

‘Moving to the country was very magical somehow’

The Young British Artists have grown up, headed for the fields – and found fresh inspiration

Sarah Lucas can be a little sketchy on details from her past, but she remembers with absolute clarity the day – about 10 years ago – when it sank in that she had bought a farmhouse in deepest Suffolk. “We got the keys and I stood there thinking, ‘What the hell are we actually going to do here? Are we just going to sit about drinking tea?’ I couldn’t envisage it at all.”

A significant pull for the 48-year-old, the bawdiest and most ideological of the Young British Artists, was that the house had been owned by Benjamin Britten, a new passion for Lucas, and slowly she realised there was more to life here than hot beverages. She found a pub where beer was drawn from the barrel and which didn’t have “music or machines”. She started to be inspired by the huge skies, the rhythms of rural life, and then, four years ago, she decided to decamp to the country. “I’d lived in London my whole life, so it was like coming out of the end of a tunnel,” she says. “It’s very magical somehow.”

Lucas, it turns out, was not the only YBA to be growing tired of east London warehouses. Painter Gary Hume now has a studio in Suffolk and they have been joined by another Goldsmiths student, Abigail Lane, who Tracey Emin said “could show the contents of her fridge and it would be fantastic”. Photographer Juergen Teller, more commonly found shooting Marc Jacobs ad campaigns, has a weekend place down the road with his wife, gallerist Sadie Coles.

With Lucas’s artist boyfriend, Julian Simmons, they are a tight-knit



Sarah Lucas, left, with fellow British artists Julian Simmons and Abigail Lane. Andy Hall

bunch and they started talking about pulling together a group show. Lane was put in charge of logistics and it was mooted that they could crash the Aldeburgh festival, the summer jamboree Britten established in 1948. The result is Snap, which features the work of 12 contemporary artists, all of whom have ties with East Anglia.

Not all of the work, which includes sculpture, photography and sound installations, explicitly relates to the area, but the spirit of Constable does appear to be rubbing off. Lucas has recently swapped her cigarettes and beer cans for flint blades and bark, while Teller, best known for his stark portraiture, has produced a book of

Suffolk scenes and landscapes that will be given away to 1,000 visitors.

This generosity underpins the whole show and Lane is determined it should not be elitist – there is pointedly an “open day” instead of a “private view” and local Aspall Cyder will be served, not champagne. “I want the farmers to come in and

complain, but actually get a bit drunk with someone who’s come up from London,” she says. “That’s how it should be.” **Tim Lewis**

Snap runs from 10-26 June at the Aldeburgh festival (aldeburgh.co.uk). An edition of 12 large-format prints is available from paulstolper.com