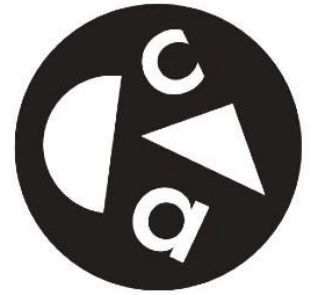


Susie Green
Queen Green
20 November 2021 – 27 February 2022
Woodend Gallery



Queen Green is an exhibition of new works by artist Susie Green inspired by her residency at Dalby Forest in the North York Moors. The exhibition celebrates erotic encounters with nature, and moments of confidence and fragility, growth and decay, lightness and dark. Works on paper and large cut-out mixed forms mounted onto wooden trellis portray powerful, blossoming, shapeshifting bodies.

The exhibition explores the concept of the word 'Viriditas', used by German Benedictine Abbess, writer, composer and mystic Hildegard von Bingen in the Middle Ages. 'Viriditas' means greenness, freshness, vitality, fruitfulness, or growth and was used by Hildegard to describe divine nature when talking about the human spirit and the natural world. Hildegard's illustrated religious visions, choral music and her rare recorded words have served as an inspiration. The exhibition asks the audience to think about who the works in *Queen Green* portray: the natural world and its grand, regal forms, or the artist herself and her fantasy world?

Green's research at the Scarborough Museums Trust archive during her residency gave her access to the nationally important William J Clarke Charm Collection. Clark, who was a former keeper of The Rotunda Museum in Scarborough was a collector of charms and folklore from around the world. His rare collection of objects and its link between the natural world and spirituality heavily influence Green's work in this exhibition. Archive images of Woodend, former home of the Sitwell family, with trellis mounted on the walls were used to design the displays, allowing the audience to explore the exhibition with their senses.

Exhibition Essay, Dr. Amy Tobin

Tender Ropes for *Queen Green*

Cloudiness what is cloudiness, is it a lining, is it a roll, is it melting.¹ Grids are art's foundation, not clouds. ² Grids rule perspective, naturalistic drawing, and the searching gaze of the picturesque. They are also the substance of abstraction, even if skewered, or present only as frame or weave. They are the matrices for sculpture, they map places for spatial design. Grids signal control in art as in life, as the substrate for beauty and expression, and as the mechanism for containing. Trellises are grids, used by garden designers to harness nature and particularly to train climbing plants and trees to create bowers, that screened parts of the garden from view. Bowers have associations with pleasurable seclusion and erotic relation. In Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* the decadent Acrasia holds court in her 'bower of bliss', a place occupied by women who 'wrestle wantonly' with one another exposed only by the Knight Guyon, who encounters the scene during his virtuous quest. ³ Guyon destroys the bower of bliss, but the phrase remains as synonym for vagina and vulva, replete with associations of dangerous sexuality and erotic pleasure beyond reproduction. ⁴

The works assembled in *Queen Green* form a new bower of bliss, in a room that once was the verdant conservatory of Woodend, the residence of the Sitwell Family. Appropriately these works are the products of the inaugural Dalby Forest artist residency, an initiative that brings artists to engage with the Sitwells' historic house, along with the collections of Scarborough Museums Trust and with Dalby Forest. Green braids together referential threads from across these sites, including the characteristic architecture of the Observatory building, doubled, and made into a nymph's bra, or objects from the Clark Charm Collection and costume archive, which inspired the trellis forms. Astrological and enchanted elements combine in this bower where Nymph Guardians appear as watercolour figures processing the room's perimeter, summoned like their mythic counterparts to capture mortal attention, and hold us in relation. Green's shimmering figures escape their papery confinement, pooled ink is stilled but still refracts the light. They mirror us so as we move, they do too, like partners in a dance. For the young Edith Sitwell it was this room, rather than any typical ballroom, as well as the grounds around Woodend at Londesborough Lodge and at Renishaw Hall in Derbyshire that captured her imagination. In her later poetry she wove together elements from an enchanted, natural world with folk tales and

avant-garde abstractions. Like Green, Sitwell imagined figures through forms gleaned from the landscape. In 'Spring', she writes:

By a maiden fair as an almond-tree,
With hair like the waterfalls' goat-locks; she

