

Laidlaw Programme Research Reflective Report

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Part 1: Research

Research Introduction and Aims

The research project I have been undertaking forms part of Feminist Art Making Histories (FAMH), an AHRC/IRC-funded initiative documenting the relation between art and feminism across the UK and Ireland. My research required working with the FAMH oral-history archive, which brings together interviews with artists, curators, art historians and art workers who were active in Ireland and the UK in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The aim of my research was to engage with the FAMH archive and support its dissemination, through which I was asked to create my own research question guided by materials in the archive. I undertook listening-based research and feminist archival interpretation, engaging closely with selected interviews to identify key themes which I used to develop my own independent research topic. I decided to focus my independent research on women artists in Wales, as I felt the arts in Wales are often underrepresented and male oriented, and thus was keen to continue the work of FAMH of honouring the overlooked voices of women artists.

A central element of the project was supporting the FAMH archive through public-facing dissemination. As well as developing my own ways of sharing insights of the archive for my independent research, I also worked alongside my fellow Laidlaw Scholar, Mabinty Kamara, to support the dissemination of the *Feminist Art Lives* podcast through curated social media content. *Feminist Art Lives* is an eight-part podcast series created by researchers from the FAMH project that explores different stories and insights from the FAMH archive in each episode.

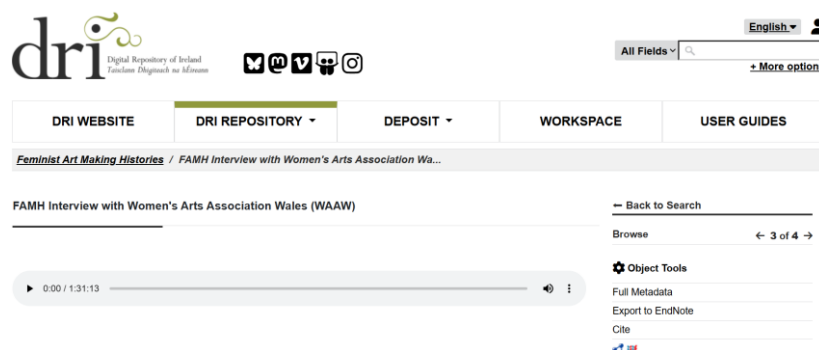


Feminist Art Lives Logo by FAMH team

Methodology

As my research involved working with the interviews in the FAMH digital archive, all my research involved qualitative research methods as I was engaging with oral histories which detailed personal experiences and reflections. Oral history is a grassroots method which aims to produce ‘history from the bottom up’, which was used by FAMH to privilege the voices of the artists and participants in the movements themselves rather than relying upon narratives provided by institutional or academic gatekeepers - such as the canons and values seen in museums, or histories written by distant scholars. In this way, the FAMH succeeds in producing a rich, nuanced, and diverse picture of feminism, art, and politics.

I applied narrative analysis when engaging with the oral history interviews through close listening and reflective notetaking as well as applying textual analysis to the transcripts provided for each interview; focusing on the interviews with Women’s Arts Association Wales, Christine Kinsey and Moira Vincentelli to conduct research on women artists in Wales. My research was anchored by my interest in how geography and place shapes identity as well as how women artists in Wales engaged with feminism, and how their experiences were unique to living in Wales.



Feminist Art Making Histories Digital Archive

These ideas were prevalent in my mind as I applied thematic analysis when listening and reading to the archive’s materials to identify key themes across all the interviews. Reflecting on my

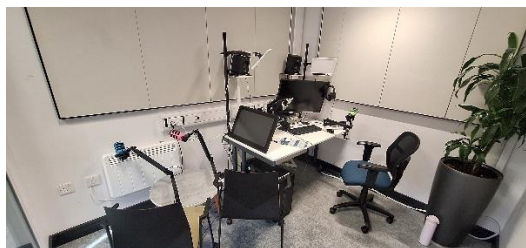
notes, I was able to collate the different experiences of all the women interviewed under the themes of identity, art education, feminist activity, and representation. I decided the best way of documenting my findings would be through a podcast episode featuring clips from the interviews as well as my own narration, as this digital media method of dissemination would allow me to share the oral histories directly, which I felt aligned with the FAMH aim of honouring the voices of women themselves. Additionally, I was keen to expand upon my research in the FAMH digital archive by visiting the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, where I could explore materials relating to each artist in the archives.

