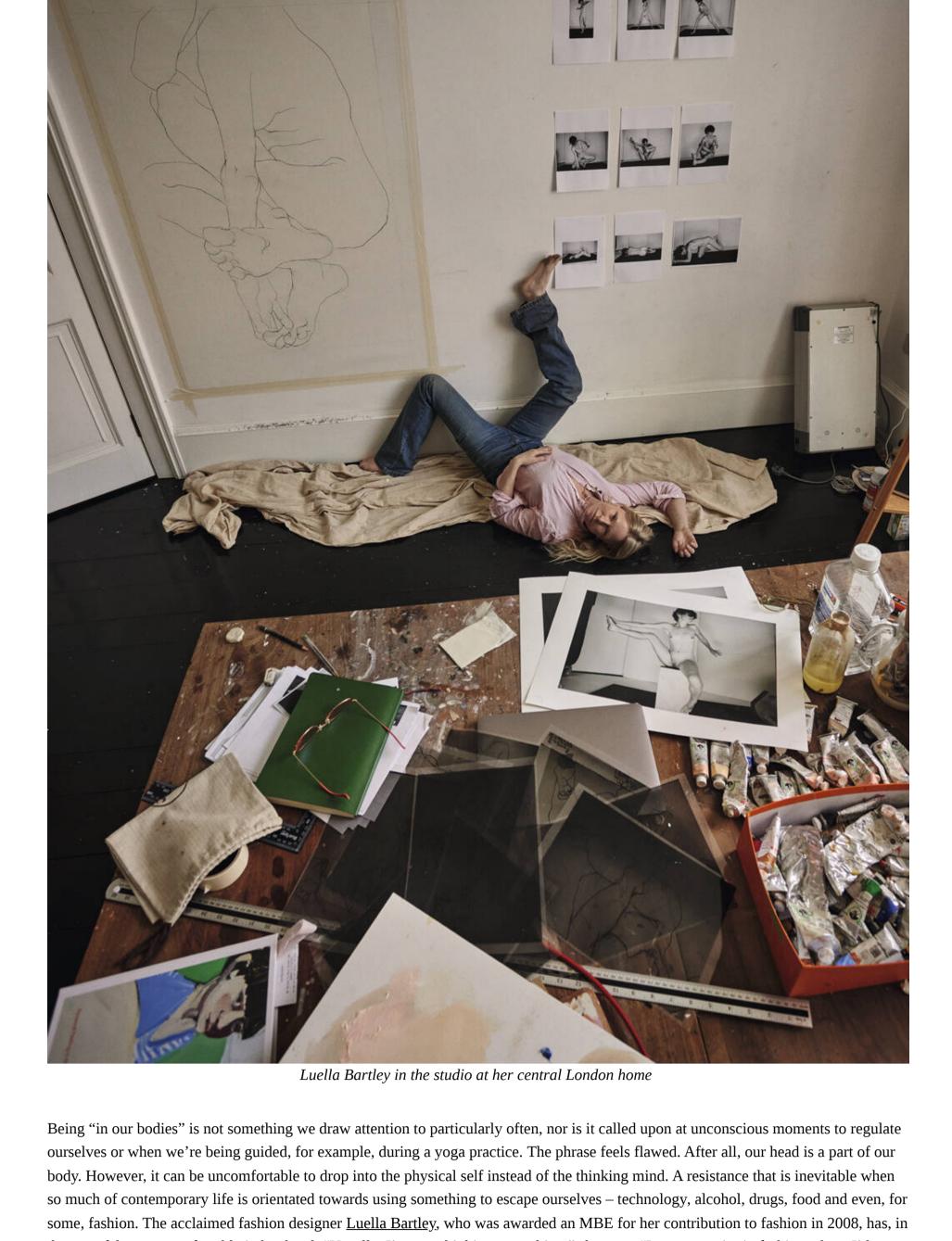


ART BY SHONAGH MARSHALL

Are you sitting comfortably? Try to find somewhere that feels good to you and let's try something. Begin by feeling your seat's surface,

