

AUDACIOUS
WOMEN
FESTIVAL

AUDACIART WEEKLY

The Most Difficult Thing

31 July 2020



Photo: Life Is A Balancing Act © Margaret Ferguson Burns

An Audacious Women Publication



AudaciArt – The Most Difficult Thing

This week's theme, *The Most Difficult Thing* was suggested by the following quote by Amelia Earhart

The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity

Audaciart

Hello Everybody

Though sadly it's time to say Goodbye. All good things must end, and Audaciart is no exception. It was intended as a lockdown project and now that is being phased out, we too must go.

For the last 4 months we have published a word or phrase suggested by a quote by or about an audacious women. Women have been invited to contribute any type of work inspired by the theme.

We hope you have enjoyed writing, drawing, digitising, crafting, photographing and reading Audaciart as much as we have. It's been amazing to see the range of work and talent that has flowed in each week. Thanks to each and every one of you who has shared your memories, your politics, your activism, your art, your fiction or your photos. What a powerful picture they have painted.

This last edition doesn't disappoint, with contributions ranging from fantastic digital art, through political activism, to personal herstory.

And very special thanks go to Hilery Williams who has co-edited with endless care and patience.

Whilst there will be no more Audaicart for now, the Audacious Women Festival is staying firmly put. We are currently looking at the options for next February, to take account of the various possible lockdown scenarios. If you aren't already on our mailing list, [sign up here](#) so that you get all the news as it happens.

If you don't know it already, The Audacious Women Festival is a chance for women to break personal, political and institutional barriers, and to celebrate audacious women. The Audacious Women Collective invites and supports you to take your first steps on a journey to audacity and to Do What You Always Wish You Dared





Contents

P4:	Amelia Earhart, Feminist and Aviatrix	Sally Wainwright
P7:	Some Reflections on the Refugee Crisis in Calais and Dunkerque	Margaret Ferguson Burns
P9:	The Most Difficult Thing	Jo Cameron Duguid
P9:	Life Is A Balancing Act	Margaret Ferguson Burns
P10:	You Cannot Begin Until You Begin	Hilery Williams
P14:	Return to the Inn	Heidi Goehkre
P15:	The Journey	Helen Dineen



Amelia Earhart, Feminist and Aviatrix

Sally Wainwright

Amelia Earhart, whose 123rd birthday was last week, is best remembered today for disappearing whilst attempting the first round the world flight. It ended in disaster 3 days from home, when she, navigator Fred Noonan and their airplane vanished over the Pacific ocean on 2 July 1937. They were heading for the tiny, flat Howland Island having left Lae on Papua New Guinea for the longest leg of the circumnavigation, some 2,500 miles. They had planned to have a US Coast Guard ship stationed on Howland Island, to communicate with Earhart and provide a homing signal to help them find the island. This was an essential precaution because navigating with the degree of accuracy required was almost impossible without any of today's aids and Noonan was relying entirely on celestial navigation. Equipment failure meant that whilst the coast guard could hear Earhart, she could not hear their replies. Whilst they came within a few tantalising miles of the island they failed to find it. Mystery has continued to surround the flight. Did they, as many believe, eventually run out of



fuel, ditch and sink? Or did they find another island on which to land? Where they taken prisoner – or even shot down – by the Japanese? The controversy rages to this day, and periodically another search is carried out. Various bits of equipment and human remains have been found but none have been conclusive.

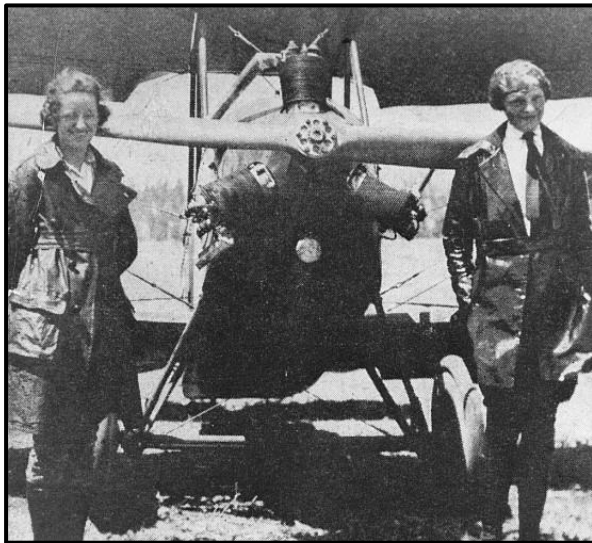
Of course Amelia didn't get to be the first person to attempt to fly round the world by being a conventional girl in early 20th Century America. Her rather troubled childhood was characterised by an alcoholic and sometimes absent father and frequent moves. But she always aspired to have a career and kept a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about women who were successful in male-orientated fields including law, advertising, management, film production and mechanical engineering.

