

Rasbs Blubs Strawbs Glee. Samara Scott

IN CONVERSATION
WITH GAVIN WADE



Rasbs Blubs Strawbs Glee is the exuberant title of one of Samara Scott's exotically prosaic artworks, the words borrowed and adapted from an enthusiastic café menu sign. The work itself appears like a close up of biological cells, squashed fruit or sexual organs but is in fact a jigsaw of Styrofoam wrapped in ladies tight toes and crotches. This transformative mirroring of language and materials is typical of Scott's atypical artworks that sit and dance around the edge of digital and material seduction and consumption. The London based artist is being commissioned to develop more and more ambitious bodies of work with her first solo show in a publicly funded gallery at Eastside Projects in the UK in May, with a simultaneous commission for Chiltern Railways from London to Birmingham.

Scott's works contain all the passages which follow the first contact of the consumer experience, from touch to mastication to assimilation and finally dispersal. The elements that constitute her work appear in a spontaneous configuration, slipping between infusions of nature and artificial imitation, antiquity and plasticity, synthetic import and organic craft class. The materiality of her imagery and her installations mish-mashes a trickled down Art History into an interior language of disposable nostalgia and melancholy. Scott's worlds are constructed of acid, gels, soft drinks, toilet paper, takeaway containers, scented waxes, noodles, blinds, carpets, eye shadow and toothpaste, rallied together in a sophisticated chaos of making. Scott's practice of processed chaos and refined, near animate, creation may ultimately be a vivacious, irrepressible questioning of our own contemporary pleasures.

Gavin Wade Seduction is a term you use in conversation about your work. What does being seductive mean for an artwork?

Samara Scott It's coating, bodywork, icing, lip-gloss. A kind of lip-licking trick. It's both invitation and camouflage, a device to trip someone up into the work. I want the work to jiggle and rummage and drag those dumb latent reflexes, those glib FHM Cosmo mag urges. Just like the soft steamy sprinklings you see in the stock of ad campaigns, I might pose similarly trivial suggestions – flecks of thighs and pinks, splashes of wanting in the work. But under that flirtatious gauze there is often sourness. I mean, I realise I'm not protected from the things I want. I want to chase someone up close to the work and then have it groping them back. I made a body of work outdoors last summer, where I got into trouble with all the kinky potions and sauces I was using as tints and tonal colorants (shampoo, red wine, 7 Up, hair gel, Alcopops) I had swathes of insects irresistibly tricked by the fickle scents and colour, crawling over the works, dying in sweet toxic puddles.

(G.W.) Experiencing your work is experiencing acts of consumption. But what are we consuming in your work? Are we consuming digital realities, reflections, artificiality, surface, capitalism's world of projected glamour?

(S.S.) I feel as though we live in a world of churning. I have a sense of materiality becoming illegible. And I'm perspiring! Shapes, textures and styles shift and remix at a zooming drunken pace. I don't know where or how to comment on this rampant volatility, these botched utopias. We are bombarded by waves of images, superimposed on other images, meanings are simultaneous and refracted. Apparently 'natural' substances and atmospheres like 'air' or 'earth' are re-assembled and cryptically transform into chemical plastics, circuit boards, synthetic surroundings. I'm dazzled and spooked by that. It's beautiful? Tragic?

Ancient Evening, 2014, styrofoam, acid, gel wax, tights (detail)
previous page: Still Life, 2014, carpet, household paints (detail) (p. 115)

I'm weak, impressionable, guilty, my logic scrambled... I find it hard to process a constantly processing landscape, and to assemble a barely logical or useful response. I feel like I'm really producing art from a position close to seasickness at the moment. So I make a kind of trashy sorcery from the kind of unsophisticated but remarkable products you find on supermarket shelves. In a kind of spiraled gravity I meld and rag combinations of these in collages and assemblages... a kind of vernacular mutation. I guess my response is a kind of frazzled vandalism. And I'm never sure whether the work is celebrating or reproaching. Either way it's a regurgitated leisure, I'm making still lives of vanities.