Before visiting the National Library of Wales, I searched for relevant materials on the archive's online website and was able to request to view them for my upcoming visit. Whilst in the archive, I applied narrative analysis when engaging with the materials, which included photographs, letters, newsletters, papers relating to artists' exhibitions and financial reports. While notetaking I applied thematic analysis of the materials as well as noting personal reflections of the experience, which I used to write a blog post for the FAMH website, sharing my findings and reflections from my visit.



The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth by Emma Rowland

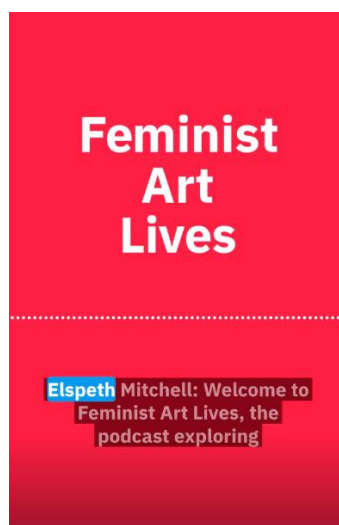
To create a podcast episode, I began by writing a transcript, using the transcripts for the FAMH interviews provided in the archive and writing my own passages to introduce and comment on this information. Using the software 'audacity', I was able to trim the relevant audio clips that I intended to include in the podcast from the full interviews. I then used the podcast recording equipment available at the Helix within University of Leeds to record my own audio clips where I narrated the podcast. Using audacity, I was able to collate all the audio clips in a structured order to create a full podcast episode.



Podcast Room 1 in the Helix, University of Leeds by Emma Rowland

To help with the dissemination of the *Feminist Art Lives* podcast, I worked with my fellow Laidlaw Scholar Mabinty Kamara to create social media content to promote the podcast. We divided the promotional work of the eight episodes equally between us and used the software 'headliner' to create audiograms that shared short audio clips, with captions, from each episode. The aim was to

promote the podcast through social media using short form content that introduced the themes of each episode whilst displaying the FAMH logo to achieve higher engagement with the podcast.



Audiogram for Episode One of the Feminist Art Lives Podcast

Research Findings

For my independent research, I was interested in understanding how Wales and Welsh identity intersected with women artists' feminist activity. Out of the women artists I researched, only Christine Kinsey was born and raised in Wales (although Monmouthshire was not at that time officially part of either England or Wales); all other artists moved to live in Wales in adulthood. It was evident through Kinsey's reflections in her interviews as well as in her book *Truth, Lies and Alibis* that she has a much stronger sense of Welsh identity than the other women artists; referring often to her sense of *Cymreictod* (Welshness) being at the core of her work. In her interviews, Kinsey talked about how the group of female characters that appear recurrently in her work are inspired by women she knew growing up in Monmouthshire as well as being inspired by female characters from the Mabinogion; an anthology of ancient Welsh folklore stories, some of which are among the earliest surviving prose stories written in Britain. Not only is her artwork influenced by her own sense of *Cymreictod*, but so too was the work she carried out as a Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff. Kinsey recalled how the lack of opportunities for women artists in Wales was at the forefront of her mind when opening Chapter, and thus Kinsey put supporting women across all artistic disciplines at the core of the programming and helped establish a nursery school within Chapter so that women artists could continue with their work in the building. Through her feminist activity there is a clear link to her sense of *Cymreictod*, and I was interested to compare how the other women artists conducted their feminist activity in Wales without being from a Welsh background. I found that not being born and raised in Wales did not lessen any of the other women's resolve to advocate for other women in Wales, and that they anchored their feminist activity in improving the opportunities for women in Wales. Before discussing the different feminist activities of these women

artists in Wales, I will now detail my findings about the factors that shaped their own sense of feminism.

