SARAH LUCAS: HAPPY GAS

28 SEP 2023 – 14 JAN 2024

LARGE PRINT GUIDE

Content guidance

This leaflet contains explicit language and references sexual activity.

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All information is correct at the time of publication

‘I decided to hang the exhibition mainly on chairs. Much in the same way I hang sculptures onto chairs, which means the chair becomes an integral part of the work. The character of the chair lends mood and meaning to the sculpture.
The progression of chair sculptures through the years adds up to a world populated by these characters.’

– Sarah Lucas

CONCOURSE

SARAH LUCAS: HAPPY GAS
28 September 2023 – 14 January 2024

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We are pleased to support Tate Britain with **Sarah Lucas: HAPPY GAS**, an exhibition dedicated to celebrating the British artist and a body of work that spans over 40 years.

Tate Britain is an integral part of our cultural landscape in the UK and close to our own headquarters on Horseferry Road, London, SW1. We are honoured to work with Tate Britain and look forward to coming together now and in the future to celebrate British art and culture.

SARAH LUCAS: HAPPY GAS

28 September 2023 – 14 January 2024

Since 1990, Sarah Lucas has been making art that distorts everyday life. The expressiveness of ordinary things is coaxed out, or just noticed and pointed at. In this exhibition, a banana, lightbulbs, concrete, fish, a car, tights, chairs, tabloid newspapers and cigarettes are used to explore the human condition. Mischievously and honestly, Lucas asks universal questions about our origins, sex, class, happiness and mortality.

Lucas's strange, familiar and funny forms are deeply personal. **HAPPY GAS** is also narrated entirely in her own voice. Yet the familiar themes and images in her work could be about any of us. The exhibition tells a fuller story than the 1990s Young British Art scene that Lucas is so often associated with. Through self-portraits, a young Lucas and the now 60-year-old artist look at each other's work. We see reminiscence, social comment, family, childhood and collaborative friendship running through almost 35 years of making art.

Lucas has always challenged the conventions of photography, sculpture and collage through her choice of subjects and materials. What might appear rough or casual is in fact a careful manipulation of materials, words and her own image.

In the exhibition, she creates a mood of grit, shock and play, regularly punctuated by the darkness and pleasure of sex, smoking and food. Lucas's subversion of social realism points to what is both laughable and demeaning about class and gender stereotypes. Too many limbs, no heads, explicit metaphors and huge food give this realism a magical quality, creating a defiant, joyful and vital atmosphere.

Tits in Space (Pink)

2020
Digitally printed wallpaper

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86878

Fuck Destiny

2000
Red sofa bed, fluorescent lamp, bulbs, box

Cranford Collection, London
X86880

Donkey Kong Diddle-Eye

2000
Sofa, fluorescent tube, lights, fittings

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86879

ROOM 1

ROOM 1

‘I love conversation, banter and reading. But everything is language, including objects. There’s an infinity of “stuff”. How to invest any of it with meaning?’

‘I didn’t set out to be autobiographical really. In fact I saw, and see, art as a way of having an objective look at something. Though now that I have a lot of works behind me, I can see that they inevitably tell a story, in their way. And of course they are much more personal than I perhaps thought they were at the time of making. It is never an easy thing to see ourselves though, is it?’

‘We were a sprawling body of kids. Different ages, sizes, and abilities, out on the street most of the time amusing ourselves. A lot of swearing went on. Swearing that was in a way in advance of understanding what the words meant. It was understood of course that they were insulting and funny. And it dawned gradually that some were worse than others, and that some weren’t even funny – although they still were when aimed with precision or ejaculated unexpectedly.’

Quotations by Sarah Lucas
Thematic texts by Dominique Heyse-Moore and Amy Emmerson Martin

WORDS

Language is a central material or tool within Lucas's practice. We see this in the playful titles she gives to her works, which are critical to their meaning. Within the artworks themselves, we find newspaper headlines, swearing, jokes and puns, casual phrases and offensive slurs. Lucas mixes up these things, juxtaposing them with images and objects to shift their effects and meanings. Offensive language experienced by many of us is reflected back to us all in a formal gallery setting. In pointing to such experiences, we are invited to think about them differently.

Casual or everyday language is still not often part of the description of contemporary art. Lucas tells stories and anecdotes to describe her work, cutting through the formal language often used in art galleries. Her everyday language (which forms the narrative of this exhibition) is humorous and accessible, but inflected with a feminist edge as it subverts patriarchal traditions of writing about art.