Has lips like that jangling harsh pink rain,
The flower-bells that spirt on the trees again.' 5

Seasonal change, particularly spring, were important for Sitwell. They meant transformation in the natural world, and she summoned this power against what she saw as the static description of nature in the popular poetry of the early twentieth century. Sitwell wanted to elicit a new kind of relationship to the world based on not knowing: 'I used the language of another, and by this means attempted to pierce down the essence of the thing seen, by discovering in it attributes which at first sight appear alien but which are acutely related.' 6

One of the ways that Sitwell makes things relate is through rhyme. The couplets in 'Spring' are tied together by those end-line rhymes, like a pattern of sound. In poetry metre often serves to bind things together, Sitwell used it to connect the animal, with the vegetable and the human, but never to hold the natural world in abeyance or in thrall to the human. As in Sitwell's Façade: 'The maid sighed, 'All my blood/ Is animal. They thought I sat/ Like a household cat;/ But through the dark woods rambled I'. 7 Here the poetic pattern – sat/ cat – does not contain the maid's animal blood but intensifies its release. Transposed into the visual world, Green's work is also about relating, training, binding and holding, it also about containment and release. Figures are often made of component parts: high-heeled boots, long whip-like braided hair, patterned or brightly coloured bodysuits, long gloves, geometric glasses, defined and rouged lips. These glamorously clad figures suggest other ways of being 'in imagined spaces that might allow for fantasy'. 8 In previous works, these figures have manifested in the social world of parties and nightclubs as transcendent Goddess-beings, 'defiant decorated bodies' who are 'weightless, free, unbounded'. 9

Green's figures are sometimes delineated by the paper or canvas edge, framed by a watercolour box like a playing card, they also appear in relief against diaphanous clouds of paint, bodies merging with another or with their environment. Her more recent articulated figures, made of hand formed coloured tissue paper and shaped into bodies, seem to have escaped their support, attached directly to the wall they enter our space. Their curvy edges, rippled surfaces, link lips, chain and ribbon bindings

imagine, almost contradictorily, how embodied feeling can be enhanced by clothing, by impossible or restricted movement, and by other body parts. These figures limbs, lips, breasts and phalluses merge and multiply or are held in suspension in as if in felt or fantasised euphoria. Green has an avatar linked to this series, Susie Unbound (2020), with leopard print legs and frilly elbow-length gloves, whose body has merged with a puffed-up, cloud-like form that lends her the power to float atmospherically. She expands transcendently to be more and to feel more, like a Queen she goes beyond the limits of the fleshy body, empowered if not masterful.

The art historian Hubert Damisch argued that a theory of clouds – or /cloud/ as he stylised it – offered a lens to write a history of painting.¹⁰ For Damisch the cloud, as a ‘surfaceless body’, proved a challenge to the ordering principles of Western perspectivalism that met their apotheosis in the grid.¹¹ Damisch writes that the /cloud/ ‘seems to call into question, thanks to its absence of limits and through the solvent effects to which it lends itself, the coherence and consistency of a syntactical ordering’ or in other words representation.¹² Clouds cannot be manifested in ‘schemata of celestial perspectives’, Damisch suggests, but they might appear to confuse rational ordering, and to signal the fantastical.¹³ In *Queen Green*, Susie Green’s cloud motif appears again, on one of the trellises that holds her majestic figures. Rather than contain the cloud form, or the tree, or the flower, these structures bind bodies to nature, portals for becoming cloud-like, tree-like, flower-like. They are thrones for queens, earthly figures, assuming new positions, bound by tender ropes shaped by nature.

