

Gina Birch Turbo Drives MÜ Through her Cornucopia of Creativity!

by Lisa Azarmi

Gina Birch is an English musician, painter and filmmaker, best known as a founding member of post-punk rock band The Raincoats, which she formed with Ana da Silva when they both attended Hornsey School of Art in 1977. Armed with a super 8 camera she made many short films and later graduated from The Royal College of Art in film direction. She has collaborated with artists and musicians in projects such as Red Crayola, Dorothy, Big Bottom, The Hangovers and The Gluts. Interest from Kurt Cobain helped to bring The Raincoats back into the public eye and a book about their first album by Jenn Pelly has contributed to the celebration of its 40th anniversary. Gina had a solo painting show in Paris in March 2020, a week after The Raincoats performance at the Centre Pompidou. Her co-directed film, 'Stories from the She Punks' travelled the UK with Doc n Roll Film Festival last year and a documentary about The Raincoats is still in the pipeline. Gina is currently busy painting in her studio and caught up with me after a year of lockdown.

Lisa Azarmi - You're back into your mojo, your visual/creative roots after an intense re-connecting spell in the studio at The Royal Drawing School and Turps Banana. Has this informed your way of looking, changed your creative perception, do you think it's made you a 'better' more skilful artist?

Gina Birch - Oh it's been amazing! Painting every day in a studio of 10 people gives you muscles to just drive forward with what you are doing. I lost my shyness or inhibitions though, I reckon when I played in 'The Raincoats' I barely knew what to do with my fingers, and my voice was wobbly and untrained. I got to the point where I realised how much of a disability shyness was. Turps Banana definitely turbo drives your practice, I already had quite a strong work ethic. I've always been driven to do things every day, be it painting, sewing, filmmaking or songwriting. That probably stems from a fear of not existing - ha!

LA - The thought of not existing is certainly a good motivation, so much to do and such little time! Do you have any fixed ideas about what you want to say through your current visual/painting practice?

GB - I don't have a fixed idea of what I want to say. It's just me and my everyday thoughts and responses to things. A sense of fairness, equality, justice in a good moment, and rage, wildness, savagery in an even better one! I suppose it's like my songs, observations of the every - day that amuse or interest me, that make me have to get something out. It could be sadness, joy, rage or a thirst for something I haven't seen before. I'm also more and more interested in the 'how' of the paint. The way paint may be thick or scratchy, or barely covering the raw canvas. There is raw emotion in the paint itself, and I am finding that more and more exciting. I tend to use a lot of charcoal and soft pastels, then acrylic paint, and then sometimes oil glazes. I've been experimenting with collage and with printed canvas collage too, amidst a melee of other paint media.

When I went to The National Gallery to draw from the Old Masters, I often found myself in front of the 'Rape of the Sabine Women' by Rubens, which dated from the mid-1600s. A strategically placed bench seemed to invite study. It was interesting to me that this abduction of women in quite a sexual way is deemed 'high art'. Obviously, it's painted with sensuality, incredible power and skill. I found myself thinking about how this might work in a more contemporary personal way. It dawned on me that the experiences many of my friends and I had as young women, were actually in need of processing.

LA - I totally get that, it's important to bring contemporary context to the journey. Disappearing into your melee of different mediums and the delicious journey and experience of using paint. You've also journeyed through the Great Masters and 're-told history', told it through the female gaze, why's that SO important to you?

GB - I love those paintings, the way they're painted, but the subject matter bothered me. I learned so much trying to copy some of them. I thought I would graffiti onto them... but as Ivan Seal said, I 'vandalised' them in some way. I think this is a much better word to describe my practice. I scribbled over them with fluorescent pink paint. I turned men into women, I revealed men's genitals. I sent in the Guerrilla Girls to rescue women being abducted. I had the power of a superhero! In a way, it was the culmination of what interested me at the time about painting. I wanted to be a 'good' painter by copying and studying traditional painting... I also loved the fast and furious way of drawing and painting, the immediate emotional response to something through a paintbrush or charcoal. I thought, 'this story is funny, this one is shocking, this one I've never told anyone, am I able to paint it?' As I studied more and more, I realised I did want to paint things I hadn't seen in contemporary painting from that period. I wanted to explore these stories... through narrative, figurative painting.