(G.W.) I always find myself imagining and following through your actions and methods of making and forging, of how your objects, surfaces, pools and images come into existence. I'm never quite sure if you are a master of careful processes, methodically pursuing a set of material questions, or if you follow an open ended quixotic array of impulses. Do either of these phrases connect to your working process?

(S.S.) I have a blurting absent-minded-accidentally-on-purpose process. It's a sloppy tidal thing, a hazy and lucid push and pull between attention and distraction, studded by clumsiness (which although it frustrates me is an amazing thing as it's impossibly anti-mechanical and human).

My studio is like a landfill, revoltingly messy, pouring in and out of these psycho tidal surges. A galloping binge-making that bleeds itself over multiple haphazard working areas. In that urgent bouncy (dumb) state I take over and cluster stupid surfaces (a patch on the floor behind the door, a cardboard surface balanced over the bin, clumped over the top of other works in progress, under the table, everywhere). It's out of control until things begin to drip onto, blur and destroy each other. Right now I'm making floor-based bank-bursting liquid works that I have to tip-toe over to cross the studio. Spillage and cross-pollination is inevitable.

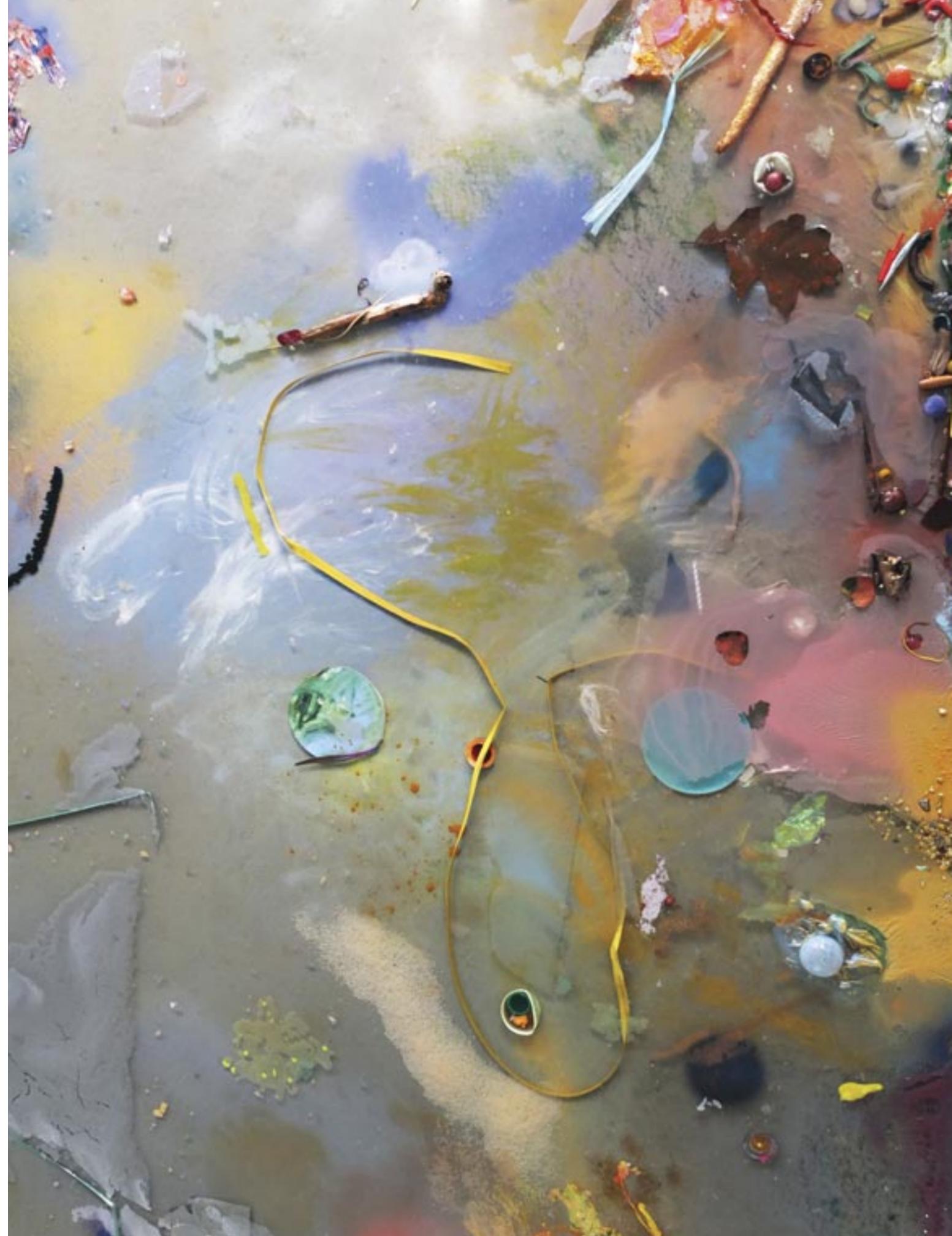
I love and hate this process, it's oppressively uncontainable but within it is all the urgency and desperation that I get drive from. I have learnt to understand and value that restlessness, understand that the commotion and climax are composed from a certain agility, a kind of present ten-seness.

