

# Greg Lucas



## THE BLOG PAPERS

<http://greg-lucas.blogspot.com>



### Greg Lucas: Walls Have Ears and Other Failed Ideas

*Outpost:* 10b Wensum Street, Tombland, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 1HR. It's an artist-run gallery founded in November 2004 and committed to presenting exciting and cutting-edge contemporary art - exhibitions, screenings, critical forums, artists' talks and other - harder-to-categorize - events. If you don't already know it, you need to check it out.

On Saturday 22 October, 2011, Greg Lucas headlined there - one of those events that evades categorization. His presentation, *Walls Have Ears and Other Failed Ideas*, remains difficult to summarize. He took the floor at 18.45. It was dark and cold outside but the atmosphere within the gallery was convivial and relaxed. The building has functioned previously as a skittle saloon and a bed shop. Now it is a whitewashed space, the

'white cube' sort of place in which one expects to view art. Art critic for the *Guardian*, Adrian Searle, once remarked (this is from memory, not wholly accurate necessarily) that you could tell when you were in the presence of art rather than entertainment because the seating, for the former, was inadequate and uncomfortable. That night, the selection of benches and chairs, informally arranged and procured from who knows where, proved comfortable. The audience was ready and waiting and wanting to be entertained. They were not going to be disappointed, but there's no doubting what they were about to experience was a masterful work of art.

Lucas is well known for his 'stand-up' slide-show performances, performances in which - through a series of visual coincidences, tangential juxtapositions and hilarious anecdotes - he weaves his inimitable narratives while exposing the inherent ambiguity and fluidity of photographic meaning. (He has continued this idiosyncratic way

of looking at and talking about photographs in his blog - <http://greg-lucas.blogspot.com> - begun in 2009.)

That Saturday night was no exception to his rule, to his game plan. We were exposed to pictures of nuns and shopping bags, sleeping bags and 'flying' sheep. The metal detritus of a near-fatal car crash. Golf courses, sweet biscuits, gaffer tape; a *Bachelor Boys*' album cover compared and contrasted to Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare*. As for the walls and ears to which the title of Lucas' talk refers - the sequence of images and accompanying narrative need to be seen to be believed. Bizarre, incongruous, unorthodox, ambiguous: the anecdotal threads that link Lucas' extraordinary imagery - we're talking pictures of the artist halfway up a rock face, a bachelor stripped bare but for his socks and boots and the women's crotch-less, thermal tights that he sports - could only ever be 'told', and probably only retrospectively. Lucas is like a novelist semantically sculpting structure and



sense out of the swirling whirling never-ending chaos of embodied experience. He distils his own history, comprised of selective, selected - and to some extent - modified memories, into a coherent story, however idiosyncratic and unexpected. That this story-telling relies on photography and other forms of visual imagery - his own line-drawings and tracings should be acknowledged for their skill and dexterity, their weird beauty and complexity - is what makes his performances so mesmerizing, pertinent and unique. A lot of people talk a lot of crap about photography, and in doing so they miss its point. Lucas speaks profoundly of the arbitrary coincidence that seemingly dictates everyday lived experience, and photography's part in making it visually explicit if, ultimately and always, refusing to explain it.