12

GINA BIRCH TURBO DRIVES MÜ THROUGH HER CORNUCOPIA OF CREATIVITY!

One of the first paintings I made at Turps was called 'Still Life with Beers', I recently reworked part of it and feel happy with it now. My most recent painting is called 'Vigil' in Response to Violence Against Women in the Light of Sarah Everard. I've also always been inspired by modern dance, and I used the poetry of gesture and shadow for this piece.

LA - The plight of Sarah Everard certainly shocked us all, your painting 'Vigil' is very moving, full of lament and grace. What is it about women's rights and Iranian civil rights that has motivated



you to continue to protest through paintings?

GB - It was International Women's Day 2019, and I heard about the amazing woman Nasrin Sotoudeh. She had been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 138 lashes, for what? For being a human rights lawyer and defending women's rights particularly. I decided on that day to paint an enormous picture of her face, so tender, so strong. It made me want to sob that smart women were being sent back to the dark ages by dominant men, who somehow fear these women, for having rights of their own. These 'religious' men decide to take away women's rights to dress and behave as women of the modern age. Obviously, women having autonomy scared the hell out of them! I don't expect my work to do anything more than introducing people to her name and her sentence. Maybe this is a small way to contribute.

LA - I agree, and I think your contribution is massive, the time is ripe for protest and for these images to be seen, questions raised. Do you think female painters have been forgotten throughout history? Is there a female painter in history who you admire, or a period in history you'd like to visit? And, what would you say to this artist if you bumped into her?

GB - Just, for now, I will choose a period of more recent history. Pauline Boty was at the Royal College of Art in the 1960s, and this seemed like an amazing period to be alive and involved in the world of painting - if you were male!! Pauline was a great painter, outspoken and her subject matter was challenging, interesting and female in content, but the art scene was singularly inhospitable to women. She suffered from the typical intense chauvinism of the day and wasn't taken too seriously. Much of her work was destroyed or missing. So... I'd probably go to an Ursula Le Guin Sci-Fi novel where the world is constructed differently. And of course, I'd love to have been taught to paint in the way of the Old Masters but no thanks, I don't want to go back there!

LA - On that note, what do you think about the way, in the past, men have often suppressed their female partners/muses and taken credit for their work and ideas. Maybe things are changing for the better, and we're beginning to see the injustice, across every discipline. Does anyone in particular strike you in this regard?

GB - Oh yes... women and people of colour are having a much better time now in terms of recognition, exhibitions and so forth. Tracey Emin revealed the power of the personal, the tragic, the every day, the power of women's creativity. I particularly love the wit of observation in Rebecca Horn's

sculptures, the power of Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono's 'Just doing it my way and I don't give a shit'.

I'm so thrilled that older women who've gone unrecognised for years are getting their moment, for example, Caroline Coon who has been painting for over 40 years with no recognition, until now. Caroline and I are in conversation about her painting, in the new Turps Banana magazine, with great pictures of her work.

With regard to men having received all the limelight, and sometimes appropriating women's work, it has just been par for the course in our patriarchal culture. It's hard for any couple who are both artists, one will often get the recognition leaving the partner more in the shadows. That's happening for men now too. It's painful and we feel more for those men because it feels wrong, but it's been happening to women without comment for aeons.

LA - Things are changing but we have a very long way to go. Has lockdown affected you and your practice, and what will you do when we are eventually allowed 'out' again?

GB - Lockdown has been ok for me. I do look forward to seeing my family properly, hanging out with my friends and going to exhibitions and live music. But... I have a new dog called Bug, so I'm out walking on Hampstead Heath every morning at 7 am and that is wild! It's so great seeing the weather each day, so different, the wind in my hair, the sun on my face, a joyful dog and my lovely partner Mike walking with me. Then I usually go to paint for about 4 hours, and come home and do music or writing. I make food, watch films. I'm very lucky. It's more like living in a small village even though I'm in North London.

LA - I live in South London, and culture has always been a huge part of my routine. I can't wait for the museums and galleries to open their doors. What's the first exhibition you want to see once this is all over?