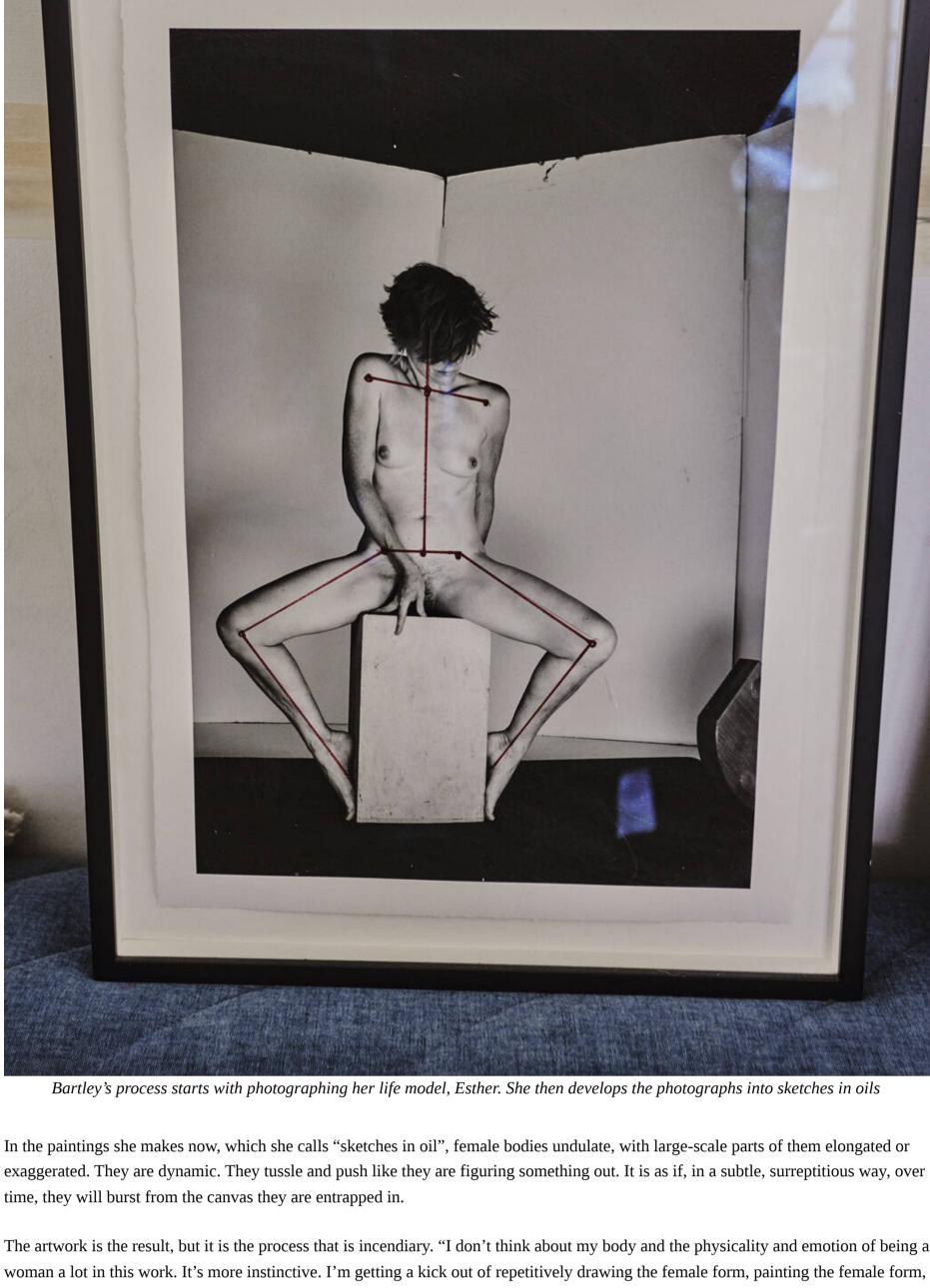
mindful, dropping pleasantly into a grounded state; others might feel their thoughts circling, a sense of feeling unsettled slowly seeping in.

