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THE POWER OF FEMINIST ARTIVISM TO CHANGE GENDER NORMS

Diana Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez

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Author: Diana Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez

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About the authors

Diana Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez is a Senior Research Officer in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion team at ODI. She holds a PhD in International Development from the University of East Anglia and an MPhil degree in Development Studies from the University of Oxford. She is a feminist researcher interested in gender norm change, gender-based violence, gender and development, the politics and impact of social movements, and environmental justice.

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Acronyms

ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
GBV	gender-based violence
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (people/movement)
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Glossary

Artivism – term bringing together the words art and activism. It refers to the work of artists that pursue activism through their work and of activists who use art as part of their strategies.

Gender based violence – violent acts (including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic harm) directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their (perceived) gender.

Feminist artivism – type of artivism that contests gender oppression and seeks to advance gender equality.

Gender norms – socioculturally defined rules about how a person should behave and present themselves, as well as interact with others, in accordance with their perceived gender. They also inform social expectations of others according to their perceived genders.

Patriarchal norms – oppressive and harmful gender norms that are informed by, and uphold, gender inequality.

Symbolic order – system of symbols, representations and meanings that creates, reinforces and upholds a shared sense of reality.

1 Introduction

Art has been central to feminist movements worldwide for decades – as it has to other social justice movements.[1] For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), from the first wave of the feminist movement onwards, posters, cartoons and crafts (such as embroidered banners) have been prominent (Atkinson, 1997; Streeten, 2020; Young, 2023).[2] In Pakistan, more recently, art has also become a central part of the annual feminist protests calling for an end to gender-based violence (GBV), known as the 'Aurat March'. Ongoing since 2018, the march has embraced dance as a form of resistance, the song *Peechay hatt* ('Move back') is now its anthem and illustrations are a cornerstone of the movement's posters (Hussain, 2023).[3]

Feminist artists have also played a crucial role in advancing feminist movements. They have not only challenged male control of the arts, but also denounced oppression and inequality, furthered feminist critique and nurtured feminist imagination. Their work has amplified the visibility of feminist movements, as well as forged powerful feminist symbols to represent them (Guinta, 2021; Reckitt, 2022). For example, in 2012 for the 30th anniversary of the Turkish feminist movement, the feminist music group Bandsista created a two-song extended play titled *Sokak, Meydan, Gece* ('Street, Square, Night'), which soon became the symbol of the celebration and later of the movement as a whole (Ögüt, 2018).

This report explores feminist 'artivism' – feminist art with activist intentions or feminist activism that uses art as part of its repertoire of actions. It analyses how this form of activism can uniquely contribute to transforming oppressive gender norms; that is, the often implicit and informal rules that inform gender roles and relations and thus people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours concerning perceived gender identities (Harper et al., 2020; Jimenez Thomas et al., 2021). While much has been written on the link between art and social justice more broadly, and on the aims of feminist artivism specifically, the potential of using art as a form of activism to transform gender norms has yet to be examined. This report fills this gap.

The report argues that feminist artivism promotes and supports gender norm change directly and indirectly: directly, by contesting patriarchal norms and supporting the creation of alternative gender-equitable norms; and indirectly, by supporting or strengthening movement building. This report discusses both visual arts (painting, drawing, collage-making, installation work, photography, crafts, etc.) and performance arts (theatre, music, storytelling and performance).[4]

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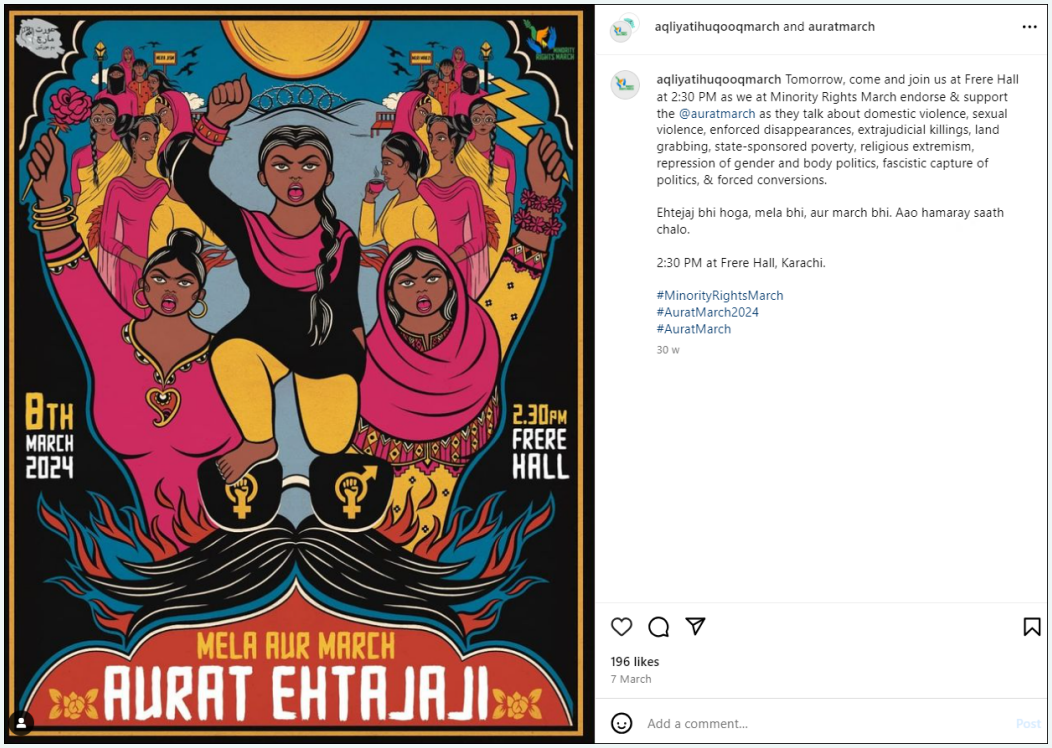
1 Art has played an important role in social movements including: alter-globalisation (McKee, 2016; Léger, 2021), democracy (Adams, 2002; Boubia, 2015; Latorre, 2019), labour (Tucker, 2010; Serafini et al., 2018), environmental and climate justice (Serafini, 2018; Merlinsky and Serafini, 2019; Stammen and Meissner, 2024), civil rights (Reed, 2005) and LGBTQI+ movements (Gould, 2009; van Klinken, 2019), as well as in advocacy for just migration policies (Mekdjian, 2018; Pulitano, 2022; Özyeşilpınar, 2022). The references provided here are not exhaustive, but provide illustrative examples.

2 'Women making history' (2018), an exhibition celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in the UK, showed the handcrafted banners used by the suffragette movement, and 'Women in revolt! Art and activism in the UK in 1970-1990' documented how the feminist movement used art throughout these decades (Reckitt, 2022; Young, 2023).

3 See the movement's Instagram page @auratmarch. In early 2024, the march also launched a call for feminist art confronting the militaristic control of feminine bodies.

4 This report does not cover dance or creative writing, as these forms of art did not feature prominently in the search results on artivism. This may be related to the more abstract nature of dance, which makes it harder to use it to convey a message and to creative writers being less likely to label their work as 'artivism'.

Figure 1: 'Aurat March'



Source: instagram.com/auratmarch

These findings are based on: 1) an in-depth literature review of both academic and grey literature on (feminist) artivism, and 2) more rapid literature reviews of theoretically relevant bodies of work: art and social movements, art and education, art and therapy, art and research methods, art and peace studies, and art theory (see Annex 2).[5] For the first literature review, searches were conducted in both English and Spanish, and for the latter, searches were conducted exclusively in English (see Annex 1 for the search terms used). Resources were subsequently identified through snowballing. There was no time criterion when conducting searches or selecting material and the information included in this report spans across countries and regions.[6] Possibly because most of the studies found come primarily from cultural studies, sociology and politics, there is more attention to the aims and potential of art to effect positive change, to the detriment of analyses of its impact. Most of the evidence of the impact of art as a tool to promote gender equality comes rather from the development sector, in the form of project impact assessments. While this is the focus of a forthcoming ALIGN publication, relevant insights that apply to the use of art by grassroots feminist actors are discussed in this report. Moreover, while the report focuses on feminist artivism specifically, it also draws on examples from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+)[7] movements, or other social justice movements, where relevant.

