

# Artful dodgems

It's a street sale, but not as you know it. The Art Car Boot Fair - now in its fourth year - is the only place you're likely to come across YBAs flogging their wares for a few quid out the back of an old car. Here, **Harriet Lane** gets revved up with some of the artists, views Sarah Lucas's cigarette necklaces and has a taster of Gavin Turk's barrow-boy routine. Photographs **Gautier Deblonde**

Boot-a-licious: (pictured left to right) Art Car Boot Fair curator Helen Hayward with her daughter Ava May, artist Ian Dawson, Lulu Kennedy from Fashion East, graphic designer Vanessa Fristedt (the classic Oldsmobile belongs to her), fashion designer and DJ Pam Hogg, the fair's co-curator Karen Ashton, and artists Richard Clegg and Cedric Christie



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What is it, exactly? Everyone has a different way of describing it. It's a village fete, a carnival, a live art event, a frat party, a burlesque entertainment, a cut-price Frieze, a family day out. One thing is for certain: the Art Car Boot Fair, according to participant Gavin Turk, is 'nothing like a car-boot sale'.

Maybe Sarah Lucas can explain. She's holed up in Suffolk, in a house she co-owns with gallerist and dealer Sadie Coles, a house on the very edge of everything with smeary full-length windows thrown open to the view of fields and sky. Lucas went to the last Art Car Boot Fair in

2004 and came home with a Yoko Brown skirt and some badges. 'We had fun last time,' she says. 'People kept showing us their knobs all day. Unrelated guys.' She enjoyed it so much that this year she's going to sell her own stuff there.

On the dining-room table, there's a sculpture made out of empty Guinness cans that have been taped together, and on the dresser there's a terracotta putto which she plans to cover with a membrane of cigarettes – maybe all of it, or maybe just the hair and wings, because that's much easier. These items won't be for sale at the ACBF: they'll be snaffled up by some private collector, and I'll probably see them in a retrospective in years to come. No, the car-boot fair requires a different sort of product.

Lucas and her co-conspirator/best mate Olivier Garbay, an engagingly camp and Puckish Frenchman, are going to sell mugs and some of their cigarette jewellery. They're both wearing cigarette necklaces, butts threaded on to gold-plated chains, a gag which is repeated on some of the mugs. Their other designs fea-



ture the chef Fergus Henderson, who runs the YBA canteen (St John in London's Clerkenwell), or his wife, Margot, doing something gymnastic and mysterious in a chair.

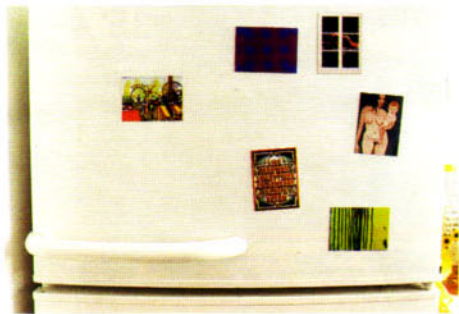
Why did Lucas agree to participate? 'Because Olivier got asked, and he said yes,' she says, amiably. She's looking forward to it. She and Garbay are thinking about going to a local agricultural auction, to pick up a farm barrow which might do for a stall. And they're pondering whether to run some mug-themed pub games off the barrow: throw the ball in the mug; find the ball in the mugs; that sort of thing.

Lucas has dirty bare feet and is drinking beer. Then she's drinking white wine and then red wine and then – after she's made us all sausages and herby lentils and salad – the local cider. There's a debate, over the sausages, about whether a celebrity should be found to open the event. Chantelle. She'd be good. Or Michael Carroll, the self-styled King of Chavs.

The first Art Car Boot Fair took place on Brighton West Pier in 2003: 18 pitches, including one manned by Jake and Dinos Chapman, selling art gimcracks and rum wheezes. The following year, the event moved to the East End, with 45 vehicles participating. The Whoopee Club offered a burlesque strip show and free massages by Tracey Emin; elsewhere, you could throw a pot or buy some compliments and flattery as well as Julian Opie's bumper stickers. This summer (the organisers needed two years to recover) there will be 50 pitches, plus various customised caravans, a Transit van, a Routemaster bus, a decommissioned ambulance and ▶

Sale of the century: (left) Gavin Turk outside his studio – he'll be selling 'Own Brand Rich Tea Biscuits' with prices to be decided on the day; (top) a miniature Mark Hampson cigarette card, £30 per sheet; and (right) Hampson with his wife Michelle – they'll be trading as Pie Island Enterprises





Art of the matter: (top) Sarah Lucas and Olivier Garbay at Lucas's Suffolk home. Inset pictures, clockwise from top left: mugs by Olivier Garbay and Sarah Lucas - to be won on the day; Ol' Broad Bean jewellery by Vanessa Fristedt, £5-£20; Cedric Christie T-shirts, £15-£30; fridge magnets curated by Ian Dawson (including work by Turner nominee Mark Titchner), £30 for six; Snow Doom by Richard Clegg, £25-£250; and Mark Hampson badges, £1.50

◀ Lucas and Garbay's barrow, if they find a suitable one. Perhaps you'd like to buy slogan knickers, concrete vegetables, bronze bricks, lilac wine or jewellery made out of broad beans? Perhaps you'd like to eat paella, or a snack from an organic barbecue? Or simply watch a lot of artists, some quite famous, behaving in the usual manner? In which case, that's your Sunday sorted.

