

## **Towards a Better Birth – An Arts-Based Exploration**

### **Susan Hogan**

Women never forget a bad birth; it can haunt them for years to come. This presentation stems from a recently completed project on the experience of birth, the trauma that can follow it, and the role of the arts and creative practices in helping express and, ultimately, mitigate negative consequences. The Birth Project focused on mothers and empowered them to articulate their own experiences. In addition, it has also helped emphasise the impact of the birthing process on all those related to it: partners, midwives and health professionals. As a result, we have managed to elucidate the complex discourses surrounding birth and trauma from a multiplicity of perspectives. Furthermore, we managed to capture these voices, through filming workshops, to make a lasting statement about the reality of birth, using the power of the art and personal testimony of those filmed. Our overarching research questions have been also concerned with the exploration of the role that arts and humanities engagement might have to play in antenatal and postnatal provision, as part of routine care, especially where post-birth trauma is being translated into bodily symptoms. The Birth Project has also focused on exploring to the extent to which clinically related birth practices, which form part of 'routine care', are implicated in post-natal distress. The Birth Project has been particularly interested to explore women's subjective experience of birth and the transition to motherhood using the arts, within a participatory arts framework. The presentation will include the screening of a new and previously unshared film *Towards a Better Birth* (8 minutes).

### **Biography**

Professor **Susan Hogan** has an international reputation in the field of arts and health. She is perhaps best known for her work on the origins of art therapy: *Healing Arts: The History of Art as Therapy* (2001) & original work on gender and sexuality within the field, especially *Feminist Approaches to Art Therapy* (1997) and *Gender Issues in Art Therapy* (2003).

### **Recent publications and conference presentations**

Five most recent books:

*Art Therapy Theories. A Critical Introduction.* (2016).

*Inscribed on the Body. Gender and Difference in the Arts Therapies* (2019).

*Gender Issues in International Arts Therapies Research* (commissioned by the European Consortium of Art Therapy Educators - ECArTE, 2020).

*The Maternal Tug: Ambivalence, Identity, and Agency* (co-edited, 2020).

*Therapeutic Arts in Pregnancy, Birth & New Motherhood* (2020).