

Still Born by Adinda van 't Klooster

New book of art and poetry brings stillbirth out of the shadows

There are few taboos left in 21st century Western society, but stillbirth - the death of a baby, over 24 weeks old, before or during delivery - is still rarely discussed. Published on 22 March, a new book of art and poetry aims to break the silence around stillbirth, approaching the issue from both a personal angle and as an issue within our society.

Artist Adinda van 't Klooster gave birth to a stillborn daughter, Elvira Elina, in 2010. Since then she has been making artwork about, and informed by, this experience. Her new book *Still Born* combines a personal selection of this artwork alongside responses by eight poets, her own narrative, and text by stillbirth specialist and obstetrician Alexander Heazell of Tommy's Stillbirth Research Centre at the University of Manchester.

The book aims to lift some of the taboos on this delicate subject matter, speaking through art and poetry about the emotions that arise in the days, months and years that follow a stillbirth.

The poems have been written in direct response to the artwork and engage with the central theme of loss. Some of the poets have their own personal experience of stillbirth, miscarriage or the death of a baby later in life, some have witnessed the loss and pain of stillbirth in others. The poets are Roger Bloor, Christine Bousfield, Jennie Farley, Rebecca Goss, Sarah James, Karen McCarthy Woolf, Claire Potter and Wendy Pratt.

Adinda said 'The artworks in *Still Born* were made over a seven-year period and chart the different stages one goes through in grief. Denial and anger are represented in the early porcelain uterus pieces and *Tree of Sadness*, made in 2013, highlights feelings of deep sadness and isolation. In my most recent work I have been able to take more distance and approach the subject matter as a societal problem, not just a personal one'.

Frozen, an artwork from 2017, which illustrates the front cover of the book, is a drawing based on a x-ray made of Adinda's stillborn daughter in 2010. The image shows the reality of stillbirth, a baby frozen in time, a baby with no future.

Drawing Elvira's skeleton in intricate detail it struck the artist that the skeleton was smiling and she concluded that we are born to smile, more so than that we are meant to disappear into our sadness. The drawing thus aims to give hope to women in the earlier stages of grief and show that, although it will never disappear, it does become a lighter load to bear.

Professor Alexander Heazell said, 'One in 224 pregnancies end in stillbirth, but nobody speaks about it and parents feel isolated and alone in their grief. Art and the written word offer an accessible means to inform and challenge the viewer in a quiet personal space. I hope that this book will help to reduce the stigma and taboo which so often prevent parents from being able to talk about stillbirth openly'.

Dr. van 't Klooster sought to raise funding for an ambitious project on stillbirth seven years ago but failed to break through barriers of taboo surrounding the topic. In 2017 she ran a successful crowdfunding campaign which, alongside Arts Council funding, allowed her to realise the *Still Born* project which has included two exhibitions, workshops and the *Still Born* book.

The book is launched at an event at Northern Print, Stepney Bank, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2NP on 22 March from 6pm – 8pm and poets Roger Bloor, Christine Bousfield and Wendy Pratt will read their work. If you would like to attend RSVP to enquiries@northernprint.org.uk

Some of the original artworks from the book will be on display at Northern Print from the 20th of March until the 21st of April. For more information see: <https://northernprint.org.uk/blogs/whats-on/still-born-20-march-21-april>

About stillbirth

- Around 1 in every 224 births ends in a stillbirth in the UK.
- Around 9 babies are stillborn everyday in the UK.
- In 2015 Britain had the 24th highest stillborn rate out of 49 high-income countries. Croatia, Poland and Czech Republic all have better stillbirth rates than the UK.
- In the UK around half of all stillbirths are linked to placental complications. Reduced foetal movement is a good indicator of stillbirth, with slowing down of movement noticed by the mother in around half of stillbirths.
- An estimated 4.2 million women are living with depression associated with a previous stillbirth.

2016 Data sourced from Tommy's <https://www.tommys.org/our-organisation/charity-research/pregnancy-statistics/stillbirth>

Adinda van 't Klooster is a Newcastle-based Dutch artist who works with drawing, sculpture, light, animation, sound and interactive installation and performance. Her work has received many awards and grants and has been commissioned throughout the UK and exhibited, screened and published internationally. www.adindavantklooster.com

Still Born is funded by Arts Council England, crowdfunding and support from Northern Print and New Writing North in Newcastle, Tommy's Stillbirth Research Centre in Manchester and the National Institute for Health Research.

Images from the book can be downloaded from:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l82teg5q5ptfe4u/AADQ3NZaHY0Duo9lBXJypJKla?dl=0>

The *Still Born* book can be purchased from Amazon.

For further enquiries email: affectformations@gmail.com

Still Born by Adinda van 't Klooster is published on 22 March 2018 by Affect Formations Publishing
46pp

ISBN: 978-1-9999657-0-9