For Christine Kinsey and Jaqueline Alkema, witnessing the inequalities their mothers faced was a huge part of their feminist awakening. Kinsey's mother was one of only two women employed in the British Nylon Spinners factory near Abergavenny. In her interview, Kinsey recalls how hard her mother had to work to support and care for herself and her sister, their uncle and grandparents; and the discrimination she faced as a working woman. On a visit to the factory on an open day when she was ten years old, Kinsey recalls becoming aware of the injustice her mother faced after witnessing the gruelling workplace conditions her mother endured each day, only to receive a fraction of the pay that the men were earning. Similarly, Jaqueline Alkema from Women's Arts Association Wales talked about how the lack of opportunities presented to her mother was also an awakening in her own sense of feminism. She recalls asking her mother not long before she died what she would have liked to have done in her life, and her mother replied that she would have liked to have studied history. This drove Alkema to reflect on the lack of opportunities her mother had to pursue her own education and career as she took on the role of wife and mother within their family.

Another factor that sparked a sense of feminism within these women artists were their experiences in art education. All women talked about the lack of female tutors within their art colleges. While Christine Kinsey was studying at Newport College of Art, there were no women tutors in the Fine Art department, and no women were included in the Art History course. For Jaqueline Alkema, she recalled the 'suggestive' attitudes of male tutors towards female students, and the dismissive response of the tutors towards a situation where a man in the college library was accused of groping girls behind bookshelves; the tutors responding that 'it's only a bit of jest'. Dilys Jackson shared a similar experience of male tutors' misconduct while studying for her MA in Fine Art at Cardiff in the 1980s, where male tutors would look through the lists of student intakes and divide up the female students between each other in unprofessional ways. Moreover, Jackson recalled how despite the fact that female students would achieve higher qualifications, it was male students who would go on to obtain jobs after art college.

For Moira Vincentelli, who moved to Aberystwyth in 1968, she felt she hadn't had much contact with feminism during that time of the second wave movement. Instead of becoming politicised during her time at the University of Edinburgh, Vincentelli's connection with feminism came from her own personal experience working in academia at Aberystwyth University. These experiences included dealing with the lack of childcare available and being told by her male head of department that 'there's no way we're going to be having a course on women' after proposing the women and art course 'Gender Cloth and Clay' in the late eighties. These experiences also led Vincentelli to reflect on the fact that she had never been taught about women artists while at university.

I found that each women artist had their own personal experience of developing a sense of feminism, and despite there being different factors that politicised them at different periods of their

lives, all their experiences reflected the lack of opportunities available to women and the lack of respect and equality they received; especially within art education.

Having better understood the ways these women artists developed their own sense of feminism, I was then keen to explore how they shaped their feminist beliefs into action. For Christine Kinsey, it was by supporting local mothers, some of which were artists, within Chapter Arts Centre by giving them opportunities to work in the building and support them with childcare through opening a nursery school at Chapter. Similarly, Moira Vincentelli also integrated her own sense of feminism within her work through helping to establish creches at Aberystwyth University, which originated as a network of 'self-help' among women in a small flat, after witnessing first-hand the lack of childcare available. She also talked about taking her son with her to lectures and conferences to make a feminist statement. As well as recognising the importance of childcare, Vincentelli also worked to support women students, students' wives and mature students (many of which of women) within the University. She was also a part of a group of women academics within the University of Aberystwyth that came together to teach each other about different aspects of women's studies, including literature and psychology, through running evening classes. They also ran women's studies conferences, which Vincentelli described not only as 'sisterly' but also as extremely important, as women could share intimate experiences of their lives as women to a receptive and supportive audience. As well as this sense of collaboration, another way Vincentelli integrated feminist values into her role within the university was through campaigning for equal opportunities during her time on senate. As one of the first women on the university senate, she lobbied for issues such as better maternity and paternity leave, often facing all male committees.