then your feet grounded on the earth. Take a deep breath, then slowly release it. Do it again. What comes up? Some might find this



the past, felt more comfortable in her head. "Usually, I'm overthinking everything," she says. "I got to a point in fashion where I'd never use my hands. I didn't draw, I didn't sew. As a creative director, I was conceptualising all the time." Over the past three years, she

has been practising as an artist, making paintings, line drawings, photographs and sculptures, reconnecting with her body using her hands. "It started as a therapeutic practice. I went through a lot of shit, so I began with clay. There was something about getting my hands dirty. I went to a different place when I was drawing, sculpting or painting – it is physical, not mental." Her journey towards art began to crystallise as a direct result of the illness and sad passing of her beloved son, Kip, who was only 18 when he died in 2021 of leukaemia after an illness lasting two and a half years. In an interview with the *Observer* in July, she related how her life was upended. "College, career, different careers, children. I don't think I stopped to reflect. Obviously Kip getting ill was a real stop sign for me. It was full of the most..." She takes a moment, floored by sudden tears, "...the most terrifying and powerless feeling in the world. But he − it − taught me so much. I don't think I can put it into words, it's only been two years, and I'm still reeling from it, but so much has changed, internally. I'm a sadder, but braver and more solid person."



that's made me pay attention and find comfort. It has made me feel more grounded, more inquiring. It's helped me make decisions in my life that have been brave. Energy has transferred from the work into me." The first body of work that Bartley exhibited at London's Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in the summer of 2022 was about tension and

photographing the female form," she says. "I can't explain it, but it's definitely had an effect on me as a woman. It's been a process

looked at as a woman", she explains. Her new work eases into this vulnerability, sloshing around it, confronting it, revelling in it. She has found it a route to a truer connection. "The more open you are about yourself, the more you attract people who understand you. In the work I'm doing now, there's a lot less tension. It's more about how I see that vulnerability as a strength." The authenticity in the process and drawing on lived experience are what make her work so compelling. When I view it, the cogs in my

mind whirr as if the bodies are a Rubik's cube, and when they are slotted together in a certain configuration, something might eventually

be worked out. What is it to be women in our bodies? We are obviously in our body, we own it, but in many ways we don't. We might capitalise on it, use and abuse it, or others might abuse us, and we are the victims of this. We might love ourselves fully and tenderly, caress our bodies and care for them. Or we might disassociate, where we are outside ourselves, looking on and wondering: who is that down there? Surely not me?! It is not a singular experience. Bartley is drawing solely on her experience, but I resonate with her as she