GB - Oh, everything... I want to go to The National Gallery, the Tate, the Serpentine, the RA and all the amazing independent galleries. I'm keen to see the Lynette Yeadon - Boakye paintings. I saw her work at the Serpentine some years ago and was very taken with it. I have booked everything I can go to see so far... excited.

LA - Me too, it feels almost daunting, the choice we have in London is so amazing. Then there is the prospect of travel again, and work, have you got anything big planned?

GB - It may not sound big, but it is to me... I have a 7" vinyl single coming out on Third Man Records, in the very near future.

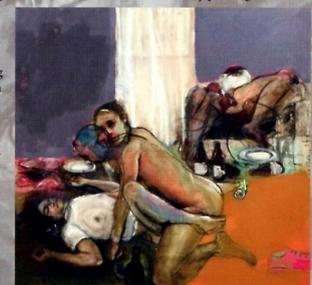
It's probably the best song I've ever written, and I have two of my paintings on the front and back covers. Youth made a great ambient mix of it too, which is on one side of the 7". I'm also working on a follow up full-length record.

Concerning painting, I have a fantastic gallery in Paris, Gallerie Arnaud Lefebvre, where I had a solo painting show last year and I've also been in many of their group shows. I'm starting to think about galleries in London. I hope I will have something sorted by the end of the year. I'll probably put on a show of my work in a disused shop in town in the not too distant future.

LA - Boom, it all sounds jam-packed, thank you!

ginabirchpainting.com
Insta: Gina Birch

Background - The Guerrilla Girls Rescue the Sabine Women



Still Life with Beers

By Lisa Azarmi

13

Gina Birch is an English musician, painter and filmmaker, best known as a founding member of post-punk rock band The Raincoats, which she formed with Ana da Silva when they both attended Hornsey School of Art in 1977. Armed with a super 8 camera she made many short films and later graduated from The Royal College of Art in film direction. She has collaborated with artists and musicians in projects such as Red Crayola, Dorothy, Big Bottom, The Hangovers and The Gluts. Interest from Kurt Cobain helped to bring The Raincoats back into the public eye and a book about their first album by Jenn Pelly has contributed to the celebration of its 40th anniversary. Gina had a solo painting show in Paris in March 2020, a week after The Raincoats performance at the Centre Pompidou. Her co-directed film, 'Stories from the She Punks' travelled the UK with Doc n Roll Film Festival last year and a documentary about The Raincoats is still in the pipeline.

Gina is currently busy painting in her studio and caught up with me after a year of lockdown.

LISA AZARMI – You’re back into your mojo, your visual/creative roots after an intense re-connecting spell in the studio at The Royal Drawing School and Turps Banana. Has this informed your way of looking, changed your creative perception, do you think it’s made you a ‘better’ more skilful artist?

GINA BIRCH - *Oh it's been amazing! Painting every day in a studio of 10 people gives you muscles to just drive forward with what you are doing. I lost my shyness or inhibitions though, I reckon when I played in 'The Raincoats'. I barely knew what to do with my fingers, and my voice was wobbly and untrained. I got to the point where I realised how much of a disability shyness was.*

Turps Banana definitely turbo drives your practice, I already had quite a strong work ethic. I've always been driven to do things every day, be it painting, sewing, filmmaking or songwriting. That probably stems from a fear of not existing - ha!

LA – The thought of not existing is certainly a good motivation, so much to do and such little time! Do you have any fixed ideas about what you want to say through your current visual/painting practice?

GB - *I don't have a fixed idea of what I want to say. It's just me and my everyday thoughts and responses to things. A sense of fairness, equality, justice in a good moment, and rage, wildness, savagery in an even better one!*

I suppose it's like my songs, observations of the every-day that amuse or interest me, that make me have to get something out. It could be sadness, joy, rage or a thirst for something I haven't seen before.

I'm also more and more interested in the 'how' of the paint. The way paint may be thick or scratchy, or barely covering the raw canvas. There is raw emotion in the paint itself, and I am finding that more and more exciting. I tend to use a lot of charcoal and soft pastels, then acrylic paint, and then sometimes oil glazes. I've been experimenting with collage and with printed canvas collage too, amidst a melee of other paint media.