5 These bodies of literature explore the diverse potentials of artivist work, while also identifying some common themes. For instance, while peace studies and psychology literature emphasise the cathartic potential of art, education literature emphasises its pedagogical role, and that on research methodology delves into its epistemological potential. Yet, the three bodies of work highlight, for example, the link between art and agency, community building, emotional engagement and awareness-raising.

6 While there was no time criterion for the searches, all examples used are from the 1970s onwards, as artivism gained prominence during feminism's second wave as a result of the emergence of the feminist art movement in the late 1960s.

7 The plus sign represents people with diverse sexual and gender identifies who identify using other terms.

Understanding the use of art to challenge patriarchal gender norms is of special importance in contexts of dwindling funding for the arts, such as in the UK and India (Higgins, 2024; Dhar, 2021), and of backlash against the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people (Khan et al., 2023).[8] Limited available resources for feminist movements to use artistic strategies and for feminist artivists to pursue their work can limit the potential of artivism to support norm change and protect it from reversal. Lack of resources and increasing backlash against feminist activism can also increase the physical and mental health risks that artivists take through their work. Red Women's Workshop, Shaima Dief, the Guerilla Girls, Hossna Hanafy, Farida Batool and Claudia Michaus, among countless others, have received hate messages and threats in response to their work (Abdelrahman, 2020; Guerilla Girls, 2020; Castillo, 2022; Ejaz, 2022; Streeten, 2020). Others have also faced criminal charges. Members of the Russian punk rock and performance group Pussy Riot were imprisoned in 2012 on charges of 'religious hatred and hooliganism' and Chilean performance group Las Tesis faced charges in 2020 for supposedly inciting violence against the police through their performance *Un Violador en tu Camino* ('A Rapist in your Path') (Walker, 2013; Serafini 2020).

The report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of artivism and specifically feminist artivism, as well as the concept of gender norms and what gender norm change looks like.

Chapter 3 discusses and illustrates how feminist artivism supports the transformation of oppressive gender norms directly and indirectly. It also discusses existing evidence of its impact on gender norm change.

The conclusion returns to the importance of feminist artivism today.

8 According to the Arts Index 2020, government arts funding in England fell by 35% in 2010–2020 (Masso, 2020).

2 Artivism, feminism and gender norms

2.1 What is artivism?

The term 'artivism' brings together the words art and activism. It is synonymous with activist art and art activism. It encompasses artists that pursue activism through their work (that is, activist art) as well as activists who use art as a tool and as part of their repertoire of actions (that is, art activism) (Serafini, 2018). An example of the former is Zanele Muholi, a South African visual activist artist who uses photography, video and sculpture to document the lives of members of the black LGBTQI+ community in South Africa, challenging their erasure from visual history and heteropatriarchal misrepresentation (Greenberg, 2019; Mullins, 2019; Onabanjo, 2020; see Figure 2). An example of the latter is the performance *Un Violador en tu Camino* ('A Rapist in your Path') created by Chilean collective Las Tesis in 2019 as a way of denouncing and highlighting the structural nature of GBV – a performance that has since featured worldwide in protests against GBV (Serafini, 2020; Castillo, 2022; see Figure 3).

There are ongoing disagreements over how art and activism should interact, reflecting broader debates surrounding the nature of art (whether it *is* inherently political) and its role (whether art *should* be political). Some scholars, like Bishop and Bourriaud (cited in Kester, 2011; Serafini, 2018), argue that art is not political by nature and that art's aesthetic value depends on its autonomy from politics. Others posit, instead, a positive or

Figure 2: Photographs by Zanele Muholi at the 58th Venice Biennale's show (2019)

Credit: © bepsy | Shutterstock ID: 1398111242

inherent connection between the two. Rancière (2013), for example, suggests art's autonomy is what empowers it to play a social and political role. Mouffe (2013) goes further to argue that politics and art are inherently intertwined, since politics involve symbolic representation and art plays an important role in the maintenance of symbolic orders – that is, in the system of symbols, representations and meanings that creates, reinforces and upholds a shared sense of reality. In this view, art's relationship with power extends beyond the resistance and transformation of existing power structures to their reproduction and reinforcement, as Box 1 discusses.

Box 1: Art and power: a double-edged sword

Art does not occur in a social, political and economic vacuum (Foucault, 1980). As a result, the relationship between art and politics is not inherently progressive, and art, and art-related technologies, can be used to reinforce existing oppressive power relations and structures (Preda, 2013; Adams, 2002; Hawksley and Mitchell, 2020; Streeten, 2020). Women's representations in art, for example, have supported patriarchal worldviews and gender inequality. The hypersexualised – and in many cases racialised – depiction of the female body has contributed to women's sexual objectification, to the understanding of women's value as linked to the male gaze and to oppressive beauty ideals and norms (Berger, 2008; Guerilla Girls, 2020). In a similar fashion, visual technologies have supported racial oppression. Photography was used to document black bodies and lives, using it as evidence in support of colonial projects and worldviews (Talwar, 2018). Posters were also used in many colonial and neocolonial contexts to dehumanise colonised groups through caricatures that depicted them as deviants, menaces or with childlike qualities (Jim Crow Museum, 2024). Art can also be used to sustain authoritarian political regimes. For example, the Suharto regime (1996–1998) in Indonesia used art as a tool to impose national unity by promoting ideological adherence and homogeneity, as well as by co-opting and manipulating regional artistic expressions (Bräuchler, 2022). In Italy, the artistic movement of Futurism, with its glorification of war, industrial society and expansionism, played an important role in the rise of fascism in the country and, in fact, later became its political supporter (Bowler, 1991).

Figure 3: A performance of Las Tesis' *Un Violador en tu Camino in Bogotá*, Colombia

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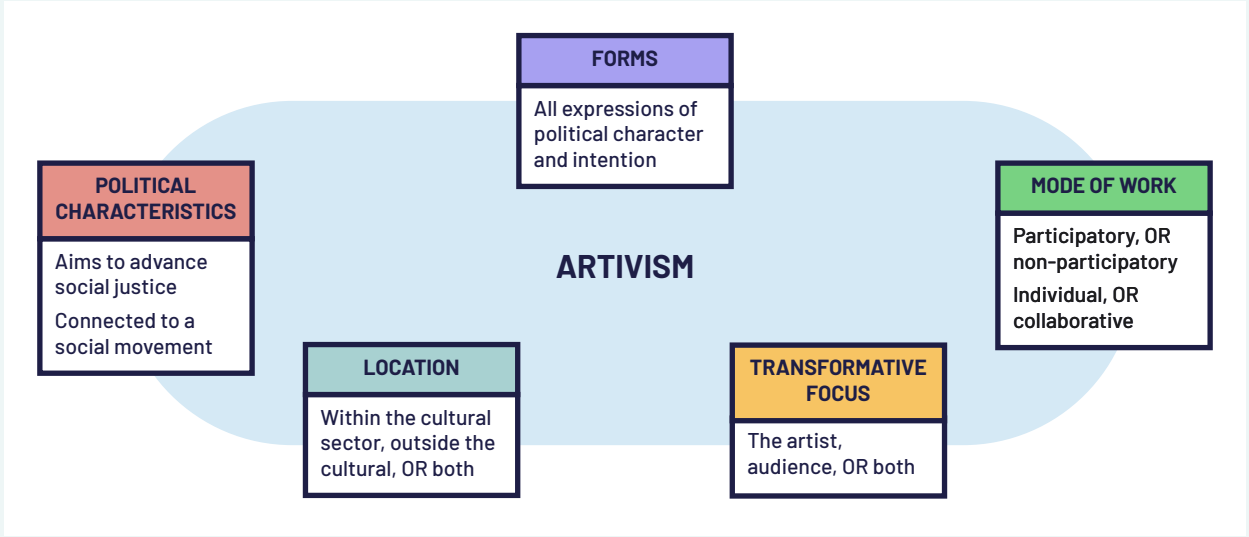
There are also debates about what counts as artivism and what its defining characteristics are – on what it means for art to be 'involved in trying to effect change' (Serafini, 2018: 2, citing Lippard, 1984 and Groys, 2014). For instance, Serafini (2018) argues that artivism is art that goes beyond articulating a critique; Lippard (1984) suggests that it should occur at least both within and outside the art world, since the latter can be an elitist space; and Lacy (1995) argues that it needs to be participatory in nature – that is, art that involves viewers as makers and thus as co-producers – geared towards public spaces and shaped by an awareness of its anticipated audience.[9] There is, however, consensus across different bodies of literature on art and social justice (see Annex 2) that using art as a form of activism is characterised by: 1) valuing art's instrumental character or its potential to achieve a desired outcome; and 2) seeing this potential to effect change not only in the art product itself, but in the process of making art too (for example, Lacy, 1995; Dewhurst, 2014; Corbett, 2017; Serafini, 2018).