For Dilys Jackson and Dianne Setch as founding members of Women's Arts Association Wales, establishing the Association itself was a feminist activity. In their interview, Setch talked about the male dominated systems which existed within the Welsh Arts Council during the 1980s, as grants were distributed to male artists by their own peers year after year. This left little opportunities for women artists and sparked feelings of anger and inequality that led to the formation of the Arts Discussion Group within the Women's Committee of the South Glamorgan County Council, in 1984, before becoming the South East Wales Women's Arts Association and a registered charity in 1997. Through the Arts Discussion Group, Setch helped create a positive and women-oriented space within the patriarchal structures of society, where she recalls 'everything we did was designed to keep men away'. As an organisation, Women's Arts Association Wales is committed to addressing isolation and exclusion experienced by women in the arts in Wales and provides support for women across all artistic disciplines. The Association aims to build confidence in women to pursue their own careers as artists, something that was particularly difficult for women after leaving art colleges in the 1970s and 80s. Jackson herself talked about her experience of her career being sidetracked within her marriage as she gave up her work to support her ex-husband who was a painter; finding scholarships for him, helping him exhibit his work and carrying out secretarial and agency work for him. Yet when it was her turn, as they initially agreed, for her to return to her own career and receive the same level of support from him, she found that this didn't happen. This experience urged Jackson to support other

women artists within the Association, demonstrating again the role of personal experiences in invoking feminist action.

Despite the success of these women artists in bringing about institutional change and creating more opportunities for women artists in Wales, their feminist activities faced many challenges and opposition. Whilst founding Women's Arts Association Wales, Setch recalled the challenge they faced from councillors about the technicality of having a chairman, as they initially refused to grant the Association charitable status, maintaining that Parliamentary documentation stated that organisations must have a chairman to achieve this status, and Women's Arts Association Wales didn't have a male chair. Moreover, Dilys Jackson, Jaqueline Alkema and Dianne Setch talked about other challenges the Association faced in their interviews, including acts of sabotage where publicity leaflets were found in a dustbin round the back of council offices, a negative review of an exhibition written by a man who never actually attended it, and the withdrawal of funding by the Arts Council of Wales that means all the Association's work is now voluntary.

Finally, I also discovered that remembering and sharing feminist histories was of great importance to these women artists in Wales. For Christine Kinsey, being part of the oral history archive made her more aware of all the work she has done to give a voice to other women and was a reminder of the need to continue 'bearing witness' to women all around the world who are restricted, exploited and excluded. Vincentelli reflected on the importance of remembering feminist histories to maintain feminist attitudes in order to combat complacency; referencing the situation about abortion in America as a reminder that 'you never know when it's going to turn round on you'. For Jaqueline Alkema, it's also important to reflect on the past to recognise the women who have been written out of art history, and who are only now getting the recognition they deserved at the time. Many of Women's Arts Association Wales's values align with the Feminist Art Making Histories project. For instance, Dilys Jackson captured the essence of Feminist Art Making Histories whilst talking about the importance of recording women's experiences. She stated the importance of creating lasting and accessible records of women's lives to honour their labour and recognise their contributions to society throughout history.

I'd now like to reflect on the results of my collaborative work with the FAMH team, where I created social media content to promote the *Feminist Art Lives* podcast. To date, the *Feminist Art Lives* Instagram account has received 40,128 views across the launch and gained 449 new followers. Moreover, the audiograms that Mabinty Kamara and I have created have been getting between 1k-3.7k views since being posted on the Instagram account. From these statistics it's clear that the *Feminist Art Lives* Instagram account has been receiving a good level of engagement; which continues to grow each week.



