

HOLLYWOOD SIN

Olivia Cole

Writer, Poet and Journalist

The arresting title of Nina Mae Fowler's new composite drawing comes from Marlene Dietrich's disparaging remark about her contemporary, the famously devout all-American beauty Loretta Young. "Every time she sins, she builds a church. That's why there are so many Catholic churches in Hollywood..." is her insult in full. The implication is one of lip-service on a grandiose, grotesque scale: a very Dietrich wink to the messier life behind Young's pristine image that endured for six decades, until explosive revelations of her affair as an unmarried woman with her co-star Clark Gable, of the accidental pregnancy that followed and its concealment by Loretta and her family – revelations made public by the daughter of that same affair.

Dietrich probably knew at least some of this astonishing truth: most people in what was still quaintly termed 'the movie colony' did. However, whilst Young's division between a public and a private life presents an extreme case, Dietrich's sense of a sham is perhaps a subject closer to home. For after all, how could anyone be a star and have avoided committing 'sins' in Hollywood? And how could anyone avoid some level of hypocrisy? Though fans today cannot get enough of the details of her true-life libertine exploits, audiences at the time knew nothing of her open marriage or innumerable famous lovers. Perhaps the contempt with which Dietrich throws that stone at the unmarried accidental mother contains an element of recognition and rage as well. For Dietrich and her generation were not only the studios' stars but also their contracted servants, bound to a strict 'moral code' of behavior – in public at least – that for all the trappings of movie star success had them living in fragile glass houses.

Assembling a cast of five of cinema's most famous female stars, for 'Every time she sins, she builds a church...' Nina Mae Fowler pools their experiences to interrogate the culture of women in Hollywood, packaged as fantasies for the world to consume, and all too often consumed themselves in the process. Alternately shocking, sensual and witty, its slipperiness of tone inspires an immediate emotional response that can only be deepened the more you know of their lives. The eye may find a line from a kind of Eve (Kim Novak tempted by her banana split) to Bette Davis's dying fallen woman in *Of Human Bondage* (1934) and Marlene Dietrich's body descending into hell, but arguably there can be no good end for being worshipped on a pedestal as these women were.

A need to escape to survive the experience is a view expressed eloquently by Kim Novak – an actress of Hollywood's second generation of studio stars who could learn from the history of the 'sins' and brutal punishments of the previous generation. When she read the script for her now classic role(s) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), she described how the narrative (in which James Stewart's detective tries to mould his new lover into the image of an old case with whom he's obsessed) resonated with her experience of being discovered and reinvented by Harry Cohn, who saw her as his studio's version of Marilyn Monroe. "When I first read those lines where she says, 'I want you to love me for me' ... I just identified with it so much because going to Hollywood as a

young girl and suddenly finding they want to make you over totally, it's such a total change and it was like I was always fighting to show some of myself, feeling that I wanted to be there as well."

That erosion of the self – to the extent that 'I' is someone left behind – is an experience felt by many of cinema's most enduring legends. We might think of Cary Grant giving his real name to his dog, or singing music hall songs in his Archie Leach Cockney voice after a few drinks – or of stars whose resulting inner conflicts led to self-destruction or self-medicating to ease the confusion. "At the height of my film career," Novak has said, "I decided to walk away from Hollywood – not wanting to fall prey to the tragic endings that often result when stars and sex symbols get lost in an identity crisis. I turned my back on a successful and lucrative career to define who I was." Perhaps the best-known line on that psychic fracture comes from Monroe herself, who stated that her problem with men "is that they all want to go to bed with Marilyn, but they wake up with Norma" – thereby framing her with the endlessly crushing misdemeanour of being someone else.

That is part of the dilemma dramatised in 'Every time she sins, she builds a church...' If there is a vision of hell here, it's a man-made living one, in which audiences hanker for screen goddesses, filling the cinemas and collaging the walls of their teenage rooms like shrines, but where the real women will always fall short of the camera's versions, cannot stop the ravages of time and – in the most extreme cases – hide away from sight altogether rather than be photographed or seen as they really are. Shadowed by Loretta's larger fictions, concealment of the real self is a motif in this work. At first glance, Tallulah Bankhead seems to be revelling in her signature exhibitionism, a glass in one hand, and champagne provocatively drunk from her shoe in the other. As a star of an earlier, far more licentious era (the original flapper who inspired even childhood friend Zelda Fitzgerald), Bankhead could misbehave as she saw fit with no regard for studio opprobrium. In this instance, though, her attention-seeking presents a sadder moment. She later described how, arriving in London after an absence of years, the champagne in her shoe was a stunt to distract photographers from her visibly older appearance.