In this report, artivism is understood as referring to both 'art activism' and 'activist art' as art practices that challenge hegemony and propose and seek to bring about visions of social justice (Mouffe, 2013). As summarised in Figure 4, artivism is, consecutively, understood as:

1) seeking to advance social justice, indirectly or directly linked to social movements (Serafini, 2018)
2) expressing political character and intention in any form, such as expressing one's experiences, articulating a critique or working with others
3) working in individual or collaborative, participatory or non-participatory modes
4) seeking transformation of the artist, its audience (or co-creators in the case of participatory projects) or both, recognising how the self is a site of political activity
5) occurring within the cultural sector, outside of it or both, since artivism can contest power relations and dominant worldviews within the art sector and outside of it.[10]

Figure 4: Defining dimensions of artivism



9 While artivism is not a term used by these authors, their discussion of what constitutes activist art is pertinent to a discussion of the term.

10 In doing so, this framework does not reproduce classed assumptions about the spaces in which oppression and inequality occur and the direction in which activism travels; it also recognises the importance of reaching and working with elites.

Understanding artivism under this framework avoids distinguishing between art activism/activist art that critiques social injustice and that which seeks to create solutions. It recognises how expressing individual or collective experiences (that is, 'the personal') is of political importance and potential, as well as how art communicates and recreates personal experiences for an audience by demanding an emotional response from them (Dewhurst, 2014).

This framework also recognises how social, political and economic contexts will shape how artivism is pursued and expressed. The role that cultural institutions have in different contexts, the safety of public spaces, and the democratic or repressive character of the state can, for example, impact whether artivism is pursued within or outside the cultural sector – or through both – or whether it is safer to pursue artivism collaboratively or individually. Cuban feminist hip-hop and theatre group Las Krudas explains that they organise independent theatre projects because of the state's heavy influence on Cuban theatre, which leaves little room to challenge dominant narratives on race and gender (Armstead, 2007).

Artivism, however, is not without critique. Box 2 discusses some of the main concerns that surround this form of activism.

Box 2: Critiques of artivism

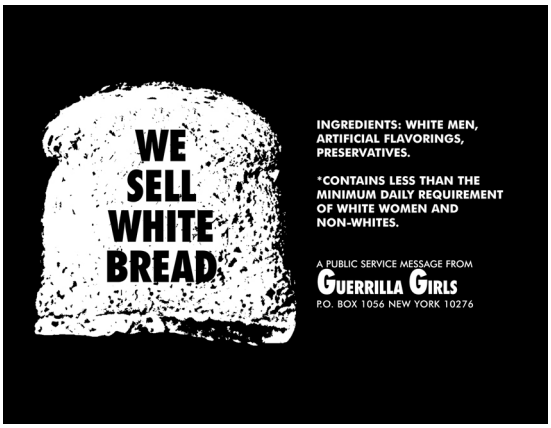
Artivism is not without its tensions and critiques. Some of these include concerns that:

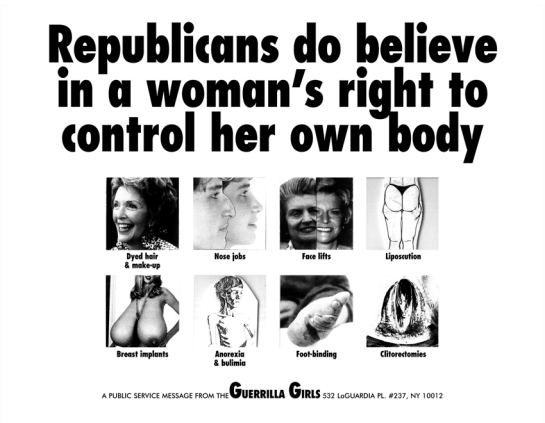
- Artivism reduces art and artists to an instrumental function and value and thus hinders art's aesthetic coherence, engagement and value (Lacy, 1995; Balfour, 2009; Kester, 2011) and tokenises artists (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021).
- An overemphasis on artivism reduces social movements to artistic expressions, as social struggles can be depoliticised as a result of seeing political action mostly through aesthetics lenses (especially when people interact with art that has previously been in public spaces in museums) (Valdivieso, 2014 in Aladro Vico, 2018).
- Artivism, if resulting in personal profit for the artist(s) in question, may be commodifying social struggles and supporting personal benefits from oppression and inequality. This is a particularly sensitive issue in cases of artivism against femicide and other forms of GBV, since it may be participating in what Rodriguez (cited in Castillo, 2022) calls the lucrative business of the 'stylistics of death'.
- Artivism furthers an individualisation of activism, since artivism does not require collective action as it can be carried out in an individual and non-participatory manner. Some forms of artivism may be, thus, a form of activism that is compatible with societal trends towards individualisation – occurring under neoliberal narratives – and thus supporting the decline of collective political action (Richardson, 2015).

2.2 What is feminist artivism?

Feminist artivism is here understood as an art practice that seeks to foment dissent against patriarchal worldviews, structures, roles and relations.[11] It seeks to advance gender equality and justice. It is connected to, and influenced by, feminist movements, and can take many forms depending on how it expresses its political goal, its mode of work, its location and its transformative focus (see Figure 3).[12] Feminist artivism can be directed at gendered injustices in the art world itself (see Box 3) and/or at gender and intersecting oppressions and injustices elsewhere or more broadly. For example, the Guerrilla Girls collective, based in the United States (US), has done both through posters, installations and performances (Guerrilla Girls, 2020; see Figures 5 and 6).[13]

Figures 5 and 6: Guerrilla Girls' posters against women artists' under-representation in museums (left) and the denial of women's reproductive and sexual rights (right)





Credit: © Guerrilla Girls, courtesy of www.guerrillagirls.com

11 Not all artists or movements against patriarchal oppression and gender inequality necessarily use the term 'feminist'. For example, some indigenous movements against patriarchal oppression in Latin America prefer using the term 'anti-patriarchal' rather than feminist as a way of critiquing feminism as a school of thought considered 'Western' in origin and orientation and proposing a view that is more closely aligned with indigenous worldviews (Paredes, 2008; Sieder, 2015; Cabnal, 2018). Similarly, some groups in South Asia may also prefer avoiding the label 'feminist'. Since feminism tends to be seen as a Western influence, acquiring a negative connotation, movements may prefer to use the language of 'women's empowerment', 'human rights' or more specific terms such as 'Islamic feminism', as a way of communicating more context-specific and culturally relevant frameworks, building broader constituency bases and/or avoiding backlash (Shaheed, 2017; Nazneen, et al., 2019). In conceptualising their work in this report as 'feminist', we are only referring to their political intention.

12 Though not covered in the practice of artivism, some feminist movements (as other social movements) have a strategic engagement with art, not by producing art, but by damaging – or pretending to damage – art pieces. This has been pursued with the objective of calling attention to their demands through scandal or through humour and irreverence (see Castillo, 2022 for an example on the feminist movement in Mexico, where activists occupying a state building painted over the all-male historical portraits, adding lipstick, flowers, adornments or devil horns).

13 The Guerilla Girls have also been active on other social justice issues such as homelessness and environmental degradation, as well outside of the US (Guerrilla Girls, 2020).

Box 3: Gender inequality within the arts sector

Art has not been immune to the influence of gendered power structures. These structures have led to: (1) hierarchical distinctions between art and craft, as the latter has often been associated with women's work and considered unrefined (Parker and Pollock, 1981); and (2) the reproduction of patriarchal worldviews by reinforcing 'the perceived bias of a world created for and dominated by men' (Mullins, 2019: 8). Gendered power structures have, moreover, resulted in the historical exclusion and invisibility of women from the art world – a situation that persists to this day (Reckitt, 2022; Young, 2023). According to the Survey of Global Collecting, while women are the majority or an equal proportion of art students, 'female artists are still underrepresented in exhibitions and sales, both in the dealer and auction sectors', as well as experience 'inequality in terms of career longevity and commercial success' (McAndrew, 2023: 57).

