

Abigail Lane (left)  
and Sarah Lucas  
laying out the  
“Snap” exhibition  
in Snape Maltings





# YBAs COME OUT TO PLAY

The Young British Artists have grown up and shipped out to live and work in Suffolk. The result is 'Snap' – a major new show in Snape Maltings. Sarah Lucas and Abigail Lane tell Jan Dalley how it happened. Photography by Joss McKinley

**H**ow do groups of artists get their names? Some, like the Vorticists, self-consciously name themselves; others, such as the Impressionists, cheerfully adopt the labels other people dismissively hang on them.

Often it's to do with a sense of place – the St Ives School, the Camden Town Group. This, I can't help thinking, is quite likely to happen to the 12 artists involved in Snap, a multimedia show at Snape Maltings, near Aldeburgh in Suffolk, part of the Aldeburgh Festival. The uniting force in this exhibition is Suffolk and its countryside, and whether they like it or not, these artists are going to attract a label.

Ranging from sculpture to video and installation work, everything in the show is made or adapted for the surroundings, and in response to them – and extraordinary surroundings they are. More like a village than a single site, the 19th-century maltings at Snape sit dramatically on the very edge of deep marshy reed beds stretching out into the sea. Some of the glowing red-brick buildings were first converted in the 1960s, when Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears established their music festival here; others have been re-made into smaller halls and rehearsal spaces. But other old grain stores and workshops still stand in the raw, and the Snap art trail will encompass it all – giant photographs in the modern ticket hall concourse, light installations in parts of the concert halls themselves, sculpture on the lawns and walkways with a view of the wide sea horizon, on into video installations in the disused buildings at the mercy of wind and seabirds.

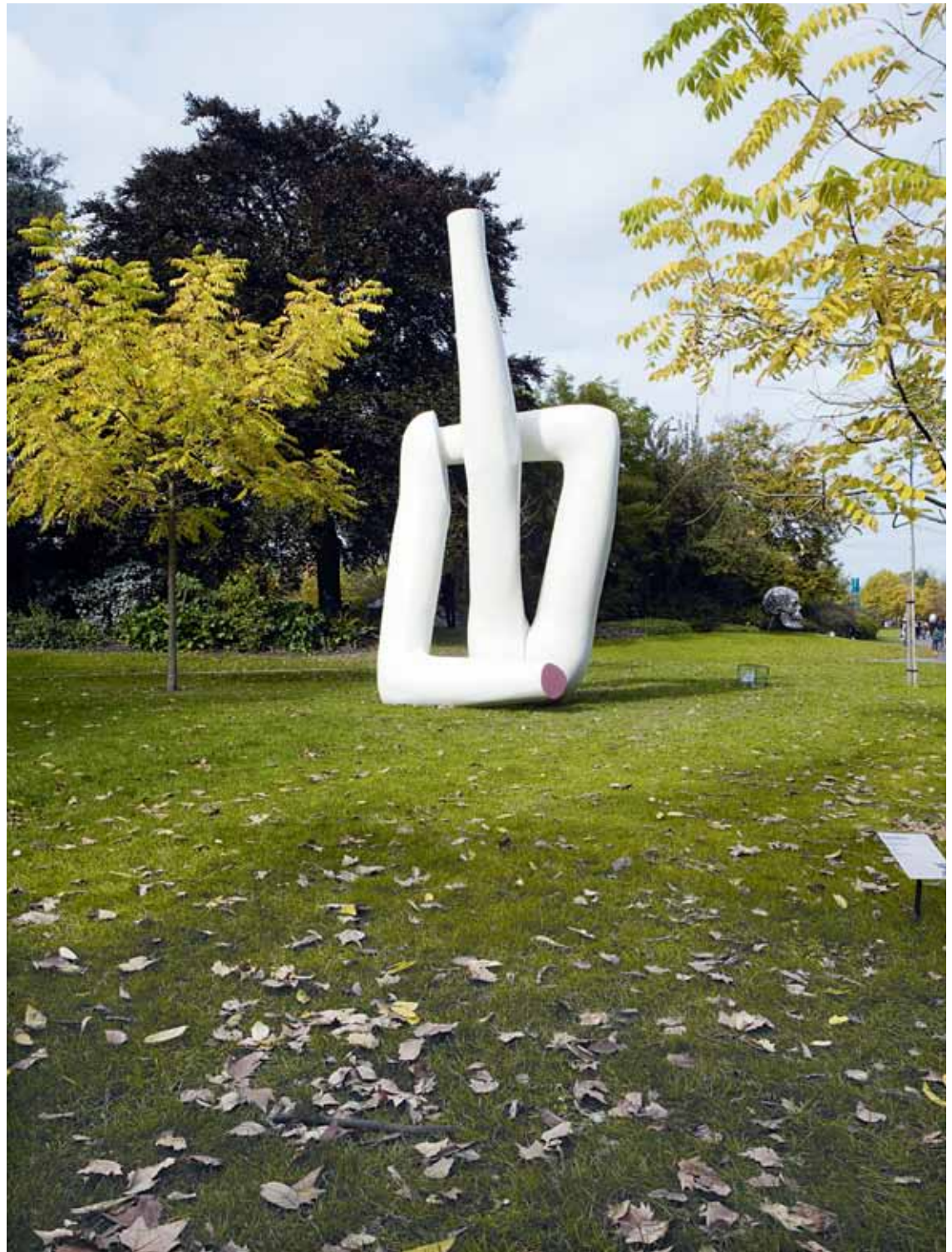
The 12 artists are as diverse as their work, but bound together by looping, elastic ties of art and friendship that stretch back more than 20 years, and by a more new-found sense of place. Sarah Lucas and Abigail Lane, artists who met at Goldsmiths College in the 1980s, are two of the driving forces behind Snap. Some 10 years ago Lucas and her friend and dealer, the London gallerist Sadie Coles, chanced on the secluded farmhouse where Benjamin Britten lived at the end of his life, and decided to buy it as a weekend home. And gradually, Lucas says, "I started to spend more and more time here, it was good for working." Her Suffolk base is now shared with her partner Julian Simmons (who is exhibiting work at Snap); Sadie Coles lives nearby with her husband, the successful commercial photographer Juergen Teller (ditto).