In an even more extreme case of concealment, the paparazzi photograph which is the source for the portrait of dying Marlene Dietrich is the most shocking visual moment here. When she died in 1992, she hadn't been seen in public for years. Her determination to control her image and to go to her grave unseen was violated in a snatched voyeuristic picture syndicated around the world. That shared horrible fate is hinted at too in Fowler's choice of coy pose for Hedy Lamarr. These two women presented to American audiences as visions of European beauty ended their lives in self-imposed hiding, speaking to the world only over the phone, and occasionally to curious filmmakers who by the 1970s already recognised their place in cinematic history. Like Tallulah with her shoe, Hedy covers her face, seemingly sharing in a joke made by Kim Novak, but also prefiguring her own tragic final years. Just like Dietrich, Lamarr was too afraid to be seen in public at all, despite her intellect and talents far beyond the incredible face that inspired Louis B Meyer to pluck an unknown Viennese actress and market her as the next Bergman, and 'the world's most beautiful woman.'

While we might consider that kind of reclusiveness a part of history, there is a cruel footnote to Kim Novak's bid for freedom. Despite the insight and grace of her exit from life as a working actress (making a new quieter life as an artist in Oregon), when she agreed to appear at the Academy Awards in 2014, Novak was – sickeningly – mocked for her anti-aging surgeries, with even Donald Trump seeing fit to weigh in as a Twitter troll. A perceived lapse in appearance remains a modern day 'sin' for which people (most often women) are publically shamed.

Instead of hiding away, happily Novak (aged 81 at the time) decided to confront this body shaming, writing an open letter in which she movingly described how the comments had left her in a ‘tailspin’ with the feel of a bullied teenager. This ugly incident is a reminder that far from something confined to the history books, we are still living with public judgement of female ‘sins’ and female appearances.

The story of riches and glittering fame is a Faustian pact that we know all about from storytelling archetypes, but it’s one that remains uniquely vicious and violent when applied to female experience – as visceral as the banana split Kim Novak is here demolishing with such relish, or the two drinks Tallulah Bankhead is using as her means of distraction and escape, and that you can almost feel spilling all over her silk. Novak might be joking for the ever-present cameras (perhaps making her banana split suggestive before anyone else can) but her clowning is provocative too, demanding that we acknowledge the so called ‘casting couch’ and what was so often so casually demanded of the women, men and even children who fought to occupy the spotlight. As a kind of giant storyboard, this monumental drawing has an immediate visual impact and punch, but its effects become more and more haunting (or incendiary) the more you know of these women and the virtually lawless territories they navigated.

The missing sixth woman is the aforementioned Loretta Young – her supposed ‘sins’ unspooling like film from a can into this work, telling a story that speaks to all of the experiences of these women. In her memoir *Uncommon Knowledge* (published in 1994), Young’s daughter Judy Lewis lifted the veil on her mother’s carefully maintained saintly image, revealing in confessional detail what many had long suspected. But not only was there the story of the rumoured Young/Gable love affair, but also an almost Dickensian subplot in which mother and grandmother had concealed the resulting pregnancy and then secretly given Judy to an orphanage, only to then stage an ‘adoption’ while she was still a baby.

Uncommon Knowledge retains its power to shock. It’s a harrowing read, full of traumatic details such as how, as her father went on to become the most recognisable matinee idol in the world thanks to his role in *Gone with the Wind*, at her mother’s instigation his secret young daughter was enduring a painful operation to pin back her unmistakably Gable-esque ears, to better silence the rumours and playground taunts. Kept in the dark about her father’s identity, Lewis missed out on a relationship with him altogether. When he died suddenly in 1960 of a heart attack, aged 59, she had met him only once. After publication of the book, mother and daughter were estranged for three years.

While studio publicity always idealised the beautiful Young sisters, making much of the fact that this future trio of silent era stars had once prophetically lived on a street named Hollywood, the reality was closer to Skid Row. They had arrived in Los Angeles from Salt Lake City with nothing except a brother in law who worked in the industry and an idea that he might use his sister’s good-looking kids as extras: those endlessly replaceable human beings who even in the 1920s were already arriving in the city in hopeful droves, hankering for a tiny piece of the boom in this new American industry.

