

Shock tactics to teach lessons from history

Catherine Jones talks to the disabled artist using Nazi iconography to bring home the horrors of the holocaust

WHEN artist **Liz Crow** took her turn on **Antony Gormley's** Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square it's true to say it caused something of a stir.

The 45-year-old was helped up to her perch above the pigeons and tourists covered in a sheet.

It was only after 10 minutes that Liz pulled off her cover to reveal she was wearing full Nazi regalia as she sat in her wheelchair.

"It's not my regular dress!" she laughs from the office of her arts company, Roaring Girl Productions.

"That was just an opportunity that came up and it seemed a perfect chance to start to put this thing on the map, and it's become the image for the project now."

The project being *Resistance*, Liz's new multi-media installation whose thorny theme is based on the Nazi's mass murder of disabled people at the start of World War II.

It receives its premiere at the Contemporary Urban Centre this month as part of DaDaFest, the UK's leading deaf and disabled arts festival which is held each year in Liverpool.

"This is the big launch," says the Cheshire-born but Bristol-based artist, whose mum Barbara hails from Liverpool.

"I got the new media arts award two years ago, and I've had a film screened at Dada before, but this is the biggest project I've ever worked on and it's the first time I'll personally have got to Dada."

"I'm really looking forward to it, I've wanted to come in previous years and just never been able to manage it."

Resistance itself has also been years in the making.

"I read a book about it 12 years ago, about the historical part of the project which is the Nazi programme which targeted disabled people," explains Liz. "It was that first phase of systematic murder that became the blueprint for everything else."

"As you'd expect it was horrific information that really shocked me, but I was also shocked because I hadn't come across that as a history before."

"I knew a lot about the Jewish Holocaust and that other social groups had been targeted, but I had no idea disabled people were not only the target but also the initial target."

"I was also struck by two other things. One was that in the midst of all of that, disabled people actually resisted which I just thought showed courage beyond anything I can even get my head around."

"The other was that when you looked at values within that system, and the thinking that permitted it to happen, it was familiar to the kind of

rationale of disabled people being lesser or burdensome or pitiful.

"Those things are all around today although generally they don't lead to such extremes. But just to confine it to history is a really risky thing to do."

Liz hopes the artwork, which will feature a story based on historical facts and then individual disabled people's stories today, will make people consider not simply history but how we continue to make changes to society.

And she promises the 30-minute piece, which will also be complemented by activities at the Bluecoat, "isn't frightening, it's not obscure and overly arty! It's very accessible".

The work, and Liz's appearance on the Fourth Plinth, has already garnered support from high profile names including Baroness **Julia Neuberger**.

And **Ruth Gould**, founder of DaDa, adds: "It's a chilling piece of work but also moving, tender and hauntingly beautiful, delivering hope and a sense of promise for the future."

"One of the voices in the installation says this is not just an issue about disabled people for disabled people," says Liz, whose previous work includes pieces about artist **Frida Kahlo** and deaf-blind American author **Helen Keller**.

"It's an issue for society and one of the things we hope will come from this is that people grasp that actually what happened to any one of those groups in the Holocaust happened to them because it was permitted to happen to all those other groups."

"If we don't tackle one we fail to tackle the other."

Resistance is part of a wide-ranging programme for this year's DaDaFest which runs from November 17 to December 5.

It includes specially-commissioned short films screened on to the Big Screen in Clayton Square; a 1970s Magic Mirror Ball at Tate Liverpool, an evening of burlesque at the Bluecoat and performances by comedians **Mat Fraser** and **Liz Carr**.