Feminist Art Lives Instagram Account

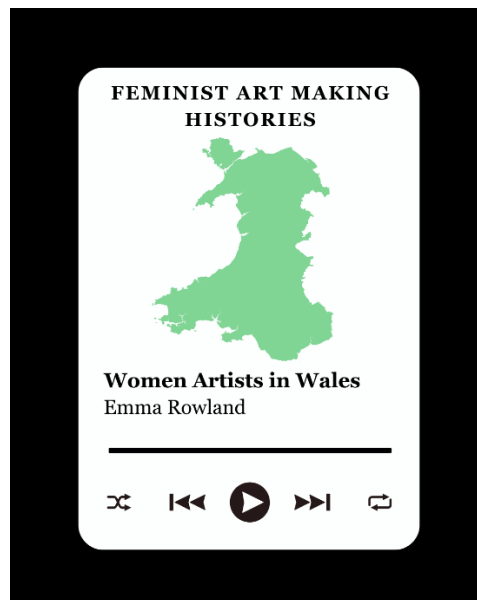


Feminist Art Lives Instagram Account

Discussion

Whilst working alongside the FAMH team, my main aim was to help with the dissemination of the project and to continue their work of honouring the lives and work of women artists and art workers. Through conducting my independent research on women artists in Wales, I discovered many rich and important insights about these women's lives. I discovered the lack of opportunities that were available to women in the arts in Wales throughout the late twentieth century because of male oriented systems that favoured giving grants to male artists as well as the lack of childcare that was available. The dismissive and often unprofessional attitudes of male tutors towards female students presented another barrier, which combined with the lack of representation of women both in teaching positions within art colleges and within art history courses, created male dominated environments within art education in Wales. In this context, I discovered how groundbreaking the work of establishing Chapter Arts Centre and Women's Arts Association Wales was, and hope that through creating a blog post and podcast episode that will be shared on the FAMH website that my research can help share the impactful work of women artists in Wales. As FAMH aims to honour voices from all over Ireland and the UK, from rural as well as urban areas, I hope my research can contribute to

providing more representation about the arts in Wales, which are often marginalised within the context of the UK. Moreover, through creating a podcast episode that shares the oral histories of women artists in Wales, my research continues with the digital archive's 'bottom up' method of research. Through working to share the archive in this way, I hope to encourage others to interact with the oral histories, as there are so many more important insights about the relation between art and feminism in Ireland and the UK.



Promotional Content for Women Artists in Wales Podcast Episode by Emma Rowland

Part 2: Reflections

Personal Impact of Conducting the Research

Before starting this project, I felt quite overwhelmed at the thought of undertaking six weeks of research. Having not had much previous researching experience and also not coming from an art history background, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to produce outputs of a high standard and wouldn't be able to support the FAMH project effectively. Having the independence to decide on my own research topic within the project was also quite overwhelming at first, as the oral histories archive features interviews with over sixty artists, which cover a broad range of themes. At the beginning of the research period then, I definitely lacked confidence in my researching abilities and felt quite directionless. Yet once I started engaging with the archive, I found that the researching process began to click into place. Looking at the list of featured oral histories on the FAMH website, I was interested to listen to Women's Arts Association Wales's interview, as I was drawn to the Welsh connection. From there I continued researching women artists in Wales through engaging with Christine Kinsey and Moira Vincentelli's interviews, taking notes as I went. Being allowed this freedom at the beginning of the project by my supervisor to explore the archive and find an area of personal interest was extremely productive and rewarding. I was able to develop more confidence in my own

researching capacities, and I also developed a better understanding of research methods and really began to enjoy the process of researching.

As the project progressed, I visited the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth to further my research. This visit was definitely a highlight of the project for me as it was my first experience visiting an archive. Initially I felt quite out of my depth as I didn't know any of the formalities of visiting an archive, such as requesting the materials beforehand, placing your belongings in a locker before entering the archive, and only being permitted to sit in specific areas of the library if you wished to view archival materials. I found it was very much a 'learn on the job' experience and was surprised by how quickly I learned to work with archival materials. From this experience I have definitely gained more confidence to be in academic spaces and feel more prepared to engage with archives within my university studies.

