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A Look in the Mirror: The Stunning Reflection of Lena Dunham

BY JON STEELY, PHOTOGRAPHY FABRICE TROMBERT
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Having come a long way from the day she quit her childhood Hebrew school because she did not get the lead role in the class play, New York filmmaker Lena Dunham still carries a spirited desire to express herself, a desire that propelled her from living a low-key, creative life head-first into a very special position on the center stage of Hollywood. The 24-year old writer-director-actor has been commissioned by mega-hit producer Scott Rudin (*No Country for Old Men*, *The Social Network*) to adapt and direct a feature based on David Levithan and Rachel Cohn's book, *Dash and Lily's Book of Dares*. She is also developing a series for HBO with Judd Apatow (in which she will also star) about three New York, twentysomething girlfriends. And IFC Films is set to release Dunham's *Tiny Furniture*, a funny, smart, touching and "semi-autobiographical" feature that won the Best Narrative Feature Award at the 2010 SXSW Film Festival. "I had no idea that there would be any kind of big, public reaction," Dunham says. "I was just excited that I was going to be able to make a movie with people that I love and also have a great learning experience."

Growing up in New York City, Ms. Dunham left Manhattan to attend Oberlin College where she completed a degree in creative writing and then returned to live with her mom (artist/photographer Laurie Simmons) and her younger sister (Grace Dunham) in her family's Tribeca loft. She created impressive webisodes and searched for a direction to take her artistic life in while working odd jobs. A year later, the budding auteur decided to make a film about a girl from New York City who returns from college, with an unmarketable degree, to live in her family's loft with her successful artist mother and overachieving little sister, while soul searching, putting herself on YouTube, getting used by boys, and working a low paying gig as a restaurant hostess. Sound familiar? "I felt compelled to tell this story. It's a very personal story and I think I started writing it to express the confusion I felt during that time period. Writing is very personal to me and I never intentionally try to push any kind of sociopolitical agenda, so it's interesting when it turns out that what is so personal to me is universal to other people."

Focusing with humor and compassion on the humiliation associated with a young woman's journey of self-discovery, Dunham wrote the screenplay for *Tiny Furniture* in four days, casting herself in the lead role and her real life mom and sister to play her character's mom and sister. Intensifying the blissful mojo of this uniquely incestuous production, Dunham shot *Tiny Furniture* in fifteen days, interlocking the creative process with her family dynamic. "I come from an artistic family, so creating art together felt very natural. I love working with actors, but working with non-actors is something I love, too. And being so familiar with everyone's tics and personalities really helped. There was kind of a 'camp field trip' feeling to all of it and there's something fun about that."

An overly generous artist, Lena Dunham is brave enough to do what it takes to make quality art. Exposing the same human flaws that many strive to hide, she shares her life experiences with an already signature style of portraying her truth, sweetly cloaked in humor, blended with a nice helping of creative writing. “I have a complicated relationship with telling my own story. I’m not trying to write my memoir through my story, so I add fiction to create some dramatic incidents. I don’t know any other way to write other than beginning with my own personal experiences. It’s just my way into storytelling. Hopefully, the story will connect with people and give them that ‘we laughed, we cried’ feeling.” □

Tiny Furniture opens in New York on November 12th and in Los Angeles on November 26th.