

Feminist Animated Documentary Production: working slowly to build community

Sabbatical Report

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Winter 2026

INTRODUCTION

I set out the following goals for myself during the period of my sabbatical from January-March 2026:

This sabbatical project proposes the pre-production and initial phases of production for the creation of a *short, experimental, animated documentary about a women's collectives in Britain in the 1980's*, with a specific focus on the history and founding members of the Leeds Animation Workshop. This project will advance my own creative practice, experience as a mother, animator and storyteller.

The project has five core objectives:

1. *Document the History of Women in Animation*: Conduct in-depth research and interviews with current and founding members of the Leeds Animation Workshop to capture their perspectives, experiences, and contributions to feminist animation.
2. *Explore Motherhood and Artistic Identity*: Investigate how members of the Workshop have navigated dual roles as artists and mothers, focusing on how caregiving has shaped their creative outputs and their collective ethos. Many of the films that have been produced over the years detail subjects that are particular to the raising of children and the community support required for such a project, and as a mother myself, this is a topic of extreme importance to me, and it is also something that I have found to be under-discussed, particularly in American culture.
3. *Recall and Innovate Animation Techniques*: Experiment with labor-intensive, hand-crafted animation methods, such as watercolor cutouts, cel animation, and stop-motion, to explore new storytelling possibilities.
4. *Connect Process and Feminism*: Examine how the slow, deliberate nature of animation production can deepen emotional resonance and reflect feminist values of collaboration, patience, and intentionality.
5. *Advance my own Creative Practice*: This project builds on another first short film I created in 2021, *The Golden Age*, which highlighted the uncredited contributions of Disney's "ink and paint girls." The new documentary will serve as the second chapter in my series on feminist animation, offering an empowering counterpoint by showcasing a collective that valued and celebrated women's creativity and labor.

In addition to these ideas set forth in my project proposal, I generated several 'Sabbatical Level Outcomes' for myself during the first week of the sabbatical time in order to assess the work that I was setting out to do.

Upon successful completion of this sabbatical, the participant (self) will be able to:

1. Create a working draft of at least one new film
2. Discern whether the day's creativity requires productivity and action or rest and reflection
3. Cultivate a renewed sense of connection to my creative practice (develop daily systems and rhythms that benefit from the more focused state of being resulting from a break from teaching)
4. Research and infuse the creative practice with a renewed connection to the things that inspire and move me to create (watch movies, watch experimental films, read books, read poetry, write)
5. Connect the new film to the people I meet on my trip and investigate new forms of collaboration
6. Play regularly, enjoy, explore, discover, create things that are ephemeral
7. Resist the urge to prove my worth to myself by measuring my output
8. Always keep part of the garden (studio practice) wild

Though there is quite a bit of overlap and reiteration between these varieties of my goals, I find it valuable to include both of them here as a representation of both the idealized goals of the project proposal and the ones that found traction in the reality of the sabbatical experience.

I am the creator of all of the images included in this report.

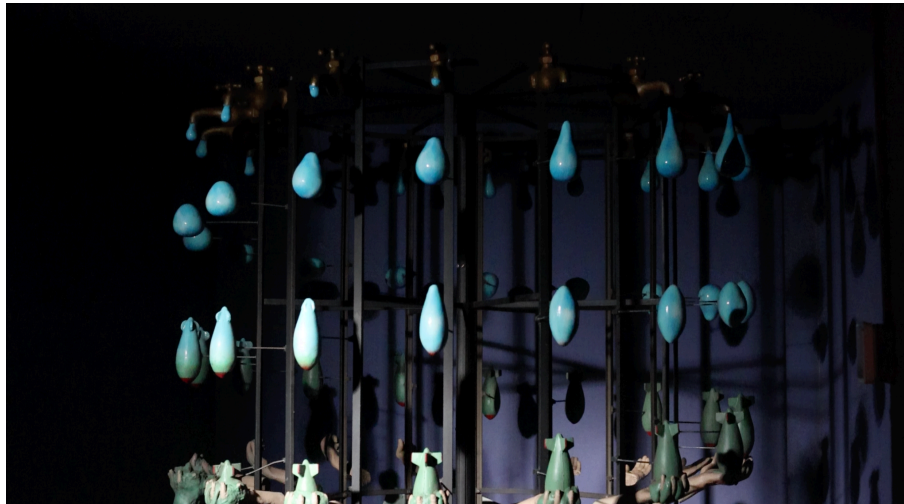
DISCUSSION

At the beginning of my sabbatical time I was able to travel, first to New York City, and then to Leeds. My time in New York was a brief but stimulating experience with time spent, among other locations, at the Brooklyn Museum, where I was able to experience Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* in person, as well as the Museum of the Moving Image, which featured a compelling presentation of historical and contemporary cinema.