When I went to The National Gallery to draw from the Old Masters, I often found myself in front of the 'Rape of the Sabine Women' by Reubens, which dated from the mid-1600s. A strategically placed bench seemed to invite study. It was interesting to me that this abduction of women in quite a sexual way is deemed 'high art'. Obviously, it's painted with sensuality, incredible power and skill. I found myself thinking about how this might work in a more contemporary personal way.

It dawned on me that the experiences many of my friends and I had as young women, were actually in need of processing.

LA – I totally get that, it’s important to bring contemporary context to the viewer. Disappearing into your melee of different mediums and the delicious journey and experience of using paint. You’ve also journeyed through the Great Masters and ‘re-told history’, told it through the female gaze, why’s that SO important to you?

GB - *I love those paintings, the way they're painted, but the subject matter bothered me. I learned so much trying to copy some of them.*

I thought I would graffiti onto them... but as Ivan Seal said, I 'vandalised' them in some way. I think this is a much better word to describe my practice. I scrawled over them with fluorescent pink paint, I turned men into women, I revealed men's genitals, I sent in the Guerilla Girls to rescue women being abducted. I had the power of a superhero!

In a way, it was the culmination of what interested me at the time about painting. I wanted to be a 'good' painter by copying and studying traditional painting... I also loved the fast and furious way of drawing and painting, the immediate emotional response to something through a paintbrush or charcoal.

I thought, 'this story is funny, this one is shocking, this one I've never told anyone, am I able to paint it?' As I studied more and more, I realised I did want to paint things I hadn't seen in contemporary painting from that period. I wanted to explore these stories.... through narrative, figurative painting.

One of the first paintings I made at Turps was called 'Still Life with Beers', I recently reworked part of it and feel happy with it now.

My most recent painting is called 'Vigil' in Response to Violence Against Women in the Light of Sarah Everard.

I've also always been inspired by modern dance, and I used the poetry of gesture and shadow for this piece.

LA – The plight of Sarah Everard certainly shocked us all, your painting ‘Vigil’, is very moving, full of lament and grace.

What is it about women’s rights and Iranian civil rights that has motivated you to continue to protest through paintings?

GB - *It was International Women’s Day 2019, and I heard about the amazing woman Nasrin Sotoudeh. She had been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 138 lashes, for what? For being a human rights lawyer and defending women's rights particularly.*

I decided on that day, to paint an enormous picture of her face, so tender, so strong. It made me want to sob that smart women were being sent back to the dark ages by dominant men, who somehow fear these women for having rights of their own.

These ‘religious’ men decide to take away women's rights to dress and behave as women of the modern age. Obviously, women having autonomy scared the hell out of them! I don't expect my work to do anything more than introducing people to her name and her sentence. Maybe this is a small way to contribute.

LA – I agree, and I think your contribution is massive, the time is ripe for protest and for these images to be seen, questions raised.

Do you think female painters have been forgotten throughout history? Is there a female painter in history who you admire, or a period in history you’d like to visit? And, what would you say to this artist if you bumped into her?

GB - *Just, for now, I will choose a period of more recent history. Pauline Boty was at the Royal College of Art in the 1960s, and this seemed like an amazing period to be alive and involved in the world of painting - if you were male!! Pauline was a great painter, outspoken and her subject matter was challenging, interesting and female in content, but the art scene was singularly inhospitable to women. She suffered from the typical intense chauvinism of the day and wasn’t taken too seriously. Much of her work was destroyed or missing.*

So... I’d probably go to an Ursula Le Guin Sci-Fi novel where the world is constructed differently. And of course, I’d love to have been taught to paint in the way of the Old Masters but no thanks, I don’t want to go back there!

LA – On that note, what do you think about the way, in the past, men have often suppressed their female partners/muses and taken credit for their work and ideas. Maybe things are changing for the better, and we’re beginning to see the injustice, across every discipline. Does anyone in particular strike you in this regard?