Such was the youngest sister Gretchen’s determination to work that her older sisters nicknamed her ‘Gretch the Wretch.’ A single mother abandoned by a philandering husband, their mother Gladys Young was desperate enough to loan her children to other families. Gretchen – the future ‘Loretta’ – briefly lived with a childless couple

who'd become fans of her on screen in a Depression-era arrangement that seems unfathomable today. Loretta possessed fairy child looks that saw her working consistently from the age of four and she grew into an excellent actress as well as a doe-eyed beauty, pulled out of school yet schooled in screen acting by the hours of work she'd done while still a child. In 1928's *Laugh Clown Laugh*, cast opposite a leading man more than twice her age, Nils Asther, then in his 30s, is said to have tried to help the 14 year old. As her biographer Bernard Dick relates, "When Loretta was having difficulty expressing her attraction, Asther told her to imagine him as something she truly desired, like a hot fudge sundae. The scene worked." It's a queasy anecdote that gives a glimpse into the strange life of a child star: so innocent that all she really knew of desire was an ice cream sundae (or banana split) yet already being served up as the object of desire for audiences, and being required to fake longing for a series of older co-stars.

By the time she was 22 and starring opposite Clark Gable, the so-judged aggressive 'wretch' had left poverty behind. She had been working almost full time for eight years and supporting her entire family with her burgeoning career. Revelations of an affair with the married Gable would have ended all this. It's in this desperate context that, finding she was pregnant after an on-set romance of some kind, the stage mother and her most successful product decided to strong-arm a flimsy plot line worthy of early cinema into real life, however emotionally damaging the consequences. The surviving child, Judy, worked first as an actor and later, after making sense of her own story, as a psychotherapist working with traumatised foster children. As she reflected in her memoir, "My mother and grandmother dealt with my life as they would with a movie script. I could be written out of the plot when I didn't enhance the story, and I could be written back in just as easily when it was convenient."

The great studio publicity departments were masters of the half-truth, blatant lie and 'sin' of omission, and gave Loretta and her mother their cues in how to handle real life events. Judy Lewis was 31 before Loretta would admit that she was her biological mother, all the while keeping intact the wholesome and devout reputation the studio machine perpetuated. Fan magazine readers were fed choice iced gems, such as how the strength of Loretta's Catholic faith supposedly meant that she couldn't stand to be in the company of bad language and would bring a swear box to her set, for the foul-mouthed, rough-around-the-edges likes of Gable and co to pay their dues. A detail left out of this particular story was her lifelong support for charities that supported unmarried mothers who wished to keep their babies – it was to such charities that she'd always donate these fines.

Loretta's final photoshoot took place in 1999 for Vanity Fair, just months before her death. Her astonishing looks, aged 87, caused a wave of appreciation for this still beautiful older woman whose career and memories stretched back to the formative time of the film industry itself. The accompanying text alluded cryptically to the row with her daughter but was delivered in language more fitting for the moralistic cinema of Loretta's heyday than a magazine at the turn of the millennium. "She elected not to talk about whether her daughter was the child of Clark Gable, with whom she made *The Call of the Wild* in 1935. For this restraint, much honor" read the picture caption. A year later, Loretta's own version was a similarly soft-focus production authorised biography, thin on detail and posthumously published, preserving that 'honor' to the last. Of the relationship with Gable, which many who had been on location for the film felt they had witnessed, all that was said was this: "As always Loretta maintained her moral principles. There had been no affair, as gossip mongers would assume, instead, only one night when her iron will slipped. It would have been a casual event to many, especially in Hollywood, but she was ashamed ... she had failed to live up to her own principles. She vowed not to let it happen again."

If fining a man who has secretly fathered your child for his bad language doesn't strain credulity enough, finally came the coda. In 2015, with mother and daughter both now dead, living family members decided to defend that 'honor' one final time, putting forth the theory that there had been no affair, only some on set flirtation that had culminated in a 'date rape'. The allegation from Linda Lewis, the wife of one of Judy Lewis's half-brothers, was that the 'horseplay' witnessed by members of the production was an attempted seduction of Loretta by the married older star, which ended with rape on the night train as they returned to Los Angeles from their weeks on location. Loretta Young hadn't known what 'date rape' meant until the term came up watching Larry King with her daughter in law, when, aged 85, she had asked what the term meant, before saying: "that was what happened with Clark."

