

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Tim Adams, "The big picture: Sarah Lucas's Got a Salmon On," *The Guardian*, January 27, 2019

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The big picture: Sarah Lucas's Got a Salmon On



Sarah Lucas plays with a salmon – and gender constructs – as British art hits a peak in 1997

In 1997, at the height of media interest in the Young British Artists who had mostly come out of Goldsmiths' College and set up shop in east

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London, Sarah Lucas made a series of self-portraits as part of her ongoing assault on received ideas of gender and sexuality.

Many of the portraits involved food picked up at local markets in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. Her most famous images – *Chicken Knickers*, in which she attached an oven-ready bird, cavity gaping, to her crotch, or *Self-Portrait with Fried Eggs*, where a pair of the latter lay on her T-shirted chest, below the ultimate “what you looking at? stare – asked blunt questions about the objectification of women, and the predictable appetite of the male gaze.

Others, like this one, the first of three pictures entitled *Got a Salmon On* played with clichés of masculine prowess, to pointed comic effect. Lucas hoists the fat fish on her shoulder like a floppy rifle. She’s outside the barred-up gents in her oversized double-breasted pinstripe jacket and spit-and-polished boots. The title of the picture echoes a sexual boast, hints at a female equivalent, and captures some of the absurdity of such phrasing. Unusually, for Lucas, her eyes fix not on us but down on the salmon; she stands awkwardly, likably, trying to get a proper grip of the big fish and her slippery metaphors (by number three in the series, she has got the fish in place and stands, dark-eyed, to attention by the wall).

The picture is included in an exhibition featuring more than a century of British women photographers subtitled *A History of British Trailblazers*. Lucas lines up alongside pioneers such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Lee Miller, as well as fellow former YBAs Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing. Others more than match her technical gifts, but Lucas’s swagger and confrontation is a defining spirit.