GB - *Oh yes.. women and people of colour are having a much better time now in terms of recognition, exhibitions and so forth. Tracey Emin revealed the power of the personal, the tragic, the every day, the power of women’s creativity. I particularly love the wit of observation in Rebecca Horn’s sculptures, the power of Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono’s “just doing it my way and I don’t give a shit“.*

I’m so thrilled that older women who’ve gone unrecognised for years are getting their moment, for example, Caroline Coon who has been painting for over 40 years with no recognition, until now. Caroline and I are in conversation about her painting, in the new Turps Banana magazine, with great pictures of her work.

With regard to men having received all the limelight, and sometimes appropriating women's work, it has just been par for the course in our patriarchal culture. It's hard for any couple who are both artists, one will often get the recognition leaving the partner more in the shadows. That’s happening for men now too. It’s painful and we feel more for those men because it feels wrong, but it’s been happening to women without comment for aeons.

LA – Things are changing but we have a very long way to go.

Has lockdown affected you and your practice, and what will you do when we are eventually allowed ‘out’ again?

GB - *Lockdown has been ok for me. I do look forward to seeing my family properly, hanging out with my friends and*

going to exhibitions and live music. But... I have a new dog called Bug, so I'm out walking on Hampstead Heath every morning at 7 am and that is wild! It's so great seeing the weather each day, so different, the wind in my hair, the sun on my face, a joyful dog and my lovely partner Mike walking with me.

Then I usually go to paint for about 4 hours, and come home and do music or writing. I make food, watch films. I'm very lucky. It's more like living in a small village even though I'm in North London.

LA – I live in South London, and culture has always been a huge part of my routine. I can't wait for the museums and galleries to open their doors. What's the first exhibition you want to see once this is all over?

GB - Oh, everything... I want to go to The National Gallery, the Tate, the Serpentine, the RA and all the amazing independent galleries. I'm keen to see the Lynette Yiadom-Boakye paintings. I saw her work at the Serpentine some years ago and was very taken with it. I have booked everything I can go to see so far... excited.

LA – Me too, it feels almost daunting, the choice we have in London is so amazing. Then there is the prospect of travel again, and work, have you got anything big planned?

GB - It may not sound big, but it is to me... I have a 7" vinyl single coming out on Third Man Records, in the very near future. It's probably the best song I've ever written, and I have two of my paintings on the front and back covers. Youth made a great ambient mix of it too, which is on one side of the 7". I'm also working on a follow up full-length record. Concerning painting, I have a fantastic gallery in Paris, Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, where I had a solo painting show last year and I've also been in many of their group shows. I'm starting to think about galleries in London. I hope I will have something sorted by the end of the year. I'll probably put on a show of my work in a disused shop in town in the not too distant future.

LA – Boom, it all sounds jam-packed, thank you!

Traduction française

Gina Birch Turbo Drives MÜ Through her Cornucopia of Creativity ! de Lisa Azarmi

Gina Birch est une musicienne anglaise, peintre et cinéaste, particulièrement connue comme membre fondatrice du groupe post-punk Les Raincoats, qu'elle a formé avec Ana da Silva quand elles ont toutes deux suivi l'École d'art de Hornsey en 1977. Équipée d'une caméra super 8 elle a fait de nombreux courts-métrages et a ensuite passé le diplôme du Royal College of Arts dans la section film. Elle a collaboré sur des projets avec des artistes et des musiciens comme Red Crayola, Dorothy, Big Bottom, The Hangovers, et The Gluts. L'intérêt que leur a porté Kurt Cobain a aidé à ramener Les Raincoats dans l'œil du public et un livre de Jenn Pelly a contribué à la célébration du 40^e anniversaire de leur premier album. Gina a eu une exposition personnelle de sa peinture à Paris en mars 2020, une semaine après le concert des Raincoats au Centre Pompidou. Le film qu'elle a co-réalisé « Stories from the She Punks » a circulé au Royaume-Uni avec le Festival de Films Doc n Roll l'année dernière et un documentaire sur les Raincoats est encore en cours.

Gina est actuellement occupée à peindre dans son atelier et s'est entretenue avec moi après un an de confinement.