It's with this upsetting subtext that contemporary viewers can look to *The Call of the Wild*, the film made whilst – quite what we can never know – unfolded off camera. Based on a Jack London novel exploring baser human instinct versus civility, it's the story of a slightly dubious gold prospector (played by Gable) and a dog that refuses to be tamed. Buck's bark and bite, howling at the moon while his human masters try to domesticate him, none too subtly mirrors the desperado hero's struggle to stay on the straight and narrow when faced with the dual temptation of an unclaimed gold mine and an unclaimed beautiful woman whose husband may or may not be lost in the Alaskan wilderness. A location shoot was a rarity in the 1930s and snowbound upstate Washington was used to stand in for Yuma, Alaska. The weeks in the cold were fraught with difficulty, and too much snow for the crew to handle, but the end result is shot as stunningly as an Ansel Adams photograph.

For the almost painful benefit of the daydreaming Depression-era audience, looking into the embers of the camp fire, Gable's dozy sidekick Shorty Hoolihan expostulates: "Gee, I wonder what it's going to be like, having things instead of wishing for them." The confusion of mining prospects and romantic prospects isn't subtle when Jack explains his dubious code of values: "Wishing never got anybody any place. It's owning something that counts. And taking it when you can't get it any other way, that's alright too. That's the law out here. When there's something you need, grab it, take it away from the other guy. It's a good law. It works." Loretta's response is equally resonant, "It only works if you deserve what you take. Otherwise it's stealing. Perhaps that particular commandment isn't respected up here." Gable's set piece is the kind of up-by-the-boots homily that made him the 'King of Hollywood' to both male and female fans, who hankered for his alternately tender and tough certainties in an uncertain, deprived age. However, in the context of the question marks around their relationship, it also seems to offer a particularly startling commentary.

In a lifetime of revising the truth to the point of pure fiction to those closest to her, is Loretta Young's last word her most accurate? Or was that one final revision to alleviate the guilt and shame of what she considered a moral aberration on her part? When we watch this film, are we also watching the virginal former child star Gretchen seduced by her co-star (as described by her biographer Bernard Dick)? A couple in an exotic location far from home falling in love, even if just for a moment (as their characters do and as Loretta once memorably recalled in a TV interview, and as their resulting daughter believed), or a powerful married co-star leaning on an impressionable girl with his charm, before an ugly subplot ending in something being 'taken' if it couldn't be got any other way? The questions themselves make for an uncomfortable half knowledge, as does Gable's own unfulfilled longing for a child, and Judy Lewis's grief for her unknown father and for the mother who kept her at a distance by denying their biological connection for so many formative years. The details of just what was 'wished

for', 'owned' or 'stolen' are far too far away to ever know the exact truth, though fans and film historians schooled in the affection (and often sheer lust) the real-life Gable inspired have remained sceptical about the date rape accusation.

As seen in his better-known film from the same period, *It Happened One Night* (1934), for all his good looks Clark Gable was always just ordinary enough to be a convincing everyman, with a corresponding reputation held dear in the public consciousness. Before Rhett Butler in *Gone With The Wind* (a dandyish role he had no desire to play) he was a Midwest hero from the middle of nowhere, whom women could daydream about and men cheer on. For male fans, like so many of his characters, his Jack the lad in *The Call of the Wild* presented a better-looking version of themselves. He had better clothes and better (false) teeth and lustrous hair, better lines and better girls (Loretta herself, with a screen chemistry we can wonder at forever) – but enough of real world disappointment about him to be someone audiences would *love* to see strike gold, and whose real-life successes were vicariously enjoyed by fans, who labelled the Ohio lumberjack made good the 'King of Hollywood.'

A flash of Gable's own dizzying success story seems to light up the screen in the one blissful domestic scene he shares with Young, as they count out their not quite ill-gotten gains, having together found the gold mine she set out to look for with her conveniently lost-along-the-way husband. Here, just for a few seconds, the boundaries of art and reality seem to have collapsed, giving us a flash of the wannabe actor Billy Gable (once so desperate he slept on the beach, and with the terrible teeth to show for his years of near destitution) and adding true emotional realism to the film's flimsy get-rich-quick fantasy. To the hustling prospector, art becomes a kind of joke: a rich man's privilege he can now afford, the ultimate proof of having made it. "*The world doesn't understand me*" Clark/Jack teases Loretta/Clare. "At heart I'm an artist. Oh ... I want to write poetry. I want to compose. I want to paint ... Yes ... I want to starve in a garret: wear my hair long, get egg on a flowing tie. In other words, be a genius. But the world sneers at my talent. And instead it gives me GOLD!" He has the beautiful young girl he chased around the set looking longingly into his eyes (at least on camera), and he has the means. Their joy and intimacy doesn't seem like the kind of acting that can be taught like a girl wanting a sundae, but who knows?