The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago, The Brooklyn Museum

At the Museum of the Moving Image I had the opportunity to document the kinetic sculpture called 'Feral Fount' by Gregory Barsamian, which is an incredible visual teaching tool to describe the mechanics of animation, and I have already used this documentation in my classes to teach students this critical foundational information. I had attempted to arrange a visit to the Anthology Film Archives as well, but due to renovations they were not taking public visitors at the time of my visit. This first part of the trip felt like a prologue that set the stage for the rest of my trip: it reinvigorated my desire to connect with a broader context for my research around feminism and art making.



Kinetic Sculpture "Feral Fount" by Gregory Barsamian, at the Museum of the Moving Image

I then traveled to Leeds in order to spend time with Terry Wragg, Jo Dunn, and Maria Wronka at the Leeds Animation Workshop and in the surrounding area. I learned about

the history of Leeds, the workshop, and Yorkshire in general. I visited the Leeds University Archive and examined archival materials from the Workshop. I spent extensive time at the workshop and examined many more project materials that were not included in the archival project. I also visited the Leeds Industrial Museum at Armley Mills where I learned about the history of textile production in Leeds and its connection to the early days of film technology, which was also developed in this area. I learned that there are some who claim the first ever motion picture film was created on top of Leeds Bridge which I was able to visit.



Outside the Leeds Animation Workshop in Leeds, UK

Throughout my time I organized interviews with each of the three primary members of the workshop who were present during my visit and conducted each interview at the house in Harehills. I also spent time filming and documenting the spaces within the workshop, as well as the surrounding areas in the neighborhood that are important to various members of the workshop. I listened to so many more stories in casual discussion than I was able to actually document, and one of the challenges and opportunities of the project that I am trying to create is to figure out how to represent the workshop in all its complexity when the documentation that I have doesn't fully reflect it. I was more interested in prioritizing meaningful quality time with the members of the workshop than in documenting the time that we experienced together because I was hoping that would lead to more comfortable, spontaneous interview material when it came time to set up the camera. In general, I found this to be true, and I also gained valuable experience and insight into the process of conducting interviews that I would use to guide my process the next time I pursue this type of project.

Once I returned home I began the process of figuring out the new rhythm of work in my studio. I underestimated the amount of time it would take to settle into a routine that felt

both restorative and productive, but eventually was ready to start sorting through the footage I had captured while traveling and to try and start sorting it into some kind of a documentary project. During the weeks of post-production on the documentary, I integrated two key elements that helped continue to move the project along: research, and feedback. I was able to really dig into research and new-to-me writing on feminist documentary practices and animation which kept my mind stimulated as I worked through the laborious process of editing down the nearly twenty hours of footage into what ended up becoming a 13 minute documentary.

By organizing bi-weekly screenings and feedback meetings with a regular creative collaborator I was able to hold myself accountable to making progress on the documentary. Because I chose to create this project with a commitment to an experimental process, there were very few tangible milestones to help develop the project forward. Whereas in the past I might have regarded the need for hard deadlines that are accountable to someone other than myself as a weakness, I have since learned that sometimes doing your best means asking for help. I would not have made the progress on this project that I did without these bi-weekly meetings.

By the end of the sabbatical I had developed a substantial edit from the footage that I captured in Leeds, but that edit had a lot less animation produced than I expected. I continued working on the animation during spring term and have made more progress. I plan to have a completed polished draft of the film ready to show at the sabbatical talks in Fall of 2026, and I plan to have the film fully completed by the end of fall term 2026.



On Leeds Bridge, arguably the site of the first ever motion picture film, Leeds, UK

DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

The main tangible result of my sabbatical time was the substantial forward movement on the production of my documentary, which was the original plan. But the main result

that I did not expect to occur was a total revitalization of my creative process and energy as a whole. I realized once I returned from my trip and began settling into my routine of working at home that this was the first time I'd had an opportunity to work on my creative practice full time since grad school in 2017. I was overjoyed to discover that some of the key to be able to continue to work on my creative projects was simply to have the dedicated time and energy to get started and create momentum. I was also able to discover ways of finding and generating momentum to work and be productive in a variety of ways on a day to day basis, including a variety of 'rules' I assigned to myself:

- Having a hard deadline is essential - putting off a necessary task until 3pm is ok as long as you get it done by the 5pm daycare pickup.

