

Visual art
From Death to Death and Other Small Tales
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Walking around the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art you might not usually notice Balthus's *Getting Up* (1955), a painting of a nude lifting herself awkwardly from a bed. Or you might notice it and think, "Well, that's not a very good Balthus". And to be honest it isn't really, but in the context of this exhibition, *From Death to Death and Other Small Tales*, which pairs works from the gallery's permanent collection with a choice selection from that of the Greek financier and former dairy magnate Dimitris Daskalopoulos, it becomes something new. Placed in a room with Sarah Lucas's *Bunny Gets Snookered #10* (1997, pictured), suddenly the raw, unvarnished sexuality of Balthus's painting is face-slappingly obvious. The sheer weirdness of Lucas's pair of stuffed tights seated on a chair

recalls the Surrealists, with whom Balthus is often (erroneously) associated. The two works speak to each other, the artists too.

The show is not for the faint-hearted, or perhaps the prudish (a friend's 16-year-old daughter pronounced it "a bit disgusting", the final straw possibly being the later room covered with Robert Gober's 1989 *Male and Female Genital Wallpaper*). Admittedly, Paul McCarthy's four-screen film installation *Pirate Party* (2005), depicting an orgy between a woman and four puppet men, is a tough watch and Louise Bourgeois's *Fillette* (1968) — shown here alongside Marcel Duchamp's bronzes *Wedge of Chastity* and *Female Fig Leaf* — is pretty punchy. But there's nothing wrong with that and there is real quality here. Watching Marina Abramovic's fascinating 1977 film *Imponderabilia* — in which she and

SARAH LUCAS, COURTESY SADIE COLES HQ, LONDON



her then partner Ulay stood naked in a doorway so that visitors had to squeeze between them — it was striking that almost none of the many who wriggled through, some openly leering, turned their bodies toward the nude man.

There is less explicit work but the body is the inescapable theme — Ernesto Neto's gorgeous installation *It Happens When the Body is Anatomy of Time* plays on the senses with its strange protrusions filled with aromatic ground spices; Doris Salcedo's *Untitled*, 1995 (a cupboard and chair with every crevice filled with concrete) evokes physical limitations or entombment. It's a tribute to the curators' skill that this exhibition leaves you feeling not icky (unless you happen to be a particularly sweet 16) but with a sense that you've seen the gallery's own collection anew.

Nancy Durrant
Exhibition runs to Sept 8