

## **Artist Statement**

### **“Lady Lazarus” and “Stillness”**

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Throughout my life, Plath’s poetry has been featured at times of change and emotional intensity. It has been an inspiration for my creativity—both as an artist, and as a musician. Sitting down on my own and absorbing the poetry of Sylvia Plath was a special place to go. It was a refuge from the world; a place to discover new ideas—particularly about womanhood—and a place of emotions. I was particularly drawn to performative aspects of the poetry.

At the age of 17, I was hooked by “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus”. At art college and newly independent from my family, the rebelliousness, emotion, and sheer drama of the poetry struck me immediately. “Daddy” encompassed conflicted emotions about my family and sadness about my Dad’s early life. He was a refugee from a German concentration camp and held his displaced person status until the day he died. The emphatic “You do not do, you do not do, Any more” and “In the German tongue, in the Polish town Scraped flat by the roller, Of wars, wars, wars” spoke to me of my family history and male authority in general.

“Lady Lazarus”, with its macabre cabaret - “Them unwrap me hand and foot - The big strip tease” - showed me a subversive woman. Around the same time, I read *Spare Rib*, a magazine that championed women’s equality. At Dundee Art College in 1977, with its all-male painting school, the male gaze was alive and well. Female models were nude; males wore underpants. Against this background, the sedition and self-determination of Lady Lazarus was a breath of fresh air! And I poured this into my performances as a punk singer.

In 2010, Lady Lazarus was the impetus for a group of images I called The White Series. I had returned to thinking about performance as a way of communicating my visual ideas. It felt natural as I was a musician and had received dance training as a child. I had already started to experiment with movement sequences and timed photography for a project that I had carried out for the University of Edinburgh in 2009. This culminated in a virtual dance sequence performed by 4 older people who were part of the University’s ageing research.

As well as the male gaze, I started to think about “Lady Lazarus” as a poem that depicted the fragility and transience of life. At that time, I was looking for a visual way to represent these ideas. Plath’s use of personae in general and the first person was something that I wanted to emulate. I began to perform movement sequences myself and photograph them. I took “Lady Lazarus’s” white cloth and used it for The White Series. It seemed to me a very simple and direct way of referring to familiar birth and death rituals as well as femininity, innocence, and purity.

Creating images that were personal and female was important to me. I chose poses for their emotional intensity and their universal meaning - a fetal pose, a madonna pose, a corpse-like

pose, a twisting pose suggestive of struggle. Some poses suggested classical paintings and sculpture; I was particularly inspired by Bernini's ability to sculpt cloth in marble. Timed photography allowed me to break down the movements into single poses and to photograph myself. Since I was photographing myself, I did not see what was being photographed until the sequence was complete. I relied upon the spatial awareness that I had developed over years of childhood dance training. The result was hundreds of images from which a much smaller number was chosen.

The image "Stillness" was featured in my first sequence of The White Series. On reflection, it was partly an exploration of my emotions following a death in my family some years before. I was attempting to uncover some aspect of the inexplicable mystery of life and death. I repeated very similar poses with subtle differences. I was intensely interested in the subtleties of light on a white cloth, under which I moved slightly. The filmy, transparent cloth blurred these slight movements. In this image I wanted to indicate an ethereal woman and suggest modesty, shame and desire. I arranged my head and body like a renaissance madonna and pulled my arms and the cloth with it behind my back.

"Stillness" was followed by the Breath of Life sequence which includes the "Lady Lazarus" image. Once again, I wore the fine white cloth and explored my feelings about transience. I performed on a bed placed beside a window with strong sunshine beaming in. Placing the camera parallel to the bed and in line with my eyes, the bed was intended to heighten the stagey, voyeuristic, and claustrophobic effect. The bed takes up virtually all the picture space and I "exhibited" myself on it.

To suggest the journey from life to death to rebirth, I began and ended the sequence with recumbent poses. The sequence begins with a lifting and upward movement towards the sunshine. This is followed by the pivotal point of the sequence where my body is dissolved by the same light. This dissolution and the subsequent struggling downward movements were intended to portray decline after the hopefulness of the first part of the sequence.

Since that time, Plath's poetry continues to be an inspiration. I would be keen to explore new themes and work collaboratively with Plath scholars, researchers, poets and writers. I'm particularly interested in the use of female personae.

Please contact me at [mywhiteroom@icloud.com](mailto:mywhiteroom@icloud.com) if you'd like to discuss this. My work has been exhibited throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, and Malaysia and can be seen on my website: <https://mywhiteroom.myportfolio.com/> and on Facebook @Linda Kosciwicz. I'd be delighted to hear from you.