

# Sam Taylor -Wood

Sam Taylor-Wood is an English filmmaker, photographer and visual artist. She is one of the groups of artists known as Young British Artists. Sam began exhibiting her fine art photography in the 1990's. In 1994 she exhibited a multi-screen work called **Killing Time**, in which four people mimed to an opera score. From here on video work became her focus. In 2000 Taylor-Wood released a **photomural** wrapped around the scaffolding of Selfridges, London. The mural consisted of portraits of 21 cultural icons, Elton John, Richard E Grant and many more.

Sam Taylor Wood exhibited video installations, framed and moving incredibly slowly. These videos were depicting different states of being; they're emotional and strangely addictive to watch. . They were exhibited in-between still photography, taking on the element of surprise when these framed installations start to move slowly. They focused on a decaying world, showing the ability to play with time. The **fruits** curiously decay and change form in minutes.



## A Little Death

The content of this image is of a decaying Hare. The Composition uses a video format to create a sped up film of the 'slow' process of the decomposition of a Hare, a deterioration of natural decay, evoking fascination rather than disgust. The lighting is low, dull, shadowy and rustic. The angles of light are a strong frontal angle, casting heavy shadows giving depth. The technical skills used are the lighting and arrangement giving a feeling of age, and shape to the form; in body and shadow. No foreground is used giving vision only to the middle ground and background. The background is large and spacious; with the hare becoming integral to the middle and back ground. The middle ground uses a different texture, with the light reflecting off of the wood contrasting with hare's fur. This is effective as the eye is taken directly into the subject, giving us the viewer a direct focus on the hare, its shape, and shadows that have been created. All the colours that have been used are dull and decaying, this reflects the theme of mortality. The still life subject matter and process connect with mortality and passage of time. This shows direct links with the content of Dutch realist painters of the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Artists of this time used a close up subject matter, without a foreground; that was symbolic, cute and grotesque. The images show us what it means to decay, capturing this process for eternity. The film has a distinctive painterly approach; this is very similar to the Dutch led world of botanical and scientific drawings, studies of dead game that were drawn from dead! Colours were often muted, with browns dominating and dark backgrounds. Painters William Aest, Leiden; painters at The Hague and Amsterdam all excelled in this style of painting. These still-life had a moralistic message that tell us about the shortness of life, its brevity when you are a Hare or game! A Little death was exhibited in 2002. I feel connected with this piece as I have a great affiliation with nature, and the circle of life within nature. I often see the decomposing life in the fields that surround me, as well as the wealth of life, or witness the hunters that seek the game. I find that I have a great bond with the cycle of nature, and the way this piece portrays what is inevitable, makes me reflect on the lack of time in existence these animals really have. How they nurture their young and then they are denied the privilege

- I have great empathy in their quality of life and how its cut so short, whether it is by another predator or man. Watching how the body decomposes fascinates me, as it is returned to dust and the earth once more, going through many stages exposing the mechanics and structure of the bone form. The meaning of mortality behind this work evokes a sense of horror but also a reassurance in knowing what will be.....for all of us. The gentleness of the demise of the still life shows a great strength of understanding that mortality is an inevitable reality. The bleakness of the light and shadow immediately makes us reflect on the darkness imposed by death. I like this piece because it shows reality in a modern way that has been inspired by some of the greatest masters of our time. I like the connection with the positioning of the Hare, how it seemingly hangs, but is just propped in its stiff repose.

**A Little Death - Sam Taylor Wood**



**Frans Snyders - Kitchen still life**



**Jan Weenix - Still Life with a Dead Peacock**

**Crying Men**



In 2004 a series of work at the National Gallery of **Crying Men** was exhibited; these included Sean Penn, Robbie Williams. The photos can be interpreted on so many different levels, superficially or a much deeper level. They are such rich works of art, maybe based on how The Masters have been painting 'Iconic' people in society for hundreds of years - Royals and the hierarchy. Today's celebrities are just our version of these people in society. Elevated with power because they're made famous by us, or by what their careers or family status has led them to. These photos represent power, masculinity or people who are representational in our media. The photos are made to make the celebrities within them look really vulnerable, crying - undoing their status in power so subtly. I find this concept very interesting, considering the debilitation of

human's emotions; no matter how special, famous or blessed they are in society. I feel the photo makes it clear that it doesn't matter who we are, we are all the same when it comes to emotions. The feelings are the same and the emotion is as raw as it is with the poorest or most insignificant human being in the world. When we cry - we are equal. I think this is very powerful and provides a lot of interest or content for a series of emotional thought provoking set of photos or paintings. In the example I have chosen, I love the way the light source or window behind the subject is indicative to that of Christ or a saint. The light creating a halo around the celebrity promoting his state in society yet the tears that prevail, show us that he is really no different from the next person in life. The light and shape in the room, gives a tunnel effect leading us into the intensity of this photo, it's cold and empty; reflecting the mood or context in which the photo is set.

Sam Taylor Woods self portraits **Suspended(2004)** were also an incredible set of photos that display images of Taylor-Wood bound and hung from the ceiling, elaborately set up in her studio. The process was painful and constricting, truly an uncomfortable experience. Yet you have no sense of this when you look at the photos. There is a sense of freedom rather than constriction. It becomes a spiritual sense of a moment frozen in time and space. There is a partnership between heaven and earth, body and spirit. They tell us the subject is dealing with life; the fullness and vulnerability of life. But they also show us that the subject herself is dealing with pain and joy.





**Bram Stokers Chair 2005** There is a much darker element. The Chair is named after Dracula who had no shadow. Taylor-Wood has removed the shadow from the chair, the chair becoming a tentative support, precariously balanced. The figure gives a sense of falling into the abyss. It's quite a dark series emotionally. I like the way the shadow is totally independent from the suspended form, it has no connection with the chair; it's a composition within the composition giving a sense of illusion.



**Bram Stoker Chair**

Sam Taylor Wood has a sense of wonderment, beauty, even horror; we witness the 'in the moment' subject matter of her photos. Her ideas gestate for a few years, weeks or day. The process takes a lot of organising, for big or small productions.