Since feminist art is directly connected to feminist movements and characterised by its political intention to contest and transform patriarchal relations (within or outside the art world), the definition of feminist artivism adopted in this report understands all feminist art as artivism.[14]

Feminist art, as an artistic movement, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s across different contexts, challenging gender inequality within the arts sector (see Box 3) and in society.[15] Feminist art revitalised a connection between art and politics articulated through earlier artistic movements or proposals such as Dadaism, Epic Theatre, Surrealism and the Theatre of the Oppressed. By strengthening the use of art as a tool for social transformation (Lacy, 1995; Mullins, 2019), it also contributed to the creation of new artistic proposals with a strong activist character, such as new genre public art, Useful Art and Maintenance Art (see Annex 3).

Under the banner of 'the personal is political', feminist art emphasises how expressing oneself through the arts can be a political tool against oppression. Under this banner, it has given voice to women's experiences, challenged stereotypes, revalued crafts, reclaimed the body as a subject rather than an object of art and as a political site, and countered the depoliticisation and/or taboos around women's experiences and work by making 'mundane' objects and themes subjects of art (Mullins, 2019; Abdelrahman, 2020). See, for example, Billie Zangewa's *The Rebirth of the Black Venus* (2010) (Figure 7) and *Womanhouse* (1972) by Miriam Schapiro, Judy Chicago and others (Figure 8).[16]

Feminist artivism can take place across the public sphere, including digital spaces. Social media has become a key and distinctive space for feminist activism (Washington and Marcus, 2022). Social media is well-placed to be a platform for feminist artivists because of its audiovisual character and because it offers increased reach and anonymity (in case they wish to protect their identities) (Rodal et al., 2019; Lanson, et al., 2020).

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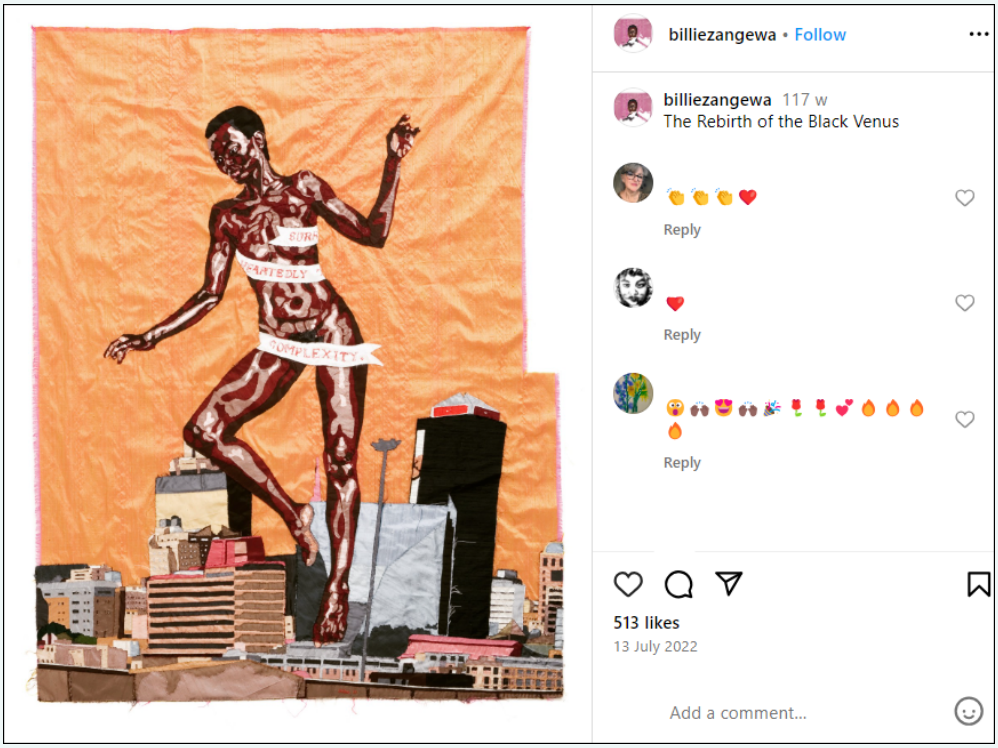
14 Feminist art is not synonymous with female artists.

15 This, however, may not have been undertaken from an intersectional perspective. In the UK, for example, in the 1970s and 1980s, black feminist artists denounced their marginalisation on account of their race (Mullins, 2019).

16 Zangewa's piece reclaims the use of textiles in this hand-sewn silk collage, as well as the traditional female nude, by depicting herself against the backdrop of Johannesburg as a way of speaking of black women's oppression and agency in the city. In *Womanhouse*, according to Schapiro, 'what formerly was considered trivial was heightened to the level of serious art-making: dolls, pillows, cosmetics, sanitary napkins, silk stockings, underwear, children's toys, washbasins, toasters, frying pans, refrigerator door handles, shower caps, quilts and satin bedspreads' (cited in Mullins, 2019: 30).

Figure 7: Billie Zangewa's *The Rebirth of Black Venus* (2010)



Source: instagram.com/p/Cf8klYTsslw

Figure 8: Sandy Orgel's *Linen Closet* in *Womanhouse* (1972)

Credit: © Dori Atlantis

2.3 Artivism and gender norms

Gender norms are a subset of social norms or 'the implicit informal rules that most people accept and follow' and they vary across sociocultural contexts (Harper et al., 2020: 5). They inform how a person should behave and socially interact – as well as what to expect from others – in accordance with their and others' (perceived) gender identity (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022). Gender norms thus inform gender expression, roles and relations. They are present at the individual level, in communities and societies, and embedded in our political, social and economic institutions. They are maintained through rewards and sanctions, such as violence, increase or decrease in social status and social approval or lack thereof (Harper et al., 2020). Gender norms often intersect with other social norms, such as those around race, sexuality, able-bodiedness and age. As such, gender norm change (and of intersecting social norms) is central to dismantling gender oppression and inequality.

Gender norm change is a slow process. It requires identifying and uprooting long-seated – and thus often 'sticky' – beliefs and behaviours embedded in people's minds and in our institutions and articulating and embedding new norms in their place. This creates new codes of what is permissible and desirable – in relation to perceived gender roles and identities – for oneself and for others.

Artivism is particularly well-placed to contest oppressive gender norms for various reasons. First, both gender norms and art operate in the cultural sphere. Gender norms are reinforced through symbolic representation and art plays an important role in its maintenance or disruption (as discussed in Section 2.1). As such, art is an obvious site of action to challenge and propose ways of being and relating to others (Whittier, 2017; Abdelrahman, 2020). Second, as Chapter 3 highlights, artivism facilitates both individual and collective exploration and expression. It draws attention to the body and emotions – both central dimensions to subjectivity, identity and social relations, and thus to norms. Its open-ended nature – its possibility to hold multiple and ever-changing meanings – also makes it a useful tool to explore the complexity of subjectivity, identity and social relations (Blanco Martínez and Mendoza Téllez-Girón, 2019; Leavy, 2020; Forcer et al., 2022).

Feminist artivism has contested the norms that are central to women's exclusion from the arts sector, such as the belief that women lack creativity, that women can only be objects not makers of art, and that crafts are a lesser form of artistic production (Reckitt 2022, citing Parker and Pollock, 1981).[17] In doing so, it has challenged male control of, and authority in, the sector or specific art forms. For example, the Riot Grrrl movement, which originated in the 1990s in the US, contested male control over punk rock by using it to celebrate girls and their power (Harris, 2012). In the words of Egyptian artist Deena Mohamed when speaking about her comic book *Qahera* (see Figure 9), which tells the story of a Muslim woman superhero fighting against gender oppression (discussed in more detail in Section 3.1.):

> *I like that you can easily adopt an art form usually commandeered by Western males … and in doing so, make a statement on what is and isn't expected of Muslim (and also Egyptian) women.* (cited in Soliman, 2020: 272)[18]

17 In the pursuit of artivism, women from other marginalised groups can also contest intersecting social norms, such as those around race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness and sexuality.

18 See also Latorre (2008) who documents how Chicana muralists in the US also appropriated an art form previously considered male.

While the questioning of gender norms within the art world impacts society more broadly, feminist artivism can also promote gender norm change directly outside of it. As Chapter 3 discusses, this works by contesting patriarchal gender norms, supporting the creation of alternative gender-equitable norms, and supporting movement building, among other pathways. As artivism mobilises emotions and bodily experience, feminist artivism can further support gender norm change by 'making change stick'.

