AIMS For a better birth...

Birth: it wasn't a pretty picture

AIMS Journal, 2022, Vol 34, No 4

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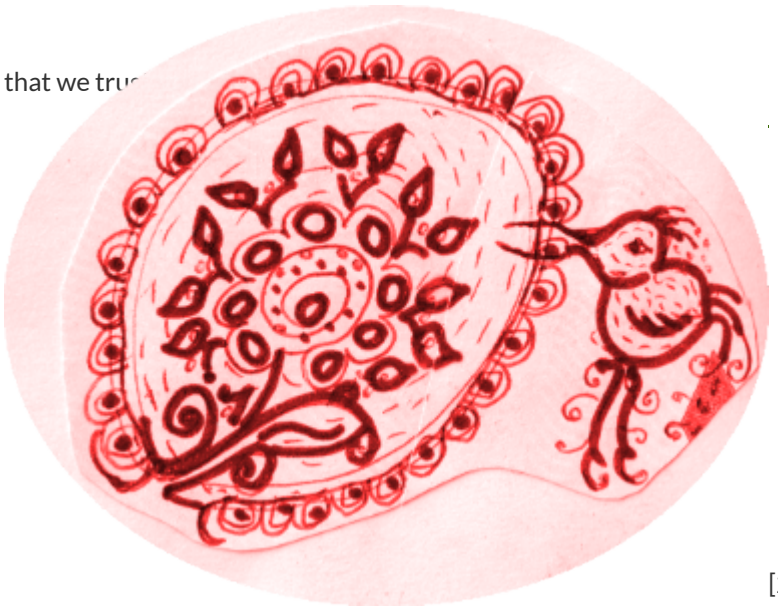
By Alex Smith

The theme of this December edition of the AIMS journal is the expression of birth experience through the medium of art. The finished issue is not exactly as I envisioned it - bursting with the warmth and colour of deeply personal and reflective birth art images. Despite a widely offered invitation to contribute, it appears that for most people, the experience of birth was not a pretty picture, and my invitation was met, largely, by a very telling silence. Accordingly, we have just two wonderful images to illustrate my original intention - although these are amply supported by some equally wonderful birth poetry - and the absence of the expected flood of pictures, the very silence, the fear 'to go there', the what is *not* in this issue - is equally powerful and, to me at least, spoke volumes.

If you are interested in exploring your experience of birth through the medium of art, you may be interested to read 'Maternal Journal' by Laura Godfrey-Isaacs and Samantha McGowan, a book AIMS reviewed earlier this year.[1]

AIMS as an organisation listens to women's lived experience of birth and campaigns for change within the maternity services. With the old adage in mind, *a picture is worth a thousand words*, my intention was to present a really powerful visual reflection of those experiences. I imagined each image being accompanied by the voice of the artist-mother saying what they had learned from the process of undertaking the artwork, and concluding with a thought on what change within the services they would like to see. What we offer you instead is a gentler, but nevertheless, interesting and very touching issue

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Mary Nolan opens this issue by introducing us to six pieces of birth art that resonate powerfully with her own thinking and her personal experiences of being pregnant and giving birth, as well as those of the many women she has met during the course of her career. Mary's piece is followed by a poem by **Lizzy Lister**. If you are interested in trying out some personal birth art but are not sure where to begin, you may enjoy my article on **how to draw a labyrinth**. This is followed with a poem by **Danielle Gilmour**.

In her interesting article, **Gemma McKenzie** explains how images, accompanied by just a few words, can convey powerful and challenging messages about current issues within maternity care. **Mary Nolan** shares her beautiful and moving birth art story, while **Salli Ward** reviews Natalie Lennard's birth art collection called 'Birth Undisturbed'. **Hannah Wood** shares her birth art story and **Jo Dagustun** offers the lyrics to her song, 'Give Birth a Chance' (to be sung to the tune of, 'Give Peace a Chance'). This is followed by **Rosie Burridge** commentating on behalf of AIMS, on the 2022 UK Government publication of the 'Women's Health Strategy for England'.

This issue also includes two book reviews. **Charlotte Tonkin Edun** tells us about Jodie Miller's 'What Does it Feel Like Being Born? A memoir of maternity activism', a comprehensive account of a decade campaigning for humanised maternity care in Queensland, Australia, and **Mary Newburn** reviews 'The Birthkeeper of Bethlehem: A Midwife's Tale' by Bridget Supple, a novel retelling the birth of Jesus. These are followed by an obituary for the late Elizabeth Cockerell in which **Beverley Beech** reflects on the time in the 1980s when Elizabeth was the secretary for AIMS.

Finally, we have the **AIMS critique of the Ockenden report**, and the usual news round up of the work of the **AIMS Campaigns team**.

We are very grateful to all the volunteers who help in the production of our Journal: our authors, peer reviewers, proofreaders, website uploaders and, of course, our readers and supporters. This edition

especially benefited from the help of Tamsyn Markham, who joined me as a superb co-editor for this issue, Anne Glover, Caroline Mayers, Rachel Boldero, Jo Dagustun, Salli Ward, Danielle Gilmour, Joanna Rana, Hannah Wood, Katherine Revell and Josey Smith.

We really hope you will enjoy this issue. In our next Journal coming in March we will be exploring what is meant by physiological birth.

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[1] 'Maternal Journal' by Laura Godfrey-Isaacs and Samantha McGowan, reviewed by Keren Williams. www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/maternal-journal-review

[2] I occasionally 'journal' the doodles I make while on phone calls. This one dates from 2009, doodled just before my daughter announced her very long-awaited pregnancy.