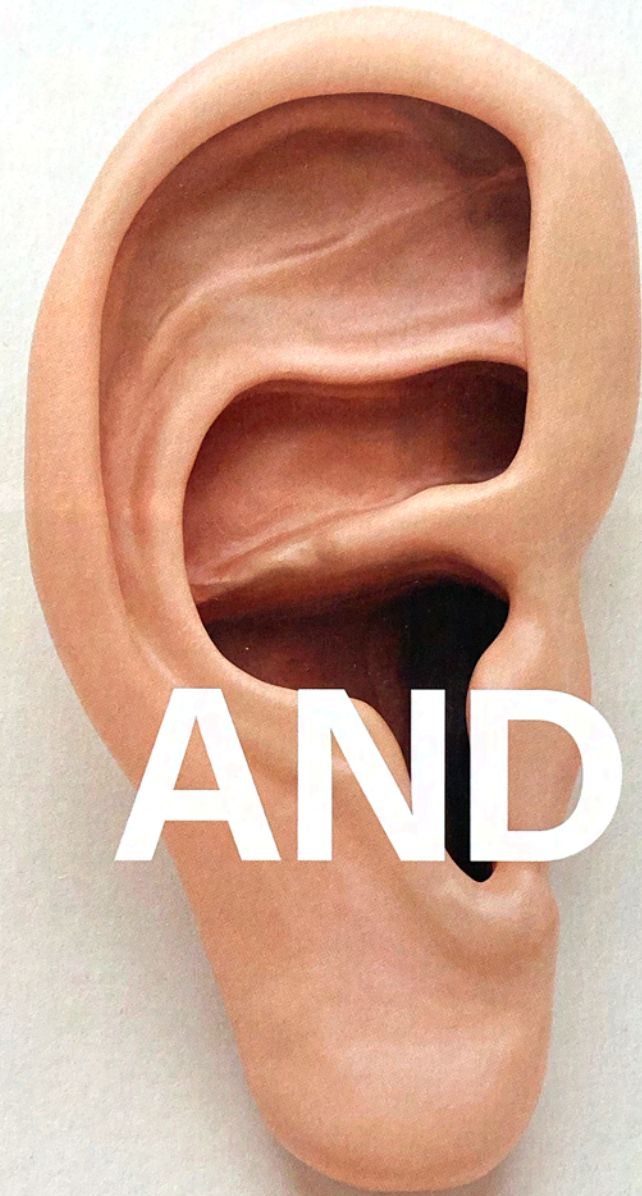


WORDS  
Francesca  
GAVIN

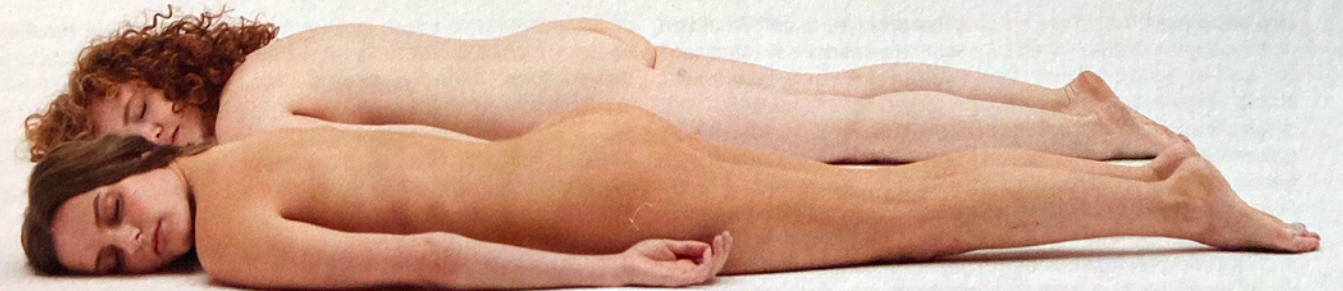
It is hard to pin down Georgina Starr's artwork. It spans sound pieces, sculptural installation, film work, narrative-led performance, drawing and choreography. There is something eerie in her playful narratives but they emerges in a bold, femme and sexy way. Born in Leeds, Starr studied at the Slade and Rijksakademie and has been a fixture in the British art scene since the 90s with exhibitions at the Tate, MoMA, Venice Biennale and Stedelijk among other spaces. 2020 was due to be a major year for Georgina with a central solo show at Tramway as part of Glasgow International, showcasing her new feature length film *Quarantaine* and a satellite performance show *Moment Memory Monument*. Despite various postponed and cancelled exhibitions in the past two years, she has managed to still to get short-listed for the highly respected Jarman Award and to create a unique performance project with Hermès. Alongside finishing her first novel, Starr is looking to create something for the stage. "The project with Hermès has made me want to do something even more spectacular, but on a bigger physical stage—something incorporating words, movement, light, sound, sculpture/sets, costumes, choreography and music. The whole shebang!"