In her late teens during WWI she trained as a nurse's aid and worked at a military hospital in Toronto, Canada. However when the Spanish flu pandemic hit in 2018 (in



the days before anti-biotics) she was hospitalised for 2 months with pneumonia. A series of sinus operations failed to cure her resulting chronic sinusitis.

In 1919 she started to study medicine, but left after only a year to join her reunited



Neta Snook and Amelia Earhart circa 1921

parents in California. The following year her father paid \$10 for her to have a 10 minute flight, and she immediately decided to learn to fly. Her flying teacher was another pioneering female aviator Anita 'Neta' Snook. Despite Neta's own significant achievements – amongst others, she was the first female aviator in Iowa, the first female to run her own aviation business and the first woman to run a commercial airfield – she is forever linked with Earhart, as she exemplified in the title of her autobiography *I Taught Amelia to Fly*.

In 1927 Charles Lindbergh made the first solo transatlantic flight. The following year, multi-billionaire Amy Guest decided to sponsor “An American girl of the right type” to become the first woman to fly the Atlantic. Out of the blue, Amelia, at the time working as a social worker with immigrant families in Boston, received a phone call inviting her to accompany pilot Wilmer Stultz and mechanic Louis Gordon on a transatlantic flight in a monoplane named *Friendship*. Not having the training to use the instruments on board, Amelia was not able to pilot the plane but had the job of keeping the flight log. Guest also decreed that she should be the aircraft commander. Her instructions were very specific: *... if any questions of policy, procedure, personnel or any other question arises the decision of Miss Amelia M. Earhart is to be final.... she is to have control of the plane and of the disposal of the services of all employees as fully as if she were the owner.*

On landing, Amelia commented *I was just baggage, like a sack of potatoes... maybe someday I'll try it alone.* And in May 1932 she did just that, becoming the first woman (and only the second person) to do so, flying from Newfoundland, Canada. The flight was not uneventful – she had to contend with fatigue, a leaky fuel tank and a cracked manifold that shot flames out of the side of the engine cowling, before ice on the plane's wings led to a sudden descent of 3,000 feet, leaving her only just above the waves. Realising she was way north of her planned route to France, she diverted to Northern Ireland. Back home, she became the first woman to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, a military decoration awarded for 'heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.' That August she became the first woman to fly solo, non-stop across the USA, setting a women's distance flying record of 2,447 miles.



By this time, already something of a celebrity, Earhart started to design and personally modelled her own range of functional 'active living' women's clothing. They were designed with sleek, simple, natural lines but used wrinkle-proof, washable materials. When Amelia was offered the post of associate editor at *Cosmopolitan*, she used it as a forum to campaign for a greater acceptance of women in aviation. She invested her own time and money to help set up the first flying shuttle service between New York and Washington DC. In 1930, as the first woman vice president of the National Aeronautical Association she promoted the establishment of separate women's records. She argued that women did not have the same money, or planes and therefore experience, to fairly compete against men.

In 1935 she became the first person to fly solo from Hawaii to the US mainland, several aviators having previously met their deaths attempting the same route. She was appointed visiting professor at Purdue University to promote higher education for women, especially in engineering and science..

In 1929, Earhart became one of the founders of The Ninety Nines (named for the number of female pilots who set it up), which to this day promotes the advancement of women in aviation '*through education, scholarships, and mutual support while honoring our unique history and sharing our passion for flight.*' Her accomplishments inspired a generation of women flyers, including some 1,100 members of the civilian organisation Women Airforce Service Pilots who tested aircraft, trained other pilots, and ferried military planes during WWII, to free up male pilots for combat roles.

Amelia was unconventional in her private life as well. She believed in equal responsibilities within marriage and insisted on keeping her own name, rather than being referred to as Mrs Putnam. She describe her partnership with Charles Putnam as one 'with dual control'. On their wedding day she wrote to Putnam saying *I want you to understand I shall not hold you to any midaevil (sic) code of faithfulness to me nor shall I consider myself bound to you similarly.... I may have to keep some place where I can go to be by myself, now and then, for I cannot guarantee to endure at all times the confinement of even an attractive cage.*

Described by Tom Crouch of the National Air and Space Museum as *our favorite missing person* Amelia was also a fearsome advocate for women's equality, saying her transatlantic flight proved that men and women are equal in "jobs requiring intelligence, coordination, speed, coolness, and willpower."

I couldn't agree more.