Figure 9: Deena Mohamed's *Qahera*, 'Part 1: Brainstorm' (2013)

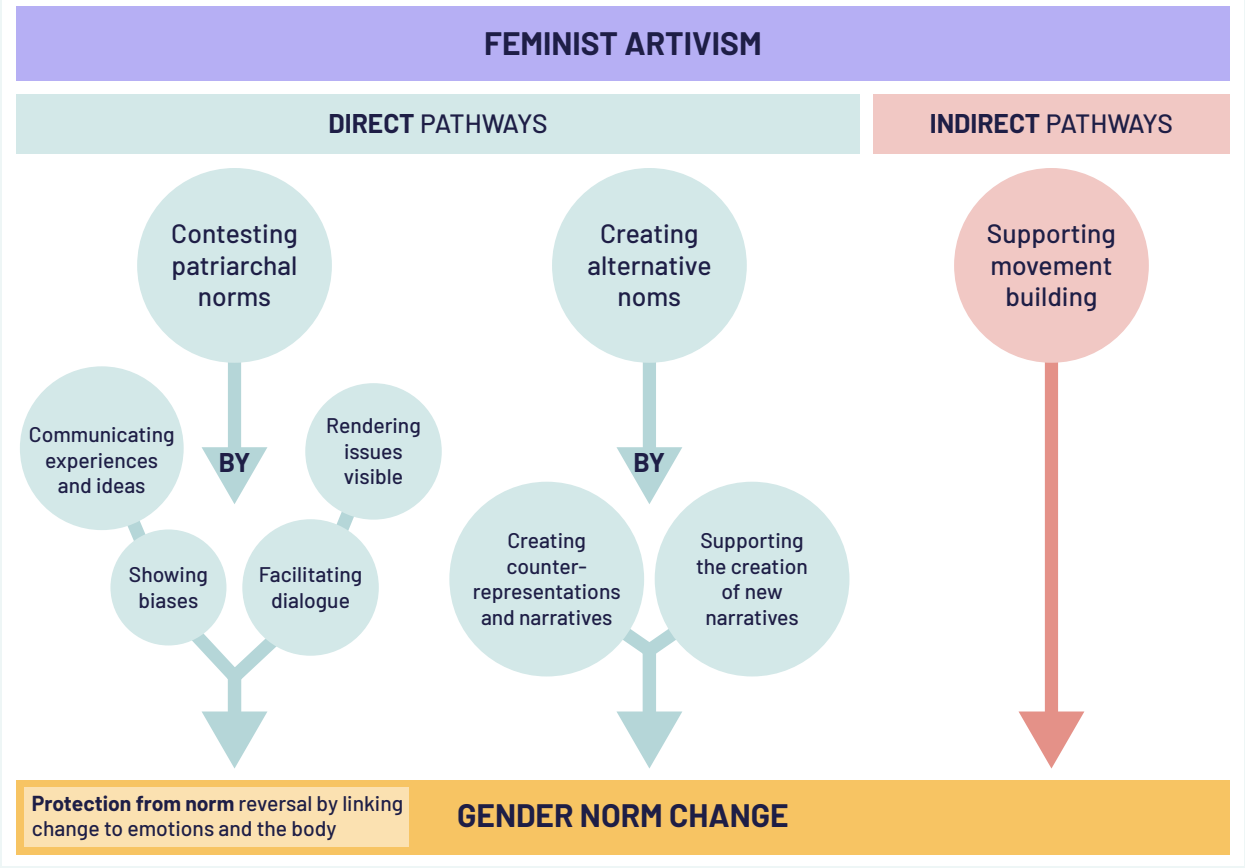
Credit: © Deena Mohamed

3 How does feminist artivism promote gender norm change beyond the art world?

Literature on feminist artivism, as well as other relevant bodies of work connected to the use of art for social justice (see Annex 2), speak of the potential of art to effect positive change. While not all the uses of art documented in existing literature are relevant to gender norm change (see Annex 2), many are. Art can express and nurture agency, raise questions about social reality, support creativity and imagination, and bring people together, among other functions.

Because of these, feminist artivism can support gender norm change directly and indirectly (see Figure 10). It can do so directly by contesting patriarchal norms and supporting the creation of alternative gender-equitable norms. Feminist artivism can also indirectly support gender norm change by aiding movement building. Each pathway is discussed separately and in detail in Sections 3.1–3.3, but artivist projects can often pursue multiple objectives simultaneously. For instance, an initiative might create counter-representations while also supporting movement building.

Figure 10: How does feminist artivism promote gender norm change?



Though different forms of art have different strengths and may even impact the brain differently, all art forms covered in this report can leverage the pathways outlined above in Figure 10.[19] The following sections indicate, as much as possible, where specific art forms excel at different functions. The examples used were chosen to highlight geographical diversity, art form variety and evidence strength.

As the diagram shows, feminist artivism can also decrease the likelihood of norm reversal by linking contestations of patriarchal norms and/or new norms to emotions and/or bodily experiences. Artivism does not only engage its audience intellectually, but also bodily and emotionally (Sullivan, 2012; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024).[20]

Speaking about how art involves the body, Hanauer (2010) argues that using the arts to reflect on and inquire into social justice issues often means that unjust situations and/or people's experiences of them are not described but rather recreated for the audience. For example, theatre and performance can unsettle 'the boundaries of acceptable conduct' by transgressing them on the stage or public spaces (Bellingreri, 2020: 191). In doing so, art offers a different mode of discovery (Forcer et al., 2022). It allows people to obtain something closer to a first-hand experience of the issue or of solutions – and thus involve the body and emotions in this cognitive process, making change 'stickier' or more resilient to reversal. This may be particularly true for participatory art, given that it involves the audience in the making of the artistic piece, as well as for artistic forms that rely on the body, such as performance, as this involves kinaesthetic-tactile learning.[21]

While discussing social injustice can be emotionally transformative (Whittier, 2017), art's ability to arouse emotions through the personal/collective, aesthetic and bodily can also increase resistance to reversal – through what Ahmed (2014) calls 'affective stickiness'.

Art can make powerful critiques and make critiques stick by appealing emotionally to the audience. Mexican artist Claudia Michaus, for example, aims to do this with her one-woman play, *Las Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez* ('The Women of Ciudad Juárez'), which delves into the waves of femicides occurring in this Mexican city. As she explains, 'if it [the play] does not touch, contact, bother the audience, the production will have failed' (Castillo, 2022: 666). This is also the case for the works of Guatemalan artist Regina Jose Galindo that focus on GBV, as they aim to shock the viewer by confronting them with a body in pain. In her 2005 performance *Perra* ('Bitch'), Galindo inscribed the word on herself using a knife, calling attention to the different forms of violence inflicted upon women's bodies (Cano Arcay, n.d.; Mullins, 2019). Similarly, when art is used to communicate new norms, its ability to appeal emotionally to people can also infuse new norms with a positive emotional dimension and make them less likely to be reversed (Forcer et al., 2022).

Moreover, as highlighted by literature on peace studies and social research (see Annex 2), art can generate empathy by prompting people to understand different perspectives and/or humanising the issue or dynamic (Leavy, 2013; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024; see also, Lodhia 2021). For example, when art is used

19 See Leavy (2020) for a discussion of the strengths of different forms of art. The study of how different art forms may impact the brain differently belongs to the field of neuroaesthetics, which looks at the neural consequences of engaging with art (Magsamen, 2019; Magsamen and Ross, 2024).

20 See also Kim et al. (2016), Serafini (2018) and Leavy (2020).

21 Learning style that involves physical activity, such as touching, moving one's body, or carrying out hands-on tasks.

to communicate personal experiences of oppression and injustice (see Section 3.1), it can contribute to sustaining the motivation to challenge internalised gender norms in oneself and others through time.

3.1 Contesting patriarchal gender norms

Feminist artivism, as feminist activism more generally, immediately contests various gender norms.

There is a close relationship between art and agency. As the literature on art, social justice and education and the literature on art, social justice and psychology highlight (see Annex 2), artistic expression is a manifestation of agency as well as a space to explore and develop it (Talwar 2018; Stabler, 2012). As a result, feminist artivism immediately contests gender norms that negate political voice and agency to women and people of other genders and nurtures a sense of empowerment (Dewhurst 2014; Bell 2020). Exemplifying this potential of artivism is the 'Chouftouhonna International Feminist Art Festival' (see Figure 11), which emerged during Tunisia's post-revolution cultural wave, running annually from 2015 to 2017. Each year, it brought together hundreds of feminist artists from various regions to share and discuss their work. Participants noted how the festival created a sense of empowerment, describing it as a space where they could be seen and heard (Szakal, 2017) and thus have what Borrillo (2020) calls 'transformative agency'.