(G.W.) Is it important to steer clear of categorizing what you do, or to not over-describe the works themselves?

(S.S.) When I try to describe my work, to process it with words, it can feel muddy, jerky, ruffled, leaky. Making as a physical, visual dimensionality neatly skirts around an embedded problem within language itself being so innately direct and linear, whereas I want to make and think in a state where sense dilates, becomes illusionistic and pushes towards a more globular sizzling non-sense. Words and images always try to get a hold of reality, but the grip is eroded and fickle. Things can be so much better in incomplete, uncertain form – more beautiful and pure. The more something becomes complete the more alienating it can become. Ideas can also be like that.

(G.W.) This stage of incompleteness or messiness sounds like a description of humankind as seen from outside, as if it is man's function to muddy things. What else does this idea of mess mean to you?

Lonely Planet, 2014, cement frame and water pool with oil paints, watercolour, food colouring, nail varnish, soft drinks, spray paint, foodstuffs, rocks, sand, clay, soil, eyeshadow, wrapping paper and mixed media (detail)



(S.S.) Mess curves its way into talking about touch. Textural encounters like wet car bonnets, crisp white baguette, lathered soap, sticky PVC, clotted Velcro, steamy glass, ketchup on napkin, sandy towels, sweat on satin. And with a tipsy tactility, accessible materials are re-performed, diverted, edited, submitted, polluted. Toilet paper, or moisturizer, eye shadow, tights, marshmallows all lean themselves into asking to be thought about sensually because as products they all demand to be touched – absorbed, ingested or rubbed onto skin. The whole of my practice swills and tickles the agitated eros of these products.

I want to use these lethargic by-products to grip what it feels like to be in a body, to be alive, to be this fleshy, oozing biological thing. Maybe it's all about *Appearances*... thinking about the skin as both a surface and container can release the superficiality and oddness of reality, the confused body as a clashing site of primitive bodily passages and physiological emotions.

(G.W.) Do you equate this oozing, fluid materiality to human emotions also, are these stains, blobs, smears, and drips metaphors for our metaphysical lives?

(S.S.) Well everything is soggy with metaphor maybe, but I prefer to avoid being literal. I want the commentary to be more squiggled than that. My practice is more simply constructed, it's more aligned with those dated anti-analysis self-expressive pop figures. I absorb experiences and I regurgitate abstract, sensory, gurgled, perishable scapes.

I try to shove out anxieties over that heat of intellectual responsibility or ethics, and rather try to transcribe a compulsive and perverted response to reality. In the process there are also these energizing oppositions, which awkwardly irritate and judder against each other: skepticism and optimism, roughness and softness, tenderness and violence, embarrassment and indifference, control and vulnerability.