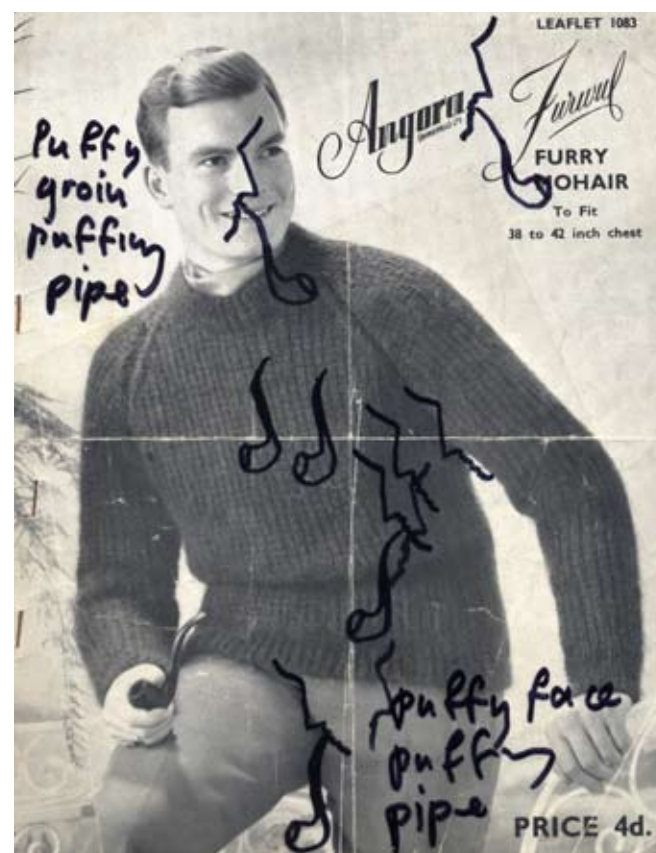
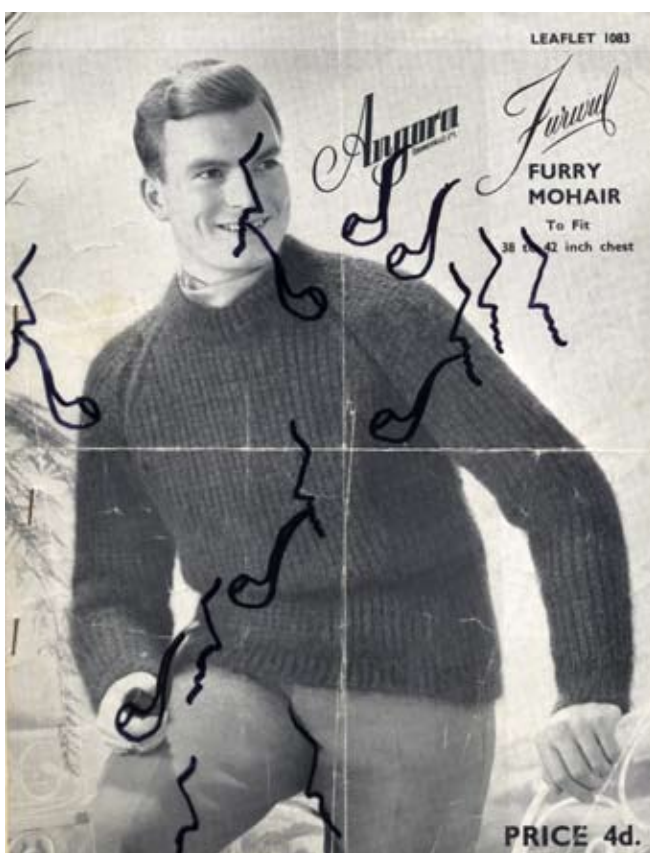
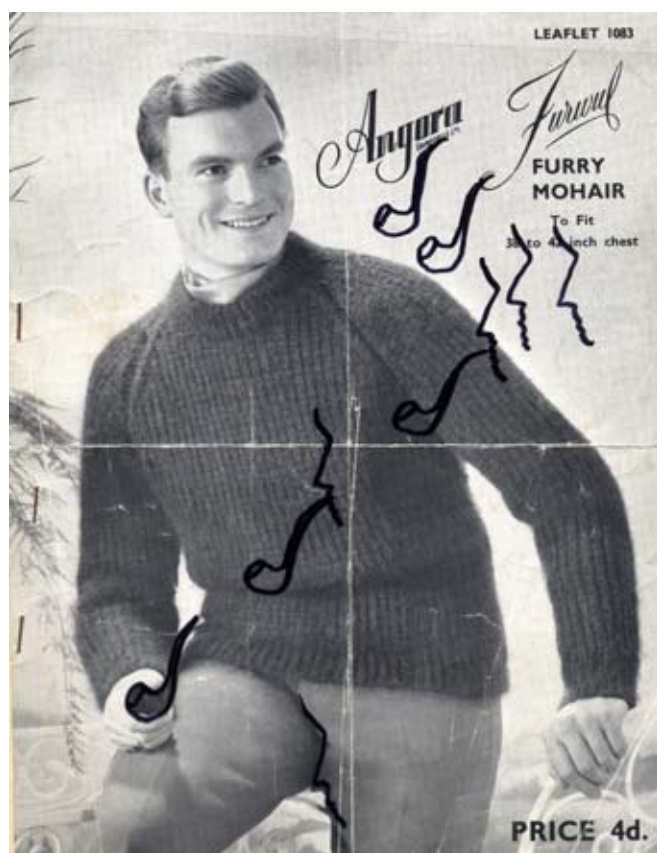
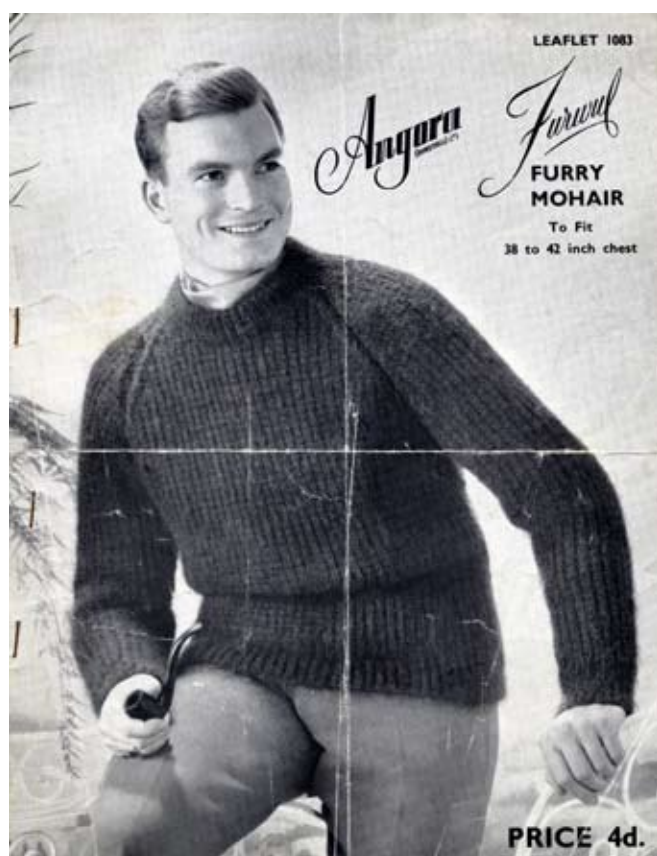
For a long time now Lucas has aligned himself with Pataphysics and its 'inventor' Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). In doing so, he rightly situates himself in a fabulous legacy of imagination, symbolism and subversion: from Surrealism to the Theatre of the Absurd, from Pop Art to Baudrillard.