Figure 11: 'Chouftouhonna Feminist International Art Festival' poster (2018)

Source: instagram.com/chouftouhonna.festival

Feminist artivism, moreover, challenges norms that dictate patriarchal authority:

- It can be a means for women and people of other genders to symbolically take back control of their bodies, challenging patriarchal control over them (Mullins, 2019; Bellingreri, 2020; Martin, 2023). This is particularly the case in performance arts, where the body is the artistic medium, or visual arts that focus on the body (Serafini, 2018). For example, UK performance art group The Neo Naturists painted each other's naked bodies as a way of asserting bodily autonomy (see Young, 2023).
- It can also contest patriarchal control over a given space (Bellingreri, 2020). By symbolically occupying a space with art and/or by using art to bring people together therein, feminist artivism can reclaim and/or reconfigure spaces for women and other marginalised genders (Serafini, 2018; Borrillo, 2020). One of the aims of the Chouftouhonna Festival was precisely to reclaim public space 'into a territory of possibilities', where all people who identify as women could exercise their right to be visible (Borrillo, 2020: 204). In its last iteration, the festival took place in Khaznadar Palace, now the home of Tunisia's National Theatre, transforming a space that is rarely open to the public into a space occupied by feminist art of all kinds and hundreds of people who identify as women (Szakal, 2017).[22]

Feminist artivism can contest these or other patriarchal gender norms by prompting or nurturing consciousness-raising processes – by helping people become aware of unjust dynamics or situations, re-interpret reality through political lenses and develop a motivation to work towards change (see Box 4). This is because art can be used to raise questions about social, economic and political conditions (Milbrandt, 2010; see Annex 2 on education, peace and research methods literature). For example, Argentinian artist Patrizia Zangaro's theatrical piece *Ella en Familia* ('Her in Family') tells the story – in five monologue acts – of a trans woman in Buenos Aires and her efforts to escape the constant GBV to which she is subjected, reflecting on the 'social structures that permit transphobia and dismiss the femicide of transpeople' (Castillo, 2022: 668; Carrillo Casas, 2021). Art's ability to create a playful atmosphere that nurtures curiosity and openness, as well as its ability to draw out emotional responses, can be valuable in these processes (Tucker, 2010; Leavy, 2020; Forcer et al., 2022).

Box 4: What is consciousness-raising?

Consciousness-raising is a pedagogical method for liberation from oppression. It has been a key aspect of feminist pedagogy and struggles, as well as other schools of critical pedagogy and other social movements (see, for example, Freire, 1979; Reed, 2005). For feminist activists, consciousness-raising was, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the collective exercise of 'study[ing] the situation of women' (Sarachild, 1978: 144; Whittier, 2017). The aim was to strengthen their knowledge of the causes, mechanisms, and experiences of gender oppression and injustice, prompt individual and collective change, as well as illuminate strategies for change. Feminist movements have also used consciousness-raising as a way of working with others to 'raise public consciousness and provoke political responses' through actions such as speak-outs (Heberle, 2016: 598). This has been criticised, however, for becoming an end in and of itself and for reproducing power and privilege on the basis of other axes (Heberle, 2016; Whittier, 2017). Feminist consciousness-raising groups in the US have been criticised for focusing disproportionately on the concerns of white women and for representing these as universal (Leggett, 2020).

22 It can also contest patriarchal power over women's representation – whether in the arts sector or beyond, in spaces like mass and social media – by creating counter-representations and narratives (see Communicating experiences and critiques).

Art can support this form of feminist pedagogy by communicating experiences and ideas; exposing inconsistencies and biases in beliefs and attitudes; and facilitating dialogue – as discussed in the following sections.

Communicating experiences and critiques

Art is primarily a form of communication (Latorre, 2019; Streeten, 2020).[23] It allows people to articulate and communicate ideas, worldviews, critiques, visions, knowledge and/or experiences. For Lacy (1995) and Latorre (2019), among other authors, artivism emphasises the role of artists – first and foremost – as public communicators. In the words of Iranian artist Shirin Neshat, 'we [artists] are the reporters of our people and are communicators to the outside world' (cited in Mullins, 2019: 17).

Feminist artivism has often been used to communicate personal and/or collective experiences of oppression and injustice. As Whittier (2017: 384) explains, 'much activist art aims to break the artist's own silence'. For example, three comic books – *Qahera* by Deena Mohamed (see Section 2.3), *Nano Volta* by Hanan El-Karargy and *Lamis* by Safia Baraka (see Figure 12) – depict Muslim female superheroes fighting against gender oppression, in part 'to communicate the complex reality that women in Egypt, and they [the artists] as women, are exposed to daily' (Soliman, 2020: 267). Safia Baraka, for instance, was inspired by and draws from her mother's experience of having gender norms enforced on her, either through social criticism, ostracism or violence (ibid.).

Figure 12: Safia Baraka's *Lamis*

Credit: © Safia Baraka

23 See also Lacy (1995), Atkinson (1997), Nordenstam and Wictorin (2022), and Campbell and Jankowitz (2024).

Art has also been used to communicate feminist critiques and/or theory. For example, the music and performance group Pussy Riot has communicated, through their dissident pop-up performances and punk lyrics, feminist critiques of the Russian Government and its policies – including the status of women and LGBTQI+ rights in the country (Graper, 2018; Peraino, 2021).

Artivism's power to communicate feminist social commentary and theory lies in the way it can make messages more appealing and understandable for more people (Dewhurst, 2014; Streeten, 2020). As literature on arts and research methods highlights, art can increase people's access to social theory and critique by communicating ideas more simply and/or non-verbally, as well as by making ideas publicly available – meaning free to view or listen to (see, for example, Fragapane, 2017, 2023; Mendonça, 2018; Tarr et al., 2018; Leavy, 2020). For instance, the Spanish-Argentinian feminist project Femiñetas, seeking to communicate feminist theory in innovative forms, consists of the creation and publication of feminist vignettes (Femiñetas, 2024). Figure 13 shows one of the group's posters communicating one of the key messages of feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's book *Living a feminist life* (2017).

Communicating feminist theory in simple terms was also one of the motivations for Chilean feminist group Las Tesis. As Serafini (2020) documents, while the performance responded to the violence experienced by Chilean women at the hands of the police during the 2019 protests in Chile, the lyrics of the song are also the result of a research process on how to make feminist theories more accessible for a wider audience. As Serafini (2020) explains, *Un Violador en tu Camino* aims to communicate Rita Segato's theories on GBV, which posit GBV as an act of patriarchal domination and communication (Segato 2010, 2016).

Figure 13: Tweet by Femiñetas 'Femiñetas Supplement: Promise of happiness not guaranteed'

Source: x.com/feminetas1/status/1469753883148836868/photo/1

By communicating women's experiences in relatable and powerful ways, and feminist theory and critiques in appealing and simple terms, feminist artivism can widen the reach of feminist critiques of patriarchal gender norms and create an entry point to raise awareness with a wider audience. Moreover, as feminist artivism can also present critiques in less confrontational manners and more aesthetically pleasing ways than speech or non-fictional writing – though it does not necessarily do so – it cannot only widen potential audiences, but also increase the take-up of feminist messages (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021; Nordenstam and Wictorin, 2022; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024).[24]

This is the theory, for example, behind 'craftivism' – a term coined in 2003 by Betsy Greer to refer to the use of craft as a form of social justice activism. The use of craft can enable what Corbett (2017) calls gentle protesting – that is, a form of activism that works, when possible, through persuasion and quiet engagement, rather than confrontation, to create political will or buy-in. Backing her claim, Corbett describes her craftivist experiences and how it provokes different, more engaging, responses than conventional activism: how she only succeeded in connecting with her local Member of Parliament when she resorted to the use of embroidery. Forcer et al. (2022) found, too, for example, in their work on violence, that people responded much more positively to their partners' claims when this was communicated through music rather than verbal dialogue.

Similarly, this occurs when art deploys humour, such as in cartoons, music or theatre. As Atkison (1997:xvii) explains:

> *a cartoon can get a message across, sometimes a very complex, subtle or uncomfortable message, by breaking down defensiveness and making the reader laugh.* (see also Streeten, 2020)[25]

Artivism can also increase a message's take-up by grounding abstract social justice issues in personal stories and appealing to the audience's emotions (Serafini, 2018; see Box 5).