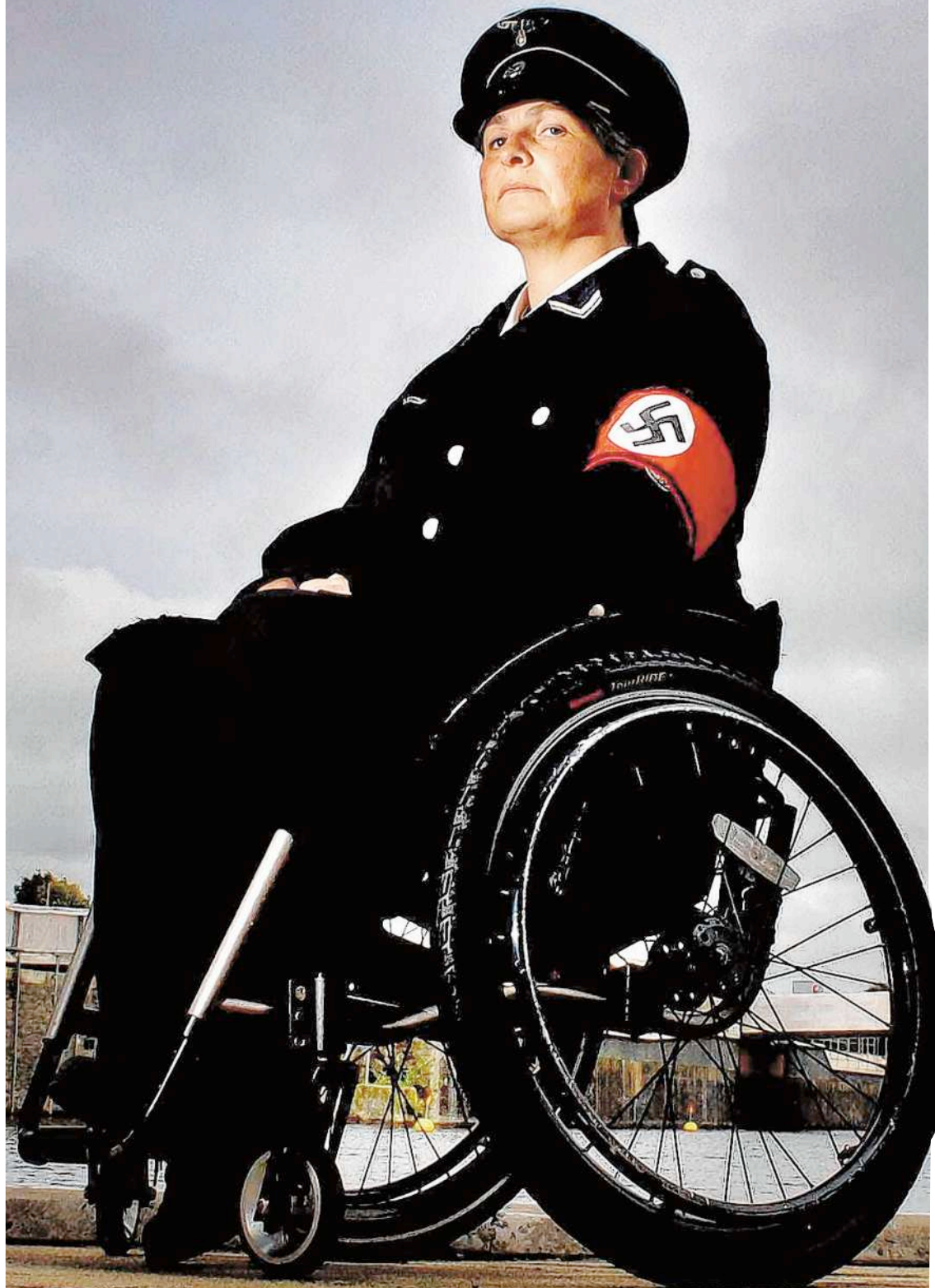
The festival also includes two award ceremonies; Young DaDaFest at the Contemporary Urban Centre on November 19, and the DaDa Award 2009 at the Hilton Hotel on December 3.

"The exhibitions, seminars and performances within DaDaFest will enlighten, engage and educate the public," says Ruth.

"There are some incredible artists sharing their work this year and we're looking forward to an even more successful festival than last year."

◆ **For more details on the festival programme visit www.dada.hello.com.**

For more details on Liz Crow's work visit www.roaring-girl.com.



POWERFUL STATEMENT:
Artist Liz Crow, inset Ruth Gould