These artistic stances and social critiques underpin Lucas's practice; an extremely radical practice, I would argue. For his part, Lucas seems to be driven by the realization - the understanding - that photographs generally fail to function within established codes of communication; or, rather, they are always on the brink of subverting and demolishing them. Instead of evidencing the truth - as was once hoped they would - photographs have the power - in the right hands - to dispute what we think we know and to challenge what we accept to be true.

Thus, in the tradition of Roland Barthes and his hard-to-categorize meditations on photography, Lucas reveals how the photographs that don't end up in the coffee-table book or on the gallery wall - that aren't contained within the cultural economies and social taxonomies that we carelessly allow to constrain us - are the ones that (perhaps unfortunately) depict and determine our destinies. Jokes apart, this is deadly serious stuff.

*Dr Jane Fletcher*

## Connecting Pipes (Facing Pipes): 26/11/10





## Drowned Fireman Bern: 27/10/10

Drowned Firemen, Bern' is a 'found' - rescued, saved - archive of water-damaged, 35mm slide-transparencies, of firemen, taken by firemen. The slides are a record of some of the fires fought by the firemen of Bern, Switzerland, over a period of twenty or so years, from the mid 1970s to the late 1990s.



## Exes: 13/06/11







## Headspace: 19/06/11

I continue along the seashore, trying to recall all the blondes I know from memory: Jimmy Saville, Andy Warhol, Boris Johnson, Ulrika Johnson, Klaus Kinski, Mira Hindley, Dick - 'you are awful, but I like you' - Emery, Martin Kippenberger, Kurt Cobain, Vitus Gerulaitis, Marlon Brando, Jill Dando. Reading back over the list now, my blondes from memory, they were all nutters, with the exception of newsreader Jill Dando, who was shot in the head by a nutter.

<http://dreg-lucas.blogspot.com>

## Kinematic Clichés: 18/10/10

The Pataphysician Alfred Jarry said, '*Clichés are the armature of the absolute*', and swans, like ducks and sheep (from lambing to shearing) invite (incite?) the production of photographic clichés. In sculpture an armature is the framework around which the sculpture is built. 'Outdoor types' are often clad in a combination of fleece and down - walking, climbing clichés. An armature is also the name used for the kinematic chains used in computer animation to simulate the motions of virtual human or animal characters. In 1996, Dolly the sheep was the first mammal to be cloned, using the process of nuclear transfer. And we are all familiar with 'The Ugly Duckling'.



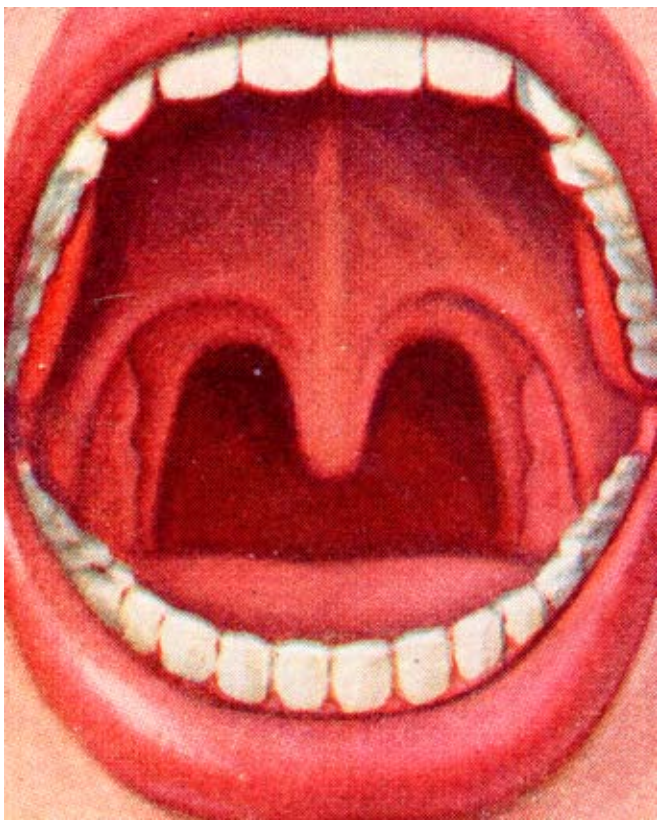




**One-Finger-Pull-Ups: 17/10/09**

My father plays, his mother played, but I never progressed beyond "A Dozen A Day (Book 1, Pre-Practice Exercises for the Piano)".





