

GEORGIE

Georgie Hopton grows vegetables part of her year; on a farm where she lives in the Catskill Mountains, Upstate New York. As an artist she sculpts, paints and photographs her material simply as a means to make art, object and image, it's a compulsion. On this occasion the produce she has grown over the past four or five years has been the inspiration, which has transformed the work from seed to sauce, from flower to fruit.

Presently exhibiting in London, with Poppy Sebire, 'Cut and Come Again' is showing until 29th May 2010.

We met at her studio in East London.



Interview by Polly ReSin

Photographer Kevin Davies

HOPTON

George Hopton
Large Potato Palette, 2010
Bronze and acrylic, 40 x 23.5 x 6.5cm
Image courtesy the artist



Polly ReSin: Apparently you enjoy gardening, what are you growing this year?

George Hopton: Nothing. Because I am here in England right now and not in America. There's not a single god dam thing being grown right now. It's horrible, my beautiful vegetable gardens lie fallow.

PR: The photography in the exhibition was taken in situ in those gardens, but I see here in the studio sculptures too. Were these made in America?

GH: The palette sculptures, came out of using the produce I had grown and had begun making prints with. They are basically potatoes on chopping board, which look like an artist palette because they have painted cut ends. I'm mad about artist palettes. I've collected them and made them for years. The potatoes were cast in America because you can't send your potatoes to England without a lot of bother. Their moulds were then sent to England to a foundry I've been working with here.

PR: You're working in Bronze for the first time?

GH: Yes, they have recently arrived from the foundry; it is very exciting to make a bronze sculpture when you have never done so. It's all been a huge

learning curve as they didn't come away from the foundry as I had imagined they would look.

PR: Can you elaborate?

GH: The first choice you get when asking for bronze is they can be coloured using a patina. In my head the whole sculpture was a very dark bronze with a splash of colour at the ends of the potatoes. I didn't articulate this well; it was a strange environment so I just said I don't want them to look gold and shiny. Bronze is gold and shiny when it's first been cast. After the foundry had applied the patina, the wooden chopping board looked exactly like a piece of wood and that really confused me, as it still didn't look like bronze. I told them I was going to paint the potatoes so they offered to colour them using inks that are painted onto the bronze. The colours available were red, blue and yellow, which so happened are the same colours the potatoes I had been growing in America are naturally. Once they had done the colouring I was like 'NO', this isn't supposed to happen, they look like the real thing. They're supposed to be sculpture, not a piece of realism. It was a whole new journey, a road down which I have been learning what you can do with bronze.



George Hopton
Small Potato Palette, 2010
Bronze and acrylic, 30 x 20 x 6cm
Image courtesy the artist



Georgia Hopton
Medium size veg print, 2009
Acrylic on newsprint, 260.5 x 45.5cm, unframed
Image courtesy the artist and Poppy Sebbs Gallery

PR: You paint, sculpt and grow your pieces suggesting a pleasure in developing an intimacy with each stage of your practice.

GH: It's as simple as, 'now I can do that with that, oh and now I can do that with that.' It's a matter of using something to make an image, to have it lying around and almost out of the corner of your eye see it in another way.

Like noticing out of sheer desperation, here I am growing my first flowers then my first vegetables. They come up out of the ground and they look like sculptures, my relationship with them is not only one of total pleasure but that I am becoming a gardener. This notion in time turns to frustration as I think I am not a gardener I am an artist. So what the hell is going on here?

Eventually, literally gathering up some vegetables I took them into the studio at our farm plucked them on the table, folded my arms and I looked at them saying, come on, come on you, be or do something for me I can't just be growing you and eating you it's not enough. It was at this point I started to take my clothes off, get my camera out and began shooting some photos. When it happened it was like a revelation. Out of that frustration had grown this final act. As soon as the step was made it became yes of course it's work and they are materials everything in that garden is material for work because it is what I am interested in.