LISA AZARMI – Tu es à nouveau dans ton « mojo », dans tes racines visuelles/créatives après une période intense de reconnexion à l'atelier de la Royal Drawing School et à Turps Banana. Est-ce que cela a modifié ta façon de voir, changé ta perception créative, penses-tu que cela t'a transformé en une artiste « meilleure » et plus douée ?

GB - *Oh ça a été incroyable ! Peindre tous les jours dans un atelier de 10 personnes vous donne des muscles pour simplement avancer dans ce qu'on fait. J'ai perdu ma timidité ou mes inhibitions, je crois, quand je jouais avec les Raincoats. Je savais à peine quoi faire avec mes doigts, et ma voix était chancelante et pas travaillée. J'en suis arrivée au point de me rendre compte combien la timidité était un handicap.*

Turps Banana donne sans aucun doute une accélération folle à sa pratique. J'avais déjà une éthique de travail assez forte. J'ai toujours été amenée à faire des choses quotidiennement, que ce soit de la peinture, de la couture, des films ou des chansons. Cela provient certainement de la peur de ne pas exister - ha !

LA – La pensée de ne pas exister est certainement une bonne motivation, tant à faire et si peu de temps ! As-tu une idée fixée d'avance de ce que tu veux dire par ta pratique actuelle de peinture/art visuel ?

GB - *Je n'ai pas d'idée arrêtée de ce que je veux dire. C'est seulement moi et mes pensées de tous les jours et mes réactions aux choses. Un sens de beauté, d'égalité, de justice dans un bon moment, et de rage, de folie, de sauvagerie dans un moment encore meilleur !*

Je suppose que c'est comme avec mes chansons, en observant le quotidien qui m'amuse ou m'intéresse, qui me fait en sortir quelque chose. Ça peut être de la tristesse, de la joie, de la rage ou une soif de quelque chose que je n'ai jamais vu avant.

Je suis aussi de plus en plus intéressée par le « comment » de la peinture. La façon dont la peinture peut être épaisse ou rêche, ou à peine couvrir la toile vierge. Il y a une émotion brute de la peinture en soi, et cela m'intéresse de plus en plus. J'ai tendance à utiliser beaucoup de fusain et de pastels doux, puis de la peinture acrylique, et puis parfois du glacis à l'huile. J'ai fait des expériences avec des collages et avec des collages de toiles imprimées également, parmi tout un tas d'autres média de peinture.

Quand j'allais à la National Gallery pour dessiner à partir des maîtres anciens, je me suis souvent trouvée devant « L'Enlèvement des Sabines » de Rubens qui remonte au milieu des années 1600. Une banquette stratégiquement placée semblait une invitation à l'étudier. C'était pour moi intéressant que cet enlèvement de femmes dans un sens tout à fait sexuel soit qualifié de « grand art ». De toute évidence, c'est peint avec sensualité, une puissance incroyable et de l'habileté. J'en suis venue à me demander comment cela pourrait fonctionner avec une façon de faire plus contemporaine et personnelle. Je me suis rendue compte que les expériences vécues par beaucoup d'amies et moi en tant que jeunes femmes avaient en fait besoin qu'on s'en occupe.

LA – Je comprends tout à fait cela, c'est important d'apporter un contexte contemporain à la personne qui regarde. De disparaître dans ta grande diversité de médiums et le délicieux voyage et l'expérience de se servir de la peinture. Tu as également voyagé à travers les grands maîtres et as « redis » l'histoire, tu l'as dite à travers le regard féminin, pourquoi est-ce AUCSI important pour toi ?

GB - *J'aime beaucoup ces peintures, la façon dont elles sont peintes, mais le sujet traité me gêne. J'ai tellement appris à essayer de copier certaines d'entre elles.*

Je pensais que je ferai des graffiti par dessus... mais comme a dit Ivan Seal, je les ai « vandalisées » d'une façon ou d'une autre. Je pense que c'est un bien meilleur mot pour décrire ma pratique. J'ai gribouillé par-dessus avec de la peinture rose fluorescente, j'ai changé les hommes en femmes, j'ai mise à nue les parties génitales des hommes, j'ai envoyé les Guerilla Girls à la rescousse des femmes que l'on enlevaient. J'avais le pouvoir d'un super héros !