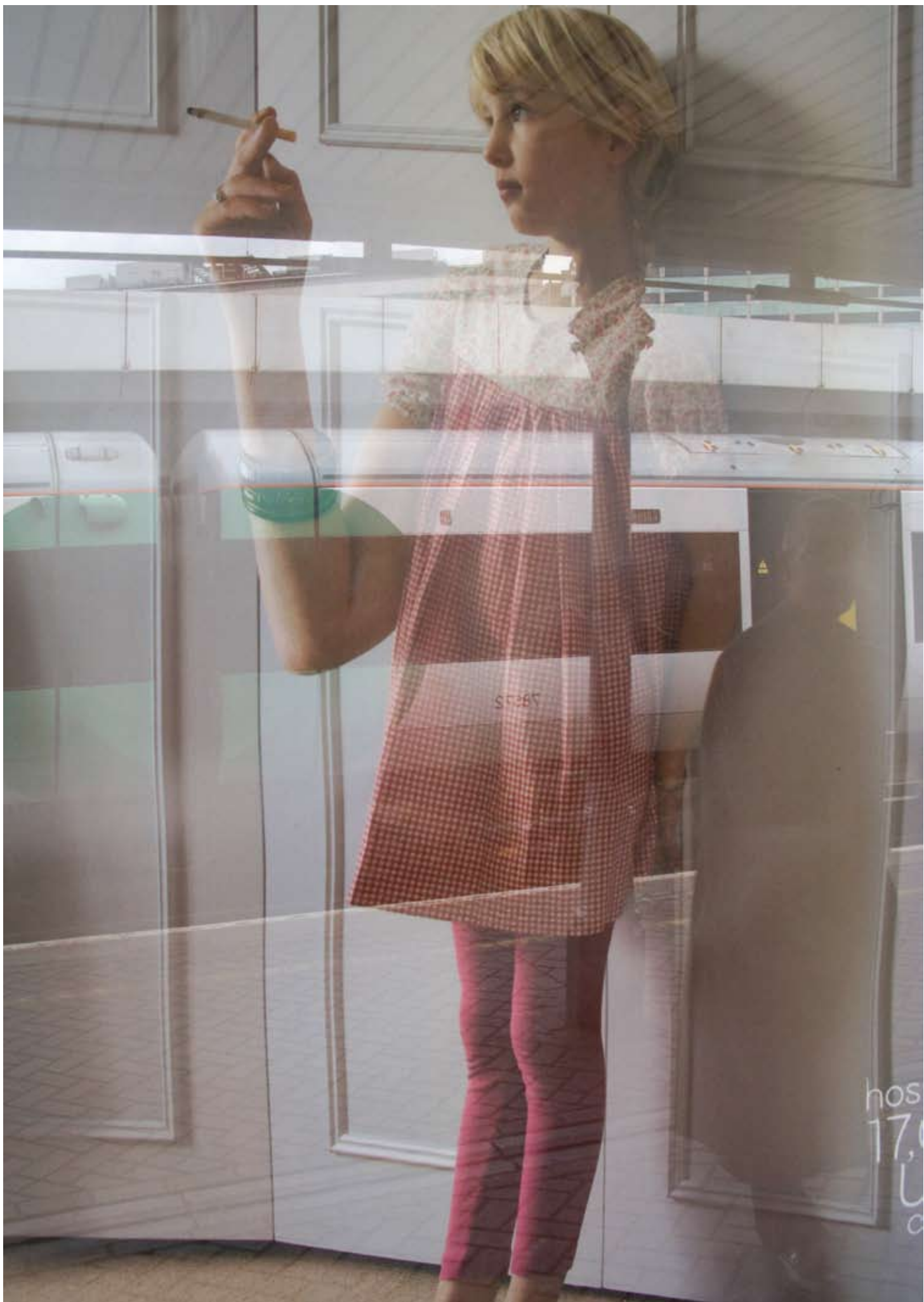
## Pay Lip-Service To McTonsils:

I plan to erect a chain of gigantic, drive-in mouths - McTonsils Drive-in-Lip-Service areas - situated in service-areas beside Motorways - up and down the land. Massive open mouths surrounded by fields; mouths so big you can drive right into them; mouths with teeth that come up out of the road and slash your tires, if you try to drive-off without paying; mouths you can see from the air; mouths with their own abattoirs (way underground, where the stomach would normally be situated). Horses and cows will be herded off the meadows, straight into the mouths; masticated into burgers, 'on site' and within sight, of their parents or offspring, in the very landscape they grew up in: environmentally friendly mouths.