Box 5: Communicating in the midst of shrinking civil space

Articulating and communicating feminist critiques and ideas through arts may become especially important in contexts of censorship, as it can provide means to avoid censorship and/or repression. Latorre (2019) explains how crafts became an important avenue for dissent under Pinochet's regime, as their separation from fine arts allowed them to circulate more freely. Human rights networks, along with women's groups, set up what came to be known as *arpilleras* workshops, where women produced embroideries 'usually depicting the hunger, lack of jobs, and political repression in the shantytowns' (Adams, 2002: 30; see also Adams, 2005; Merlin, 2022). These were sent abroad as a way of denouncing the regime internationally. Similarly, Thiel (2017) shows how using humour in visual and performing arts, through political satire, has served as a way of escaping political censorship and repression in Zimbabwe, and Borrillo (2021) how artivism has allowed Moroccan activists to indirectly confront the authoritarian regime in the context of the shrinking civic space that followed the 2011 protests. Artivism, therefore, can create hope by serving as a means through which people can dissent and resist when it is not possible to directly confront the state (Adams, 2002). However, this will depend on the degree of state control over the arts sector or specific art forms (ibid., citing Szemere, 1992; Wicke, 1992).

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24 See also Streeten (2020) and Milbrandt (2010).

25 There is also the risk that messages communicated in less confrontational ways are more easily ignored. A gendered perception of art could contribute to this being the case, with art forms traditionally associated with women (such as crafts) at greater risk of being seen as less serious and ignored. However, there is no literature probing the relative impact of different art forms.

Rendering neglected issues visible

Through its material and aesthetic potential, art can 'make public that which has been ignored, silenced or otherwise kept from public conscience' (Dewhurst, 2014). It can make 'visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (Mouffe, 2013: 70; see also Whittier, 2017). This can be connected to artivists' use of art to communicate their – or others' – experiences of oppression or inequality.

Visual artivism in public spaces has particularly a strong potential to bring attention to neglected issues. For example, activists have used art to contest social and political neglect of GBV in public discourse by creating visual and tangible calls for attention. Mexican artist Elina Chauvet places 100 pairs of donated red shoes in public spaces to represent victims of GBV – a project that started in response to the wave of femicides that began in Tijuana in the 1990s (Jiménez Thomas Rodriquez, 2022; see Figure 14). Similarly, in the REDress Project, Canadian Métis artist Jaime Black exhibits numerous red dresses to represent the more than 1,000 missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, calling attention to the brutal ways in which racial discrimination and historical marginalisation heightens GBV for Indigenous women. This is also how the work of the Mexican collective RestaurAmoras can be understood. As they paint beautiful street murals of femicide victims in Mexico's southeast, they are making visible in public space crimes that often occur in private spaces, denouncing them and their impunity (Lines, n.d.).[26]

Figure 14: Elina Chauvet's *Zapatos Rojos* in Turin, Italy (2016)

Credit: © MikeDotta | Shutterstock ID: 522815899

26 In doing so, they seek to offer symbolic reparation and recognition to victims and their families, communicating solidarity to the latter as well.

Music shares this potential as it is a ubiquitous art form that can easily travel. For example, Guatemalan hip-hop artist Rebeca Lane denounces the prevalence of GBV and lack of bodily autonomy in Guatemala through her music. In *Ni una menos* ('Not one less'), she sings:

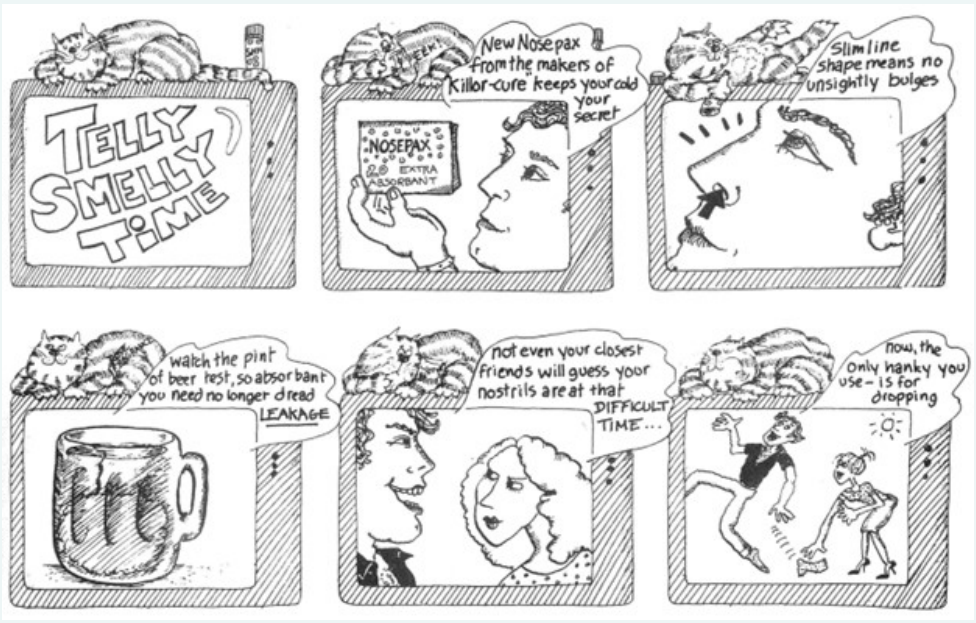
> *I would like to have sweet things to write about … 5 women have been murdered today and at least 20 women have been raped. That is only in a day in Guatemala, multiply it and you'll know why we are angry … I am just like others, fed up of walking with fear … I don't have a privilege protecting this body, in the streets they think I am a perfect target.*[27]

Calling attention to inconsistencies and biases in beliefs and attitudes

Art can also call into question normalised beliefs, attitudes and dynamics by exposing their inconsistencies, biases and simplifications (Milbrandt, 2010; Abouelnaga, 2020; Bell, 2020). It can also help unearth unconscious beliefs and behaviours (through verbal and/or non-verbal means) (Collier and Eastwood, 2022).

As Streeten (2020) discusses, incongruity and hyperbole can be used to expose 'social absurdities', repudiate stereotypes and disrupt norms – a technique commonly used by UK feminist cartoonists (see also Carroll, 2014). This can be observed in Viv Quillin's 1981 work, *Sourcream*, which employs satire to challenge the social stigma surrounding menstruation, highlighting its absurdity by applying the taboo to nose drip (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Viv Quillin's *Sourcream* (1981)



Credit: © Vivien Quillin

27 The original lyrics in Spanish are: *'Quisiera tener cosas dulces que escribir … 5 mujeres hoy han sido asesinadas, y a la hora por lo menos 20 mujeres violadas. Eso que solo es un día en Guatemala, multiplícalo y sabrás porqué estamos enojadas … Soy como las otras hartas de andar con miedo … No tengo privilegio que proteja este cuerpo, en la calle creen que soy un blanco perfecto.'*

Art can also contest biases by creating contradictions, curating counter-evidence and juxtaposing meanings. Deena Mohamed's satirical cartoon *Qahera* (also discussed previously in Communicating experiences and critiques), which aims to challenge stereotypes of Muslim women through the figure of the female superhero, provides an example of the former. As Mohamed explains:

> *Muslim women are very often put into an 'oppressed, indoctrinated, in need of saving' trope, and superheroes are the precise opposite of that… That's one of the reasons I enjoyed creating [Qahera] as a [female] superhero, because to many people it's a very contradictory concept*. (cited in Soliman, 2020: 272)

Installations may be particularly suited to presenting counter-evidence. They allow for a dual analysis: of individual pieces and of the collection as a whole. For example, there have been various clothes installations displaying the attire of victims-survivors of GBV at the time of their assault – such as *Ropa Sucia* ('Dirty Clothes', Mexico), *Chega de Fiu Fiu* ('Enough with the Catcalls', Brazil) and *#DontTellMeHowToDress* (Thailand) – as a way of contesting the belief that women arouse their aggressors through 'provocative' dress.

Moreover, art – especially the process of making it – can be used to question simplified worldviews by exploring social complexity and nuance (Corbett, 2017; Finley, 2017).[28] For example, collage-making can facilitate this by allowing connections to be created between disparate elements and layering multiple meanings or perspectives (Hanauer, 2010; Leavy, 2020). Art's ability to appeal to emotions can be crucial for this function, as, by provoking an emotional response, it can invite audience members to open the space for more complex understandings (Milbrandt, 2010).