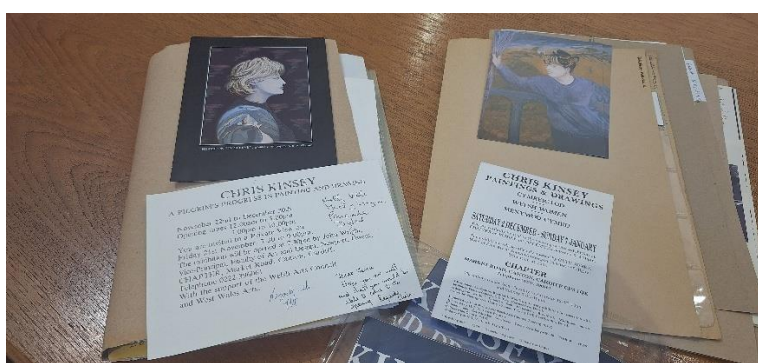


Image from the 'Truth, Lies & Alibis / Images and Words by Christine Kinsey' collection. Photo by Emma Rowland.

Whilst engaging with the materials in both the physical archive in Aberystwyth and the FAMH digital archive, I faced some challenges around how best to deal with the personal nature of the materials. There was a need to be sensitive, sympathetic and respectful whilst engaging with such personal insights and reflections, and I was unsure how best to share these women's experiences in a way that privileged their own voices and maintained their autonomy over their own stories. Even after deciding on creating a podcast episode to share audio clips from their oral history interviews, I was aware that I was still controlling their narratives to an extent through editing and rearranging these audio clips. This experience of creating a podcast episode has made me more aware of ethical considerations surrounding research, and I feel that I will be more conscious and place more importance on conducting ethical research in future projects; an important skill for my future university studies. Another aspect I needed to consider was how to address the women artists within my research outputs; should I refer to them by their first, last or full name? This question, although seemingly an editorial issue, actually carried a lot of political weight. When discussing this question with my supervisor, we talked about the tendency to refer to many well-known women, and especially women artists, by their first name only, whereas male artists are remembered by their last names (Picasso, Van Gogh etc). With this in mind, and with a desire to be respectful and honour the work of these women artists, I decided to refer to them via either their full names or by their surnames; which holds a more academic and respectful tone. This consideration opened my eyes to the smaller yet important details within research, especially those regarding the equitable representation of women within media. I was also keen to direct the readers and listeners of my research outputs towards the

FAMH website and archive, to encourage them to also engage with the full, unedited oral histories to ensure that the voices in the archive were receiving their deserved attention. These efforts and considerations throughout my research have made me value the importance of ethical research much more through being able to put them into real context.

Leadership Skills

Throughout this project, I have definitely developed and improved upon my leadership skills and the Laidlaw 3Cs; capacities, changemaker values and character. My leadership capacities have improved through working collaboratively with my project supervisor and fellow Laidlaw scholar throughout the project. During our online weekly meetings, we shared ideas for the *Feminist Art Lives* podcast's dissemination and discussed our progression with our independent research. These meetings were an opportunity to collaborate creatively, discuss challenges and seek advice from each other, and I learned how to communicate my concerns or suggestions effectively to move the project forward efficiently. As much of our research was conducted independently, these meetings also allowed me to develop better project and time management skills as I set research goals before each weekly meeting so that I could discuss my findings in each meeting. I also valued the collaboration of these meetings as it was beneficial to have a fresh perspective on my independent research. I also developed more confidence in my creative and critical thinking skills through sharing my own ideas and reflections on the project in an inclusive and equitable space.

During the researching process, this project has undoubtedly allowed me to improve upon my emotional intelligence capacities as I engaged with personal histories and reflections. While engaging with the oral histories and developing my research outputs, I was aware of the role of the Laidlaw change maker value of 'good', and the need to deal with research materials sensitively and thoughtfully to create meaningful and impactful research outputs. My capacity to create and follow research strategies also improved during this project as I strengthened my adaptability and time management skills. Whilst working towards my own research goals within my independent research, I initially found it difficult to create a research question and was unsure if my vision was too broad or too narrow. Through collaborating with my supervisor on the project, I found that regularly checking in and reflecting on my research to assess if it was moving in the right direction and if my vision for research outputs were achievable was extremely effective for managing and prioritising my time, and I was able to develop project management skills through taking responsibility for my own research. I also learned how to channel the Laidlaw value of ambition effectively and realistically within the project's time frame, as I adapted my vision as I went, resulting in complete research outputs that I feel reflect my engagement and passion for the project well.

