

Tramway presents the first major solo exhibition of Sarah Lucas' work in Scotland, bringing together key works from the last decade. Lucas is one of Britain's most exciting and important sculptors, emerging on the international art scene in the nineties as one of the key figures in a new generation of 'young British artists', which included the likes of Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Gary Hume and Fiona Banner. A central figure in this movement, Lucas has garnered a reputation for producing highly evocative, controversial and humorous works which evoke and challenge contemporary and historical representations of the sexual body.

Characterised by the use of everyday, familiar materials, Lucas' provocative sculptures challenge and subvert attitudes towards class, gender and sexuality through their use of humour and bawdy messages. Her works set up symbolic stand-ins for the body, intuitively drawing together raw, urban materials such as breeze blocks and crushed cars with more abject and fragile elements such as stuffed tights and found domestic objects. Perched on concrete plinths, bound to furniture or realised in monumental scale as here, Lucas works defiantly flip traditional representations of and attitudes towards both the male and female body in popular culture.

Lucas knowingly inhabits masculine clichés, reframing and subverting them to reveal the forces at work in the construction of dominant gender stereotypes. Her art functions as a mirror which reflects back pervasive attitudes by highlighting their manifestation in our daily lives. In her ongoing series of self portraits, Lucas defiantly casts herself in the pose of the bad boy rebel or adopts macho postures as a means to parody traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Despite their nonchalance and disarming sense of fun, her works belie an archly feminist stance - as with the female icons of the punk era she employs male posturing as a means to reclaim and dissect ingrained notions of identity. This ongoing examination of male and female identity is played out through the use of loaded symbolism, her sculptures evoking disembodied torsos, genitalia, phalluses, breasts and limbs. Lucas exaggerates and dehumanises the human form and reduces women and men to their sexual organs, forcing us to question our own views of sex and gender.

"There's a subtle tradition of women with phalluses; Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and other feminist artists all tap into a sub-motif of phalluses being reclaimed. Sarah Lucas is part of that. She empties out macho gestures, uses them as confrontation, and plays between taking that power and making it monumental"¹.

Encompassing many of these themes, this exhibition at Tramway juxtaposes seminal early sculptures with her recent concrete sculptures, furniture and large scale prints. Lucas tackles the full scale of Tramway's main gallery incorporating much large scale works not seen together previously,

thus setting up an immersive environment where themes from past and present works converge.

Notes on the exhibition:

Lucas exhibition at Tramway embraces the theatrical and dramatic, with an oversized wall which creates a stage like backdrop for a number of large scale works of almost fair ground scale as we enter the space. The sense of drama is apt given the large, hydraulic Wanking Arm (2000) we are confronted with on entering the space was originally realised as a stage prop for her collaborative performance with Michael Clarke *Before and After: The Fall* at Sadler's Wells theatre. Surrounded by a number of similar, smaller mechanisms Lucas sets up a provocative environment in which the viewer is literally immersed in a sexualised tableau, each sculpture caught up in its own frenetic, slightly bored or in the case of the large arm, arduous endeavors to perform. Lucas sets up complete with furniture positioned in conveniently voyeuristic spots for us to absorb this scene of perpetual futility, stating "My feeling is that wanking is all about time. Sex in general is time, literally - the wanking arms looks and feels and sounds, in the head, like a clock. It's always going on. Somebody else takes over where you left off. It's like a tune that we all have some inner compulsion to sing along to"².

Despite being surrounded by testosterone fuelled gestures, with the exception of the comparatively minute *I Scream Daddio* (2013) which appears as though melting away before our eyes, the phallus is distinctly absent in this side of the space or, as with the early photos of her former partner Gary Hume, shrouded in an array of stand-ins from raw meat to bunches of flowers.

Lucas presents with a tableau of giant male torsos which appear almost god like in size. Hung directly on the wallpaper is a further smaller series *Got a Salmon on (Prawn)* (1994) which presents the same headless torso of Hume at a more intimate, human scale. The overloaded symbolism of the larger pictures is replaced here with the ultimately symbol of laddishness - the beer can, placing the ordinary and everyday in dialogue with the epic.

The disembodied masturbating arm appears again in the cab of *The Man Who Sold The World* (2004), a lorry driver's cab plastered with yellowing page 3 newspaper images of naked women. The interior is lit by a dimmed light bulb and the windows are steamed up and marked with smiley-face finger drawings hinting at the scene inside. The work stems from an ongoing series that use the tabloid press as their source material, stemming back to the early 1990's. Lucas made a number of these images following her studies at Goldsmiths when she turned away from the high production values of work of that time to a cheaper and more immediate source of imagery that she felt was

more relevant to her: the tabloid press. Lucas realised she had conflicting feelings about these images, identifying herself both as a viewer with the traditionally male desiring eye and as a woman being objectified and dehumanised. In works such as *The Man Who Sold The World* Lucas continues to address popular culture's attitudes to and representations of women as the material and subject of her work.

Standing in close proximity is another work which incorporates an immersive collage of nicotine-stained tabloid spreads is, *Chuffing Away To Oblivion* (1996), a free-standing room which evokes the experience of entering a tar soaked pub. This is an enclosure for smoking in whilst casually browsing the sexist tabloids and sensational headlines - the lock on the outside a disturbing suggestion of entrapment. Viewing these works in the context of a somewhat de-sensitised era, Lucas earlier tabloid works present us with the last residues of the pre-internet age and the precedents for our current unregulated image economy. The pervading stereotypes and caricatures of working class life and women depicted in the 90's tabloid press are now played out and fuelled through digital culture, becoming increasingly more complex and dysphoric constructs through the reach of the internet.