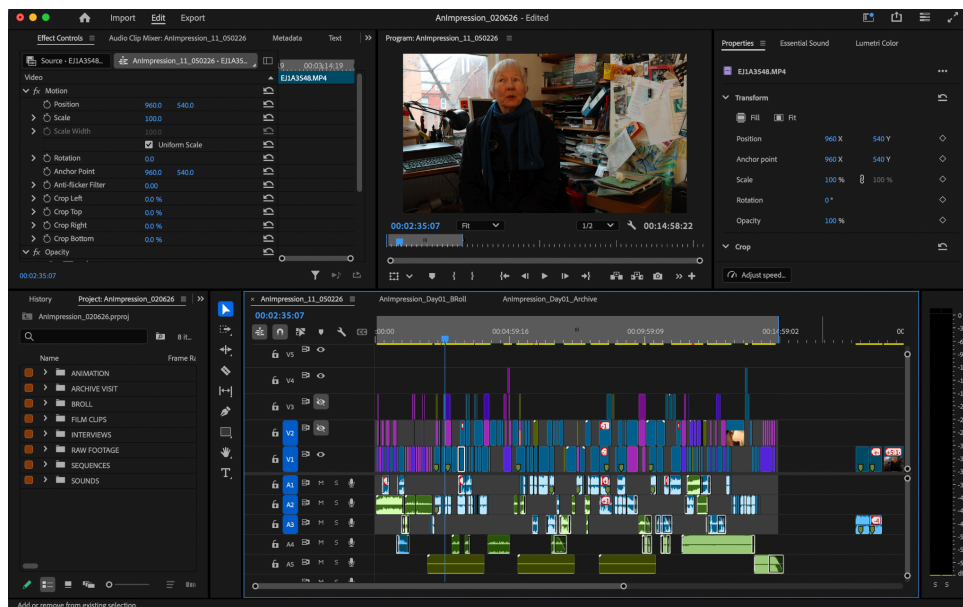
- Focus inward on what you have the capacity and interest for right now - work on that thing! And then let the creative momentum carry you forward to something else. The to-do list doesn't need to be a tyranny, but a menu of options.

- Work on multiple projects at once with radically different goals and processes! (While I worked on wrangling the documentary, I was also editing footage previously captured in Ireland that I didn't have any specific goal in mind for. My excitement for this new project helped spur me to complete the drudgerous tasks required in doing the initial edit of my documentary footage.)

- Schedule work sharing sessions with a trusted collaborator - regularly scheduling work shares keeps you accountable to moving the project forward.

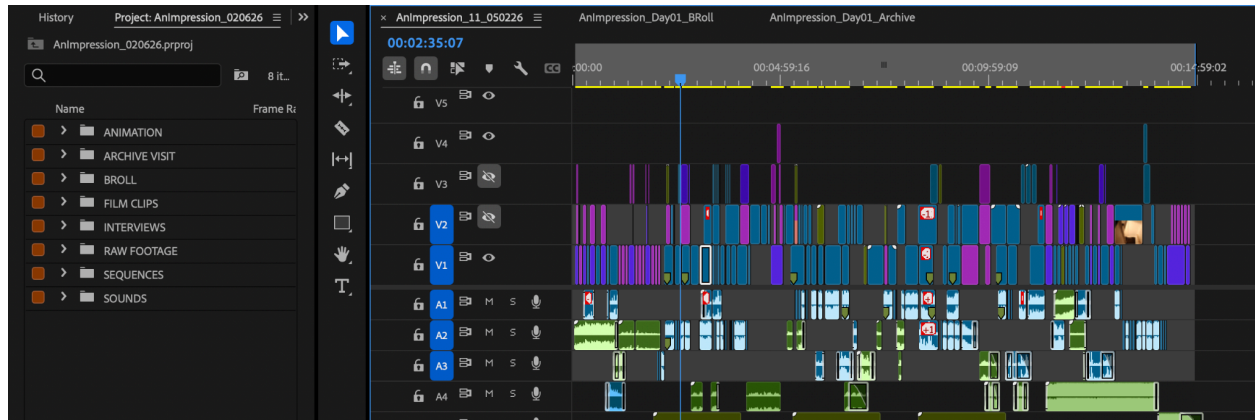
- You have to work on the project in order to want to work on the project.

- What sounds fun? Let joy inform the process! Try to make creative choices that won't unnecessarily burden yourself. Adding lots of hand drawn animation sounds stressful? You've been wanting to do cutout animation for a long time? Do it!



The current state of my Premiere edit timeline for the film

Another discovery at the end of the sabbatical time was that both the major project (the documentary) and all of the small branching projects, sketches, and ideas have ended up integrating motherhood into them. I realized that these are the first major projects I have undertaken since becoming a mother, and it feels both exciting and invigorating to be able to work towards understanding myself as an artist and a creative person in light of this other creative role that has since taken up a majority of my time and effort.



The most organized I've ever been while working on a project!

FINAL REFLECTION

It is difficult to truly articulate the significance of this project to my work at Lane. A major theme of the SLO's (Sabbatical Level Outcomes) that I generated for myself was that of 'reinvigoration', and that is really the word that I would use to describe the outcome that I experienced at the end of the eleven weeks. I am meaningfully reconnected to my drive to create which is ultimately why I am teaching at Lane in the first place. I always try to describe myself to my students as a 'teaching artist', and when I am connected to my artistic practice, I am a better teacher. It is extremely frustrating to feel that there is not enough energy at the end of a teaching day to put towards personal creative projects, and it was analogously rewarding to have been able to prioritize this time of renewal and refreshment. My students benefited during spring term by having the best possible version of their instructor with a freshly reminded perspective of what it is like to be in the trenches of working on a creative project. I was able to speak to my students about their creative practice not from a place of distant memory of that process but from active lived experiences.

I very much look forward to continuing work on this documentary over the summer and sharing my work with my colleagues this Fall, and beyond. I am very grateful to Lane and to the Sabbatical Committee for this opportunity.