

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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MEXICO

SARAH LUCAS Museo Anahuacalli Mexico City

A few weeks after visiting the Sarah Lucas exhibition 'Nuds' at the Museo Anahuacalli – a grandiose, pyramid-like Aztec fantasy built by artist Diego Rivera and finished by Juan O'Gorman in the 1950s to house Rivera's stunning collection of pre-Hispanic art and studies for Communist-inspired murals – I dreamt that her sculptures (mostly made of skin-tone tights and cotton stuffing) came to life, untangled themselves and slinked off their pedestals, sliding around the museum to hug and fuck some of the larger Aztec carved stone sculptures. I woke up because I was laughing loudly. I think that the show was meant to provoke this dream.

As I walked around the quiet rooms I had been to so many times before – rooms filled with objects that, as children during school visits, we were instructed to understand as part of our identity more than enjoy – I noticed that Lucas's sculptures, made with simple, everyday materials, shone a different light on the mostly Aztec artefacts; her knotted, naked, sexy, gross, crass, funny sculptures activated and breathed new life into the pre-Hispanic sculptures in the collection.

For many others in the city, the exhibition became a scandal. (Perhaps scandal is a necessary accompaniment to anything that no longer-so-young British artists do, no matter where.) Some over-nationalistic journalists and viewers thought that the pieces were junk and couldn't compare (shouldn't even come near) our 'revered' national treasures. In the run-up to the presidential elections in July, others used the exhibition as an excuse to make a statement for or against public and private collaborations in the art world and the need for a comprehensive cultural policy in the future. None of them seemed to understand that the show was more about an experience. Unlike a failed exhibition a few years ago in this city by another yBa who will remain unnamed, complete with paraphernalia that ended up resembling a kitsch south-of-the-border-fantasy by Robert Rodriguez on crack, this show actually worked in its context, and, even better: worked its context – changed it.

Lucas has said before that 'Nuds' comes from the slang word for naked, 'nuddy', but, in Spanish, 'nuds' immediately connotes the word *nudos*, knots, in addition to *desnudos*, which could be unknot but actually means nudes. These nude knots are, yes, giant phallus-like forms, and, yes, also tits and ass. But this time, pantyhose is not always stuffed and is sometimes left hanging or

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Kerry Tribe
There Will Be _____, 2012,
single-channel projection

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Sarah Lucas
Hoolian, 2012, wire covered with
masking tape, cotton,
lycra stockings and adobe bricks,
sculpture: 47 × 62 × 58 cm,
plinth: 110 × 50 × 46 cm

REVIEWS

sagging. What was once tight, unravels: the sculptures reveal aging, and also transience, time passing in the face of things as seemingly timeless as the surrounding worn stone figures. At the beginning of the exhibition is a small sculpture called *Guardian* with the year 2012 inscribed on it. This fetish-like character greets us and bids us goodbye, yet seems immovable and as old as the other stone guardians in the gallery. In a similar way to Lucas's first 'Nuds' exhibition in the Museum of Cycladic Art in Greece, the sculptures here are not just about the artist's usual discourse on sex, bodies, space and irreverence, they are also about time – a deeper reflection (in the sense of both thought and mirroring). Time is everywhere in this museum, in the collection it houses and in the show. And while a primal humour remains, some sculptures, such as *Realidad* (Reality, 2012) sitting next to Xochilpilli (the Aztec deity of love, games, pleasure, flowers) echo each other's forms, reveal that the antique sculptures were also knotted up, or other times (as with a Toltec sculpture of a pregnant woman) knocked-up, naked, reminding us that, despite time passing, some basic things have not and will not change. While some pieces recall other antique civilizations, such as *Lupe* (2012), who looks like a thousand-breasted Aphrodite, others are very grounded in local references: Dr. Atl, or a Vlady portrait of Leon Trotsky (who lived down the street from Rivera) re-made in cigarettes, for example, or the bust of Benito Juárez partially masked with cigarettes as well. The most successful works are all a single colour: the earthy colour of the adobe pedestals and the nude pantyhose. And so monochrome becomes monolith, and the sculptures hunker down comfortably, right at home.

GABRIELA JAUREGUI

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