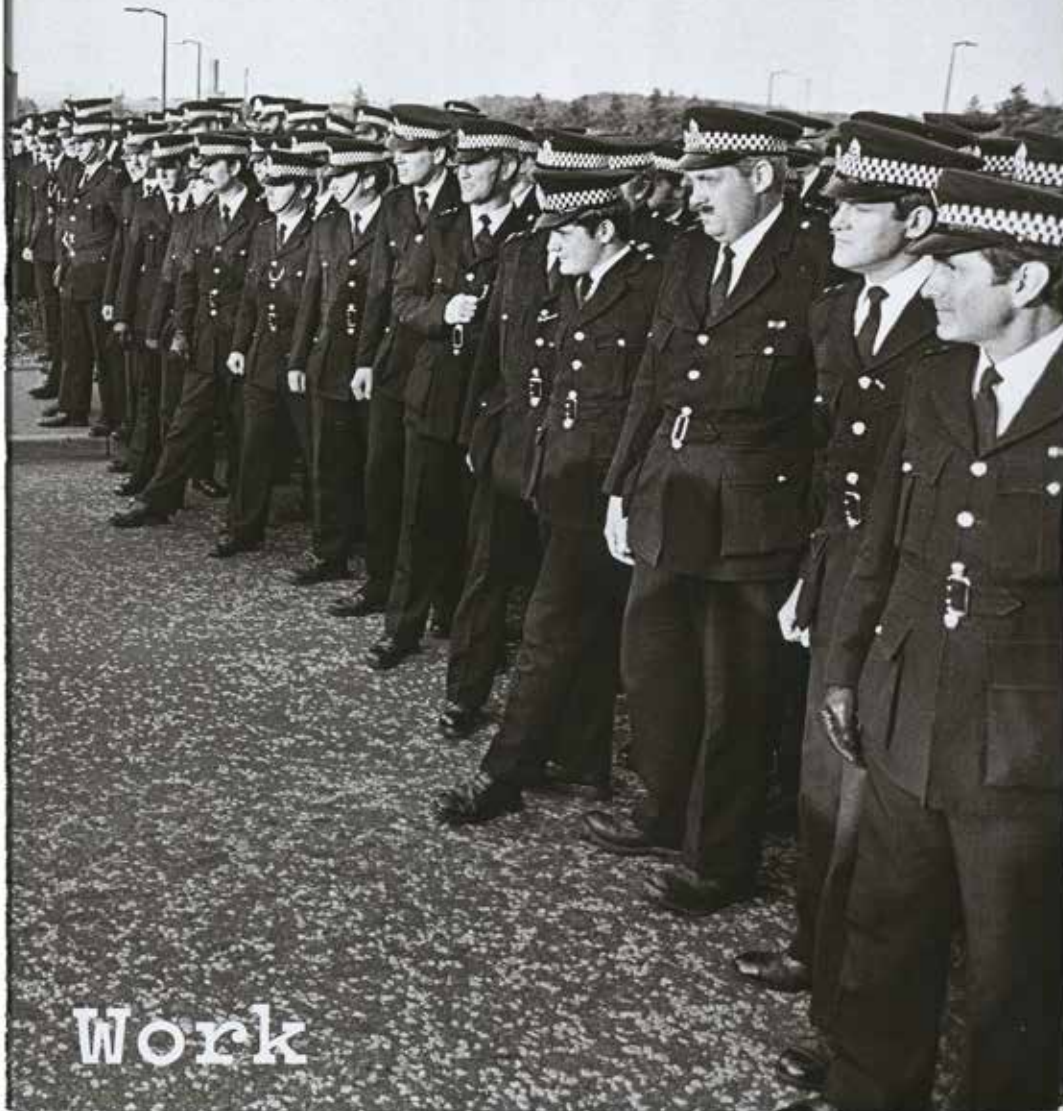


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A trained radiography technician, **Lindsay Caldicott** made intricate collages of medical images and photographs informed by her own hospital stays. Her brother Richard traces her life and legacy