Lucas's exhibition title **HAPPY GAS** – a reference to nitrous oxide – could be part of a newspaper headline about anti-social behaviour in 2023 Britain. Political promises to ban the sale and recreational use of the drug form many anxious stories in the British press. **HAPPY GAS** is also reminiscent of NHS labour wards and dental extractions – like many aspects

of Lucas's work linking to her use of very British motifs and references.

PORTRAITURE

Portraiture is a core part of Lucas's practice. She uses her own image again and again, which we can see throughout **HAPPY GAS**. Some images are presented as wallpapers that consume whole gallery spaces, such as **Eating a Banana** 1990 and **Smoking** 1998, as well as the more recent **Red Sky** series from 2018 in the final room of the show. Although these photos could be read as self-portraits – they are indeed photographs of the artist – they are also always impromptu collaborations with the photographers. They appear simultaneously staged and unposed. The same objects reappear: bananas, salmon, skulls, cigarettes and toilets. By continuously presenting her own image alongside these objects and motifs, Lucas creates a unique visual language which she uses to challenge stereotypical notions of identity and gender. This reuse reinforces the connotations Lucas imbues in the objects, creating a readymade vocabulary of imagery for her to draw upon.

'It was significant that I put my own image into the work from the outset. Although, at the time, it wasn't important to me

that it was my own image. I just happened to be handy. It gave me, in the eyes of other people, a voice or attitude within the work. This has been a constant presence since, but, in fact, I return to making self-portraits only rarely.'

Anti-clockwise from room 1 entrance

Got A Salmon On #1

1997
Digitally printed wallpaper
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
Z88745

Bunny

1997
Tights, stockings, plywood chair, clamp, kapok, wire

Private collection
X86731

‘I didn’t give feminism much serious thought until my mid-20s. I came across a book by Andrea Dworkin called **Intercourse** and another called **Pornography**. I was drawn to the titles. And they … trawled through pornography and

other atrocities committed against women. Fighting fire with fire… It caused a schism in my feelings towards men. At that point I started using tabloid newspapers. And really I didn't have to add any comment. I just blew them up and put them in a gallery. And people, most of whom must have seen this stuff every day of their lives, felt in the self-conscious atmosphere of the gallery, that I was criticising them in some way. Maybe I was.'

Fat, Forty and Flab-ulous

1990
Photocopy on paper

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of the D. Daskalopoulos Collection donated jointly to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2022
X86913

Sod You Gits

1990
Photocopy on paper

Private collection
X86916

Pairfect Match

1992
Phototransfer on paper laid on canvas

Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London
X89222

Chicken Knickers

1997
Digitally printed wallpaper. Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
Z88746

Is Suicide Genetic?

1996
Helmet, cigarettes, burnt chair, cigarette packets

Private collection
X89054

Tit Tom 3

2023
Bronze

Courtesy the artist
X88510

Untitled

1993
Gouache and collage on card

Frances Henderson
X86877

28 Percent Bent

1991
Letraset on paper

Private collection of Ben Clapp
X86939

‘When I compiled my **Five Lists**, … I was spending summer in Rome. Impossibly hot and I had no equipment to speak of so I set myself the task of just pulling things out of my memory. It was 1990 so I must have been 27. I made five lists one for women, one for men, one for homosexuals, one for wanking and one for excrement – these seemed to be the main categories that swearing could be divided by in English. I saw the overlap. And the hatred.

I was already aware, instinctively, since childhood, of a distinction between people swearing humorously or with venom and bile, I suppose we all are – but I hadn’t thought clearly until then about how whole classes of people had language stacked against them, including sexism and racism.

I retaliated with **Five Lists**.’

Five Lists

1991
Graphite on paper

Collection the artist
X33803

Wanker

1999
Buckets, mechanical arm, chair

Boros Collection, Berlin
X86732

Centre of room 1, anti-clockwise from entrance

The Old Couple

1992
Two chairs, wax, false teeth

Collection of Frank Gallipoli
X14580

Max's Wanking Armchair

2000
Upholstered imitation leather chair, fibreglass, wood, steel, acrylic

Private collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth
X86733

Hysterical Attack (Eyes)

1999
Chair, papier mâché

Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland
X86728

Hysterical Attack (Mouths)

1999
Chair, collage, papier mâché

Private collection, courtesy Reiss Klein Partners
X86727

Portable Smoking Area

1996
Wood, box, chair, electric light, steel stand, weights

Belvedere Vienna, gift of the Ursula & Rainer Blickle Collection, Kraichtal
X86726

ROOM 2

ROOM 2

‘The purpose of chairs (in the world) is to accommodate the human body sitting. They can be turned to other purposes. Generally as a support for an action or object. Changing light bulbs. Propping open a door. Posing. Sex.’

