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Sarah Lucas

**BUNNY GETS SNOOKERED #3, 1997**
Tan tights, green stockings, red office chair, clamp, kapok, wire
120 × 58 × 60 CM

**POLAROID BUNNY #1-4, 1997**
Four C-prints on MDF board
50.8 × 50.8 CM each

**THE LAW, 2000**
C-print from Polaroid
122 × 91 CM

**CHARLIE'S DELIGHT, 2002**
Photocopy on packing paper
115 × 140 CM

**G-G-G GUNNER ON PARADE, 2002**
Concrete football, pearly buttons on leather boots
Dimensions variable

**DACRE, 2013**
Cast bronze
Sculpture: 61.5 × 49 × 65.5 CM
Plinth: 84 × 44.5 × 44.5 CM

Piercing stare, lank hair, sprawled legs in thick jeans, clumsy boots: what sounds like a description of Jim Stark, James Dean's character in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), is actually Sarah Lucas's look in her series of photographic self-portraits (1991–98). By striking a pose reminiscent of self-assured masculinity—or perhaps the vulnerable self-display of nude models in men's magazines—the artist shamelessly directs our gaze to her most private parts. Uncomfortably and unwillingly, we are complicit in objectifying her body. This simple but cocky gesture has become emblematic of the confrontational attitude that has infused Lucas's works since, in which she occupies spaces of antagonisms to subvert, rupture, and break with gender and identity biases. Iconographically the posture references VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), six identical photographs that document an actionist performance during which the artist interrupted a movie screening at an art-house cinema in Munich, wearing crotchless pants and holding a gun in her hand. Just as EXPORT confronted the clichéd historical representation of woman in cinema as passive objects with out agency, Lucas turns to a different source of imagery propagating sexist and hegemonic discourses: tabloids and lad's mags, whose *readership* (or rather *viewership*), it is said, is particularly strong in the working-class milieu.

In the color photograph *The Law* (2000), an unidentified person dressed in jeans and dirty sneakers—probably the artist in her studio—sits, legs spread, on a sculptural work by Lucas also titled *The Law* (1997): a TV box cast in concrete with huge engraved letters that read “THE LAW.” The sitter is holding an issue of the Sun so that it covers most of her face and upper torso, displaying the catchy tabloid headlines and flashy images. The image circles around questions of representation and what it means to be on the other side of the lens. How is one captured, represented, and perceived in a photographic image, in real life? With her fuck-you attitude Lucas is appropriating male stereotypes and overlaying them with female elements—as in *Self-Portrait with Fried Eggs* (1996), in which she sits in her trademark pose wearing jeans, T-shirt, and a couple of fried eggs atop her breasts—to operate within a mode of visibility that empowers those being exploited and devalued in the media landscape. She brings to light the extent to which art with claims to loftiness and refinement is often in the service of male desire, laying bare a distorted attitude toward sexuality that moves between hypersexualized content and the repression of basic sexual impulses. Her system of reference is a visual and semiotic language that already exists in tabloids and pornographic magazines, which resurfaces in her work. She explains: “I don’t think any of the pieces are that shocking. Things, other images, people see everyday are far more explicit. I find the thing that makes it shocking is people’s own self-consciousness.”