3

# SPECTACLE



AND



# SUSPENSE



FRANCESCA GAVIN

What drew you to art? What was your experience of studying? I believe, initially, your work emerged out of sound.

GEORGINA STARR

I don't have an artistic background in terms of my family, so there was never any expectation for me to do anything remotely creative. But I was recording sound from an early age and have talked a lot before about the audio hallucination I experience as a child - odd imagined multiple voices that I was desperate to untangle. They were instrumental in sending me off on a voyage to locate where certain sounds came from and decipher their meaning. I had a small cassette recorder that I would carry everywhere recording random noises and voices as a child, I still have some of these tapes.

I collated all my sound pieces into a huge archival work in 2010 called *I am a Record*, where all the audio works over 20 years were pressed onto individual 12" vinyl records. Study-wise I did a BA in Ceramic and Glass at Middlesex and made these huge glass kinetic light sculptures

which incorporated sound too, that's how I got a place at the Slade on the MA in Sculpture. It was at the Slade where I first picked up a video camera. My first works were all sound-based though. I think it was at the Slade when I first recognised that the works I made were bigger than me, they were saying things that I could never quite articulate verbally. It was like discovering a superpower. A recording of me whistling a tune played in an empty basement corridor could have the power to bring people to tears—that's proper alchemy.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

Tell me about the plot and process of your film *Quarantaine*. How did the film relate and emerge from your Frieze Art Fair performance?

GEORGINA STARR

*Quarantaine* (2020) was definitely borne out of *Androgynous Egg*, the Frieze performance in 2017. Many of the motifs I had started to develop in that performance work were expanded upon and transferred into the film - like the eggs, the instructional poetry, portals, the Pink Ursula Material and even some of the costumes. While *Androgynous Egg* was a glimpse



into a new world, I think *Quarantaine* took you on the total journey from outside to inside, and then spat you back out again. Through the film I was able to bring the viewer up-close to everything and allow them to totally morph with this world, that's more difficult to do in a live performance work. I had been circling particular subjects for a while, predominantly alternative educational systems and ideas around metaphysical transformation.

The title was originally inspired by something I read in Celtic mythology. 'Une Quarantaine' was a period of 40 days that began on the eve of the 1st Full Moon of Spring. It's described as a time where supernatural beings could descend onto Earth and live alongside mortals, it's a liminal dangerous occasion when the barriers between the Earthly world and the Spirit world are completely dissolved, where time is suspended. This is the place where I set film. The

This page, Georgina Starr, *Quarantaine*, 40 minutes, 2020, courtesy the artist, FVU, The Huntarian, Glasgow International, Leeds Art Gallery & Art Fund.

Previous spread, Photo credit: Amy Gwatkin.

women entering this place, through a secret arboreal portal, join a queue of women at different stages on the path to enlightenment, having their fortunes foretold, and their identities re-cast, as they come under the gaze of a disembodied singing oracle called Pearl Mama One. It's through the strict supervision of this singing teacher that they learn a whole new language. It's also about deep listening—at one stage the two initiates find themselves lying naked below a giant ear which they have to climb through to enter the next stage.

