

CONDITIONAL LOVE

Excerpt from exhibition information by Cassie Beadle

Sainsbury Centre For Visual Arts, Norwich

These works are from a series entitled 'Conditional Love' featuring mothers and their daughters. The double-sided drawings have been incorporated into decorative Art Deco table-top lamps – occupying a place where, traditionally, photographs would have been displayed. The two artworks feature Bette Davis and her daughter B.D Hyman, and Lana Turner and her daughter Cheryl Crane. The original antique lamps, typifying the Art Deco style, have been sourced to approximately represent the same era as when the actresses portrayed were at the height of their fame.

Fowler's series explores the concept of 'conditional love' through the experiences of the children of Hollywood superstars. Some of the daughters in this series have written condemnatory accounts of their childhoods – exposing their mothers as abusive, alcoholic and violent figures whose anodyne public image was the opposite of the truth. The detail and small scale of the drawings, coupled with the lamplight, lend the work a quiet and contemplative intimacy, contradicting the well-documented, fractious relationships between the mothers and daughters depicted. Furthermore, the decorative, ornamental display explores the tension between the artifice of a public image and the realities of a private one.

The title 'immaculate' nods to the immaculate conception and the preservation of the stars' reputation and physicality. It seems today that the quicker a mother's body returns to its 'pre-baby' condition, the better. It is hard to imagine these actresses as mothers because their fame is based upon a myth of perfection. The drawings, framed by lamps, illuminate the strained relationships suffered on both sides (by mother and daughter) as a result of living under the scrutiny of the public eye. They also alert us to the sometimes tragic consequences of stardom and its enduring legacy.

"All of my work is about light and dark (drawing from the illuminated cinema screen), seduction and mystery (searching behind the curtains of fame). My latest series, entitled 'Conditional Love', lends itself particularly to thoughts of revealing and hiding. The antique lamp was originally used to frame photographs. I have reconditioned it to present a double-sided drawing. The works depict actress Joan Crawford and her adopted daughter Christina. They are separated from their stiff embrace and banished to either side of the glass. Replacing them on both sides is the blackness of my pencil used to eradicate their forms. The darkness they embrace, instead of each other, hints at the emptiness of celebrity and the self-indulgence that accompanies our obsession with it. The light itself acts as an altarpiece, representing the enduring relationship between mother/ child and the legacy of fame." - Nina Mae Fowler

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