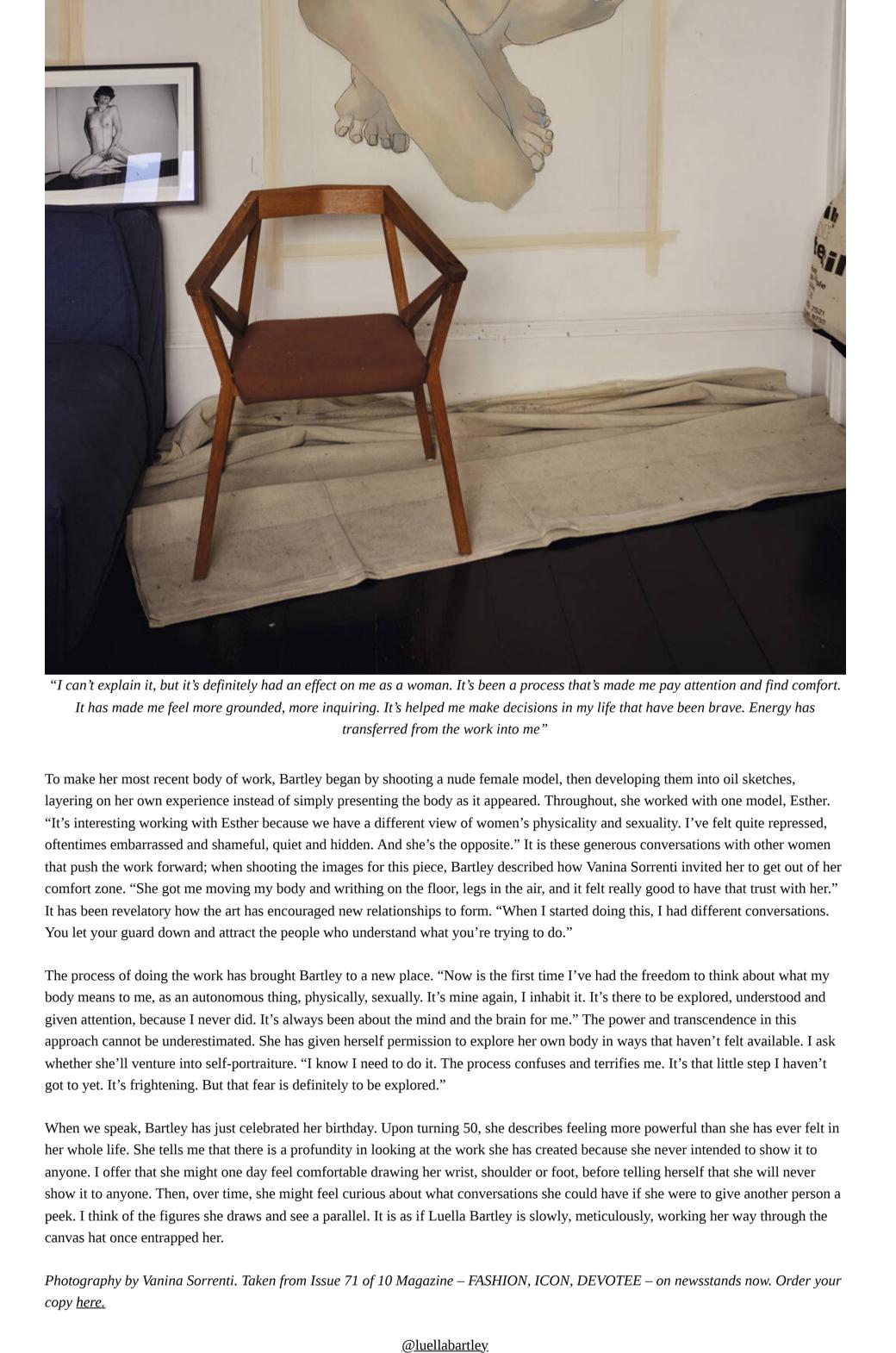
anxiety, exploring vulnerability, intimacy and conflict around the female experience – "almost like the ugliness of being a woman being

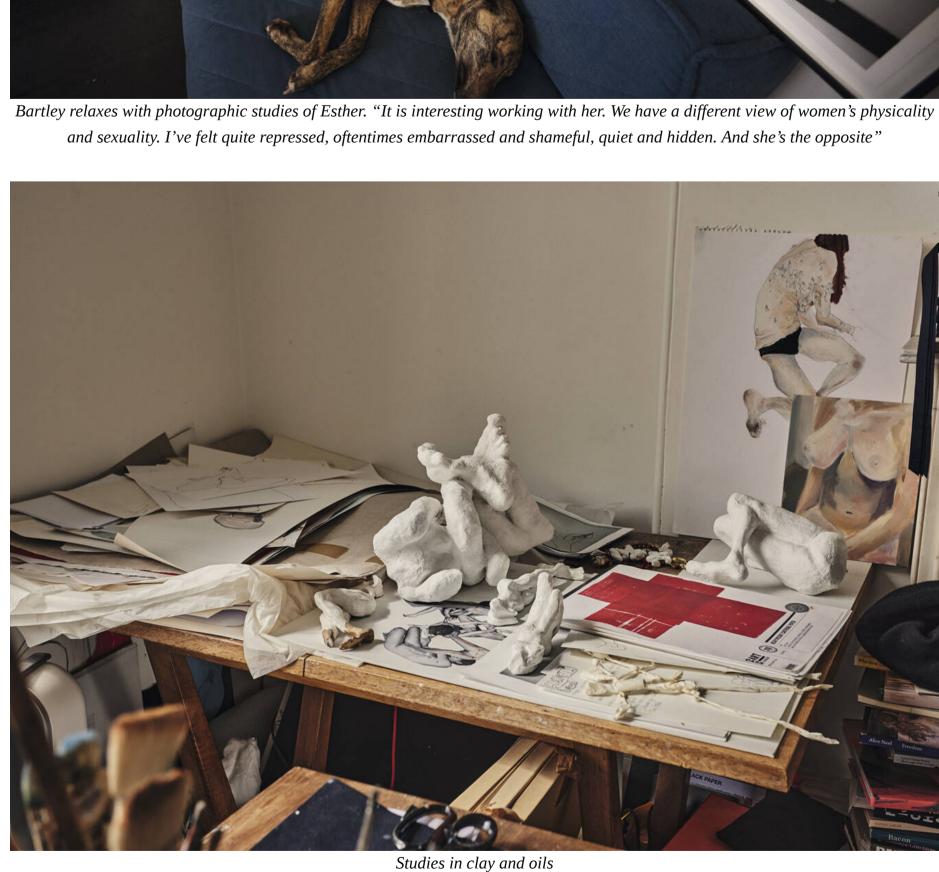
speaks. She tells me, "This is the only time, the first time, that I am really inhabiting my body – I was completely disconnected from it. I abused it in my teens and twenties. I had such a negative relationship with it. I had a personal experience that made things difficult, but I'm sure there were some social aspects to it. I suppose the first time I felt my body was when I had kids and I was pregnant, which is a very different kind of thing to what I'm thinking about now." I ask about the role that shame plays in her work. "The process is not necessarily understanding the shame that I've felt through my life," she says, "although it has been a process of stripping it away and becoming more celebratory about it. And it's not even about the physical body, it's about how you feel about being female. In my