As Gable's idiotic sidekick Shorty sings when they strike gold, "it's never going to rain again." It's a perfect almost-real moment and a vivid reminder of Hollywood's own boomtown status and endless sunshine – the fantasy of those who watched these films and also the delusion of the many who hoped to find their fortune in Los Angeles's own frontier town. For the lucky few it delivered extraordinary life-changing success and yet, for all its potential and admirable classlessness, it also retained a lawlessness and an element of the wild that endured for decades.

A frontier town is a lawless one, or one that makes its own laws, as we have seen. *The Call of the Wild* made a pretend version of a world elsewhere but Los Angeles was already its own other place, at a total remove from the rest of America and never quite a 'proper' place, however fabulous the lots and the houses the newly minted moguls built for themselves as speedily as they erected sets. If identity crises became a kind of epidemic for its self-medicating, self-destructive stars, the whole industry had one too. In the pages of fan magazines and press releases, for the cinema-going public it burnished its own myth as a meritocratic dream factory where ordinary yet hard-working people like Loretta Young and her winsome sisters, or the one-time lumberjack Clark Gable or acrobat Cary Grant could become screen goddesses and gods. And yet it was always forever a little shabby to anyone

more cynical: whether the intellectuals who didn't mind taking the money to write its scripts, or to America's old moneyed families whose playboy sons would come to the west coast to dabble in film finance with immigrant movie moguls and to have love affairs (but never marriages) with stars.

Nina Mae Fowler's female subjects here are examples of this wild west's pioneers who entered the public imagination: they are simultaneously extravagantly beautiful and talented embodiments of this gold rush, and all too often its human cost too. If there is a descent into hell in this portrait, starting with the banana split as a diner stand-in for Eve's apple, then there are also many Faustian pacts – the many little 'sins' of compromise and compliance along the way – the details of which may be being worked out by the serious-faced men in dark suits who (as often in Fowler's work) are confined to the edges of the drawing. These are the off-screen executives, forever engaged in the business of star-making, controlling the talent or deciding what to do with the human problems that occurred when real life repeatedly interrupted carefully manufactured fantasy; with unwanted pregnancies, or the unwanted parents that haunt Hollywood histories or enraged abandoned spouses or, more recently, children.

The human cost can be mapped too in the innumerable marriage and messy family breakdowns that came in the wake of fame and success – Loretta's tortuous path, concealing a child's true origins, might read as astonishing but it wasn't exceptional. Hedy Lamarr used a similarly extreme clandestine strategy, adopting a son she had secretly conceived with her second husband. The 'child of' a screen goddess who was, behind closed doors, all too human has become in itself a kind of disturbing sub-genre of Hollywood history.

For all that was modern and new and exciting about the film industry, the Hayes Code ushered in a period of almost Puritanical public morality for men and women alike. Gable's image as an irresistible man about town between marriages was packaged as part of his myth (womanising and drinking were never denoted as 'sins' for male stars) but his MGM masters were much happier for him to be safely married – going into a publicity overdrive with his genuine love story with Carole Lombard – instead of endlessly bedding his co-stars. For the real women who lived through a time of such double standards, their stories provide a rich seam for a work of art, diving into the territory where messy human reality infringed on this unreal confected world.

Hollywood sold sex, but sex had consequences too. The spectacle of the abandoned pregnant mother was an almost primeval fear for women before contraception and Hollywood stars were no exception. As an on-screen version of the punishment of promiscuity there was Mildred Rogers, as played in her career-making performance by Bette Davis in *Of Human Bondage*. The precise moment from that film captured here is one of total anguish as Mildred, her own child having died, is dying of TB. Made in 1934, the performance made Bette Davis a star and was hailed as the greatest moment of realism to date in the still new medium of acting on film. As well as her performance, Davis had a strong hand in the production values and film's aesthetics too, designing her own hair and make-up. As she recalled, "I made it very clear that Mildred was not going to die of a dread disease looking as if a deb had missed her noon nap. The last stages of consumption, poverty, and neglect are not pretty, and I intended to be convincing-looking. We pulled no punches, and Mildred emerged ... as starkly real as a pestilence."

