

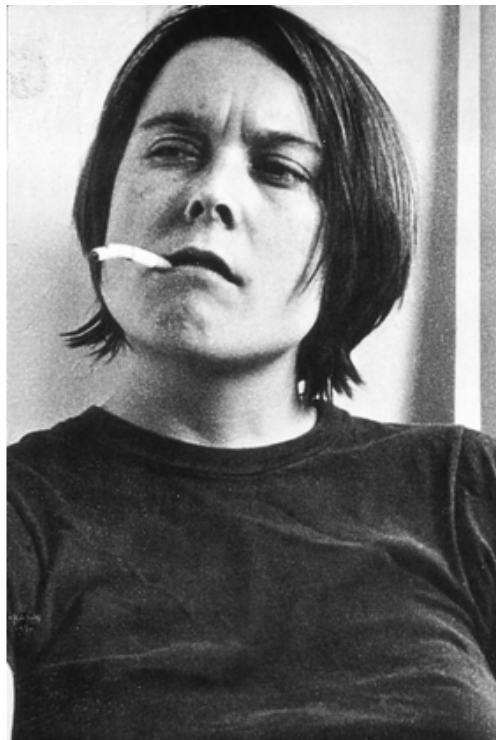
GLADSTONE GALLERY

Skye Sherwin, "It's Hard Being Sarah Lucas," *W Magazine*, October 11, 2013.

It's Hard Being Sarah Lucas The artist's first big UK survey showcases her fierce humor.

October 11, 2013

| by Skye Sherwin



“SITUATION Absolute Beach Man Rubble,” Sarah Lucas’s first big UK survey, on view through December 15 at Whitechapel Gallery in London, is hard in every sense: the jokes are bawdy, laughter harsh and the genitalia as obstreperous as an upright cucumber, a shriveled cigarette, neon tubes, buckets, a lamb kebab, two fried eggs, melons and whatever other mean and dumb sexual puns this fierce artist confronts us with.

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The works jostling for attention in the gallery's crowded downstairs space were mostly created during the grungy YBA heyday in the 1990s. This was when Lucas set up her East End London shop with fellow "bad girl" Tracey Emin and shocked the art establishment with sculptures like "Bitch," a bare table adorned with melons and a kipper that took misogyny head-on. There are lists of rude words, dirty mattresses and hunks of raw meat. You can practically smell the hangover in a sculpture like "Donkey-Kong-Diddle-Eye," a cheap faux leather sofa with a cushion pierced by a neon rod, in a tragicomic echo of a four in the morning fumble. The gloom of next day's self-reflection hangs in the air. Indeed, for all the coarse humor, Lucas's is a soul-searching and melancholy take on the human condition: an attitude summed up in another photo of the young artist, this time perched pensively on the toilet.

Lest things get too maudlin, Lucas shakes them up with a bloody chamber to rival Blue Beard's. In the second gallery, wrapped in red wallpaper, crotch shots capture a naked man posing provocatively with an exploding beer can, a strip of steak and—a nod to the British love of a cuppa—two biscuits and a milk bottle.

Six years ago Lucas ditched London for the Suffolk countryside and the final room of the exhibition, which features works created in her big-skied rural retreat, is a total contrast. In this light, airy gallery are giant bone-white phalluses that might be ancient fertility gods' members, unearthed from Stone Age soil, or Barbara Hepworth's subconscious. The presiding deity though is "Nice Tits," concrete thigh high boots topped with a bouquet of breasts made from stuffed tights: a dominatrix earth mother as triumphant as she is scary.

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