Although I gave the film its title way before the pandemic struck, it became a strangely prophetic work as the plot centres around two women going into states of isolation and being tested and observed. There is no 'disease' in my film, but the women are taken through various intense and strict lessons and are on an unpredictable hallucinogenic journey.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

Let's talk about Jacques Rivette and how you have worked and referred to his projects throughout your practise?

“They were instrumental in sending me off on a voyage to locate where certain sounds came from and decipher their meaning.”

GEORGINA STARR

My life changed after I saw Rivette's *Celine et Julie vont en Bateau* around 2001. I connected to every single part of it—it was a world I had been attempting to conjure in my own work for years; dreams, mysticism, female friendship, surreal humour, doubles & dopplegangers, feminist anger and frustration, poetry, literature, riddles and fables, time-loops, darkness, magic and voodoo! I have been stepping in and out of film fictions for years and have explored this in many works, these films are portals, in-between worlds on which I create a completely new one. As well as Rivette the French director Alain Resnais has been a big inspiration, especially his 1968 film *Je t'aime Je t'aime*. I was invited to make a large sculptural work in 2017 and I kept thinking about this strange brain-shaped time machine from *Je t'aime Je t'aime*. In the movie a suicidal man is selected by a team of neurologists to enter the machine and be taken back in time to recover one minute in his past when he was truly happy, the idea being that he might be 'cured' if he could locate this moment. I recreated this giant sculptural for a work called *Moment Memory Monument* and developed a whole performance work around it. Visitors were chosen to enter 'The Sphere' and lay within its comfortable folds while listening to a spoken word piece which gently guided them back to their own moment in the past. In the gallery outside a team of performers were manning a kind of science laboratory and acting out their 'memories' for a live audience. I performed it in France and in Italy and we were going to bring it to Glasgow for GI 2020 but it was cancelled because of Covid, a real shame as I had just recorded an English version of the spoken word narration with the wonderful actress Gabrielle Drake.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

The casting in your films and performances is really interesting. What draws you to the women you work with?

GEORGINA STARR

The casting is a huge process, always very complex as I have a very strong idea of what the women should look like and the voices and character they bring. In the past I have searched out particular actresses and singers for roles; Hermine Karagheuz (a Jacques Rivette actress), Luise Rainer (silent movie actress), Gabrielle Drake (TV actress from the 70s/80s), Sigune von Osten (German soprano) and in *Quarantaine* the wonderful mezzo-soprano Loré Lixenberg. These women carry a certain historical significance for me and that becomes part of work. I discovered some amazing new women for my film *Quarantaine* and brought some of them onboard for the *Hermès* project.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

Tell me about the idea behind *Gelato* and the process of working with Hermès.

GEORGINA STARR

*Hermès* got in touch back in the summer with an idea of us collaborating on a project in London in February to present their 'Gelato' Spring/Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear Collection. It was super open. They wanted a 15-minute live performance that would be something unexpected, not the usual runway show. They shared the 18 looks of the collection by the brilliant designer Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski, the colour palette and fabrics. I began by thinking about what 'gelato' would sound like. I could immediately hear metallic sounds and also warmer sounds of fabric on wood—vibraphone, chimes, drums, claves—percussive sounds. I also had a vision of a huge mountain with undulating pastel coloured curves that the women wearing the beautiful clothes would emerge from. I started writing a script, in the same way I would when making any new artwork. I imagined two female warriors (Eve & Eve) at the foot of the mountain, like the first two women on earth, their call to the mountain would be the start of the performance.

I had worked with the sound designer and composer Thomas Haines on my last film to develop some minimal percussive pieces for *glockenspiel* and *vibraphone*. I approached him with a proposal. We met once a week for a month to talk about sound, instrumentation and started writing a new score.

The mountain idea started to take shape along with props. I also began working with producer Elizabeth Benjamin to start searching for performers and musicians.

Opposite, *A Performance* by Georgina Starr for Hermès, 2022. Courtesy Hermès. Photo credit: Amelia Allen.