The smoking theme is picked up in *Self-portrait with Cigarettes* (2000) which we encounter as we enter the space. In this and other works, Lucas explored her obsession with cigarettes as a material for art, suggesting the connection between smoking and sexually obsessive activity. This self-portrait made with cigarettes, makes a connection between the obsessional, introverted activities of smoking and drawing. Lucas pushes the sense of introversion into one of contemplation, placing a small stool from her recent furniture collection directly in front of the work. Throughout the space Lucas recent furniture hovers somewhere between casual domesticity and the austere exhibition furniture found in traditional museum spaces - specifically designed for the act of looking. In other situations the furniture seems to imply various scenario's of looking and viewing with coffee tables and seating arranged in ways which although casual implicate the viewer directly in the scene.

Moving into the second half of the space, we are presented with another self portrait *Fighting Fire with Fire 20 Pack* (1997), which features the defiant image of Lucas smoking a cigarette with an iconic swagger that riffs off and parodies the likes of James Dean. The serial print technique itself echoing the repetition of iconic male artist Warhol yet Lucas has daubed the image in the "self-destructive, punk vandalism" of yellow ink. "The image is of the artist defiantly smoking, looking like one very confident Kray sister indeed; but the effacement of the splashed ink renders the work a huge double negative, quivering between self-important grandiosity and anguished self doubt"³. Photographic self portraits have been an important element of Lucas's work since the early 1990s

and shifted Lucas's perception of her “masculine” appearance from being a disadvantage to being something she could use in her art. “I suddenly could see the strength of the masculinity about it - the usefulness of it to the subject struck me at that point, and since then I've used that”⁴. The resulting confrontational self portrait photographs, made throughout the 1990s present a hybrid identity which challenges stereotypical representations and roles. Posing simultaneously as tough and abject, macho but female, Lucas creates an image of defiant femininity.

Turning the corner we are presented with another monumental scale diorama which includes the work *Concrete Void* (1997). The environment here exudes a latent tension which lies between the implicit, violence of the car-park and its cold inhuman architecture and the willfully destroyed car. In the car park images we are presented with either a crime scene or an ominous space in which a crime is about to happen.

The cinematic drama on this side of the room takes on a slightly bleaker note, featuring smashed cars, broken shards of glass and a neon coffin glowing uneasily next to the remains of a wreck. Themes of sex and death converge in the space with works such as *New Religion* (1999), an outline of a coffin presents a compelling sculptural evocation of fatality rendered in the desirable and seductive medium of neon, which is concurrently reminiscent of spaces of leisure, entertainment and red-light districts around the world. The coffin itself is an obvious reference to death, but the glowing neon plays a completely opposite role, lending the sculpture a vibrant, energetic quality.

This contrast of beauty and brutality is also evident in the work *Islington Diamonds* (1997) which cites the area of London where the artist grew up. The title of the work is slang for the shards of smashed glass from car windows strewn on the pavement following a break in. Despite the menacing undertones of vandalism and theft, these ‘diamond’ like chunks are strangely attractive “worthless gems that shine against the dull hues of the pavement”, presenting something trivial and abject as a seductive work of art. Here Lucas makes a poetic and ironic statement which touches on the raw reality of the social divides and tensions. Wrecked cars also appear throughout the space both as unconventional display plinths and ready-made sculptures. The violence of their death and re-making is still evident on the surface, through layers of dust, broken plastic and smashed glass. However the glimpse of a sheen of red paint or sparkling fragment of glass under the gallery lights lends these objects a strangely fetishistic quality, compounding the hyper-sexualised and hyper-consumed allure of both the fast car and the glamorous art object.

The use of raw, urban materials is present throughout this space and echoed in the extensive use of concrete in Lucas’ recent works. In contrast to the other side of the space where the phallus is

implied but invisible, here it is an omnipresent motif. Priapus (2013) is a new cast plaster work made by Lucas as part of her Penetralia series, a group of totemic objects inspired by her move to the Suffolk countryside and combining casts of a penis with fragments of found flint and wood. Resembling a pagan fertility emblem realised with the purist aesthetics of abstract Modernist sculpture – its sinuous forms and white plaster call to mind the sculptures of Moore and Hepworth. In their conflation of penis and sword like forms, these sculptures blur metaphors in a way that echoes many of Lucas' earlier works.

The two concrete phalluses riff off two other sculptures which are strategically placed nearby, Untitled Marrows (2011). “The phallic marrows are jolly and jokey while the actual phallus sculptures, against a backdrop of strange, rusting contraptions, seem threatening and foreign.”⁵. Though their reference is obvious, these recent concrete and plaster sculptures also refer to Lucas move to the Suffolk countryside - their monumental scale, rough surfaces and mythological titles reflecting her immediate experience of and connection to Suffolk's ancient landscape.

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1. Iwona Blazwick on Sarah Lucas at The Whitechapel Gallery 2014
2. Sarah Lucas, cited in M. Collings, Sarah Lucas, 2002, p. 105
3. Neil Brown, Frieze, October 1997
4. Lucas quoted in Barber, p.16
5. Financial times Landscape with visions of Britten. By Griselda Murray Brown, June 7th 2013

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