Georgie Hepton
The Easter Egg Hunt, 2008

Giclee print on fibre paper, 15.2 x 20.2cm
Edition 4, 2 Apis, unframed

Image courtesy the artist and Poppy Selvie Gallery

PR: How long did it take, to shift the perception within your self from Georgie as burgeoning gardener having retreated from Art back towards Georgie's as much the artist as ever?

GH: I reference it to seasons, it definitely wasn't the first season I grew vegetables and it might not have been the second, I'd say it was the third. That was when I took things into the studio as opposed to the kitchen. The first season with gardening doesn't count; you have no idea what you are doing. I don't even remember what it was I was able to grow, but very little. It was much more serious the second season and by the third season I felt I knew what I was doing.

PR: Do you think it has taught you more about art than you previously knew?

GH: Yes definitely, absolutely. I have in the past set up rules for myself as an

artist. Rules, I absolutely don't want but just don't seem to have any control over. They are about what you are not allowed to do, what you are allowed to do and levels of pleasure and pain. I don't necessarily mean I have to be crying and weeping and pulling out my hair before I know I have made a good piece of work but for instance, if I am doodling or feel that I am doodling it would have been very hard for me to look at that work and think that it could become something. It went in the draw or the bin.

PR: Your photographs connect me with the spirit of Lee Miller, Man Ray. The 'Naked Gardener' is at once glamorous and mysterious yet posed and reminiscent European cubism, 'a nude in motion'. The series also harks towards a fifties domestic American advertising style. Living part of your life in the US as you do and partly in England how do these influences measure with you if at all?

GH: I find myself attached to the Technicolour 50's vision of America, I love Doris Day films, I love musicals and I love the pop art Pepsi cola look. It isn't what I want to make and I don't feel the photos are quite doing that, they are engaging with the style but there is something else happening. When we made the decision to live half of our life in America it may have seemed a little weird. At that point everybody had his or her fears, not so much anymore with Obama but before that it was like what is going on there? Of course the politics are impossible to ignore and the whole way the society is run has a weird homogenous quality it is so different from Europe, there feels little room for idiosyncrasy. Maybe that apple pie image becomes more necessary to hold onto because there are some really yucky things to get to grips with within

aspects of American society.

It is great being there and at the same time its weird and you wonder why you are.

PR: Placing your self prominently in these pictures, what led to this direction of exposure in the work?

GH: Well, I had made some films previously and I was always in front of the camera. It was not a clear intention to be in front of the camera though I did discover that embodying another persona was a nice thing to take up, more emblem than persona really. In one film I am a Pierrot, in another a vague attempt at DeGus' Dancer, in another a stereotype American farmers wife.

Having tried taking the photos with just the vegetables; they felt too entrenched in referencing magazines and still life photography. There was a tiny reference to Arcimbaldo's fruit and vegetable portraits but there was not enough of anything

else. I felt there had to be another element and that element was myself. It felt right making them, but it is really hard to explain how they ended up looking like they do, to be honest it was dictated by the vegetable. In my naivety I imagined I could pick up a vegetable place myself in front of the camera and it would be just be weird. It was erotic immediately and I hadn't thought of myself as making erotic art, not that I am not interested it just never occurred that it would come out of me.

PR: I wanted to know if there was any sense of you having a dialogue with the skin, the body and the form of the vegetable in comparison to your own. 'You are what you eat' perhaps?

GH: I am looking at the relationship between myself my shape, weight and texture with that of the object I have grown like a sort of compare and contrast. That sentence 'you are what you eat' could be exchanged with 'I am what I make' or 'I am what I chose to work with'. Yes, I am definitely trying to say that.