‘My own, sculptural, purposes are not different. I use them as chairs for bodies, sometimes parts of bodies and also as stand-ins for bodies on occasion. Car seats, when glanced at through a windscreen – and particularly when they have head rests attached – can look like a couple of bodies, I think. Seen while passing from the corner of the eye. Even empty chairs are implying a body. It’s their meaning. Individual chairs have their own character too.’

‘I’ve been making **Bunnies** for a long while. The first one from the mid 1990s is in this show. I’m not constantly making them but it’s something I’ve returned to from time to time and they’ve evolved over the years. It struck me, quite recently, that they’re mostly very thin. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say I had a sudden urge to make some fleshy ones. It must be a combination of the fleshiness and the saggy tits that make them appear old to you. The latter probably. It turns out, surprisingly you may think, that a saggy tit is very expressive.’

TIGHTS

As part of a long commitment to readily available materials, Lucas uses tights filled with stuffing to make soft sculptures. Associated with sex and femininity, tights have an enduring appeal to her, first appearing in her work in 1993. They form a body with a pair of lightbulb breasts, the stuffing evoking marbled fat and blood vessels. Hems and seams make nipples and labia. Lucas often pairs the fragility of sheer nylon with solid, heavy or rough materials. Her structures might be limbs or breasts, always relating to a body; sometimes exhausted, sometimes excited or performing. Often sitting in a chair, they seem vulnerable and very human.

‘Stuffing can be kapok, cotton or wool. By now and for a good while it’s usually wool. Initially it was shredded newspaper.’

ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS

French artist Louise Bourgeois made innovative use of stockings and other textiles to explore memory, trauma and sex. Indian artist Mrinalini Mukherjee hand worked much tougher fibre to create outsized soft genital sculptures. For many feminist artists, textiles have been a shorthand for ideas and experiences imposed on women, as well as an opportunity to subvert them.

CHAIRS

Chairs have been a reoccurring object in Lucas's practice since 1992 when she created **The Old Couple** (room 1). She loads these simple, everyday and often found objects with meaning through carefully positioning and adding items to them. The chairs become human, their legs, arms and backs standing in for a figure. In the mid 1990s, Lucas began using chairs with tights and kapok stuffing to create bodily structures, as we can see in **Bunny** 1997. These 'figures' are arranged throughout the exhibition, mostly on plinths, insolently posed for the viewer. In recent years, their lumpy forms have been rendered in different mediums such as bronze.

Plinths have been used throughout museum history to act as a support for a work of art. In this exhibition Lucas uses the plinth to elevate the chair. Textures within the sculptures are highlighted by the various materials and colours used to create the plinths.

Anti-clockwise from room 2 entrance

Eating a Banana

1990
Digitally printed wallpaper Photo by Gary Hume

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
Z88835

'**Eating a Banana** 1990 was the first "self-portrait". I was doing a lot of photographic work at the time, but I'm not the person behind the camera in any of the shots featuring me. In the case of **Banana**, it was Gary Hume, who I was living as well as sharing a studio with. In general it has been whoever I was living/working with at the time. It was a random thing. I just happened to be eating a banana and thought it might be good.'

CROSS DORIS

2019
Concrete, bronze, steel, acrylic paint

Private collection, London
X86827

FAT DORIS

2023
Tights, wire, wool, shoes, armchair, breeze blocks

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X88507

Tit Tom 2

2023
Bronze

Courtesy the artist
X88509

E3

2013
MDF, breeze blocks

Courtesy Sarah Lucas, Sadie Coles HQ and
London Art Workshop
Z88756

‘The purpose of chairs (in the world) is to accommodate the human body sitting. At a table eating or working. Watching TV. On a bus. They can be turned to other purposes generally as a support for an action or object. Changing a light bulb. Propping open a door. Posing. Sex.’