Queen Green is not one person. She is the artist, she is Sitwell, she is a reimagined Mother Earth. These queens are Sitwellesque ‘changelings’, who wear a crowns like the poet’s own headpieces, one element of her self-presentation aimed to mark her out as ‘existing on the periphery of human society’, an ‘eccentric’, like her friend and fellow writer Gertrude Stein.¹⁴ Sitwell invited Stein to come to England in 1926 to lecture at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The effect was as Sitwell wanted it; Stein caused a sensation.¹⁵ Despite its many differences Sitwell’s and Stein’s poetry shares an aversion to naturalism in favour of a new kind of attention to the surrounding world. If Sitwell turned to the power but familiarity of the natural world, then Stein looked to the everyday, bringing everything into the poem in new syntactical relations. In her book *Tender Buttons*, which is made up of three poems ‘Objects’, ‘Food’ and ‘Rooms’, Stein recounts the world around her as seen and sensed, rather than as known.¹⁶ Stein’s ‘word-systems’ state the ‘impossibility of arriving at “the

meaning” even as countless meanings present themselves to our attention’.¹⁷ Her writing also offers up new ways of feeling, new ways of relating to rooms, food and objects, where buttons are tender. The sensorial possibilities that Stein opens in her poetry, are evident in Green’s figures who present different ways of being on vertiginous heels, or as part-cloud, or tied up with rope. In *Queen Green*, these figures are transformed by a majestic ecology, in which bodies are parts tethered by tendril-like ropes and breasts, genitals and bottoms become cloudy or vegetal, no longer solely human. The artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens have described this way of being in relation to nature as ‘ecosexual’. Their ‘Ecosexual Manifesto’ which provided a guide and companion for Green during her residency at Dalby Forest reads:

*The Earth is our lover... In order to create a more mutual and sustainable relationship with the Earth, we collaborate with nature. We treat the Earth with kindness, respect and affection... We make love to the Earth through our senses.*¹⁸

Sprinkle and Stephens’ ecosexuality offers a vision of non-human relationship turned toward the politics of protecting the planet. It is an invitation to rethink how we relate to the earth, how we care for it, as well as how we might take respectful pleasure from it, in the face of the violent exploitation of resources. Take their definition of ‘windplay’ for example: ‘Enjoying the wind blowing on your body, such as a gentle wind blowing through your hair on a spring day’.¹⁹ But it is also a way to rethink sexual pleasure beyond normative sex acts and roles, they encourage us to experiment with an ‘ecosexual gaze’, which means to ‘look at the world with the awareness that sex is happening everywhere’.²⁰ This invitation to level love making and pollination returns us to Susie Green’s bower of bliss where pleasurable sensation circulates not only between secluded figures, but also the trees, and flowers and clouds.

References

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3. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas Roche (London: Penguin, 1978): 2.12.63.
4. See Sonya Freeman Loftis, ‘Reconstructing the Bower of Bliss:

Homoerotic Myth-Making in the Faerie Queene, *Renaissance Papers* (2012): pp.1–12. Also Amy Tobin, 'Bower of Bliss: An Improper Architecture: Structure and Transgression in a New Performance by Linder', (*Kettle's Yard*, Cambridge 2020), <https://stories.kettlesyard.co.uk/bower-of-bliss/>, last accessed 7 Nov 2021.

5. Edith Sitwell, 'Spring' in *Edith Sitwell: Collected Poems* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2006): p.14.

6. Sitwell quoted in Elizabeth Black, 'Edith Sitwell', *The nature of modernism: ecocritical approaches to the poetry of Edward Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Charlotte Mew*, (London: Routledge, 2017): p.150.

7. Sitwell, *Collected Poems*, p.149.

8. Susie Green quoted in Philomena Epps, 'I'm All Dressed Up and Ready to Fall in Love', *CARF 03*, (Champagne-Ardenne: FRAC, 2020), pp.70–85: 72.

9. Green quoted in Epps, 'I'm All Dressed Up': p. 72.

10. Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*: Toward a History of Painting, trans. Janet Lloyd (California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

11. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*: p.185.

12. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*: p.185.

13. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*: p.193.

14. Sitwell quoted in Black, 'Edith Sitwell': p.159.

15. See Susan Hastings, 'Two of the Weird Sisters: The Eccentricities of Gertrude Stein and Edith Sitwell', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 4 no.1 (spring 1985): pp.101–123.