My relationship with subject and material is incredibly vital and intimate to me. It takes a lot of photographs to produce the one that you can carry on looking at when it is your own body in the picture. That sounds like I am being incredibly vain but when you make a image you are very critical of every single millimeter, so if much of the picture is taken up with your body you will be even more



Georgia Hayton
The Easter Egg Hunt, 2008
Giclée print on film paper, 13.2 x 20.2cm
Edition 4, 2 Apr, unsigned
Image courtesy the artist and Poppy Selzer Gallery



Georgia Hayton
The Long Gourd, 2009
Giclée print on fibre paper, 15.2 x 20.2cm
Edition 4, 2 Apr, unsigned
Image courtesy the artist and Poppy Sebou Gallery

critical because you want it to be there for a reason. It is not that I am exploring the beauty of my body by any means it is a compare and contrast discussion predominantly. Look at that thigh alongside that Gourd', it's quite interesting the difference between, the similarity and the difference, the similarity is probably what really interests me.

PR: How did you decide upon the scale of these photographs, they are smaller than I expected?

GH: I think it was very apparent from the word go that they ought to be small because they were erotic. I wanted you to look into them with the body. It is funny; when you show your work to people they generally want you to make it bigger it doesn't matter if it's a drawing, a painting or a sculpture. I'm the opposite I always wish to make things smaller, it's either because I'm embarrassed or I like small things I can't quite decide.

PR: What are your ambitions for the work?

GH: That's a very good question because I am already wondering if I shouldn't make this work any more. It is so about me, my body and it is impossible to not actually get more critical as the seasons go by because your body doesn't look the same. These photographs were taken over three/four years. Every summer I'd grow the vegetables, get them into the studio

take my clothes off and take a photograph. Saying, oh my god that arm didn't look like that last year.

PR: Have you ever put yourself into any of your sculptural works?

GH: No, I have thought about it, I have been toying with the possibilities of casting parts of me with the vegetables but it's a very fine line between there being some mystery in the work and there being just a figurative sculpture, I can't quite see it yet so I'm unsure as if I'm ready.

PR: Previously your inspirations have been the Pierrot, glitter etc. Have you moved on now or are those symbols still poignant for you?

GH: They are still poignant for me; for instance the photo of the dinosaur gound looks to me like a reference to the Harlequin stick. Harlequins used these little batons which they pretend fight with. Then you have the magic wand, which I have worked with in sculptures and drawings before. I see the vegetables as replacements, natural versions.

The photo called 'Hiding the Crown' is a Crown pumpkin under an apron, which is like a magic trick, the rabbit out of the hat sort of thing.

PR: Would you agree then that the greater focus for you is the process, the making and not actually the final pieces?



*Georgia Hayton
Hiding the Crown, 2008
13.5 x 20.2cm softwood
Giclée print on fibre paper
Edition of 4, 2 Apr*

Image courtesy the artist and Poppy Sebire Gallery

GH: Yes, definitely it's the alchemy it's the doing and making that's where the magic lies for me.

PR: Your originally from North Yorkshire, do you still feel any of that Yorkshire heritage within you as an artist today?

GH: The older you get the more you feel some sort of bond with where you are from. I definitely rejected it for a long time. I didn't want anything to do with it I felt the best thing I had every done was leaving Yorkshire and the last thing I ever wanted to do was return. I have family there and I love them very much, the countryside is very beautiful and there are some lovely people but I feel you couldn't be an artist and live in Yorkshire in terms of creative expansion. It felt completely acceptable to go to America to make work. I could never move back to Yorkshire though there is certainly the Yorkshire girl in me without a doubt.

PR: How do you relate to a parallel of David Hockney, he being a Yorkshire native, having lived in America has then returned to Yorkshire to make new work?

GH: He really only came back to England because you can smoke here which I think is absolutely hysterical and I hate smoking. What's interesting about his recent paintings, which I'm sure you have noticed they look exactly where I live in America? They look nothing like the Yorkshire where he is living and painting. They look exactly like upstate New York. When I walked into the exhibitions at the Tate to see them it was just like being at home in America. He sits and draws on the dullest corner of a road in Yorkshire where there is a really uninteresting barn and makes these fantastic, richly coloured, grand landscapes. Yorkshire is exquisite but the corner that David Hockney is painting on is not. Maybe what happens when you leave a place, it enables you to follow flights of fancy that you wouldn't have done so previously. I certainly was able to.