‘The first time I used a table I could visualise it as being a reclining nude. The first two chairs a couple sitting side by side. We even call the parts of chairs arms and legs. It’s easy to imagine someone sitting in them. I often do a double take passing parked cars. The person is already implied. With soft furnishings they also take on body shapes according to their fabric and stuffing, creating various creases and folds which can be suggestive. I like the idea of using a particularly naff piece of furniture and exploring its inherent character or hidden elegance by working on it.’

Centre of room 2, anti-clockwise from entrance

PEEPING THOMASINA

2020
Tights, wire, wool, shoes, acrylic paint, vinyl, metal chair

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86734

SUGAR

2020
Tights, wire, wool, bulldog clips, shoes, acrylic paint, metal chair

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86735

MRS NICUBATOR

2019
Tights, wool, wire, spring clamp, chair, acrylic paint, shoes, MDF plinth

Collection of Elizabeth Redmond
X86826

WINTER SONG

2020
Tights, wire, wool, spring clamps, shoes, acrylic paint, wooden chair

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86822

BUNNY RABBIT

2022
Bronze, concrete, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86835

ZEN LOVESONG

2022
Bronze, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86836

ANGEL

2022
Bronze, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86829

SLAG

2022
Concrete, chair

Courtesy the artist
X86936

GODDESS

2022
Bronze, concrete, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86831

CHERRY

2023
Resin and acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist
X89578

BUNNY RABBIT

2023
Resin and acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist
X89577

ZEN LOVESONG

2023
Resin and acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist
X89579

ROSE

2022
Bronze, concrete

Courtesy the artist
X86833

CHERIE

2022
Bronze, concrete, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86830

ANGEL

2022
Concrete, bronze, mild steel

Courtesy the artist
X86937

SEX BOMB

2022
Bronze, concrete

Courtesy the artist
X86832

COOL CHICK BABY

2020
Tights, wire, wool, shoes, acrylic paint, vinyl, metal chair

Collection of Alexander V. Petalas
X86821

HONEY PIE

2020
Tights, wire, wool, shoes, acrylic paint, vinyl, metal chair

Collection of Frank Gallipoli
X86823

ROOM 3

ROOM 3

‘What I look for in materials is readiness. Something I can get on with in a spontaneous way and just do it myself. It might well be that I’m doing this at home at some odd hour of the day. Often the things that are there aren’t generally credited with being an art material – like tights or cigarettes or an onion. The important thing for me is to be able to act on it there and then.’

‘We all might find ourselves subject to a whole gamut of emotions. The stuff of tragedy and comedy. Of daily grind and boredom. Of living. And I do find myself subject to these things like everybody else and often I feel a tremendous urge to do something with that feeling right away with whatever there is about, even if at first glance it looks like there’s nothing very promising about.

There always is something. And that’s gratifying and often amusing. To express the anxiety or the anger or the joy with an onion or a chair.’

CONCRETE

Concrete appears in two forms in the exhibition: as plinths the works sit upon, and as sculptural material. Instead of smooth and pristine plinths, Lucas uses concrete breeze blocks to support many of her works. The breeze blocks are not precious or finished: they are basic, practical, uncovered building blocks. The stone exposed in grand museum buildings was traditionally luxurious, like the walls of the Duveen galleries that run through the centre of Tate Britain. It was not until the arrival of modern architecture that cheaper construction materials such as concrete were made visible.

For decades Lucas has created sculptures in concrete, first making a cast of a pair of her own boots in 1999. In this exhibition, you can see a gigantic concrete marrow and a sandwich, as well as a cast of modern furniture design icon, the Eames Chair. Lucas often uses the roughness of concrete to contrast with the delicacy of other materials such as tights and paper.

ARTISTIC CONNECTIONS

British sculptor Henry Moore also explored this idea of truth to material by making giant works from concrete: a material which is often associated with masculinity. Works by Moore are on display at Tate Britain in a nearby room within the collection displays.

Anti-clockwise from room 3 entrance

‘Reasons for making a penis: appropriation, because I don’t have one; voodoo; economics; totemism; they’re a convenient size for the lap; fetishism; compact power; gents; gnomes; because you don’t see them on display much; for religious reasons having to do with the spark.’