More Information

The Sound of Wings, by Mary S. Lovell

<https://www.ameliaearhart.com/biography/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amelia_Earhart

<https://airandspace.si.edu/explore-and-learn/topics/women-in-aviation/earhart.cfm>

<https://www.ninety-nines.org/>

<https://www.thisdayinaviation.com/tag/amy-phipps-guest/>



The Most Difficult Thing Some Reflections on the Refugee Crisis in Calais and Dunkerque

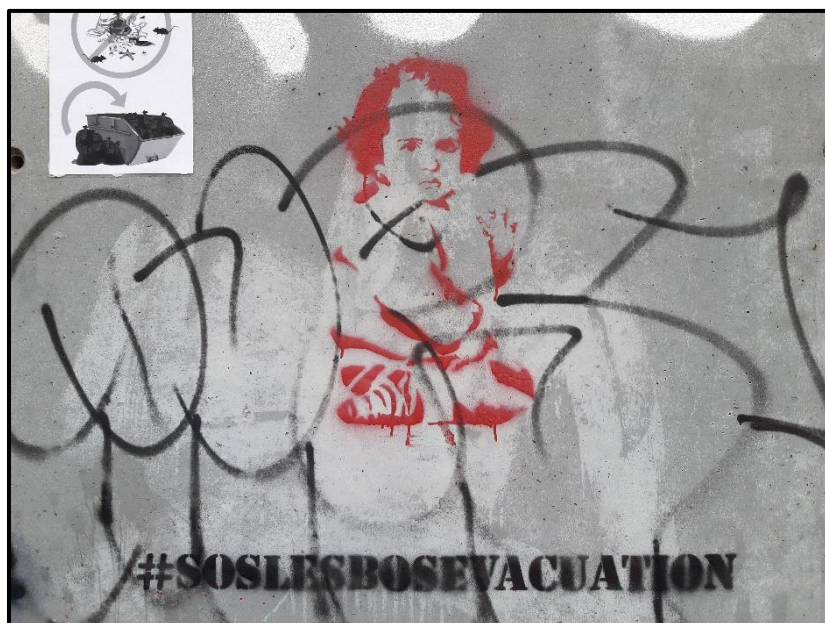
Margaret Ferguson Burns.

The most difficult thing is when children are caught up in the machinations of grown ups, too entrenched in hatred and greed to care about the consequences of their actions - children taken away from places too dangerous to remain - to other places too hazardous to be - sleeping in the woods, with or without tents in the freezing cold and wet - where traffickers, smugglers, abusers prowl - and parents dare not lose sight of them - and women dare not go out at night for fear of attack.

Picture a tiny girl and her mother walking into the darkness in a driving snow storm, carrying their little boxes of food, curry and rice, picked up at a food distribution in a forested country park - in a car park next to a lake - each wearing a pink plastic poncho, entirely inadequate for the conditions - she speechless, with wide bewildered eyes. Hard to watch, while shivering yourself to block out the cold of a midwinter night - the tears from the biting cold and emotion creeping up on you.

And there's a man asking for a sleeping bag - "Sorry, we only have food" - and it's a Sunday night anyway so not possible to arrange anything - and the only thing to do is to empty the paper cups from their box - and offer it to him for his pregnant wife to sleep on, in the unexpectedly freezing rain of a summer night - and off they go grateful into another night's wild camping.

And the time a tall young man pulled me to his shoulder, just the way my own sons might do - he leaned away and indicated with his other hand - "This is my mother," said he, "- she is very white." And we all exploded in floods of laughter, the food distro volunteers and refugees chatting during a quiet time - just a guy remembering his Mum in a faraway land - like many others, pleased to see a familiar presence.



SOS Lesbos Evacuation

This stencilled image of a little girl, which was part of Art in the Jungle, appears on one of the concrete support pillars under a motorway where refugees meet to shelter from the sun, wind and rain of the summer, in the dust and gravel, parallel to the rail tracks at the edge of the country park - and to access food, water, warming sweet tea, phone charging, replacement



tents, shoes, clothing, toiletries, advice, first aid...- and to enjoy the comfort of company, however fleeting. Even in their own desperate circumstances in the north of France, thoughts are directed elsewhere to the plight of others in the Greek camps.

There are children in small groups with still smiling, grubby faces, adapting to their new surroundings, sent along from the family shelters for the hot food - and too sugary tea, too hot to carry - so it's double cups, half-filled cups, cups with cold water added, to make them safer.

The most difficult thing seems to be stopping those driven by hatred and greed from waging war and cruelty on the vulnerable, profiteering and creating this global chaos we find ourselves in.