Next page, *A Performance* by Georgina Starr for Hermès, 2022. Courtesy Hermès. Photo credit: Larissa Hofmann.







By October I had a fully formed idea to present to Hermès and they really liked it. It has been incredible having the time and space to explore a new soundscape and to choreograph something that incorporates so many amazing women: 9 performers, 4 musicians and eventually 8 models into the whole picture. It was epic! My script includes spoken word poems too - numerical magic spells that conjure the women into being. I was also playing with names from the collection's pieces like 'cliquertis' and 'Grand tra la la' and using these to create vocal patterns and sounds within the libretto. The percussive mallets became an important element. I made mallets with coloured threads from the collection, so every detail within the piece was connected to the colour palette and texture of the Nadège's designs.

Tom and I developed the first part of an instructional score with mallets being passed one by one to the musicians so that the music would slowly accumulate and become more complex. The performers inside the mountain emerge with large circular notes, interpreting the music—the whole set becomes a giant score. In December we went into workshoping with all the performers and musicians and then in January we went into full-on rehearsals for 6 days. The piece has ended up being a cross between a theatre play, an opera, a dance piece, a sculptural artwork and a fashion show. The fantastic Hermès stylists and hair/make-up team were like the icing on the gelato cake!

FRANCESCA GAVIN

GEORGINA STARR

I am not a trained dancer or choreographer but I do choreograph all my pieces. I always 'show' the moves, which can be quite embarrassing, but that's the only way I know how. For Quarantaine I filmed myself making the movement that the dancers had to interpret. Same with the vocals, I made the sounds that I wanted the singer to make. It's a transference of movement and sound which I think comes from the fact that I performed in all my work at the beginning. It's quite mediumistic. I develop all the movement first alone in my studio in the same way

Above and opposite, Georgina Starr, *Moment Memory Monument*. Performance installation, 2017, courtesy the artist and Alcantara.

Photo credit: Henrik Blomqvist

I develop a sculpture or drawing, I have big mirrors in here so I can work out moves, it's like I have my own dance academy for one. I did dance before I made art. There were a couple of great

teachers that arrived in our 4th year at high school and I gained a huge amount of confidence from working with these women. They pushed us and really believed in this type of expression, developing a visual and physical sense with them was really the beginning. I got a place at Laban dance school when I was 16, but decided to do my 'A' levels instead and ended up on an Art foundation course and then going into design and later sculpture, but the dance and performance gradually filtered back into my work once I started to make videos in the early 90s.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

GEORGINA STARR

It's connected to my Catholic upbringing of course, my interest in magic, miracles, spirits, alternate worlds, spectres and everything otherworldly and esoteric. It's ingrained in me, I have been indoctrinated, but I quite like the theatre of all that! It means that anything is possible. The Marian Mythologies are a big influence in many works of mine like *Big V* (2004) and *Quarantaine*. Mary was my first female icon as a child and I am still fascinated by the stories of the female saints, like the crusades and martyrdom of St Ursula. I enjoy the point where fact meets fiction in these mystical tales. It's where the magic happens. Through my work they evolve and adapt into something more powerful. Ursula's story for example, the brutal massacre of the saint and her entourage of 10,000 virgins, transformed into the 'Pink Ursula Material'—a kind of malleable, oozing brain-matter that the initiates of *Quarantaine* ingest to be transported to the next level of their journey.

FRANCESCA GAVIN

GEORGINA STARR

Every day is different, it totally depends what I'm working on. The last 4 months have been especially manic working on this project. A day from the last few months would usually be: talk with Elizabeth my producer; talk with Tom my composer and listen to new sounds; work on storyboarding the performance; meetings with the set builders, looking at the plans and get samples; editing videos from the workshoping days to share with the cast and then more craziness in the afternoon. A day in the studio today is: sit in a comfy chair with a pipe and read the book I got for my birthday, *Locus Solus* by Raymond Roussel.

[georginastarr.com](http://georginastarr.com)