

**PRESS RELEASE**

DRAFT 6 February 2018

## Polish artist honours her banished ancestors at the Storefront

**Karolina Lebek: Watra**

Thursday 22 February – Sunday 25 March 2018

**The Storefront**, 64 Bute Street, Luton LU1 2EY  
**Admission free**

Luton-based artist **Karolina Lebek** will display new work exploring her Polish heritage at the Storefront in Luton from Thursday 22 February. Her exhibition, **Watra**, is the latest in the **As You Change, So Do I** series of art commissions for the town.

Karolina will investigate themes of migration, displacement and assimilation informed by the experiences of her Lemko ancestors - an ethnic minority who were violently and forcibly removed from their ancestral homeland in the Carpathian Mountains in the 1940s. Throughout their traumatic history, Lemkos have used worship and singing as a way to maintain a shared sense of cultural identity and unite Lemko communities throughout the world.

Informed by these traditional songs and singing, Karolina will create a musical, performative and visual experience in which the wounded voices of the past mould into a song in the present, striving for recognition and reparation. Her installation, which merges sound, video and photography, is inspired by the 'watra' - a large bonfire, built to evoke memories of things past, or to revive a sense of community. The name also belongs to the biggest annual Lemko festival in the world, held in the Carpathian Mountains.

Karolina Lebek said “maybe something about what you discovered on your research trip to Poland eg what is so powerful about the Lemko song etc, and something about how good it is to be showing this work in Luton where so many people have come from elsewhere and feel far from their own homeland (2 or 3 short sentences max please)”

Curator Matthew Shaul said: ‘We are delighted to be working with an incredibly promising young artist who has made her adopted home in Luton. Karolina’s ideas about displacement and migration and the search for a sense of belonging through

revisiting ancient cultural traditions is hugely relevant all the town's diverse communities.

Karolina will be in conversation with Matthew Shaul during the opening of the exhibition on Wednesday 21 February 6pm-8.30pm. She will also be joined by Scottish artist Susannah Stark for a live musical performance at the Storefront on Saturday 24 March at 7pm. Both events are **free** and all are welcome.

Karolina Lebek has lived and worked in Luton for many years and graduated from the University of Bedfordshire before studying at the Royal College of Art.

*Watra* is organised by Departure Lounge in collaboration with Luton Culture and is part of *As You Change, So Do I* (<https://asyouchange.co.uk/>) a three-year programme of public art events funded by Arts Council England's Luton Investment Programme.

#AsYouChange #loungeLuton #watra

### Opening Hours

Thursday – Saturday 1pm– 6pm

### Opening Reception

Wednesday 21 February 2018, 6-8.30pm

The Storefront, 64 Bute Street, Luton LU1 2EY

Karolina Lebek will be in conversation with curator Matthew Shaul, 7 - 7.30pm.

### Closing Event

As part of their ongoing collaborative practice Karolina Lebek and Glasgow-based Scottish artist Susannah Stark will perform a live audio-visual set expanding on the themes of the exhibition on Saturday 24 March at 7pm.

Further events are planned, for details please visit <https://asyouchange.co.uk/>

### Luton Culture

Telephone 01582 878100

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### PRESS ENQUIRIES:

For further information and images please contact Hazel Foxon  
[hazel@foxon.org](mailto:hazel@foxon.org) or call 07801 234930 (not for publication)

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Karolina Lebek** completed a BA in Photography and Video Art at the University of Bedfordshire in Luton in 2012, and graduated from the Royal College of Art in London in 2016. Selected exhibitions include: Unnatural Wealth, Studio RCA, London 2017; Identify your limitations, acknowledge your periphery, Vitrine Gallery, Basel 2017; MK Calling, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK, 2017; Uncertain States, Four Corners Gallery, London, 2015; Sensing Grounds, The Horse Hospital, London, 2015; Landscapes of Poland, Project Space, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes (solo show, 2012). She participated in The Fountainhead Residency Miami in December 2017.

Website : [www.cargocollective.com/karolinalebek](http://www.cargocollective.com/karolinalebek)

Instagram: @karolinalebek

**As You Change, So Do I** is a three-year contemporary public realm arts programme commissioned by Luton Culture. It includes new works for the public realm, including artist residencies, temporary public artworks and outdoor projections to animate Luton's streets and empty buildings. Initially focusing on the Cultural Quarter within Luton, the programme will grow to impact on a wider geography. Luton Culture is working with artist Mark Titchner and curators Matthew Shaul (Departure Lounge) and Andrew Hunt to involve local people and artists in the development of a long-term approach to public realm arts commissioning and audience engagement. *As You Change, So Do I* includes a series of educational activities by a range of artists, curators and writers, and aims to establish ongoing collaborations with international arts institutions, and engage with a wide range of local community groups, schools, local businesses and residents. More information can be found at <https://asyouchange.co.uk/>

**Luton Culture** is an arts and cultural charity providing exceptional and meaningful engagement with museums, arts centres, libraries and public art for the people of Luton and beyond. Luton Culture aims to deliver exemplary public engagement with arts and culture through its locally relevant and nationally important arts and cultural programmes, whilst actively nurturing creativity and artistic talent. <http://www.lutonculture.com/>

**Arts Council England** champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural England, through the National Lottery, as part of the Luton Investment Programme. The Luton Investment Programme aims to enhance the arts and cultural infrastructure of Luton, ensuring the town has a cultural offer with something for everyone. <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

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The project receives additional support from trusts and foundations and collaborates with partners including arts agencies and other organisations to co-produce projects.