teenage years, I was terribly ashamed of everything." This curiosity has led to an investigation reverberating throughout the work,

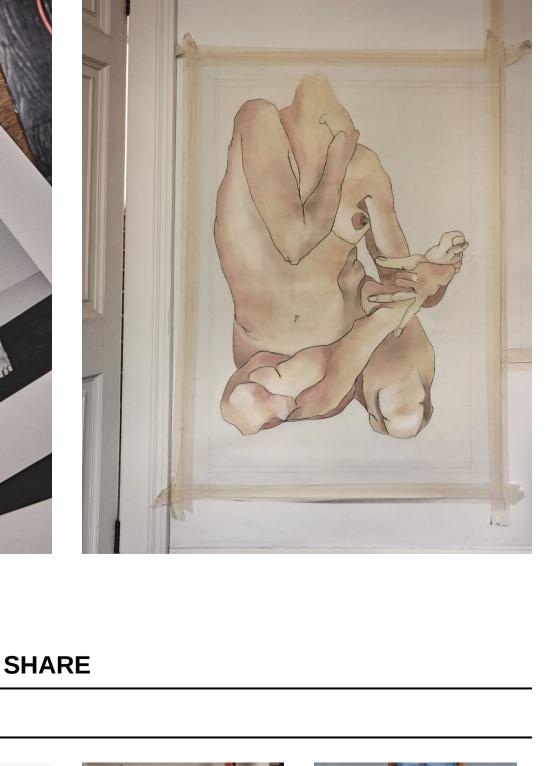
being looked at, judged, picked at, made me feel uncomfortable. So I completely disassociated."

asking: "Was that just me? Is that how every young girl feels? Why is that?" She continues, "I don't like the word 'objectified', but just









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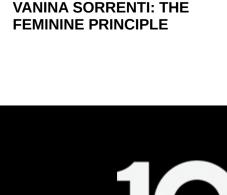
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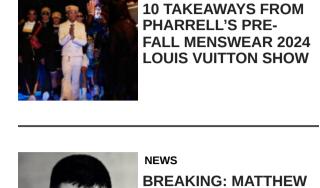
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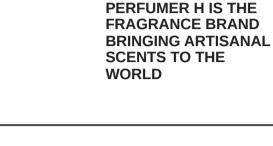






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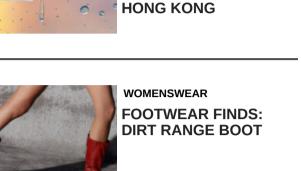
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