Abigail Lane joined the move to Suffolk more recently and in her sunny conservatory-kitchen – a vivid contrast to the east London warehouse that was her previous home – she and Lucas talked about the show's origins. Both were part of the 1988 "Freeze" exhibition, curated by Damien Hirst, which launched the Young British Artists (YBA) phenomenon; Gary Hume, another well-known YBA veteran and Suffolk resident, is also showing work in the exhibition. All were students of the artist Michael Craig-Martin, "and it was ►



**Some of the complex of derelict and restored buildings playing host to the exhibition**

**Left:** "Squab Squaw" by Sarah Lucas, from *Snap: The Portfolio*, 2011, © Sarah Lucas. **Below:** "Nature's Way", 2010, by Abigail Lane, © Abigail Lane. **Right:** "Liberty Grip", 2008, by Gary Hume, photographed by Stephen White, © Gary Hume, courtesy White Cube, London



What 'Snap' seems to show is a generation that is still inventive and self-confident... What's new, perhaps, is a quietness and thoughtfulness



**Left:** "Berty", 2004, by Johnnie Shand Kydd, © Johnnie Shand Kydd. **Above:** "Forever Always Somewhere", 2011, by Abigail Lane; still from animated film installation (animation by Olef Veron, soundtrack by Dominic Young, photographed by Olef Veron), © Abigail Lane. **Right:** "Lounger", 2011, by Sarah Lucas, photographed by Sarah Lucas, © Sarah Lucas, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London. **Facing page:** "Lola in the Water (Teenager)", 2010, by Juergen Teller, © Juergen Teller





◀ Michael,” Lane says, “who first noticed that there were all these people sort of congregating round the area, and suggested we might do something.”