16. Stein, *Tender Buttons*.

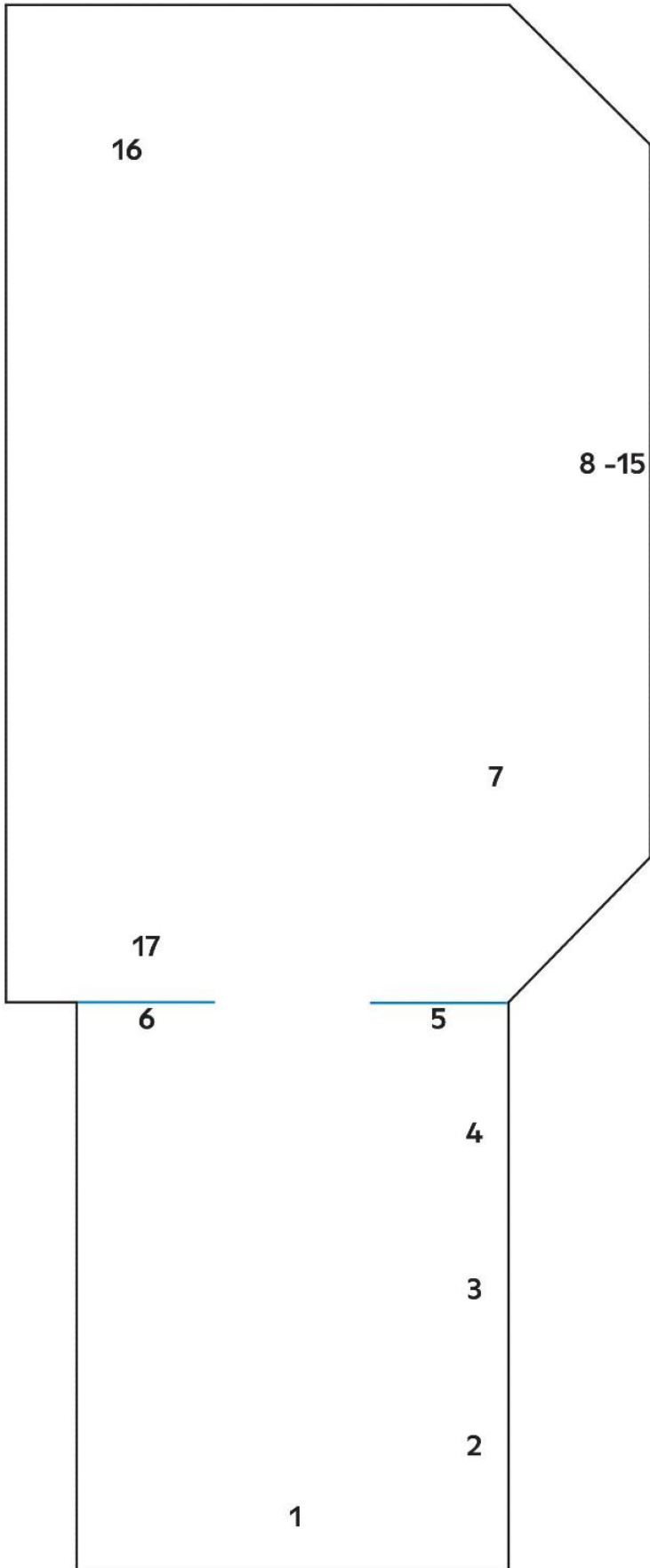
17. Marjorie Perloff, 'Poetry as Word-System: The Art of Gertrude Stein', *The American Poetry Review* (September/ October, 1979), pp.33–43: 35.

18. Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens with Jennie Klein, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth As Lover*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021: p.14.

19. Sprinkle and Stephens, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position*: p.27.

20. Sprinkle and Stephens, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position*: p.26.

Gallery Guide



Artworks

- 1:** *Becoming Queen (1)*, 2021 Wood, cotton rope, tissue paper, acrylic 220 X 200 X 50 cm
- 2 & 4:** *Nymph Guardians (Sky lover 1 & 2)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 56 x 76 cm
- 3:** *Nymph Guardians (Stargazer)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 5:** *Nymph Guardians (Abundant Feeler)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 6:** *Nymph Guardians (Deep Inhale)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 7:** *Queen Green*, 2021 Wood, cotton rope, tissue paper, acrylic 220 X 200 X 50 cm Plastic, paint, plants Dimensions variable
- 8:** *Nymph Guardians (Rose Hip)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 9:** *Nymph Guardians (Double Seeder)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 10:** *Nymph Guardians (Harnesser)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 11:** *Nymph Guardians (Titilator)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 12:** *Nymph Guardians (Clover)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 13:** *Nymph Guardians (Aureographer)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 14:** *Nymph Guardians (Critic)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 15:** *Nymph Guardians (Thinker)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 28 x 38 cm
- 16:** *Becoming Queen (2)*, 2021 Wood, cotton rope, tissue paper, acrylic 220 X 200 X 50 cm
- 17:** *Assuming The Ecosexual Position (1 & 2)*, 2021 Water colour on cotton paper 56 x 76 cm