And the very most difficult thing is finding ways to make that happen - and to get these children into the warmth and comfort of the homes, schools and communities they deserve - and live a peaceful and productive life.

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The Most Difficult Thing
Jo Cameron Duguid

50 word fiction

The first time, on a bus, she was only 58. The impertinence! Three years later, she'd been snippy with that "kind" young man. Finally, on a crowded tube train, she smiled graciously and accepted when a young woman offered her seat. Admitting she was getting older was so damn hard.

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Life is a Balancing Act
Margaret Ferguson Burns



The Most Difficult Thing is finding all the white items within reach amongst the flint - or getting the shell to balance in a growing breeze - or stopping the feather flying off down the beach - or maybe just keeping it together really...

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You Cannot Begin Until You Begin
Hilery Williams

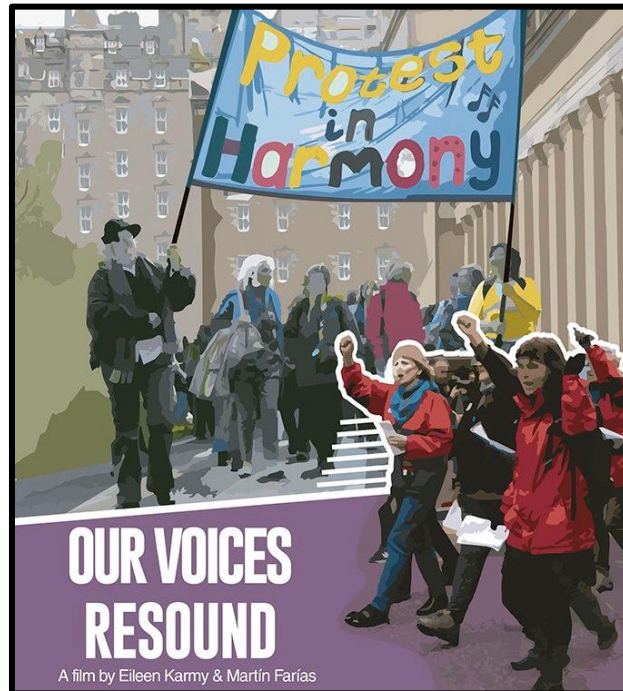


Image Copyright © 2018 Martin Fariás

I'm reading a fascinating book by Clare Hunter called *Threads of life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle*. I shall quote extensively from her chapter on Protest.

Protest in the 1980s was characterised by the assembly of multiple textiles to create demonstrations marked by the duality of a personal act and public action. On the one hand, there was the vast scale of assembled textiles, which created an extraordinary image of collective concern; on the other, were its individual parts, the personal, hand-crafted contributions in the campaign for change.

Reading this I was reminded of the 17 metres of mostly lurid pink knitting (cost taking precedence over taste) I contributed to Wool Against Weapons: a project which linked the two Atomic Weapons Research Establishments (Aldermaston and Burghfield) with a seven-mile-long knitted pink scarf at a demonstration in the summer of 2015. Knit faced outward catching the eye, a rainbow snake of creation; purl inward spinning a nuanced yarn of gathering, ravelling, blooming, florid, blushing, warm, blowsy, full-blooded, glowing pink.

Bound together through the land
Needles clicking in our hands
Peaceful knitters make a stand
Craftiness will win the day



Chorus:

*Raise your knitting high
Stitch by stitch and row by row
Plain and purl will never die
Raise your knitting high.*

Those who knit in face of strife
Those who purl for liberty
Crochet for a better life
Pink to keep the future free.

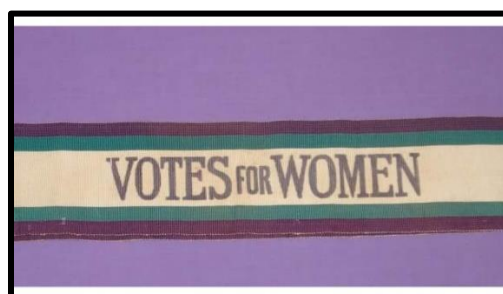
Chorus

Though the struggle brings us pain
Though the struggle brings us tears
Ours will be the final gain
We will hear the victory cheers

Chorus

But it's not rosy knitting that concerns me here, but banners. Hunter writes about these modern and historical *declarations of identity*. They are *public proclamations that tell of the who, the what and the why of social and political fealty*. They message *solidarity and collective strength*. She documents the specific creation and use of banners by women participating in protests (Suffragettes, Miners' Wives Support Groups, May Day Rallies). These banners did not just declare allegiance but *carried the argument itself*. They were *designed to be defiant, emphatic evidence of women's sensibilities and sensuality*. They represented the threads joining women's lives, the rhythms in the working of their hands: sure or clumsy; skilful or gauche; deft or inept; neat or ragged. All welcome, all celebrated.