Words by **Diane Smyth**

Patient records



Born in Leicester in 1955, Lindsay Caldicott was a radiography technician who worked in hospitals in the UK and the Netherlands. She was also an artist, graduating in fine arts from Middlesex Polytechnic in 1987, and a psychiatric patient: diagnosed as schizophrenic, obsessive-compulsive, and manic depressive. She died in 2014 aged 58, having attempted suicide several times. Caldicott's experiences were unusual and helped shape her singular approach to images, a factor she herself acknowledged. "The diverse and at times bizarre life I have lead [sic] are, I think, to be found in my work as an artist," she noted in a handwritten memo, referenced

by author Marc Lenot in *Lindsay Caldicott, X Ray Memories* - a 2018 catalogue published by Christian Berst Art Brut gallery, the sole publication on her work.

Aspects of Caidicott's diverse life are quite literally to be found in her artworks, in the multiple repeated elements that make up her intricate collages. Medical images were one of her favourite sources, particularly the 'localisation plates' used to identify where patients need treatment. Lindsay's brother Richard says she was given boxes of these images by the Leiden hospital where she worked from 1978 to 1983 and after university, until ill health forced her to return to Britain.

These photographs show "tiny bits of other people", he tells me, but if they are fragments Caidicott cut them down further. She also cut out images from her collection of medical textbooks, some of which dated back to the 1940s and displayed bodies very differently to contemporary approaches; they were "a mixed bag" Richard says, "some quite explicit". Caidicott also collected microscopic images and diagrams, as well as shots of treatments she knew from the other side of the camera.

Multiple images

Caidicott included her own photographs in the collages too, and because she spent so much time in hospitals - working, or as a patient - they also have a medical feel. There is a shot of an institutional bathroom, for example, or images featuring moveable hospital screens; some of these images include many little hair grips, which she also used to make elaborate 3D sculptures. Richard traces her fondness for these clips to her difficult relationship with their father, an art dealer who experienced mental ill-health too. Caidicott senior often

told his daughter to "get a grip", Richard recalls, and he thinks she took it literally, adding a pinch of black humour. Caidicott also used images of herself, sometimes recognisable and sometimes hard to make out: there are shots of her own hands, passport portraits, and a photograph Richard took of her cooing up to a mannequin.

The dummy is an apt prop because, as Richard points out, Caidicott's work plays with doubles and multiples. Using a photocopier, she made versions of her source images, then cut out the same element over and over with a medical scalpel. The effect is semi-hallucinatory, and Richard traces the repetition back to her obsessive-compulsion. He also says she could not work when she was ill, though when in good health, she was devoted to her practice. Their sister, Karen, writes something similar in the catalogue. "Her bipolar illness caused violent mood swings," she notes. "When she was down she was lower than low and could do no work. She would smoke cigarettes, drink tea and sit in one place for hours on end. For many years she had electric shock treatment which brought her out of these terrifying lows, eventually she would be back making art again and the dark places she had visited were apparent in the work."

Caidicott only had one exhibition in her lifetime, a modest show at the Attenborough Arts Centre of Leicester University in 2007 titled *The Disregard of Personal Boundaries*. It is tempting to link the title to her employment and experiences, to going under the skin with radiography on the one hand, and to being subjected to invasive interventions on the other. She liked going deeper in other ways too, chipping through layers of plasterboard to make her final piece for her fine art degree, and spending one summer excavating a giant hole in a friend's garden. Like an archaeologist, she meticulously recorded what she dug up. She was also intimate - even nosy - in person, her brother recalls, striking up conversation with whoever she met.

"She loved stories, both hearing them and telling them," he writes in the catalogue. "She was very talkative and inquisitive and would love to have gregarious conversations with anyone who would listen - shopkeepers, taxi drivers, doctors, nurses - and then in a matter of minutes she could get them to open up and reveal their past and present lives, histories, difficulties or whatever secrets."