I further developed the Laidlaw change maker values through being 'determined' to conduct research of a high standard; reflecting my passion for the Laidlaw programme as well as demonstrating my awareness of the importance and merit of the FAMH project's work to date. My curiosity to learn more about feminist art histories helped to drive this determination and ambition to engage with the project, and I really enjoyed the experience of being involved in a research project

that is different to my area of university of study as it's been an incredibly eye opening and enriching learning experience. The limited time frame of the project also pushed me to become 'fast'; as I improved my time management skills and managed to complete the research within the timeframe. Visiting the archive at the National Library of Wales and interviewing the artist Symrath Patti also allowed me to exercise the value 'brave', as I developed more confidence through putting myself in positions where I lacked experience. Entering the academic space of the archive and having a conversation with such an inspiring artist who is part of the FAMH digital archive were slightly daunting experiences, yet through channelling the Laidlaw value of bravery I was able to really involve myself in these experiences and become more confident and knowledgeable as a result. I hope that through practicing these Laidlaw values whilst conducting research on the underrepresented topic of women artists in Wales, I have also managed to reflect the value of 'extraordinary' through creating my own research outputs for others to engage with and hopefully be inspired to conduct their own research within the FAMH. Reflecting on my feelings at the beginning of the project when I felt overwhelmed and uncertain of my own capacities, I do feel that I have managed to reflect this value of 'extraordinary' through engaging with this research project and developing much stronger research skill, as I now feel much more confident for future research opportunities. Nevertheless, I maintain that there is an element of 'ordinary' in my research journey, as I undertook this project as someone with no real researching experience and without an expertise in my project's subject content. I believe that with a sense of ambition and curiosity, and the support of my supervisor and wider Laidlaw community, I was able to develop my research and leadership skills beyond my own expectations. From this experience of developing my own skills from the 'ordinary', I would like to encourage others in the future to apply for the Laidlaw programme and for the FAMH project, to help others improve from this transformative experience and become more 'extraordinary' themselves.

Research Dissemination

I have achieved a real sense of purpose from this project as I've worked to share feminist art histories independently and collaboratively. From working with the FAMH team, I have been inspired by their aim of honouring feminist lives and sharing the stories and insights of women across generations. I plan to continue disseminating my research and the FAMH project at a *Feminist Art Making Histories* research conference in the autumn to be held in the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Leeds. Moreover, I plan to take part in the undergraduate research conference at the University of Leeds as well as at the Laidlaw Scholars Annual Conference at Imperial College London this October.

Future Career, Educational or Continued Research Plans

Before undertaking this project, I was already considering a career in journalism and feel that this researching experience has consolidated this aspiration. I was interested in journalism because of my passion for languages and cross-cultural communication as well as my ambition to strive for

good through bringing justice to vulnerable communities and underrepresented cultures. Working on this project has revealed to me the importance of research and the dissemination of research to privilege the voices of real people and real stories, strengthening my ambition to become a journalist. It has also been an invaluable experience to be able to visit a physical archive, take part in a group interview and use recording equipment. These experiences will not only benefit me within future research but have also allowed me to grow more confidence in my ability to become a journalist.

I was also surprised by the more informal aspects of research and how much of it is built through connection and collaboration with others. For example, our interview with Symrath Patti took place at her home in London, where we were welcomed in and shared a conversation in an informal and relaxed setting in her garden. It was inspiring to have this experience as I realised that although journalistic work is often quite academic and formal, it also requires more personal connections and the need to be empathetic and present. Understanding the variety of skills needed in journalism has been a valuable and eye-opening experience, and I intend to look for more opportunities in the future where I can build upon the skills I have developed during this project. Continuing to collaborate with FAMH would also be of great interest to me, as I have been, and continue to be inspired by their purpose.



Photo (from left to right) with Emma Rowland, Symrath Patti, Mabinty Kamara and Elspeth Mitchell by Elspeth Mitchell