Banners – those *bold, often beautiful, visual statements that encapsulate both a message and a purpose* - were made, on the whole, by women whose names are forgotten, whose individual endeavours are not recognised; women who strode (or shuffled) out of their comfort zones to get involved in whatever way they could at the time. Many found that the small domestic action of contributing to a banner ultimately spurred a great deal of momentum, both personally and politically. Some felt that they were sewing to save their lives, some to tell a crucial yarn.





It was the colours of the suffragettes

that dominated the banners at Greenham Common peace camp during the 1980s.... women attached baby clothes, dresses, jeans, old clothes knotted onto the fence in the shape of birds, trees of life, rainbows. This was a personal world transported to a public stage. ... They transformed the base with a different materiality, masking the solid concrete with the fluidity of banners, punctuating the bleak landscape with small fabric tents, weaving tufts of cloth into the cold wire of the steel fence.



These colours were replicated in the centenary march, Processions, commemorating the legislation for the right to vote for some women in June 2018 in cities across the UK.

Added to *the roll call of the heroines in history* carrying banners aloft is Justine Merritt who conceived the Ribbon: the 1985 frieze for peace made in America to wrap around the Pentagon: an event to mark the 40th anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Next week marks the 75th anniversary.

Merritt evolved the idea to 'take our fear, our rage, our guilt and thread feeling into our needle and draw the needle through the fabric into an affirmation of life, while praying for peace'. 10,000 people got involved and 25,000 panels were sewn;

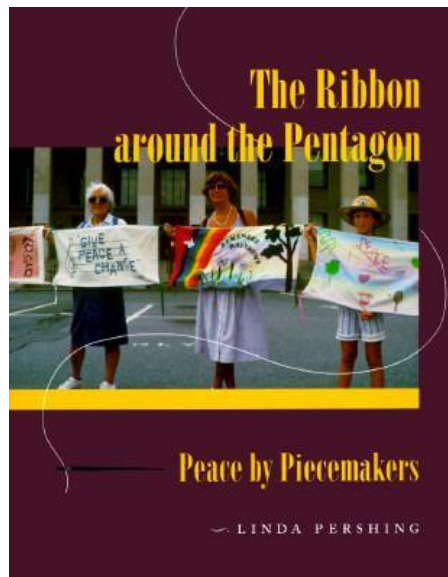
95% of those who responded were women who would not describe themselves as political activists. But they found that the invitation to use their sewing skills for an issue they cared about struck a chord. Sewing was non-confrontational, personal.

On 4th August 1985 20,000 people arrived in Washington DC to take part in the Ribbon... it was 15 miles long...there were no speeches, no celebrity appearances, no razzamatazz...the Pentagon and its



surrounding area were enveloped in an alternative unification of human hope.

The Ribbon attracted scant media attention and had little political impact. But it was conceived to encourage people to think more about how nuclear weapons affected them on a personal level, and to increase public engagement with the issue.



Step by Step the longest march can be won, can be won.
Many stones do make an arch, singly none, singly none.
And by union what we will, can be accomplished still.
Drops of water turn a mill, singly none, singly none.

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Votes for Women: Image Copyright © Heidi Wigmore

Raise Your Knitting High: Copyright © John Tams + Jane Lewis.

Listen at <https://www.protestinharmony.org.uk/songs/raise-your-knitting-high/>

Greenham Common Photo; Copyright © 1980s Sigrid Moller

The Ribbon around the Pentagon Copyright © 1985 Linda Pershing

Step by Step: Copyright © US Union of Mineworkers

Listen at <https://www.protestinharmony.org.uk/songs/step-by-step/>



Return to the Inn

Heidi Goehrke

The most difficult thing is to create yourself constantly out of the ashes of your being; out of decisions to act or not to act; out of your own thoughts.



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The Journey
Helen Dineen

Because the most difficult thing about having children is letting go.

I remember those days
When you stepped out, unsteady,
But with such joy and concentration
that the destination was never the point.

Instead,
your chubby fingers reached for yet another fragile flutterby,
then traced that crack in the wall
that seemed to go on
for miles
and miles.

Every journey required a rest break,
squatting by the fishy pond
Heels bouncing, humming,
counting flashes of gold.

And every cat received a greeting (of course)
of length and form befitting its status
as guardian of the street.

I watch you now
A shadow-length or more growing between us
as you stride on, self-assured.
Your fingers reaching towards adulthood
as mine reach for yours as if to say,

I'm still here.
Let's count the fishes.

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