Artist Bio

Susie Green (b.1979) works across painting, performance and sculpture, focussing on empowerment through dress, fetish & disguise. At the heart of her work is an exploration into the personal and political powers of intimacy, vulnerability and transgression.

She received an MA in Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art, UK (2009) and BA in Fine Art from Newcastle University, UK (2002). In 2020 she was selected for BALTIC STATES, a three-month residency at Nida Art Colony, Lithuania, in association with BALTIC, Gateshead, UK.

Recent solo and two person exhibitions include: Empty rooms full of love (2021) with Cathy Josefowitz, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, FR; Double Trouble (2020) Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, DE; Jerwood Solo Presentations (2018), Jerwood Arts, London, UK; Interior Report (2018), Workplace, Gateshead, UK; If They be Two (2018) with Kim Coleman, Five Years, London, UK; Pleasure is a Weapon (2017), Grand Union, Birmingham, UK.

Group exhibitions and performances include: Means of Escape (2021), Kunsthaus Erfurt, DE; CANONS (2021), Galerie Derouillon, Paris, FR; Something Soft (2019) Kunstraum, London, UK; Idea Home (2017), MIMA, Middlesbrough, UK; Exhibition of a Dream (2017), Gulbenkian, Paris, FR. Recent performances include: The Hold (2019), Tate St Ives, Cornwall, UK (solo); ROMANTI-CRASH (2018), Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh, UK (solo); Dwarling, My Darling (2017) with Rory Pilgrim as The Brilliant State, Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, NL.

susiegreen.co.uk

Events

In conversation: Susie Green & Dr. Amy Tobin

Woodend Gallery, Woodend Creative Space

Saturday, 20 November 2021

2pm – 3pm

Tickets: Free (book via Eventbrite)

Join artist Susie Green with Dr. Amy Tobin from the University of Cambridge department of Art History as they discuss the development of *Queen Green*. This is an opportunity to gain a unique insight into the artist's process and the influences behind the exhibition.

Exhibitions

Feral Practice: The Ant-ic Museum

Until 30 January 2022

Scarborough Art Gallery

How might an exhibition be guided by ants? The Ant-ic Museum utilises materials, forms and themes influenced by the perceptual and semiotic priorities of ants. Three new sculptures bring the domed shape of the wood ant nest into dialogue with human architectural forms, whilst audio and video works embedded in these sculptures offer intimate views of the wood ants' world.

John Atkinson Grimshaw

Until 1 October 2023

Scarborough Art Gallery

Five recently cleaned and conserved paintings by John Atkinson Grimshaw (1836-1893), a Leeds born artist best known for his nocturnal and urban landscapes.

scarboroughmuseumstrust.com

About

Crescent Arts and Scarborough Museums Trust partnership is an Arts Council England funded initiative that aims to develop Scarborough as a centre for excellence for the visual arts. The partnership reflects both a new strategic priority for Scarborough Museums Trust to support the creative industries in Scarborough, and Crescent Arts' recently revised vision and mission to nurture diverse artistic talent, connect people to art and artists, and make contemporary visual arts publicly accessible.

Crescent Arts recently physically moved to join the 120 creative tenants at Woodend Creative Space, which merged with Scarborough Art Gallery and The Rotunda Museum to join the Scarborough Museums Trust portfolio. The partnership is rooted in Woodend Gallery, the historic heart of literature in Scarborough and home to the Sitwell Library. Woodend Creative Space houses Scarborough Museum Trust's archive as well as a café space and a two-story Victorian glasshouse, the site for the new programme of partnership exhibitions.

Queen Green is supported by Crescent Arts, Scarborough Museums Trust, Arts Council England and Forestry England.

