

Susie Green interview with George Vasey, 2015

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GV: What drives you?

SG: Mysterious inner forces. Ambition, fear, vanity, sex, obsessive behaviour. Not knowing what else to do.

GV: How would you describe your working process? Do you work on one thing at once?

SG: I spin many plates, and try to not drink too much coffee whilst doing so for fear of knocking them all over. I work on multiple projects at the same time and find that one idea often feeds into another. My work can live in multiple realms, and can be fitted into categories of art, music and design, although more and more it is easier for me if I just think of them all as branches of my art practice. Sometimes I wish I could be slower and more focussed on one medium - but I get too excited. And my ideas dictate how I'll make them. The one constant is my overarching interest in intimacy and the ways in which I can achieve it in life. I want more.

GV: This notion of intimacy is something that really interests me, I was wondering if you could expand on that. The artist, Nicholas Pope, has a great phrase, 'Sticky intimacies' for describing the process of working with materials.... it seems somehow linked to the idea of shame and vulnerability. For him, the idea of quality wasn't really the point, but a kind of abundant outpouring... That's why I loved *EXHIBITION* curated by CIRCA Projects at Workplace Gallery, the group show that you were recently in, where the idea of shame was really foregrounded through a lot of the work on display. My feeling is that Capitalism demands us to be emotional but also to manage it — psychological vulnerability isn't tolerated...

SG: I want to take things in a more honest, and possibly sticky, direction I want to test myself to not trim edges or fold down seams like I'm prone to do. It's a relief to not see things which are perfect. Like at a gig, it's great when people get really sweaty. Or when a drummer takes their top off. Or when something goes a bit wrong, the audience relaxes a bit. When I perform in the bands I'm in I want to be honest and vulnerable. It's what makes music good most of the time. I want to make feelings. Visual Art can feel so uptight sometimes. Or perhaps it's just me.

Recently though, I've been thinking, most of us are so fragile. Like little children. I try to not take my emotions as the truth, try to be less hot headed. But sometimes it's really hard. And sometimes our instinct is right. It is really difficult to navigate emotions. I was looking at notes I made during the symposium you organised at the NGCA a few months ago, that took place as part of the Emotional Resources exhibition. A lot of what was discussed by speakers throughout the day was really interesting and useful to me. Specifically hearing curator Lucia Garavaglia talk about The Eterphilous Society. I had never heard the term Eterphilology before - meaning the study of intimacy and its forms. And sociologist Lynn Jamieson talking about terms like Authentic Self and how talking can be both transformative or restrictive. All super interesting. I like to keep notes and re-read things. As a way of not losing things. Blocks to build with.

I can see that lots of artists at the minute are making work that is tactile, about the body and our relationship to objects or medias. As it's what's going on. Screens everywhere. We're so often

looking but not touching.

GV: Is there an image that is particularly important to you? Can you explain why it is significant

SG: My good friend Laura Guy sent me an image a couple of years ago that she thought I would like and which I now keep pinned up on my studio wall. A copy of it is also included in my work *Soft Studio* that's in the *The Decorator and the Thief* exhibition at the moment (the show you curated at the NGCA in Sunderland). At the time Laura sent it, it was unlabelled, but through googling I found out that it is of Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel kissing inside a frame for a kite he had designed. I like the way that inside and outside spaces combine, and what's happening in the picture. I'm all for more pictures of kissing.

GV: What do you think of curators?

SG: They help me. You help me George. Sometimes I get pissed off with how they seem to be the people with the power, I mean I guess sometimes they are. But we need each other.

GV: Thanks! You place a particular emphasis on friendship, and you're very active on social media. How do these networks impact on your work? Can you be friends with someone you've never met? Can you have real intimacy on Facebook?

SG: I want to be clear that I am not one of those people who accepts anyone as my Facebook or Instagram friend! It's not about numbers George! I am very tentatively friends with someone I've not met. It is through knowing their work that I would normally feel an affinity and a comfort with being in touch. But yes, friendship is really important to me. I am lucky to have made some really good friends whilst at University in Newcastle many years ago, and also since then. I've lived in London on and off and feel lucky that I can drop in on friends there and in Scotland when I need somewhere to stay. And then some friends moved to Berlin so again, a place to stay sometimes. I often find that it is only through conversations that I can know my opinions or direction. Like I need to say things out loud. And I need to feel a connection with other humans so I can feel sane.

