



Hard Times for Aura

A love life can be humiliating

TINY FURNITURE: Written and directed by Lena Dunham. Cinematography, Jody Lee Lipes. Editor, Lance Edmonds. Music, Teddy Blanks. Starring Lena Dunham, Laurie Simmons, Grace Dunham, Alex Karpovsky, David Call, Merritt Wever and Jemima Kirke. IFC Films, 2010. 98 minutes. Unrated. ★★☆☆☆

Twenty-four-year-old Lena Dunham's second feature, *Tiny Furniture*, is as confident and sure a film as its subject, Aura (played by Dunham), is a mess of a girl. In the depths of a post-collegiate slump — her boyfriend's moved home to find himself, or something, and Aura's not sure she really cares about what she studied in school — Aura arrives home at the pristine Tribeca loft that's home to her mother, Siri, a successful artist, and her sister, Nadine, a studious, precocious pain in the ass. Siri (Laurie Simmons) blithely tells Aura to look for things "in the white cabinet," oblivious to the fact that the two-story loft has entire walls of said cabinets; Nadine (Grace Dunham) refers to Aura's life as like "the epilogue to *Felicity*."

The loft isn't exactly a warm and nurturing environment. But it's home, and it's a home of privilege and comfort, where Aura's even more privileged former best friend, Charlotte (Jemima Kirke), is just blocks away, languidly doing nothing for hours at a time. Aura's New York — a tidy place where people who don't have money are well out of sight (Aura and a friend do consider, jokingly, what people without money do with their days) — is full of ways to do nothing. Aura gets a hostessing job, not because it's the right job, but because it's nearby and Charlotte tells her about it. She meets a couple of guys, one a pretentious YouTube phenom, the other a snotty chef, neither all that appealing, but both right

there. Aura finds comfort and conflict with her mother, whose old journals fascinate Aura: Mom's life, when she was in her early 20s, looks so interesting. Siri, who views Aura with a sort of kind impatience, says she never thinks about her 20s, but Aura, smack in the middle of hers, can think of nothing else.

Aura, in short, is lazy and directionless, spoiled and suffering a particular kind of malaise: She's smart, educated and wealthy, and she has no idea what to do with herself. But *Tiny Furniture* doesn't wallow in this, even as Aura does. Dunham wrote her script in a week, shot her film in her family's home and cast her mother and sister as Aura's mother and sister. "Starring in your own movie about a narcissistic girl is a careful high-wire act of exhibitionism and self-parody," the film's press notes point out, accurately.

Dunham pulls this off in large part because she never lets Aura, or herself, off the hook: There isn't a shred of vanity in her performance, or in her willingness to poke at her character's self-absorption without either indulging or mocking it. You don't have to like Aura — who is at times thoroughly, petulantly unlikable — to recognize that Dunham has perfectly captured the flailing of a young woman who doesn't know who she is or who she wants to be. She's utterly convincing as Aura, yet you can't conflate the two: Aura can't step outside herself or create something this sharp. Maybe eventually, but not yet. Satirical and self-aware, *Tiny Furniture* hits just the right notes; it doesn't ask us to love or hate Aura, and it avoids a tidy resolution with its strange question mark of an ending. **EW**

Tiny Furniture opens Friday, Jan. 21, at the Bijou.



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