Smoking

1998
Digitally printed wallpaper
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
Z88833

Self Portrait with Skull

1996
C-print
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Private collection
X87095

Human Toilet Revisited

1998
C-print
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X88745

DICK 'EAD

2018
Bronze, concrete, cast iron, acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86876

Sandwich

2004–20
Jesmonite, polystyrene, paint

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86912

Mumum

2012
Tights, kapok, chair frame

Private collection
X86870

Sadie

2015
Plaster, cigarette, toilet

Collection of Alexander V. Petalas
X86907

TITTIPUSSIDAD

2018
Bronze, concrete, cast iron

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X89223

The Law

1997
Cast concrete

Private collection
X86940

Supersensible

1995
Photograph
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London X89472

STOOKS

2023
C-print
Photo by Julian Simmons, Grain stooks by Dom Meek

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London X89474

Prière de Toucher

2000
Digitally printed wallpaper
Photo by Angus Fairhurst

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London Z88834

William Hambling

2022
Concrete

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86874

‘Go away, get a nob, come back, we’ll talk about it. My mum had an allotment where she grew vegetables. There’s a tradition in England, mostly among men, of growing super large vegetables and showing them off at harvest festival time. A prize for the biggest. My mum grew the marrows in our family. She made the jam too.’

Eames Chair

2015
Bronze, concrete

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86875

ROOM 4

ROOM 4

‘There’s no substitute for genitalia in terms of meaningfulness and a bit of edge.’

‘Reasons for making a penis: appropriation, because I don’t have one; voodoo; economics; totemism; they’re a convenient size for the lap; fetishism; compact power; Dad; why make the whole bloke?; gents; gnomey; because you don’t see them on display much; for religious reasons having to do with the spark.’

‘Funnily enough vaginas seem to shock people more than a penis. Especially the plaster casts of real ones. I’ve seen people approach some of the muses and, when they’re close enough to get the vagina into focus, about turn and walk away. Which is an experience on a par with or maybe opposite to, finding out the meaning of the word cunt. I remember, as a child, being quite baffled by this word which I’d heard bandied about a lot and definitely understood enough to know it was out of the question to ever use it in front of adults and was, seemingly, the harshest and worst term of abuse available in four letters. And I had one myself. Shocking.’

CIGARETTES

Cigarettes have featured in Lucas's work since her 1997 exhibition **The Law**, and she has gone on to create several series of cigarette-coated objects. In the final room of the exhibition, we see the climax of this theme in **This Jaguar's Going to Heaven** 2018. *A Jaguar car*, covered in cigarettes, is split in two. The action of cutting the car in half is a destructive act. Lucas said, 'when I first started using cigarettes in art it was because I was wondering why people are self-destructive. But it's often destructive things that makes us feel most alive'. Self-portraits of the artist such as **Red Sky** 2018, displayed as wallpaper here, show her surrounded in an almost ethereal or ghostly cloud of smoke. In her **Muses** series, she places phallic cigarettes in the orifices of body casts of her friends.

We might also relate cigarettes to the title of the show, **HAPPY GAS**. Sarah has described her choice of exhibition title as 'funny and uplifting and a bit sinister too – ambiguous I suppose'. In typical Lucas style, however, she also insists it is merely because she 'fancied a two-word title'.

Clockwise from room 4 entrance

RED SKY

2018
Digitally printed wallpaper
Photo by Julian Simmons

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
Z88747–53

Sandwich

2011–20
Concrete

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X86869

Cnut

2004
Concrete figure, cigarette, paint, stainless steel toilet, plastic seat

ISelf Collection
X86911

Michele

2015
Plaster, cigarette, desk

Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London
X88570

Inferno

2000
Toilet, walnuts, cigar, fire bulb, wire

Tate. Presented as part of the D. Daskalopoulos Collection Gift 2023, T16069

Me (Bar Stool)

2015
Plaster, cigarette, stool

Collection Shane Akeroyd
X86949

Pauline

2015
Plaster, cigarette, chair

Collection of Kenny Schachter
X86908

Dreams Go Up In Smoke

2000
Cast bronze, cigarettes

Private collection
X86906

Tit Tom 1

2023
Bronze

Courtesy the artist
X88508

FunQroc

2017
Tights, fluff, chair, paint

Private collection
X86872

Exacto

2018
Chair, fluorescent lights

Courtesy the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City / New York
X85184

