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## Wild horses: Sculptor's moving tribute to brother's epilepsy and autism

By Matthew Knight, CNN

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Photos: Turning childhood trauma into art

Tess Dumon's life-size horse sculptures were suspended from the ceiling in the atrium at London's Central St. Martins art school.

**(CNN)**Tess Dumon didn't know whether her brother was alive or dead.

Fourteen-year-old Louis had suffered seizures almost all his life, but this time he wouldn't wake up.

"I witnessed my mother holding his lifeless body in her arms," Dumon recalls of that traumatic day at her family's home in Switzerland 12 years ago.

"He'd had one of his frequent epilepsy crises that made him convulse, distort, fall and drool. However, something came up with this one, something unusual. My brother was not reacting to our calls and our light slaps," she said.

"Time had stopped."

After being rushed to hospital, the family endured an agonizing wait as Louis, who is also autistic, remained in a coma for several hours before finally coming around.

### Art as therapy

The horrifying spectacle would leave a lasting impression on the then 12-year-old Tess, who turned to art as a form of therapy.

Initially, she explored the familial connection through sketches and drawings -- some graphically depicting her sense of pain and dislocation -- before progressing to ceramics, making small equine figurines inspired by her brother's experience with horse therapy.



Tess Dumon first explored her relationship with her brother through painting.

"I didn't know how to interact with him -- he cannot speak at all -- but then I saw him doing horse therapy. Horses are well known for having interactions with the disabled and people with trauma.

"I was just observing a lot, and when I started doing art it was the central theme in my work."

Equine-assisted therapy is an increasingly popular alternative treatment for people seeking help with a range of psychological disorders from depression to phobias.

According to the U.S.-based [Autism Spectrum Disorder Foundation](#), autistic children can benefit from the motor, emotional and sensory sensations that come with riding a horse.

Louis, now 26, has been going to Geneva for horse therapy for more than a decade.

"I just feel it's the right place for him -- it calms him," she says.

"He doesn't talk but he feels more alive around horses than when he's on his own. He usually breathes very heavily, and can be quite excited and won't sit still, (but around horses) he's just calm."

Dumon had planned to do a business management degree but was encouraged to pursue a more creative career path by her art-loving parents. "They always took me to museums," she says.