D'une certaine manière, c'était le couronnement de ce qui m'intéressait à l'époque à propos de la peinture... J'aimais aussi la façon rapide et furieuse de dessiner et de peindre, la réponse émotionnelle immédiate à quelque chose par le moyen du pinceau ou du fusain.

Je pensais « cette histoire est drôle, celle-ci est choquante, celle-ci je ne l'ai jamais raconté à personne, est-ce que je suis capable de la peindre ? » Au fur et à mesure que j'étudiais, j'ai pris conscience que je voulais avant tout peindre des choses que je n'avais pas vues dans la peinture contemporaine de cette période. Je voulais explorer ces histoires... à travers la peinture narrative et figurative.

Une des premières peintures que j'ai faites à Turps s'appelait « Still Life with Beer » (« Nature morte aux bières »). J'ai retravaillé récemment une partie, et j'en suis contente maintenant.

Ma peinture la plus récente s'appelle « Vigil in Response to Violence Against Women in the Light of Sarah Everard » (« Veille en réponse à la violence faite aux femmes à la lumière de Sarah Everard »).

J'ai aussi été inspirée par la danse moderne, et j'ai utilisé la poésie des gestes et des ombres pour cette pièce.

LA – La détresse de Sarah Everard nous a certainement choquée tous et toutes, ta peinture « Vigil » est très émouvante, pleine de lamentation et de grâce.

Qu'y a-t-il dans les droits des femmes et les droits civils iraniens pour t'avoir amené à protester encore au moyen de la peinture ?

GB - *C'était le Journée Internationale des Femmes en 2019, et j'ai entendu parler de l'incroyable femme Nasrine Sotoudeh. Elle a été condamnée à 38 ans de prison et 138 coups de fouet, pourquoi ? Pour être une avocate des droits humains et défendre le droit des femmes en particulier.*

J'ai décidé ce jour-là, de peindre un énorme tableau de son visage, si tendre, si fort. Ça m'a donné envie de pleurer qu'une femme intelligente soit renvoyée à l'âge obscur par des hommes dominants, qui d'une certaine manière craignaient ces femmes qui faisaient valoir leur propres droits.

Ces hommes « religieux » décident d'ôter aux femmes le droit de s'habiller et de se comporter en femme des temps modernes. Il est évident que les femmes ayant de l'autonomie leur font une peur bleue ! Je ne m'attends pas à ce que mon travail fasse autre chose que de faire connaître son nom et sa peine encourue. Peut-être que c'est une petite façon de contribuer.

LA – Je suis d'accord et je pense que ta contribution a un grand poids, le temps est mûr pour protester et pour que ces images soient vues, que les questions soient soulevées.

Penses-tu que les peintres femmes ont été oubliées tout au long de l'histoire ? Y a-t-il une peintre femme dans l'histoire que tu admires, ou une période dans l'histoire que tu aimerais visiter ? Et que dirais-tu à cette artiste si tu en venais à la rencontrer ?

GB - *Disons pour le moment que je choisirai une période de l'histoire la plus récente. Pauline Boty était au Royal College of Art dans les années 60, et ça semblait une période extraordinaire à vivre et à connaître en tant que peintre — si on était un homme !! Pauline était une grande peintre, très directe, et le thème de sa peinture était stimulant, intéressant et féminin dans son contenu, mais la scène de l'art était singulièrement inhospitalier aux femmes. Elle a souffert de l'intense chauvinisme typique de l'époque et n'était pas vraiment prise au sérieux. Une grande partie de son travail a été détruit ou n'a pas été retrouvé. Donc... J'irai probablement chez un roman de science-fiction d'Ursula Le Guin où le monde est construit différemment. Et bien sûr j'aurais adoré avoir appris la peinture à la manière des maîtres anciens mais non merci, je ne veux pas retourner là !*

LA – Sur cette note, que penses-tu de la façon dont, dans le passé, les hommes ont souvent supprimés leurs compagnes/muses et se sont attribués le crédit de leur travail et de leurs idées ? Peut-être que les choses sont en train de changer pour le mieux, et que nous commençons à voir l'injustice, à travers chaque discipline. Est-ce qu'il y a une personne en particulier qui te frappe à cet égard ?

