

# **STILL BORN EXHIBITION**

BY ADINDA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

Having suffered a stillbirth herself in 2010, artist Adinda van 't Klooster knows how heart breaking a stillbirth is, in particular when it could have been prevented with more routine scans during pregnancy.

One can never change the past, but together we can and *must* change the future. In 2016, The Lancet called for ending all preventable stillbirths by 2030 and for breaking the taboos surrounding stillbirth which can cause a double grieving that compounds the loss parents face.

This exhibition has been put together to coincide with IFPA2017, an international conference on the placenta. Many of its attendees will be in a position to conduct research to help end preventable stillbirths. It is hoped that this exhibition will help strengthen their resolve in doing *all* that is necessary to change things for the better. As stillbirth is shrouded in taboos and ignored in the media, there is not enough of a public outcry to bring about change which leaves placenta research underfunded. To change things the taboo on stillbirth will first have to be broken. This exhibition will be open to the public on the closing day of the conference. Art can play an important role in breaking taboos surrounding stillbirth, as it can start to lift the veil hiding the human suffering caused.

Each stillbirth is a tragedy that lasts a lifetime for the parents. The wider family is also affected in different ways. Globally there are 2.6 million stillbirths a year and 4.2 million mothers a year suffer from stillbirth related depression. Yet most of these people suffer in silence. The fact that the society they live in *chose* not to do all that could have been done to prevent the stillbirth is seldom addressed. In developed countries first time mothers and women above 35 are most at risk. Extra routine scans in the later stages of pregnancy are withheld despite the fact that this could help bring down stillbirth figures considerably. Sums of economy by health bodies tend to exclude the cost of mental health care following a stillbirth and ignore the emotional price the mothers of stillborn babies have to pay.

The works in this exhibition were made over a timespan of seven years. The earlier works combine scans and growth charts with porcelain sculptures of uterus-like forms to show how current obstetric practice can miss cases of severe growth restriction. The later drawings employ a variety of strategies to express grief caused by stillbirth and visualise the global scale of human suffering caused. A short explanation of each artwork follows.

These five porcelain uteruses with growth charts, scans and poems imprinted on them are a telling reminder of how easy it is to miss growth restriction and how much grief this can bring when it results in a stillbirth.



All images © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2010  
Photography by Colin Davison, 2017

1. **Porcelain Uterus: Poem for Elvira**, imprinted porcelain
2. **Porcelain Uterus: Fundal Height Measurements**, imprinted porcelain
3. **Porcelain Uterus: 20 Week Scan**, imprinted porcelain
4. **Porcelain Uterus: Weeks 12 and 20 Scan Results in Graph**, imprinted porcelain
5. **Porcelain Uterus: Week 36 Scan Results**, imprinted porcelain

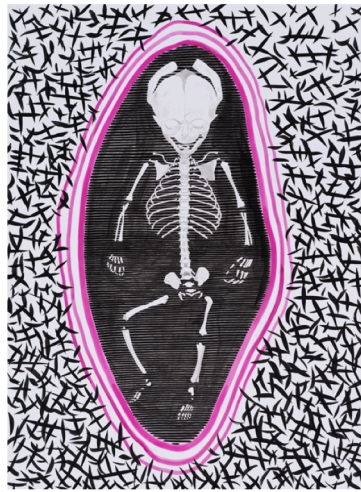


6. **Tree of Sadness**, ink on paper, 1.57 x 1.11 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2013, Photograph by Aaron Guy 2015, price: £ 2600 framed

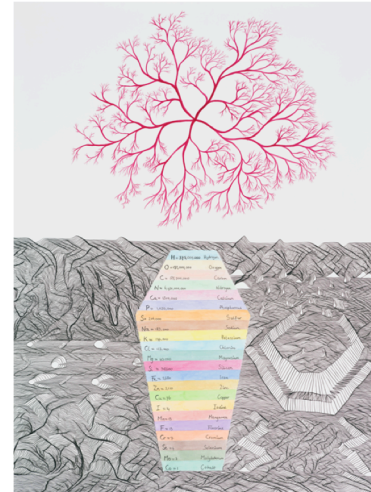
This drawing tries to express the deep sadness caused by a stillbirth. The tree has no roots which highlights feelings of isolation. An inability to carry the weight of the grief is visualised by the imbalance between the left and right side of the tree.



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7. **Bicornuate Uterus**, ink on paper, 0.845 x 1.11 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 1300 framed

A bicornuate uterus is a heart shaped uterus: a deformity of the uterus that is usually formed in the embryonic stage and in adult life is associated with repeated miscarriage and preterm birth. The drawing also shows a 3D-diagram of the female clitoris and reproductive organs, based on MRI scans by Odile Buisson and Pierre Foldes from 2009.

8. **Frozen**, ink on paper, 0.84 x 1.10 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 1300 framed

This drawing is based on an X-ray made of the artist's stillborn daughter in 2010. Treasured as one of the few memorabilia of her daughter's life, and drawn in intricate detail more than six years later, it struck her how a skeleton always smiles. Whilst this can be seen as a mockery of grief it could also be seen as a hint that perhaps we are born to smile, much more so than we are meant to disappear in our sadness.

9. **Elements of Human Life**, ink on paper, 0.845 x 1.11 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 1500 framed

This drawing incorporates Neil Shubin's (2013) formula for a human body, as broken down in the elements it consists of. When you have spent nine months being pregnant but deliver a dead baby, it's impossible to make sense of the 'Why' question. Your body spent nine months making a life, a life you had hopes and dreams for, but without the life that sustains it we have no more than a bunch of elements. However, the only other time some of these elements are formed are when stars die and supernovas occur. This does not explain the 'why' question but honours the amazing set of events that occur when life is formed.



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10. **Feather, Holes and Fur**, Ink on paper, 0.84 x 1.105 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 1400 framed

This drawing is another attempt at catching the essence of grief in an image. As grief is a process rather than a static entity, it is not surprising that the imagery has changed almost seven years after the occurrence of the stillbirth. What remains is a feeling of permanent change and scarring.

11. **More Hole than Whole**, Ink on paper, 0.85 x 1.11 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 1400 framed

This work is a sequel to *Feather, Holes and Fur*, and elaborates further on the holes turning into a galaxy. The shape here is also reminiscent of a wisdom tooth where the roots stick up in the air and the biting part is under the skin.

12. **Each Egg a World**, ink on paper, 1.165x 1.610 m, © Adinda van 't Klooster, 2017, photograph by Colin Davison, 2017, price: £ 6500 framed

Each hole in this drawing signifies a stillbirth, and all that that entails. This includes the pregnancy that went before it, the hopes and expectations of the mother and wider family for the child about to be born, the birth of a dead baby, the collapsing hopes, the years of depression that follow, the alienation from everything worldly and eventually after years of hard work finding some way to live on that honours all that is good, even if the knowledge that all that is loved can be taken away at a moment's notice remains engraved in ones being.

The aim of this work is to humanize figures on stillbirth as I think people can't feel the impact when presented with large figures. When people read there are 2.6 million stillbirths a year, they don't realize the enormity of the grief caused worldwide, as they first have to start imagining what it means for one person, and they don't want to imagine that. An idea for the future is to expand this work into an internet-based version where each dot can be claimed by the parent of a stillborn baby.

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