neglectful situations. I occasionally attended her hearings and saw how strong she was, intellectually and with her voice.'

### CAROLINE ISSA

The editor and stylist grew up in Montreal and was a management consultant in San Francisco and Singapore before moving into fashion publishing in 2002. On page 334, she shares her recommendations for travelling to 'vibrant, energetic and intoxicating' Udaipur in western India. Your most cherished fashion item 'The Jil Sander suit I bought with my very first pay cheque.' What piece of clothing do you wish you owned? 'Any Christian Lacroix couture.' Whose wardrobe do vou most admire? 'Miuccia Prada's.' Something that should never go out of fashion 'A red lip.' What is empowerment? 'Feeling good about oneself.' Your childhood heroine 'Anita Roddick - I read Business As Unusual as a teen, and it inspired

me to become an entrepreneur.'

'I am just with the bodies, the materials and my thoughts,' says the fashion designer turned sculptor (below right), describing the experience of her artistic process (page 185). This month, she showcases the beauty of the human form in two exhibitions: 'Folds' at Beaux Arts in London; and 'Heads and Hands', at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury.

**FARHI** 

Your most cherished fashion item 'My old denim bias-cut shirt. I designed it at least 30 years ago, and it is all worn out. I hope it will last as long as I do.' What piece of clothing do you wish you owned? 'An Yves Saint Laurent safari jacket that I bought in 1970 with the first money I saved when I became a fashion designer. I regret giving it away.'

What is empowerment? 'The freedom to be your own decision-maker.'

Your childhood heroine 'Tinker Bell from Disney's *Peter Pan*, because of her spirited mind and human qualities.'

### CLAIRE TOMALIN

As well as her acclaimed biographies of Charles Dickens, Mary Wollstonecraft and Katherine Mansfield, the award-winning author has chronicled the extraordinary life of the Regency actress and royal mistress Dorothea Jordan, who she profiles for our 'Heroines' portfolio, on page 306.

Your most cherished fashion item 'The gold shoes I bought for the premiere of the film version of *The Invisible Woman*.' What piece of clothing do you wish you owned? 'A warm and glamorous winter day dress.'

Whose wardrobe do you most admire? 'My friend Christina Gascoigne's – like me, she has kept lots of old clothes, which look amazing now.'

Something that should never go out of fashion 'Black tights.'
What is empowerment?

'Getting on with whatever I am researching and writing.' Your childhood heroine 'The historian Eileen Power, the

'The historian Eileen Power, the author of *Medieval English* Nunneries and Medieval People.'