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## Self-Arming: 25/03/10

"I sometimes wonder what good a university education is, for youngsters like this", the dean lamented. "Look at the size of her arm? It's almost as big as mine; and I'm a dean and she's only a teen. Imagine how big her arm will be, compared to the rest of her, when she's old enough to pull pints in pubs? A born-barmaid if I ever saw one... if the smoking doesn't kill her first". "And I thought smoking stunted growth?" I interjected. "That'll explain why she didn't flinch when I pulled out a tape measure and measured her arm... to get her vital statistics before we offered her a place", the dean said. "And she didn't respond to my request for a light. We should read this as a good sign; we don't want them to listen, think - voice an opinion and the like. Let's pull them all in, turn them round quick, and get them out again, out on the pull".





The Duck Pond:  
12/10/10

Whilst in Wales (a country known for its blubber - Dawn French, Dylan Thomas, Tom Jones, Welsh Cakes), I once more found myself focusing on foam. ‘Foam Cut To Size’, but I could hardly believe my eyes, as one foam led to another, and in no time at all I found myself staring into a duck pond.



Wing Mirrors  
Wannabe Bats:  
02/07/10

B.A.T stands for British American Tobacco and Murcielago is a Mexican cigar brand. A lot of people refer to this cigar as “The Bat”. Murcielago is the Spanish word for a bat. *The Cigar Smokers Journal*, when reviewing the Murcielago in a blind tasting, stated: “the cigar burned uneven at first with one side burning faster than the other. This was due to the soft spots I felt on the side of the cigar.”







## Net Gain: 15/07/10

The number of rendered bricks plus the number of holes in the basketball net equals the total number of holes scored by the goal.

To take a photograph in which a number unifies the entire picture. It is the inherent logic of numbers that is so useful in organising pictures, for it establishes the picture surface, or as it is also called, the net-gain of the picture plane.

Net total of net holes 181  
Net total of bricks (rendered) 129  
Net total holes in basketball net 52

(cover image)

**Eugene Bridges:**  
**06/04/10**

It was very nearly, Piers. But Piers Bridges is a contradiction of a name: all piers are wannabe bridges; piers are unfinished bridges; piers are bridges with arrested development; piers are bridges that never grew-up. Bridges and piers: arch enemies.

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**Greg Lucas** seems to exert a strange and exceptional influence that shifts the balance of the world whenever he is in near orbit. Curious things happen...

The last time he came to visit us in Exeter, he was in the city no more than a few hours, but in that time he'd discovered a photograph of a Virger named Ilya Nastase, who was working in the cathedral. He pursued the Virger, hoping to discover whether or not he was the real Nastase (renowned Romanian tennis player and Greg's childhood hero in the 1970s - the George Best of Romania apparently). If it was him, the years had not been kind. Eventually Greg tracked down the Exeter Nastase and, while they talked, Greg offered him a cigar. He didn't smoke, but instead Nastase demonstrated an origami trick that he performs whenever he finds a cigarette (or cigar) packet on the street, turning the box into a tiny cardboard coffin. I heard later (it may or may not be true) that Nastase's name used to

be Ivan Lendl and he'd changed it by deed poll. You couldn't make it up.

One of my first lessons in photography came from Greg in the late 1980s. I was printing in the university darkrooms where he was teaching. Nothing of direct, practical help with technique that I can remember. Instead, he encouraged me to eat more doughnuts and drink pints - to build myself up a bit (too skinny) and develop the necessary physique for wielding the camera. He talked about Beckett, about nuns in white habits (very rare!) and about lard. It was a formative period.

We can now encounter Greg's unpredictable universe in his subtly bizarre, occasionally disturbing and wonderful blog 'Greg Lucas Connects'. The form could have been invented just for this.

*Stephen Vaughan (University of Plymouth)*

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