

EVERY GIRL CRAZY!

Charlotte Martin

"It's food, it's always relevant!" – Nina Mae Fowler

Manicured almond nails. Diamonds glinting in the turn of the light. Slicked pin curls. Spaghetti coiling into a lipsticked mouth from on high...

Fowler has again created a subversive montage, snagging on our expected depiction of these icons. Her oeuvre is littered with explorations of the overlap between the public and private spheres and what the navigations of these realms by celebrity and fan alike can reveal of our cultural story.

Body and food are inseparable from this merging of public and private, so loaded with political and social meaning. Food is almost as much a state of mind as it is a physical entity.

It could be asked whether 'Every Girl Crazy' is a work of cruelty. These women went to gargantuan efforts over their physical appearance and to ensure their physicality matched with the public persona they wanted to project: as Marlene herself said, "glamour is assurance". Thin bodies demarcate ambition, moral value and sexual desirability in the minds of the public. Is Fowler cruelly cementing and enlarging images of these stars that they would want banished from view permanently? While there is little doubt that Monroe, Davis, Mansfield and Dietrich would not celebrate these images, with Fowler as the host of this dinner party it is in fact a work of vulnerability, the host scratching at the titanium of stardom.

When we struggle to identify our own satisfaction and must publicly constrain our appetites, bingeing becomes unremarkable. The rupturing of restraint that is bingeing seems almost banal due to the amount of people that experience it. But this public display of joyous eating from such recognisable faces is most certainly remarkable.

We must make excuses for liking food, or qualify why we *deserve* a specific food today; at the same time, whether we do indeed 'deserve' it or not is open to every stranger's interpretation of our physical self. Bingeing is, perceived as a character defect, an inability to restrain oneself. However, rather than an inadequacy, bingeing can be a rage, a rallying cry against the painful and conflicting narratives of beauty standards. A ritualistic rejection of oppressive expectations.

The relationship between appearance and food forms an infinitely complex and intricate web, the source of novels, essays, hours and hours of conversation, and yet Fowler's ever deft use of drawing has crystallised these novels and analysis, with trailing strands left for the viewer to selectively tug at.

To look at this drawing, I am reminded of John Berger's words from *Ways of Seeing*: "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." Fowler's inimitable dinner guests have powerfully and defiantly smashed this lens of the male gaze that Berger so succinctly encapsulates.

They are resplendent in their entitlement to eat, and I for one would like a seat at the table.

Featured in *Ruined Finery*, 2020