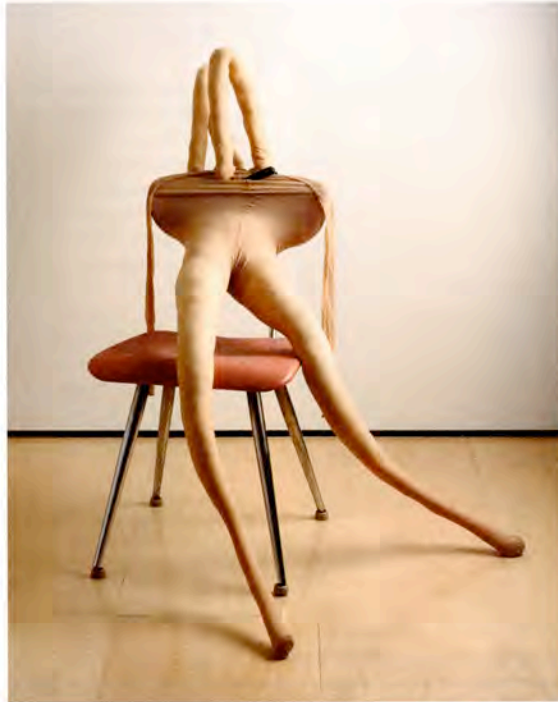


GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mark Prince, "Sarah Lucas," *Art in America*, February 2014, p. 105-106.



Sarah Lucas: *Bunny Gets Snookered #1*, 1997, tights, plastic and mixed mediums, 41¾ by 32¾ by 32 inches; at Whitechapel Gallery.

SARAH LUCAS

London — Whitechapel Gallery

In the late 1980s, British sculpture became facetious as it became populist. It was not so much the broad strokes of YBA art, with its grandiose themes of violence, sexuality and mortality, that accounted for this, but more the way artists resorted to a vocabulary of found objects as cartoonish signifiers of the objects' original presence and function. Complex sculptural metaphor ceded to simplistic similes. In the cluttered emporium of Sarah Lucas's Whitechapel retrospective, a pair of fried eggs or honeydew melons invoked breasts; a kebab, a vagina. Her early sculptures were distributed around a decor of her recent furniture. Constructed out of cinder blocks in lattices of fiberboard, these benches and screens elicit correspondences between the bluntness of Lucas's imagery and a brutalistic design language; they emphasize how she has always used found furniture as a ground to "dress."

The installation's complementing of form and function, sculpture and furniture, recalled a series of exhibitions Lucas recently curated in London, combining her own work with that of other artists, notably Franz West, whose *Adaptives* conflate modeled, readymade and functional sculptural modes. But whereas West blurred these registers to challenge our

familiarity with each, Lucas abets the kind of legibility West was intent on frustrating. *Fuck Destiny* (2000) inserts two pink bulbs into the wire base of a sofa bed. A cushion is upended, as though by the force of the penetration of a neon strip. The bed suggests a reclining nude, the bulbs breasts, the neon a penis thrust into the upholstery. The conceit is as rudimentary as it is effective, the shock it administers more visceral than aesthetic, like that of witnessing an autopsy or an accident.

Lucas has always been a persuasive poster girl for her own art despite her attempts to satirize such a role. The walls were dense with her image, sometimes wallpapered, sometimes framed, so it was difficult to distinguish between art and documentary memorabilia, both seeking the jolt of recognition—whether of familiar object becoming art object, or by trawling through her "Greatest Hits." The photograph *Super-sensible* (1995) shows Lucas on a sofa outside a second-hand store, surrounded by male workers and uniformed policemen. The image collects signs for Lucas's persona and artistic narrative (which are often the same thing): the female surrounded by predatory maleness; urban degradation; and the association of furniture with a woman's body. Next to it was *1978*

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(2000), an enlarged photograph of the teenage Lucas reading *NME*, a British music magazine. This is the other side of her persona: the feminist icon adopting stances associated with male behavior, in this case perusing a magazine considered the preserve of nerdy male music fans.

With her series of "NUDS" sculptures, begun in 2009, Lucas heightened her work's abstraction. Each features stockings stuffed with foam on a cinder-block plinth. The forms are twisted, like balloon sculptures, to evoke tangles of swollen limbs, the gatherings in the fabric their orifices. The stockings hark back to an early sculpture included here, *Bunny Gets Snookered #1* (1997), which straightforwardly represents a nude made out of stockings draped over a chair. The "NUDS" sculptures, however, deliteralize this impulse, introducing a Brancusi-esque indirectness. They make one feel unwantedly, unspecifically illicit. A series of recent versions substitute the stuffed stockings with bronze casts of them, highlighting the Brancusi allusion while sacrificing the fertile associations arising from the mottled fleshy surfaces of the stockings. The polished bronze connotes "figure sculpture" before we have assimilated the abstraction of the form.

In the midst of these pristine forms, two huge concrete sculptures of erect penises were laid, like fallen idols, over compacted automobile parts (*Eros* and *Priapus*, both 2013). They return Lucas to her mainstay themes of *eros* and *thanatos*, colliding the two as unequivocally as possible. They suggest that the earlier "NUDS"—accommodating the ambiguities of subliminal memory (of her earlier works, as well as of perceptions connoted rather than directly represented)—may have been a false lead toward a less literal idiom. And yet, the exhibition's overall trajectory plotted a transition from assembled found objects to hand-shaping and traditional casting. It seems Lucas is attempting to liberate herself from a dependence on the signification of the readymade, with its brute claim to say things as they are, into the allusiveness of an artifice in which what you see may not be what you get.

—Mark Prince