As she gathers her cast of real-life women, Fowler's work transports us to the so-called golden age of Hollywood, refusing to edit out just how tarnished and tawdry a place that could be. Yet, shockingly, these

experiences are still happening today. Marlene Dietrich's final violation by the camera took place almost thirty years ago but it still retains power to shock, and far from progress, the camera (or the ever-present mobile phone) can still make an aging woman – so much more than just her face – too frightened to go out. “It really did throw me into a tailspin, and it hit me hard,” Kim Novak said of being publically shamed. “For days, I didn't leave the house...” but she avowed: “I will no longer hold myself back from speaking out against bullies. We can't let people get away with affecting our lives.”

The longer and the closer we look at ‘Every time she sins, she builds a church...’ the more we may recognise the strength and power there is in the raising of voices and in the pooling of shared awful experiences. We only have to look to the most recent lurid chapter of film industry history to see the way in which the sharing of confessional stories in the Me Too movement can create (it is hoped) a true moment of recognition and of change. ‘Every time she sins’ can be a collective experience – those ‘sins’ today are not something to be hidden but finally, for the women brave enough to share their darkest moments of abuse, dragged into the light for the communal good of us all. We might see this work as paying tribute to the power that comes when women share their stories and make their own broad church.

The hundreds of women abused by Harvey Weinstein were not just, in the time old Hollywood cliché, those who aspired to act, but in an industry where 95% (or more) of films remain the visions of male directors and male writers, young women who aspired to produce, write, direct and tell their own stories. He was the man countless ambitious women clamoured to meet, but who behind closed doors turned out to be their worst nightmare: an embodiment of the out-of-sight frontier town and the man who can ‘take’ by whatever means he sees fit. Who can forget his threat to a reporter held in a headlock in front of photographers he knew would be too scared to print the photographs: “I'm glad I'm the f****g sheriff of this s**t a** f****g town.” Weinstein, as we have learned, liked non-disclosure agreements for his victims just as the worst of the golden era's moguls liked ‘morality contracts’ that governed everything except the morals of the executives. And the victims, too, all too often enacting their own concealments and non-disclosures due to shame, lived with the psychological torments of their secrets for years.

Hedy Lamarr covers her face – she cannot bear to be looked at, and she cannot bear to look at the business of fame and of Hollywood. None of it, as Bette Davis said, is ‘pretty’ – but how much better it is than being hidden away. Here, instead of sanitised male packaged entertainment for a female audience (as wholesome and domestic as the Depression-era china or glass that women were given as free gifts to take back home when they attended a matinee, perhaps referenced in the tableware in the foreground), we have a female artist reframing the story. Fowler's version of these mythical stars too is ‘starkly real’: putting what was pushed out of sight (female aging, female desire, female control of one's own image and agency) in the centre of the frame. The composite drawing is a kind of alternate storyboard and her chosen medium – to draw – uses images that are graphic but counters the toughest of details with the tenderness of human touch. There's empathy in spirit and in the act of drawing itself that makes charcoal the perfect counterpoint to a camera that could, and still can, be a woman's enemy. To draw these ‘sinners’ is to emphasise our shared humanity and to hope that the viewer – and the culture at large – learns to empathise rather than to judge.

Whilst many, like Loretta Young, lived in fear of what people would think if they knew or saw their real self, in fact, all these years on, it turns out that the opposite is true. We know so much more of their all too human disasters, but don't love them less. Instead, we may go away with an added awareness of that human cost, and just how much was 'taken' from them in to order to give themselves mind, body (and sometimes it seems even soul) to their art. Far from burning in hell, they have an immortality on screen and in our imaginations. If that is a romantic interpretation, it competes too with tough, unflinching realism and a feminist sense of urgency.

Far from needing to be hidden, these 'sinners' have life stories that Nina Mae Fowler encourages us to get to know better, and to appreciate anew. We will always have their art. To theirs, Nina Mae Fowler, adds her own: not 'a mug's game' (as Mildred shrieks viciously at her idealistic painter-lover in *Of Human Bondage*) or just a rich man's luxury but unvarnished and 'starkly real'. An act of empathy, and of release: a setting free of those demons for all the real and metaphorical 'daughters' who stand before this monumental drawing. There are no 'sins' here – or anybody waiting to judge – only an audience hungry for more of the same female magic and for a better sense of perspective.

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