GB - *Oh oui... les femmes et les gens de couleur sont maintenant à une époque bien plus favorable en termes de reconnaissance, d'expositions etc. Tracey Emin a révélé le pouvoir du personnel, du tragique, du quotidien, le pouvoir de la créativité des femmes. J'aime particulièrement la finesse d'observation des sculptures de Rebecca Horn, la puissance du « je le fais à ma manière et je m'en fous » de Marina Abramovic et de Yoko Ono.*

Je suis si enthousiaste que des femmes plus âgées qui ont été méconnues pendant des années connaissent le succès, par exemple Caroline Coon qui peint depuis 40 ans sans reconnaissance jusqu'à maintenant. Caroline et moi avons une conversation sur son travail, dans le nouveau Turps Banana magazine, avec de très belles images de son travail.

En ce qui concerne le fait qu'on ait donné toute la vedette aux hommes, et parfois en s'appropriant le travail des femmes, c'est tout à fait typique de notre culture patriarcale. C'est dur pour un couple d'artistes, l'un des deux aura souvent de la reconnaissance en laissant son partenaire plus dans l'ombre. C'est ce qui se passe pour les hommes aussi maintenant. C'est douloureux et nous le ressentons plus pour les hommes parce que ça n'a pas l'air juste, mais ça s'est passé pour les femmes sans commentaire depuis des lustres.

LA – Les choses changent mais nous avons un très long chemin à parcourir.

Est-ce que le confinement a eu des effets sur toi et ta pratique, et que feras-tu quand nous serons de nouveau autorisés à « sortir » ?

GB - *Le confinement s'est assez bien passé pour moi. Je suis certainement impatiente de revoir ma famille comme il se doit, sortir avec mes amis et aller à des expositions et des concerts. Mais... J'ai un nouveau chien appelé Bug, que je promène à Hampstead Heath chaque matin à 7 h et c'est fou ! C'est si bon de voir le temps qu'il fait, chaque jour, si différent, de sentir le vent dans mes cheveux, le soleil sur mon visage, un chien joyeux et mon adorable compagnon Mike qui se promène avec moi.*

Puis je vais généralement peindre pendant environ 4 heures, et je reviens chez moi et je fais de la musique ou j'écris. Je prépare à manger, regarde des films. J'ai beaucoup de chance. C'est plus comme si je vivais dans un petit village même si je suis à North London.

LA – Je vis à South London, et la culture a toujours été une partie importante de ma vie de tous les jours. J'ai tellement hâte que les musées et les galeries rouvrent. Quelle est la première exposition que tu veux voir une fois que tout ceci sera fini ?

GB - *Oh, tout... Je veux aller à la National Gallery, la Tate, la Serpentine, la Royal Academy et toutes les incroyables galeries indépendantes. Je tiens à voir les peintures de Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. J'ai vu son travail à la Serpentine il y a quelques années et il m'a beaucoup plu. J'ai réservé partout où je peux aller jusqu'à présent... vivement que ça arrive.*

LA – Moi aussi, c'est presque décourageant, le choix que nous avons à Londres est si formidable. Et puis il y a l'espoir de voyager à nouveau, et de travailler, est-ce que tu as des choses importantes de prévues ?

GB - *Ça peut ne pas sembler important, mais ça l'est pour moi... J'ai un vinyle 45 tours qui sort sur Third Man Records, dans un futur très proche.*

C'est probablement la meilleure chanson que j'aie écrite, et j'ai une peinture sur chacune des deux couvertures. Youth en a également fait un super mix ambient, qui se trouve sur une face du 45 tours. Je travaille également à la préparation d'un nouvel album complet.

En ce qui concerne la peinture, j'ai une galerie fantastique à Paris, la Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, où j'ai eu une exposition personnelle de peinture l'année dernière et j'ai également participé à plusieurs de leurs expositions collectives. Je commence à penser à des galeries à Londres. J'espère avoir trouvé quelque chose d'ici la fin de l'année. Je vais probablement organiser une exposition de mon travail dans un magasin désaffecté de la ville dans un avenir pas trop lointain.

LA – Boom, tout cela semble très bien rempli, merci !