The Kiss

2003
Cigarettes, chairs, leather cord, varnish, glue

Private collection, London
X86904

Happy Sucker

2018
Wooden chair, plungers, steel wire, cigarettes

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery
X86905

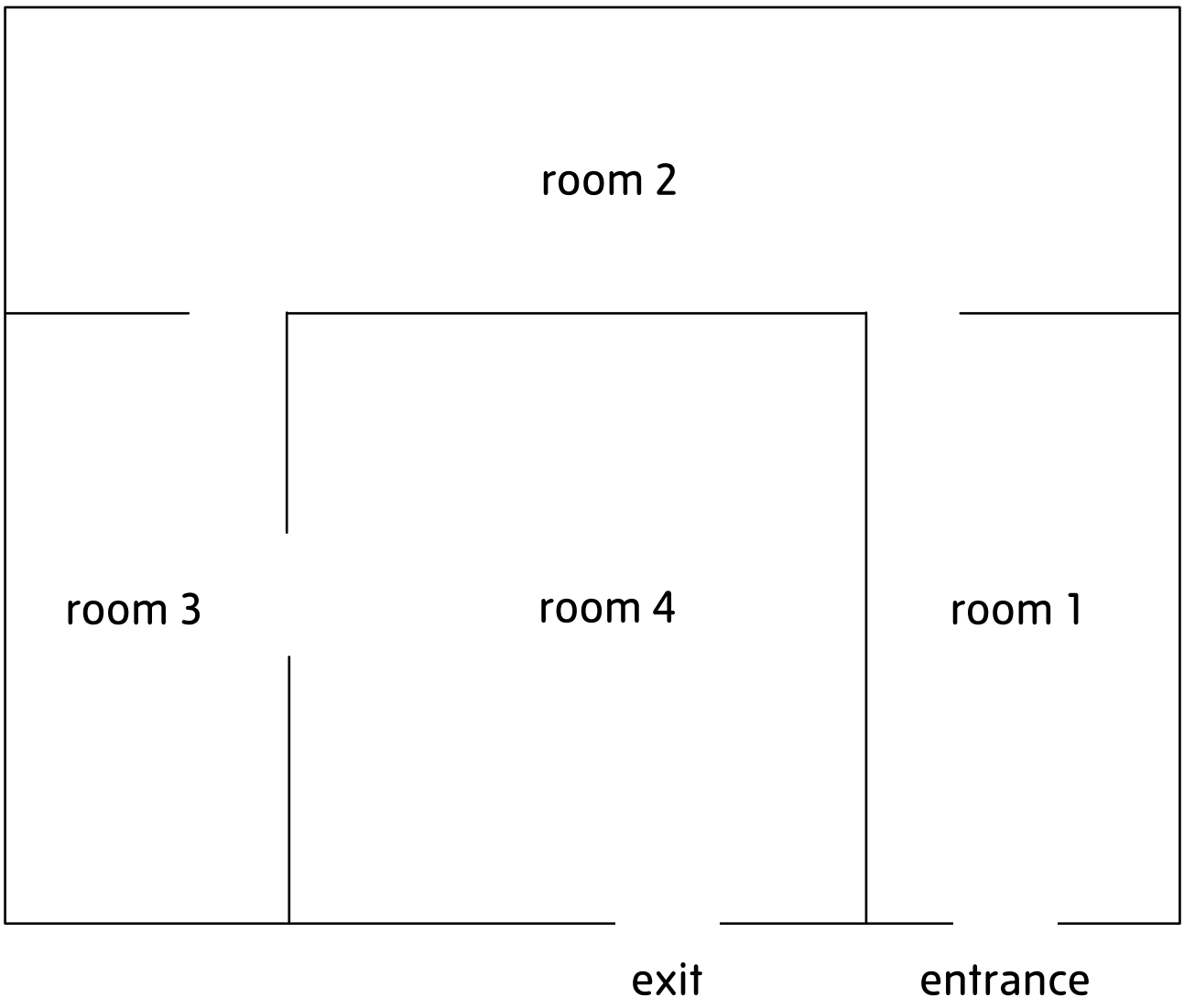
This Jaguar's Going to Heaven

2018
Car, cigarettes, glue

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery
X85185

'I'd always had it in mind to do something about the fact of smoking. I wanted to make something about the heart and lungs in real size. Then, I needed something with some scale for an exhibition, I thought of using cars. I liked the idea of the cars being burnt out because of the parallel with lungs. And because of people's idea of lungs as something insulated from the outside. Cars insulate you from the outside – like a home does. It's a shock to see it violated.'

GALLERY PLAN



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