

# Activating Hidden Histories in the Collection:

Ingrid Pollard at Glasgow Women's Library



# “This history, which felt hidden and secret, is connected to people that are moving through the world with us: hidden and secret.”

— Freya Monk-McGowan, *Lesbian Lives* project curator

Ingrid Pollard  
Portrait. Photo:  
Emile Holba ▶



**Artist Ingrid Pollard was artist-in residence at Glasgow Women’s Library and worked with Freya McGowan-Monk and the GWL team. She worked on the library’s Lesbian Archive, a rich collection which documents the history that the artist is represented in and has contributed to as a photographer, artist and activist.**

“One of the wonders of working with an artist, working with Ingrid, within the archive is the alternative perspective she brings: her curiosity, her focus and her playfulness to bring threads together and shine a new light on them has been enthralling. She has changed the way I look at the archive, and I’m sure many others too.

Having visited the archive, as a queer woman in my late twenties, it felt like for the first time I was seeing the history I had always sought out in other organisations and never found. In my mind when reviewing the collection, I felt hundreds of years away, touching and holding history I had heard of but never seen. When I visited the archive with Ingrid, this distance vanished immediately.”

Freya Monk-McGowan, *Lesbian Lives* project curator

**Cover Image:**  
Prints and  
posters from  
GWL collection  
and Lenthall  
Road Workshop  
collection, part of  
Ingrid Pollard, *No  
Cover Up*. Photo:  
Alan Dimmick

## Working with artists

Glasgow Women's Library was founded in 1991 and is an Accredited Museum, lending library and archive dedicated to celebrating women's lives, histories and achievements. GWL's collection has grown through donations from a diverse and engaged community of supporters, it is a space that holds and cares for many voices, with a collective curatorial approach that reflects this.

The library specialises in supporting artists to make new work from the collection and it is a hugely effective way to activate significant histories. Founding members of GWL are artists themselves, as well as being, like Monk-McGowan, members of the disenfranchised or marginalised groups our collections speak to.

*Lesbian Lives: Unveiling Hidden Herstories* was created to support research and access to one of the most important aspects of our collection – the Lesbian Archive. At the heart of this project is a collaboration with Glasgow International Festival of Visual Arts to host artist Ingrid Pollard in this important archive of LGBTQ history. With the support of funders like the Museums Association and Esme Fairbairn Foundation, Pollard explored a compelling collection of materials including records of projects she had been active in in the past and posters and artworks she had created. A new body of work, made in response to this exploration was showcased at the Glasgow International festival 2021.

Ingrid Pollard, 'audio-books', 2021, *No Cover Up*, installation view at Glasgow Women's Library, Glasgow, 2021. Photo: Alan Dimmick ►



Lenthall Road  
Workshop  
photographs and  
publications from  
GWL collection, part  
of Ingrid Pollard,  
*No Cover Up*.  
Installation view at  
Glasgow Women's  
Library, Glasgow,  
2021. Photo: Alan  
Dimmick ▶



## Ingrid Pollard

As an artist working in print, photography and other media, Pollard is adept at exploring complex and forgotten histories. She carefully uses the different material forms of photography to help us rethink and question what is on view. Her 1992 *Wordsworth Heritage* postcards used the postcard format to transform and question romantic notions of the English Lake District, steeped in associations with Wordsworth. Her images of a party of contemporary black walkers were presented on 25 billboards. Her carefully hand tinted 2017 *Valentine Days* project, centres 'escapee' figures overlooked in images first created to present desirable tourist locations and tropical commodities. In these and other significant examples she brings to light important stories of belonging, for those out view, or at the edges of the frame.

## The Lesbian Archive

In 1995, whilst still an entirely volunteer-run organisation, GWL became custodian of the London-based national Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC) when it was threatened with closure. 25 years on this expansive and growing collection makes up a third of the GWL archive. The only Lesbian Archive in the UK, it still holds potential for real impact and change. The collection offers insight into close-knit, inclusive and intersectional communities often formed in moments of acute threat. Amongst a huge variety of materials there is a heart-warming support network to be found

in pamphlets and 'how to guides' for newly identified lesbians and bi women with titles like, 'Being Black and a Lesbian' or 'Being a Lesbian with Disabilities' and 'Being a Lesbian with Children'.

Pollard's commission has generated an opportunity to further care for these materials, with support from an archival team. Their interpretation, through curatorial attention, and the ongoing digitisation process, has made posters, prints and photos accessible in different ways. In this way the work of an artist, tracking aspects of her own history within the collection, has been supported by many perspectives, from new generations of archivists and curators to the original custodians of LAIC. She will also leave new traces behind, shaping future work in the collection.

**“We continued down each aisle and Ingrid would pull out leaflets and posters, explaining when and why she'd worked on them. She'd pull photographs out of boxes and talk me through who was in the picture, who was missing, where it had been taken and when, which lovers were in fights, which friends had been living together”**

— Freya Monk-McGowan, *Lesbian Lives project curator*

## Conclusion

Behind print works and photographs, as well as the multitude of other materials, there is a web of personal stories and relationships. The archive is witness to many who have come together to combat the alienation created by exclusions, along sexual, class, disability and race lines, and who have found much hope in the process.

Working with an artist has allowed huge new aspects of the library, its history, and the histories of those it conserves and celebrates, to surface. At the heart of the project is Ingrid Pollard's new artistic commission and her revelatory new exhibition, *No Cover Up*, which bring the archive to life through a careful listening and making process practice that is both creative and inquisitive. *Lesbian Lives* is a timely and powerful corralling of memories, voices and histories captured through one of the most important visual artists working today and, in the process, illustrates GWL's history as a grassroots and artist run space.

**“It sounds naïve to admit but I really had no idea how young the archive is. Ingrid bridged the gap for me, and I’m sure many others, by repeating over and over again that the people within the archive are still alive – that these queer women I had been gazing at, wondering what they did, who they loved and how they moved through the world, are all around.”**

— Freya Monk-McGowan, *Lesbian Lives* project curator

Aspects of LGBTQ and feminist leadership have been at work in collaborative working processes with team members. Reconnecting Ingrid Pollard and the Lesbian Archive in this project, at this point in history, has yielded powerful new works and fresh perspectives on an important resource.

*Glasgow Women’s Library would like to thank all who contributed to this project: Ingrid Pollard, Artist; Freya Monk-McGowan, Curator; Caroline Gausden Development Worker for Programming and Curating; and team members Katie Reid (Production Co-ordinator), Nicola Maksymuk and Lauren Kelly (GWL Archivists) with support from GWL Co-founder Adele Patrick and Co-director Sue John and the wider GWL Team.*

### **Find out more:**

<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/lesbian-lives-revealing-hidden-herstories/>

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