Sometimes there is the desire to talk about ridiculous and ludicrous things in the work (like love, or death, existence! – all enormously charged but also wildly vague) and the realization that the only way I can do this is to tickle around the edges and ridges. It's too much to talk about these things by using those things themselves, directly. I try to access those things with reclining and nimble silhouettes – to poke rashly at issues and images dripping with connotations. To a certain extent I also play with a kind of hysteria (thought processes and the physical derangement of my studio). I almost voyeuristically, irresponsibly stand back and let disorder and irrationality get rowdy. I guess it helps me to make things I don't fully understand, that aren't a manufactured plop at the close of a formula. Then, in this amorphous translucent matter, there is space to deconstruct the soppy shadows and flaccid reasoning's of what I've made, to peer into and undress this unruly barnacled subject matter.

(G.W.) There is a poetic alliteration of words in your titling of works, and I wonder is this how you actually see the work, through an onomatopoeia of phrases borrowed from Kandinsky or café signs that indicate an almost accidental view into the secrets of the universe?

(S.S.) I'm snared by this disposable, slothful material, because it works at such a pressing speed. There is a viral toxic pop-iness to the 'textural glitches' I make. The surfaces are screeching: angrily happy, eroding baroque, meltingly positive. All around us there are these texturally superimposing images and overlapping potent surfaces. I want to show the porn groove of this matter (mating other matter) springing, farting, burping, greedily writhing. To occupy 'stuff'

Dream Catcher, 2012, venetian blind, mixed media (detail)

and try to pause it, stuff it further in a suspended scribble of narrative.

(G.W.) What is a porn groove? (laughs) It sounds like a phrase that captures this wonderful sense of cleaving in your work. I keep coming back to the word cleave as meaning both to split and to join at the same time. As if your work is able to exist as opposite forms of reality, it is both penetrated and penetrating. Do you mean for the work to take on both male and female sexualities, to be hermaphrodite, fertile in both directions?

(S.S.) I think that's something that I really push for actually. That overlap. Those two things, those two negatives, those two opposites dissolving into each other, like artificial and natural or the seductive and the repulsive. There's not this point where one thing ends. They dissolve into each other.

Liquid mediums ripple with a direct kind of sexiness, but wetness and stains are interesting in that they can be simultaneously explicit and flippant, both macho and effeminate... It's more about blemishes, metabolisms, gastric sap, hormonal juices, and maybe those anxious seams of adolescence – teenage humidities.

I am interested in the fleshiness of those live malleable materials, ones that absorb impression, ooze or melt. I'm attracted to baggy and flimsy plastics, scrunchy foil and limp rubber, foams, gels, froth. Substances like skin, which sweat, flake, strain, shrivel... flabby masses which evolve and degrade. I'm interested in pushing all these hard and soft textures against each other in a kind of voluptuous mingling.

I like that earnest and pseudo-hippy idea of 'spirited' materials. Rather than conduits of driftwood, sharks teeth, frankincense or amethyst, all these cosmetic and detergent liquids could be like a sort of new poetic glue. I like the idea that I make wonky shamanistic gestures with the pedestrian matter I keep talking about – that they could be nostalgic prophetic symbols of an era. I'm constantly spitting into paint for example. I like the gloopy-ness of the way it dries. It's a jaunty gesture but I also enjoy the sentimentality of it being corrupted with human traces. It's that sorcery again, a sort of interrogation of living through a buttery medley of Lidl elixirs.

(G.W.) Finally, you have a wonderful way with words, it is very close to being a performance of your sculptural actions. Whenever we have spoken I wonder where the work starts and you end. Do you ever think of your work as being performative?

(S.S.) Everyone knows what it feels like to wipe themselves with toilet paper.

Rasbs Blubs Straws Glee, 2014, styrofoam, tight toes, tight crotches (detail)
Courtesy all images the artist

