

Nicole Farhi opens her first ever solo museum exhibition at Gainsborough's House



Installation view.

SUDBURY.- Although better known for her fashion designs, Nicole Farhi is also a sculptor, who was tutored and mentored by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi.

Farhi has now been sculpting full-time for five years, and in 2019 will have her first ever, solo museum exhibition at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury – Nicole Farhi: Heads and Hands (opens 23 February 2019).

The relationship between Nicole Farhi and Gainsborough's House began in 2015, when the sculptor created a bronze bust of Thomas Gainsborough for the museum in support of their fundraising campaign for a major project to transform the site into a national centre celebrating the life of 18th-century artist. The campaign was successful and building work will be getting underway as Farhi's exhibition opens.

The exhibition includes busts of some of the greatest artists of the past 100 years - Lucian Freud (1922-2011, right), Francis Bacon (1909–1992, below), and perhaps most notably, Sir Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005), Nicole Farhi's great friend and teacher. Influential figures from stage and screen are represented through the heads of Tom Stoppard, Judi Dench, Helena Bonham Carter and Farhi's husband, David Hare.

Talking about the process of creating her work, Nicole explains that the portrait busts emerge from a

sitting in the studio where photographs are taken of the subject. “I then start building an armature and after a few hours sculpting in clay the structure of the face will appear, or not ... Once I have the structure the true character will follow—sometimes days later, weeks, sometimes months.”

“To make a good portrait you have to try and capture the character of the person to come through,” Fahri said of her experience portraying Gainsborough, as it was unveiled, “This was a challenge as there were very few portraits of the artist to be inspired by. Nevertheless, when I looked at Gainsborough’s work, I found kindness and love for his native Suffolk in his beautiful landscapes, and a certain sense of humour in his portraits of the society around him. These two elements gave me the departure for the portrait.”

The exhibition also includes portraits of hands and like the heads that they accompany; they show character and reflect the life and work of the sitter. They portray the dexterous hands of musicians, the graceful hands of dancers, the experienced hands of a sculptor and the joyful hands of children. “Hands,” Nicole says, “can be even more expressive than the face. They can tell you everything about who the person is, what they are like, what they do.”

Gainsborough’s House Director Mark Bills says “Nicole is a huge supporter of Gainsborough’s House and her bust of him is exceptional - even though they are separated by more than 200 years, I think there is an understanding there, one artist to another. This is a quality she brings to all her sculptures, and why we are so delighted to be able to show much more of her work at the museum.”

Nicole Farhi, Lady Hare, CBE (born 25 July 1946) is a French fashion designer and sculptor. She started her career as a freelance designer in Paris before settling in London in the 1970s, eventually joining the design team at French Connection in 1978. In 1982, she launched her own label (originally under the French Connection umbrella) and came to be known for her elegant, unstructured designs for women and men. Since its inception, the Nicole Farhi brand has grown to include shoes, accessories, home décor, and even restaurants.