

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Lynn Barber, "Sarah Lucas interview: 'I finally feel like I'm getting old... Now, Let's go to the pub'", *The Telegraph*, March 16, 2020

## The Telegraph

### Sarah Lucas interview: 'I finally feel like I'm getting old... Now, let's go to the pub'

She was the most rock 'n' roll of the YBAs, a provocative sculptor and a prodigious drinker. But Sarah Lucas has slowed down - a bit



Sarah Lucas in her Framlingham studio CREDIT: Julian Simmons

Framlingham is a sleepy, old-fashioned Suffolk market town, and therefore an unlikely place to find myself throwing stones at the windows of the Conservative Club.

But this is where I'm supposed to meet Sarah Lucas - she said she had a studio here and would show me her new work then take me to lunch.

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She didn't warn me that the Conservative Club is a building site with metal fences all round and no visible means of ingress. Eventually Sarah appears on a fire escape and points me to a hole in the fence.

"I'm so sorry," she says. "This has all just happened - the builders were meant to start next week."

She helps me through the fence and eventually we are in her studio, which used to be the club's billiards room but is now full of boobs and legs flung in obscene poses over chairs.

In the summer, when she had her studio doors open, old Framlingham Conservatives would peep inside and go away shaking their heads.

I wonder if Framlingham even realises it has a famous artist in its midst? Actually it knows it has one - [Ed Sheeran](#), who grew up here - but they probably haven't heard of Sarah.

She was one of the most prominent members of the Young British Artists in the Nineties, represented Britain in the 2015 Venice Biennale, and has been described by Damien Hirst as "the greatest artist I know".



Sarah Lucas in London, 2018 | CREDIT: Redux

But she is probably better known - and revered - by other artists than by the general public. She shows me the new work she has made for her forthcoming show, *Honey Pie*, opening at Sadie Coles HQ today.

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These are headless female figures made out of stuffed tights, sprawling on chairs in a doomed attempt at seduction - a new development of the Bunnies that have cropped up sporadically in her work ever since the late Nineties.

They always tend to go down better with women than with men, perhaps because they make such jaunty mockery of the male gaze.

But whereas the early Bunnies were in plain flesh tones, these have acquired brightly coloured socks and fashionista shoes.

"I wanted to add some colour," Sarah explains. "I'm very into colour suddenly." She sometimes regrets she studied sculpture rather than painting at Goldsmiths College (where she received a degree in fine arts in 1987) - she could have been living with colour all this time.

She has already sent half a dozen of these pieces to the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York, where she is having a simultaneous show, but now she is worried about how the Sadie Coles removals truck will ever get in, given that she is barricaded behind builders.

Why has she even got a studio in Framlingham, given that she has a perfectly good studio at home? She lives down a muddy track a few miles away in a cottage that used to be Benjamin Britten's hideaway, and her studio is his former music room. But she explains that because her partner Julian Simmons, a musician, also works at home she felt they hadn't really got enough space, so when some friends said they were buying the old Conservative Club to turn it into an arts centre, she said she'd join them.

"I just fancied a change. And it's been good because I've never had that sort of regular, going to work feeling, and I like coming into town. I drive in as early as I can, then go home when the light fades and deal with all the emails. It's been good."

She always used to say she never wanted to have a studio. "Yes. I remember I always wanted to travel quite light, not have tons of stuff, but just work anywhere more or less. And I've done a lot of that." I've seen her do it - making penis and scrotum sculptures out of beer cans at the Cologne Art Fair, or casting plaster torsos in a rented mews garage in Mayfair. She liked the spontaneity. "And I hate being in a place which is all cluttered up with stuff - which is weird when I'm a sculptor."

Anyway, she says, let's go to the pub. It is a lovely pub, the Station Hotel, where, of course, Sarah knows everyone - she always knows good pubs and their habitués.

She orders her usual cider and kidneys and agrees we'll go in the garden later to smoke.

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Sarah Lucas's Honey Pie | CREDIT: © Sarah Lucas, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ

She is not *quite* the inveterate smoker and drinker she used to be (in her heyday, carousing with Hirst and Tracey Emin, she could go out and not come back for five days) and I notice she looks a lot older than when I last saw her at the Biennale.

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All through her 20s, 30s and 40s she seemed unchanging - the same androgynous figure, the straight brown hair - but now she suddenly looks her age, 57.

"It's because of my hair," she says, and takes off her lumberjack hat to show me. It is wispy and streaked with white. It all fell out two years ago when she was preparing for two big shows in New York and Los Angeles. Julian noticed a bald spot at the back and then there were more bald spots and great clumps falling out.

"I was terribly upset at first, especially in LA when I was almost completely bald and I had to do lots of talks and interviews, so I armed myself with loads of caps and a couple of wigs and sometimes I wore them and sometimes I didn't."

Was it the menopause?

"No, I had that years ago - they said it was alopecia caused by stress. And it did grow back, but all white at first. Now it's sort of mixed, and my eyebrows came back dark, but we'll just have to see what happens.

"The weird thing is, when your hair falls out you feel so decrepit - you think, 'Blimey, I'm turning into a *very* old lady overnight'. But I don't feel so bad now it's coming back. And also, in another way, it's like biting the bullet about getting old.'



Sarah Lucas with Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst at a Tate exhibition, 2004 | CREDIT: dave bennett/getty

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Sarah might look older, but her art hasn't aged at all - it still feels very playful and anarchic, though possibly less angry than when she started, with her notorious *Penis Nailed to a Board* and *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab*.

The anger, she says, came from reading Andrea Dworkin. She'd grown up with a gang of boys on her Islington housing estate, so she was used to blokeishness, but when she read Dworkin she began to question male attitudes. And then, at Goldsmiths, she noticed while the other YBAs regarded her as at least their equal - or superior, according to Hirst - they all got signed up by galleries, but she didn't.

It wasn't till her friend and long-standing dealer Sadie Coles started her own gallery that she really took off.

Would she say she lives for her work?

"No, I wouldn't actually. But on the other hand when I've committed to doing a show, then it's a total priority. But I've never been a massive work ethic person."

She keeps very little of her own work, or anyone else's. "I mean I couldn't own all the things I like because most of it is prohibitively expensive. But, also, that's not really where art lives - it lives in the mind. I think that's true of possessions in general - they're not *it*."

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