Lucas had already worked at Snape, at the invitation of Aldeburgh Music’s director Jonathan Reekie. First, in 2004, she created a sculpture lawn with Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst; and since last year “Perceval”, her huge painted bronze dray horse and cart, has stood in front of the main concert hall, a witty comment on the buildings’ rural/industrial origins and a work that, surely, also blows a kiss in the direction of Suffolk’s most celebrated artist, John Constable.

So the logic for a show based on artists’ feelings for the area was growing stronger. Don Brown, another Goldsmith product and friend of Lucas, moved to a house in Suffolk that used to belong to the Australian artist Arthur Boyd, and his artistic circle included Simon Liddiment and Mark Fuller, both of whom returned from London to live and work in the area. Darren Almond and Cerith Wyn Evans are among the best-known names at Snap, along with Suffolk native Johnnie Shand Kydd, a photographer who revolved in YBA circles through the 1990s and recorded their antics.

It’s a considerable line-up to manage and organise. “But I’m not the curator,” Lane insists. “I am doing the organising, because I’m good at that, and of course I do have ideas about how the work should be – but things have just sort of evolved.”

Both she and Lucas insist that there was little direction, and their description of the group’s working processes sounds almost idyllically co-operative and consensual. Much was dictated by the spaces available. “People chose their spaces and then the work started to fall into place somehow.” The site has had its influences, too. “For instance, Johnnie [Shand Kydd] is doing something that’s new for him – he’s using a dirty old space that’s open to the sky and we decided his photographs should be pasted straight on to the brick like posters – look...” and Lane hands me a Photoshop-ed mock-up of how the space will look after the work is installed. For a not-curator she is impressively efficient and imaginative. Perhaps it takes a manager as good as this to achieve that level of apparently seamless co-operation. The artists have also produced a collectors’ limited-edition box set of prints, one by each artist, with the aim of raising money to support further art events. Behind the relaxed approach is the professionalism born of art-world experience.

Lane’s own work, a video entitled “Forever Always Somewhere”, that features the flying bones of a human skeleton against a summery turquoise sky, is also on show in a disused space full of the detritus of pigeons – “And I’m planning to leave all the mess.”

Lucas, too, agrees that her work has changed since she has been spending so much time in the East Anglian landscape, although her international career means that she devotes weeks to making and installing work in situ – recently in New Zealand.



**Sarah Lucas photographed in Suffolk, where she part-owns Benjamin Britten’s old home**

“I like it when my shows are not in the big urban centres, not the obvious places,” she says. At Snap her rag-doll mummy-figures will recline on white canvas loungers against the brickwork of one of the main spaces – something of a surprise for the more traditional concert-goers.

For many years, this part of East Anglia has been a weekend and holiday home to the capital’s culturati – countless writers and musicians as well as visual artists have memories of childhood holidays here, and later choose it for their own. So does a show such as Snap reflect this? The YBAs go out to play? Or does it reflect a real shift in the focus of some of Britain’s best contemporary artists? Success came to many of those young artists with almost frightening speed, and some of them – Sarah Lucas is one – have been riding that wave ever since. They were an artistic generation known for their self-promotion, for the sheer get-out-of-my-way size and scale of everything they did. But nothing in art, or life, can survive without moving forward, and – whether or not this show will be the first of many annual events (Lucas and Lane are both cautious about that), whether or not a new “group” has been born (if not yet named) – there’s a change here. What Snap seems to show is a generation that is still powerfully inventive and self-confident, using their well-honed skill to adapt work that was born in the cities to a different environment. What’s new, perhaps, is a quietness and thoughtfulness in the work, a deeper engagement with time as well as with place. Almost – can one say this? – a maturity. **FT**

*“Snap: Art at the Aldeburgh Festival” runs from June 10 to July 31, [www.aldeburgh.co.uk](http://www.aldeburgh.co.uk); “Snap: The Portfolio”, a limited-edition set of prints, is available through the Paul Stolper Gallery, London WC1, [www.paulstolper.com](http://www.paulstolper.com). For coverage of the Aldeburgh Festival, go to [www.ft.com/arts-extra](http://www.ft.com/arts-extra). To comment on this article, please e-mail [magazineletters@ft.com](mailto:magazineletters@ft.com)*

