



SOCIAL EYES

MUSE ALERT

Once known merely as Picasso's muse, Dora Maar is now being recognised as an artist in her own right. And if one Dora can inspire masterpieces, I thought, so can another...

By DORA DAVIES-EVITT

Photographs by ANTHONY LYCETT

MAAR-VELOUS
Reclining on a chaise longue and clad in a mainly vibrant outfit, I'm ready to be immortalised as a work of art



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Dora drawn in charcoal by Isabel Douglas-Hamilton, who produced this sketch in two hours

Nicky Phillips' portrait of Dora was completed in just three hours

Venetia Berry created this abstract of Dora from a photograph taken on a Greek holiday

THE MANY FACES OF A MODERN MUSE

From a 'glazed' expression on a plate by Sasha Compton to a softly romantic charcoal sketch from a raft of society artists depicted Dora

afraid to speak her mind. The modern-day Dora could take a leaf out of her book. A Damien Hirst-esque painting graduate strikes up a conversation. Perhaps Maar would have engaged, but this modern Dora flicks her hair and says dismissively: 'I am my own muse, thank you.'

Back at *Tatler* HQ, I post a picture on Instagram of myself in a pink gown, hoping for an artist to slide into my DMs, eager to depict me. I must have done something right, because Nicky Phillips, the Charles H Cecil-trained portrait artist who has painted Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Anne and Princes William and Harry, agrees to paint me. She only has time for a three-hour sitting (portraits can take weeks – even months), but I take what I can get and trot to

her studio in Earl's Court.

My modern muse attire? I've swapped my blouse for Versace jeans and a cropped white jacket – very Lady Lola. After my sitting, I will be watching royal DJ Cassius Taylor play a set in east London, where the It girls will be out in full force, so I am dressed accordingly. Maar also floated in a social set, counting the Fitzgeralds and Henri Matisse as friends.

I sit on the edge of the chair, my legs positioned awkwardly, as Phillips begins her sketch. It's so uncomfortable. I now understand why Maar was weeping. I don't know how I will sit like this for three hours. But if an almost 90-year-old Queen Elizabeth II could do it, surely I can. Phillips tells me to close my mouth as she

gets my lower face right. 'That's what I said to her [Majesty], she remembers. Being compared to the queen is so modern Maar. If that's not main-character energy, I don't know what is.'

I sit for another artist: society favourite Isabel Douglas-Hamilton. She draws me in charcoal, which, she says, is the most flattering medium. (Picasso would never be so generous. Didn't he make all his women look phallic?) When I tell her I am the modern Maar, she says: 'Most muses are artists themselves. They want to be part of the creative process.'

With that in mind, I decide to experiment with abstraction. So I call upon the illustrator Sasha Compton, a descendant of Lord and Lady Grantham. My brief is: powerful, strong and sultry – not a

tear in sight. She recreates me on a ceramic plate – a medium beloved of Picasso. But there's a twist: Compton has depicted me in a fiery red hue. A vision of sadness? More like Ivy Getty, eat your heart out.

But there is one more step. To truly transform into a modern muse, I need a nude, and someone who will paint me like one of their French girls. Step forward Venetia Berry, an illustrator who is famous for subverting the male gaze. I DM her a picture of myself, lounging in a bikini on a beach in Greece. Three days later, I am presented with a masterpiece: a modern Botticelli's *Venus*, an It girl posed on the sand. I've completed my mission. Sorry, Picasso, this Dora Maar has no time for your self-indulgent drama. It's all about her... or, indeed, me. □