

She is the only artist ever to have filmed a cat and mouse in zero gravity. She is probably the only person to think of propelling a horse skeleton with wings attached through water. And she plans to make a unique interplanetary artwork during the European Space Agency's next robotic trip to Mars. Some of us might ask why? But equally: why not?

Lyn Hagan is an original thinker who has the inquiring mind of a scientist and the theatrical flair of an artist. She's making fairly uncommercial pieces, but has the support of Middlesbrough's innovative Digital City where she is a Visiting Artist.

Her current project is called the Museum of Alternative Evolution and as Lyn says, "is near impossible to accomplish."

Aided by technicians, she is using the skeletons of birds and animals to create automated sculptures which she hopes will move through water.

Lyn, 33, explains: "If evolution had decided to put a bird in the water instead of in the air, what changes would have to happen to its body?"

"At the moment I'm working with bird skeletons to see how they might be animated underwater."

She hopes the investigation will eventually lead to a making a mechanically-powered Pegasus: a horse skeleton which would move through an ocean. A camera would be attached to film its journey.

Maybe a little macabre, but the idea is to put bodies into different natural environments. Lyn says: "I'm interested in how things react to their environment. If you change an environment what happens to the body or the mind? What happens if you put things in an extreme environment? That's what much of my work is about."

The Museum of Alternative Evolution is related to her biggest completed work to date, which involved making the film *Cat and Mouse in 0g* (zero gravity).

This was a colossal undertaking and was conducted in 2008 at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in



Star City. Unable to get a visa to take her own cat Major Tom to Moscow, Lyn borrowed a cat called Porcupla (Your Fault) from a Russian friend.

Following six years of research, Porcupla and two mice (in a box) were placed in a specially designed padded container inside a Russian Space Agency parabolic aeroplane.

Lyn, who was born in Gateshead but

Lyn Hagan's images of convicts. Left, pictures from her film *Cat and Mouse in 0g* (zero gravity)

now lives in Newcastle, says: "This was a borderline work, it could be seen in a behavioural way or an artistic way."

"It was the first time that two different animals had been tested during weightlessness in a parabolic plane, although they have been tested in space before."

"Being in a parabolic aeroplane is like being at the top of a roller-coaster for

half a minute and then the bottom of the roller coaster for half a minute. You do that 10 times. It wasn't the right environment for me."

"What I wanted to film was how a cat would cope with the new environment and it coped better than humans. Everything outside of the cat's tent was in mayhem, but the cat was landing on its feet. It was better suited to zero gravity and it used the mouse box to help orientate itself. The work was about the design of the body and how cats move."

Lyn says that she went to extreme lengths to ensure that the animals would be completely safe but found the project fraught with ethics.

"People got too emotional about the morality of it," she says. "If it had been a scientific inquiry it would have been fine, but an artist can't conduct those kind of inquiries."

"I'm not going to work with a live animal again because it was way too problematic!"

Lyn studied art at Sunderland University and graduated from Chelsea

College of Art six years ago. Although she painted at Sunderland, she reacted against making work in a tiny London studio. Instead she wrote a novel and made transitory performance art. She has now moved away from using her own body in performance and is more interested in sculpture.

Following Porcupla, Lyn made contact with Jorge Vago, ExoMars project scientist at the European Space Agency. The next ExoMars Rover mission is in 2018 and Lyn hopes to make art on Mars. Her idea is to choreograph a dance for the Rover which will leave wheel tracks on the planet and be photographed by the orbiter relay satellite.

Her most recent work has been closer to earth, but still links with the ephemeral nature of her art.

She became fascinated by Victorian post-mortem photography and also images of convicts studied by 19th Century criminologist Cesare Lombroso.

The Italian academic was renowned for unscientific theories linking physical



# Flights of fancy

Cosmology, cats, criminals and chaos. Tamzin Lewis enters the wonderful world of artist Lyn Hagan.

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characteristics to criminal behaviour.

Over the past year Lyn has reproduced photos using embroidery, a laborious technique which she describes as "drawing with thread."

Lyn says: "My work is quite linear with one thing leading to another. The post-mortem photography led to images of convicts in Tasmanian gaols."

"Lombroso's sketch of a 'criminal type' has big ears, close-set eyes, a big nose and a down-turned mouth."

"He also looked into prison tattoos with the idea of identifying criminals by their tattoos."

"Many are quite religious like the mother and child image, which also links to the post-mortem series."

"It is quite a dark theme but I am trying to get to how people represent themselves and how they are judged and perceived by others. What is the true self?"

\*For more information on Lyn, check [www.lynhagan.com](http://www.lynhagan.com). Digital City is part of Teesside University, [www.idi-uk.org](http://www.idi-uk.org)