GV: What questions have disappeared?

SG: Is it ok that we keep mobile phone so close to our bodies? For years I wouldn't even keep mine in my pocket for fear of cancer. Now I sleep with it next to my head, practically inserted into my body 24/7.

GV: What album should I listen to right now? You can give me an album for different activities if you want; romancing someone, running, cooking...

SG: Brian Eno's album *Another Green World* is a favourite. And Planningtorock's album *W*. Both good for train journeys. I don't tend to have music for activities on the whole though. Running is in silence except to the sound of my own breathing, and cooking is Radio Four. Except I really, really hate *The Archers*. When that comes on I put on Prince.

GV: When did you decide that you wanted to become an artist?

SG: I'm not sure. I had really great teachers throughout my art education and their feedback encouraged and flattered me. At 16 I went on my first ever trip to an art gallery with my 6th Form College. We went to Tate Liverpool and I saw some of Helen Chadwick's work and loved it. It was called *Enfleshings* - light boxes with photographs of meat and on them. Close up details

of fibres, moist and framed to look like male torsos, with lightbulbs piercing the tissue. Not long after seeing that work that Helen Chadwick died and my teacher showed me her obituary in Art Monthly. I'd never seen Art Monthly before either. I couldn't understand why it was in black and white.

GV: What do we really mean when we say that someone is creative?

SG: That they can make stuff. Or deviate from the norm in their thoughts and behaviours? That they add things to life which are unusual or just new? I'm not sure. It's a funny one. Do men get called creative as much as women I wonder? I always got called creative when I was younger, and bubbly. This gave me a weird self image. Like I was frothy and round. Creative is a bit of a shit word. But then I'd rather be labelled creative than something like analytical for example. But then again I am analytical, and practical. It is possible for artists to be both. I hate the idea that artists are disorganised, always floaty. I love a list.

GV: You work across performance, music, drawing, painting and sculpture. What is the bit in the middle that connects these divergent activities?

SG My notebook and my clothes

GV: Please describe your studio

SG: Bijou, bright, central, peaceful, solitary. I work on the 5th floor of an old office block in Newcastle upon Tyne. I have an amazing view of the city centre and views beyond. I like that I can see architectural details on the buildings opposite, that are not usually seen from the street. I mean no one carves scrolls onto a rooftop anymore. I also like looking down from above, and seeing the tessellating patterns of the pavements, the grids of road markings and the flow of people shopping. Order from what can sometimes feel like chaos on ground level.

GV: Although you work across different media all your work has a certain formal economy, your drawing is very clear and concise. I was wondering if you could talk about this...

SG: I feel things deeply and am sensitive to both my own moods and the moods of others. Perhaps I make clear drawings as a way to be more measured, objective and calm. I'm also very impatient and like to see fast results. I enjoy deciding on compositions of colour and form, so when making a drawing for example, I very much think about the space on the paper, around the marks. In terms of my subject matter, I often use experiences or observations from my everyday life, and abstract them. Perhaps this helps me make sense of things or find humour in what might otherwise make me miserable. I think that there is good to be gained from being imaginative and treating that which might perhaps be banal, as malleable and magical. I'm not sure if I like where my words are taking me here. Is the word magical even allowed when talking about art?

GV: I've never thought of your work as diaristic before, it seems interesting to me that your work deals with both the performative and intimate (or private). Maybe rather than magical, the art is somehow inexplicable? Art is a type of language, but one that resists legibility, or easy assimilation... Do you think we can think of art as a type of language?

SG: I'm not sure I had thought of it like that before. Or maybe it hasn't been so explicitly so until now. I read Ossie Clark's diary a few years ago - he illustrated it so beautifully. In regards to Art as a language. I'm not sure. Perhaps some Art is and some not. Some things say nothing to me. Mute. Other things are so exciting. Eileen Agar's Sculpture *Angel of Anarchy* that's in Tate

Tate Britain. Looking at that the other day felt like a very exciting conversation. But then again it is a head.

GV: What is your favourite title to your own work?

SG: *Internet Bum* is quite nice I think.