

## IN THE STUDIO WITH GEORGIA SPAIN

In the lead-up to her solo exhibition at Tolarno Galleries, I had the pleasure of speaking with Georgia Spain in her studio.

Over the course of the afternoon, we talked about her decision to work sculpturally alongside her paintings, and Georgia's thoughts on conjuring a poetic sense of emotional and visual ambiguity to capture the contradictory layers of human experience.

Most of the space in the studio was taken up by groupings of body-sized sculptures, which Georgia had gathered in front of her paintings. Some of the sculptures were standing up, others were hanging from the ceiling or crouching on the ground. Assembled from recycled materials and partially covered in painterly brush marks, their forms and elongated limbs seemed to be in a curious dialogue with the abstracted, figurative motifs in the paintings behind them.

On the wall above one of the paintings, Georgia had written three questions: *Why not, what if, could it be?* Three open-ended propositions that were to become the title for her latest body of work, and which immediately also sparked my curiosity.

**CB: The title of your exhibition, "Why not, what if, could it be?", seems to encapsulate a feeling of possibility, and experimentation. How did you come up with the different questions in the title?**

GS: *The show's title has been a studio mantra for me lately. A lot of the work is about transforming the detritus and waste that's been sitting around the studio, wondering how I might give it purpose or a new life again. I've been trying to approach the studio in a more playful way; finding materials and asking, why not this? What if I do this? Could it be this? What if I could turn it into something else? I like the inherent openness of this process and the sense of play and possibility, that you can transform anything. Similarly, I also want people to be able to read the work in multiple ways; the work speaks to a sense of anguish and pain, but also to joy and ecstasy.*

**CB: Could the title of the show maybe also imply an alternative kind of world that you have created in the studio for yourself?**

GS: *It does feel a bit like a world of its own, with the sculptures embodying different characters who almost feel as though they've stepped out of the paintings. But it's funny, I've had a few people visit the studio, and someone asked: "these are all self-portraits, right?". And there's truth to that, in some way they're all versions of me. They're literally made up of my things, such as my clothing. "The Lead", for example started out as a jumper I'd worn around the house, then it became a studio jumper, and then a rag, and now it's become part of the work. I'm interested in this life cycle of materials and objects, in bringing the physical vestiges of my material life together to create something new.*

**CB: Why did you decide to work sculpturally?**

GS: *I wanted to move away from the flat surface of the canvas. I've never seen myself solely as a painter and I've always made other things outside of painting. I started making these forms intuitively without knowing what they would look like. I needed to work at a scale which would reflect my own physicality. At first, I was using bits of cardboard and rags, then I brought my sewing machine in and also started hand stitching things together. One could say, the sculptures*

have grown themselves in a very organic manner, similarly to the paintings, and like the paintings, they sit in a space between figuration and abstraction.

**CB: Can you speak about your process when you paint?**

GS: My process often changes as I try and challenge myself with each new body of work. In some ways these paintings seem more akin to layered drawings, there's an emphasis on the drawn line and intuitive mark making. While drawing inspiration from a wide variety of source images, I've been trying to tap into more of a subconscious place, to layer different narratives, histories and memories.

**CB: Do you see the paintings like landscapes that these characters inhabit? How do they relate?**

GS: They speak the same visual language in many ways and certain gestural motifs I'm interested in have emerged and recurred in both the paintings and the sculptures. There's a mirroring of these arms reaching out, a gesture of coming close or almost getting at something, of the hand signaling to say, "Here I am".

I see the paintings and landscapes existing in the same worlds. Perhaps they could be emotional or psychological landscapes. Some of the paintings are anchored by a horizon line while others are more gestural and abstract. I want to maintain a sense of ambiguity, a sense that the viewer can't quite put their finger on where they are or what the works might evoke.

**CB: In that case, do you consider them more as an expansion of your painting, or do you see them as separate sculptures?**

GS: I think they definitely feel like extensions of the paintings. They are literally made with the same materials— paint rags and scraps of canvas— and the process of making them is much the same. The sculptures themselves feel like singular entities which, when they come together, form a group or a crowd.

**CB: You mentioned the sculptures feeling like "characters" that have joined you in the studio - can you describe how you see these characters relating to or representing different aspects of the human experience?**

GS: There's a sense of humour and absurdity in them...or maybe it's the image of me working alone with my strange crowd of friends that's absurd. I've spent so much time with them I've started to really get used to their company. I recognise an element of discomfort or awkwardness in them, which is perhaps a reflection of everything that's going on in the world at the moment— a sense of discomfort of being human and inhabiting a body. Making them has been a way of processing that feeling. To me they embody a piecing together of different emotional states or experiences. There's something around mending or wanting to repair things and hold it all together. I've always been interested in the extremes; the light and the dark and the heavy absurdity of life, and how these universal states coexist together, everywhere, all the time. These works feel like they carry the different emotional states that I've been experiencing while making them.

**CB: As you prepare to exhibit the sculptures alongside the paintings, what are you hoping viewers will take away or experience in encountering this combined body of work?**

GS: I think there's a transfer of energy from my hand onto the canvas through paint, and the same can be said through stitching, so I hope viewers can feel that energy and that perhaps these works can communicate something unknowable, beyond words and language.