Lives in Aldeburgh, UK.
Taking a politically feminist stance, Lucas is looking for alternatives to male-female dualism and finds new ways to think about identity construction, in which androgyny becomes a tool of resistance and, as Andrea Dworkin writes in Woman Hating, “a paradigm for a wholeness, a harmony, and a freedom which is virtually unimaginable, the antithesis of every assumption we hold about the nature of identity in general and sex in particular.” Lucas’s objects often fluctuate between daily commodities and out-of-this-world hybrids that emerge as headless, half-object and half-human figures, such as her notorious Bunnies, made from colored tights stuffed with cotton wadding, with features that evoke both human limbs and elongated bunny ears. For the installation Bunny Gets Snookered (1997), eight Bunny sculptures were placed around a snooker table, evoking the ambience of a night out at a pool bar or, much worse, the wake of a sexual assault. Bunny Gets Snookered #3 (1997) wears enticing stockings, in one of the eight colors of billiard balls, and is slacker positioned on a red cushioned office chair. Her drained, postcoital body is reminiscent of sexual conquest, as the sculpture becomes the stand-in for unresponsive sexuality, a figure bored by desire and indifferent to violence. Lucas indeed deconstructs the image of the Playboy Bunny, making it (her) hilariously comical, sexually unappealing, and bizarre in shape. One of the Bunnies emerges again in a photographic series titled Polaroid Bunny #1–4 (1997), in which the figure is seen in Lucas’s studio, strapped to a wooden chair in front of several oil paintings. Each image shows the figure from a different angle—the front, the back, and the two sides. Strokes of sunlight illuminate the room, creating a chiaroscuro-like interplay of light and shadow, all evoking a crime scene. Was the artist making an archival photograph, inventorying the sculpture before it left the studio? Are the images adding a layer to the dark and mysterious narrative around Bunny Gets Snookered? Once again, the artist offers no answers. Coinciding with the posthuman turn in critical theory, Lucas’s artistic production in the early 2000s started to incorporate more nonfigurative, organic, and biomorphic elements. In that context the Bunnies opened a new chapter: after finding a frayed and tangled old version lying around in her shed, the artist, who was drawn to its curious allure and fragile state, began reproducing different versions and ended up with a shape resembling intertwined soft pinkish-brown limbs. This metamorphosis led to a playful new series titled NUDS (2009–), in which she placed these alienish limbs on a plinth made of gray breeze blocks. Troublingly fleshy and somewhat domestic at the same time, these sculptures overthrew standard definitions of human life and eventually propose new evolutionary properties. Lucas’s objects are never stable but transgress form, materiality, and temporality, and after years of twisting and twirling, her NUDS eventually morphed into the golden bronze sculptures exhibited in the Central Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2013. Dacre (2013), one of the sculptures in question, fuses two beings into a single entity through their embrace, consolidated by their long, slender arms. The figure possesses a frosty elegance that is heightened when light strokes shimmer on its highly polished surface, contrasting with a sensible fragility, a moment of intimacy evoked through its sensual position, which in a way conjures Brancusi’s Kiss (1907). What surfaces is a feminine physicality, one that recalls the image of a caring mother and her child, two cuddling lovers, or a protective guardian. The golden hue links the bronze to the material history and status of gold, resonating particularly with Byzantine icons, golden Buddha statues, or over-the-top Versailles. Drawing on personal experience, Lucas still lets the material speak for itself. Her worn shoes are turned into sculptures, as with the bulky biker boots covered with pearly buttons that she paired with a concrete football for G-G-G Gunner on Parade (2002), an ode to the English football player Charlie George. The footballer, who rose to fame playing for Arsenal in the 1970s and who, like Lucas, grew up in Islington, then a working-class London neighborhood, plays a leading role in her narrative around football machismo and the clichéd story of the self-made man. With similar looks and background, the artist playfully appropriates his persona and ultimately circles back to her self-portraits. “I thought I’d use him as a stand-in for myself. Try him on. An androgynous extension.” Again Lucas drew on preexisting visual material to speak about the commodification of success stories, in which the celebrity becomes the blank screen for the projection of logos and commercial values. Indeed, the wide
coverage of George’s achievements in the tabloids was partly responsible for his lasting legacy. Both his athletic performance and its virtual reenactment in the media are the subject of *Charlie’s delight* (2002), an enlarged black-and-white photocopy of an original magazine photo spread. It shows two successive moments during a game: George levitating from the ground to flick a header and his ecstatic reaction after scoring the pivotal goal. The composition is visually constructed to underline his strength and extraordinary skill and athleticism. He looks as if he was picked out from among his team members to rise to the occasion.

Reevaluating Lucas’s artistic legacy from today’s politically fraught perspective can open up new agonistic spaces, to use Chantal Mouffe’s term, which allow for the negotiation of alternative modes of being and seeing. Bodies matter to the artist, but instead of latching onto our carnal existence, with its culturally enforced oppositions of “she” and “he,” Lucas questions biological determinism and explores more than human identities in a posthuman world vision. Antagonism is also fun, punk, and highly energizing, and so Lucas draws on the allure of naughtiness, and on that note we’ll end with a quote from Kathleen Hanna’s “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”: “BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak. BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheart-mindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real.”


SARAH LUCAS, BUNNY GETS SNOOKERED #3, 1997
INSTALLATION VIEW, NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK, 2018
SARAH LUCAS, POLAROID BUNNY #1–4, 1997
SARAH LUCAS, THE LAW, 2000

SARAH LUCAS, DACRE, 2013
INSTALLATION VIEW, VENICE BIENNALE, VENICE, 2013
Like Shaka's quarter-final hero, John Hughes, Arsenal's match-winner in the Sixth Round had battled against injury to get fit for the FA Cup. To their credit it was brilliant Cockney prospect, Charlie George, who missed the first months of the season, but has now returned to add his natural flair to Arsenal's bid for honours. Charlie is pictured lifting above the grasping fingers of Lincoln City's Peter Shilton to head the only goal in the replay and effect the conversion of the Highbury crowd.