Posthumous recognition

Richard cautions against reading too much into her source material, noting that medical and medical imagery just happened to play a large part in her life. He points out her collages were about an overall effect as much as their individual elements, each crafted






into shapes with meticulous cuts and colour choices. "They're repetitive but they make a form," he observes. "They make a structure." He adds that each collage had a particular meaning relating to events in Calkcott's life; they were a form of communication (or even a visual diary) but as she did not date her work or note their titles, those meanings are now obscure. What remains is a striking if inscrutable archive, represented by Christian Berst Art Brut gallery in Paris.

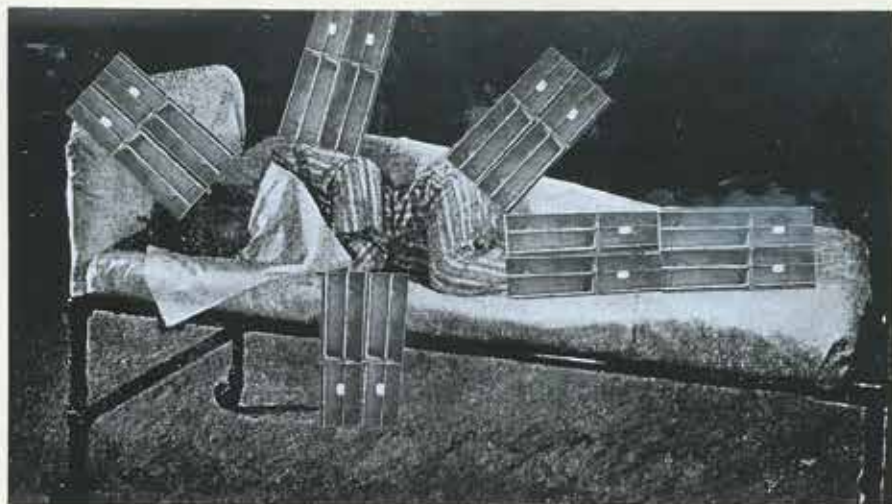
As the name suggests, Christian Berst Art Brut specialises in 'outsider artists', a factor that adds another twist to the interplay of life and work in Calkcott's oeuvre. She never earned anything from her practice, making work through compulsion rather than as a career; on the other hand, she studied art and was keen her pieces be seen. "Whenever I visited her she would show me new work," Richard says. "She was confident in it, and interested in its psychological impact [on others]. When she had the exhibition [in Leicester] she was really happy and excited, and she would have loved the Paris show [at Christian Berst in 2018], but I don't know. Personal boundaries did make her ill. She was off the rails for a few months afterwards. She found social situations quite stressful."

This reaction meant Richard hesitated to try to do more with Calkcott's work during her lifetime. When she died he rescued as much

of it as possible, however, and has looked after it ever since. Himself an artist (his work is currently on show in the V&A's *Fragile Beauty: Photographs from the Sir Elton John and David Furnish Collection*), he managed to secure representation of many of Calkcott's pieces with Berst when his Parisian gallerist introduced them. Art Brut Bruno Decharme now holds some of her work, for example, and included her collages while exhibiting his collection at *Le Botanique*, Brussels, in 2023. Berst also included some of Calkcott's collages at the *Approche* in 2019, a small, prestigious photography salon that runs alongside the Paris Photo fair.

But beyond that Calkcott's work remains little-known, and unseen in Britain for years, despite its intriguing interplay of medical perspectives and its evident quality. Sadly much has also been lost, a process that started with Calkcott herself. "She was very critical of her own work, and would destroy it," Richard says. "A lot went at the end of her degree. Also she did give things away. She would have these very intense, personal relationships with her doctors and give these pieces - I think she worked on something very large for six months and gave it away, and I don't have a record of that. It's hard to be sure what she made. She just went under the radar I'm afraid." 

theartstudent.com/xf/entry/indoor-calkcott



“THEY’RE REPETITIVE BUT THEY MAKE
A FORM. THEY MAKE A STRUCTURE”