After lunch, Sarah and Olivier head into the garden. Soon they are leaping around on the trampoline, being showered with drifts of cherry blossom and occasionally choking in the pall from the bonfire, which a friend has lit near the empty swimming pool. From time to time, incoherent with laughter, they climb off to remove old Bowie and put on new Madonna, or to open another bottle, or spark another fag. At one point, Garbay rushes up solicitously with a black and red rug, because he thinks I'm looking a bit cold. It's a car blanket designed for the last ACBF by Showroom Dummies.

A founder member of the YBAs, Abigail Lane set up the interior design company Showroom Dummies in 2003 with Brigitte Stepputtis, head of couture at Vivienne Westwood, and Bob Pain, founder of printing company Omnicolour. It's useful, Lane believes, to balance out the large-scale, corporate aspects of the business (recently showcased in Selfridges) with something smaller and more edgy. She certainly doesn't expect to make any money from the ACBF. 'Around the time of the last fair we were starting to work on a Mulberry project, and the thinking was, if we were going to do something in Bond Street, it would be quite good for our company identity to do something a bit more streetwise as well.'

Lane, who came home from the last ACBF with a Pam Hogg skirt, enjoyed the discipline of designing and manufacturing on a far tighter budget: Showroom Dummies usually makes its blankets in Scotland, using cashmere, but these car blankets ended up being made in China. 'I like any opportunity to do something new,' says Lane. 'And the Art Car Boot can be a good testing ground.' A sample range of T-shirts sold so well last time that they're now available from the website. This year, Showroom Dummies will be selling nine different designs of silk scarves at £50 a pop, all with the quirks you'd expect: coffins with a detail of daisies; babies with a detail of skeletons.

Despite the sponsorship by Vauxhall, the fair's curators, Karen Ashton and Helen Hayward, suggest the event is in the spirit of the Fete Worse than Death, that celebrated, free-wheeling YBA street party organised by Joshua Compston in the early Nineties. Abigail Lane thinks there's something to this. 'It's light relief from the more normal sort of art exhibition. It's not over serious. You shouldn't get stressed by it.' Having said that, though, she's dreading the interactive aspects of the ACBF. 'I don't like trying to sell my own things. I never have done. That's why the art world has galleries.'

Mark Hampson, an artist who is senior tutor ▶



Fair's fair: (clockwise from top) 'Bob and Roberta' Smith and artist Jessica Voorsanger; painting by Voorsanger, from £30; Showroom Dummies Brigitte Stepputtis and Abigail Lane; and one of their scarves, £35

◀ in fine-art printmaking at RCA, and a serious carbooter to boot, came away last time with a Bob and Roberta Smith concrete rubbing ('It's good to get an original, signed by the artist, up on your wall for a quid'), though he points out that most of his cash went on a horse-racing gambling game and 'quite strange cocktails'. This year, with his wife Michelle, he will be selling spoof souvenirs, badges, T-shirts, sew-on patches, posters and tea towels out of his Pie Island Enterprises car boot. He believes the two species of car-boot sale do have something in common: 'It's that kind of amateur entrepreneurial thing. There's a cheap and cheerful vibe, more shabby than chic. At real car-boot sales, there's lots of kitsch flotsam and jetsam, flawed stuff that nobody else wants - the two-headed dog, the headless horse rider - and there is that kind of cheapness, that humour, a similar sort of oddness, at the Art Car Boot.'

Gavin Turk, who participated in the Fete Worse than Death, compares the ACBF to a fancy-dress party. 'There's a sort of lightness to it. It's like having a little break and yet I can still use the ideas I work with in the studio.' Last time, in between picking up a Bob and Roberta Smith rubbing, some medallions and a robotic diamante tortoise, he sold *Pop Art Road Kill*: 'Crushed cans, crushed packaging that was discarded on the street and run over by cars. It was something I couldn't show in a gallery, but at the same time it worked very well in the context.' He sold about 100 pieces, for £25 each. Not a bad day's work.

For a while now he's been interested in staple foods - bread, tea - and he's fairly sure that this time he's going to do something for the ACBF using Rich Tea biscuits, 'which are strange sculptures in themselves. I like the fact they're called Rich Tea. They're nothing to do with being rich... or anything to do with tea, really.' Maybe he'll sign them, which would be very Gavin Turk. Possibly he'll emboss them. 'I want to use very economic means to create something which can actually be a cultural springboard. But I don't really know. This is about having some fun and certainly it's an important thing to take part in, but it shouldn't be taken too seriously.'

Unlike Lane, Turk is looking forward to getting to grips with the punters and squeezing the cash out of them. For years, he assumed he would be a terrible salesman. But at the last fair, he discovered his inner *Apprentice*, his inner geezer. 'I've now found out that I do really like selling,' he says. 'My East End roots are showing through. I loved it last time. We tried to barter the price up a bit if people were vying for stuff; we did a few deals.' He does his Del Boy spiel on me: 'The more you buy, the bigger the reductions... the more you buy, the better-off you are. I mean, if you save a pound per item and you buy a million of them, well - you've made a million pounds!' Well, I'm buying it. ★

The Art Car Boot Fair 2006 is on 4 June, 12-6pm, at The Old Truman Brewery, 150 Brick Lane, London E1