Facilitating dialogue

Art can facilitate dialogue around gender norms – especially around sensitive issues. Art forms – especially visual arts, such as collage-making, painting, photography and sculpture, as well as performance art – can allow people to initially express themselves non-verbally and then use their creative outputs as prompts to share their experiences and/or opinions (Wang and Burris, 1997; Scott-Hoy and Ellis, 2008; Leavy, 2020). Art can also create space to discuss difficult topics by allowing people to feel less vulnerable and/or exposed by speaking about a fictitious other rather than themselves, as can be the case through storytelling and theatre (Bell, 2020).

Storytelling, for example, can defuse tension in uncomfortable discussions and create a 'more honest, less defensive dialogue' (Bell 2020: 8). In Bell's (2020) teaching experience in the US, storytelling made white students more open to critical reflection on their beliefs and attitudes around race, as well as more willing to recognise some of these as racist, while black students felt less worried about classmates becoming defensive.

Art can also create a 'playful' atmosphere that is more conducive to approaching sensitive or taboo topics. Forcer et al. (2022) found this to be the case in Sierra Leone when using theatre and dance, as well as entertainment in the form of comedy, as a way of eliciting conversations on GBV.

28 See also Leavy (2013, 2020), Soliman (2020) and Dahrendorf and Reichert (2021).

By providing a safer way of discussing sensitive issues, art not only motivates discussion but may also increase take-up. Preventing people from feeling personally attacked and/or exposed can also decrease resistance and/or dismissal of feminist ideas. It is important, however, that discussions are guided by a prepared facilitator and under clear 'terms of engagement' to ensure it is a safe space, as well as a productive conversation for everyone involved (hooks, 1995).

3.2 Supporting the creation of alternative gender-equitable norms

As literature on art and education, and art and social research, highlight (see Annex 2), art can mobilise people's political imagination in utopian ways. By mobilising emotions, art sets the necessary emotions – such as hope and empathy – for imagining otherwise (Bell, 2020, citing Bell and Desai, 2011). It can help imagine new political possibilities, explore new political ideas and values, as well as envision what more just societies would look like (Mullin 2003; Borrillo, 2021; Simoncini and Martini, 2019).[29] It may also help communicate visions of social transformation to others and create a roadmap for change (Quinn, 2006; Quinn et al., 2012). In other words, it can help us create, nurture and portray feminist visions of social justice (Blanco Martínez and Mendoza Téllez-Girón, 2019). For example, Pakistani artist Farida Batool, in collaboration with Argentinian artist Graciela Ovejero, worked with victims-survivors of GBV in a shelter in Lahore. Refusing to paint about their past, women used the opportunity of painting on textiles to explore and express, instead, their 'dreams of a better future' (Ejaz, 2022: 194, citing Batool, 2004).

Feminist artivism, thus, can not only contest patriarchal gender norms, but also support the creation of new gender-equitable norms. It can help us imagine other ways of being and relating by: 1) creating counternarratives and representations, and 2) providing the means through which new narratives, values and principles can be articulated.

Creating counternarratives and representations

Since oppressive representations of women and androcentric narratives and worldviews are complicit in the (re)production of gender inequality, producing counter-representations and narratives is central to gender norm change. Countering women's representation – as sexualised objects, as passive victims or in idealised terms or racialised gender stereotypes – has been a key motivation for feminist artivists (Antivilo Peña, 2013; Mullins, 2019; Reckitt, 2022).[30] For example, Moyna Chitrakar and Samhita Arni's retelling of the *Ramayana*[31] centres Sita's perspective of the tale, challenging an andro-centric worldview in the epic and its idealised representation of Sita as modest and submissive (Bhat, 2022; Sengupta, 2023).[32]

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29 Also argued by Milbrandt (2010), Tucker (2010), Corbett (2017), Serafini (2018), Blanco Martínez and Mendoza Tellez-Girón (2019), Abouelnaga (2020), Bellingreri (2020), Leavy (2020), Castillo (2022) and Mandolini (2022).

30 These can also be based on artists' own experiences or those of other women and people of diverse genders.

31 The *Ramayana* is one of the two most important Sanskrit epics – the other being the *Mahabharata*. It narrates the life of Rama, a Hindu deity.

32 This is just one of the many retellings of the *Ramayana* from Sita's perspectives – others include Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) and Nagpal and Manikandan's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* (2011). There have also been similar retellings of the *Mahabharata* (see Krishnamurti, 2019; Lodhia 2021) and of Greek myths (see Plaß, 2023; Kapoor, 2021; Judge, 2022).

New narratives are also being articulated through music. For example, through combative and hopeful lyrics, queer feminist rappers, reggaeton and hip-hop artists in Latin America have also aimed to strengthen the self-esteem and feelings of empowerment of people who identify as women (Tamayac and Tijoux, 2016; Armstead, 2007; Flockhart, 2017; LAB 2019, 2021). The lyrics of artists – such as Chocolate Remix, Nakury, Las Krudas, Rebeca Lane, Mare Advertencia Lirika, Miss Bolivia and Ana Tijoux – often communicate narratives of resistance rather than subordination, freedom from gender stereotypes, self-love and acceptance, female sexuality and pleasure, as well as of resilience and hope in feminist futures. Feminist artists elsewhere, like Spanish singer La Otra, have also created alternative narratives for romantic relationships to be healthy and violence-free. Her song *Contigo* ('With you') states:

> *I won't die if you are not here, I can be alright without. I do not miss you and you are not my other half in life. But it is true that with you the world is less ugly. It is true that with you it hurts less, sometimes, to break down the chains … I learn with you and walk with you … breaking down walls, busting myths. I want you to be free and I want myself to be free with you.*[33]

Figure 16: Rebeca Lane's *El amor de mi vida soy yo* music video

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDoFjYXIAJY

In offering counternarratives, feminist artivism goes beyond only contesting the symbolic order of patriarchal gender norms and allows women and people of other genders to 'talk back to power' (hooks, 1995; see Box 6). It also strengthens the symbolic order of feminist change and alternative equitable gender norms. This may not only prompt gender norm change but also increase the resilience of new norms in case of backlash.

33 Original lyrics in Spanish: *'Yo no me muero si no estás aquí, puedo andar bien caminando sin ti. No me haces falta ni eres mi media naranja en la vida … Pero contigo es cierto que el mundo parece un poco menos feo. Contigo es cierto que a veces romper las cadenas duele un poco menos … aprendo contigo y contigo camino…Tirando barreras, rompiendo los mitos. Te quiero libre, y me quiero libre contigo.'*

Box 6: Communicating alternative narratives

Similarly to how art can be a useful means to express dissent in repressive or authoritarian contexts, it can also communicate counternarratives in contexts where there is extensive mass media presence and where it is difficult for content creators to access the media (Latorre, 2019; Eyerman, 2002). In these cases, as Latorre (2019) argues, art can become a form of public communication, for new and or alternative narratives – especially when this occurs outside of the arts sector. Latorre (2019: 4) argues that street art – graffiti and murals – in Chile have become a vehicle 'to create alternative images and messages to those produced and disseminated by institutions of power'. In this way, artivism can be a tool for marginalised groups to express themselves and for the democratisation of the power of representation (Mouffe, 2013: 70).

Supporting the creation of new narratives

Artivism does not always need to offer a counter-representation and/or a new narrative. It can also create space to explore and experiment with new narratives and values. This means artivism does not have to provide the answers but can also just raise the question or show that it is possible to contest gender norms. This may be a particular strength of participatory arts, as it allows the audience to be involved in the making of art, facilitating its use as an exploratory medium. For example, in US artist Suzanne Lacy's participatory project *De Tu Puño y Letra* ('By Your Own Hand') in Ecuador, 350 men were invited to take part in workshops on masculinity and GBV. Each participant adopted a letter from a previous project (titled *Carta de Mujeres* ('Women's Letter'), which invited women across Ecuador to write letters about their experiences of GBV) and wrote a response. Lacy then transformed the 56 written responses into a participatory theatrical performance to be presented in Quito's Plaza Belmonte. With the project, Lacy sought not only to encourage men to be part of a public conversation on GBV, but also to foster empathy between men and GBV victims-survivors, prompting reflections about masculinity (see Figure 17).[34]

Figure 17: Suzanne Lacy's *De Tu Puño y Letra*, Quito, Ecuador

Credit: Suzanne Lacy, De tu Puño y Letra, Quito, Ecuador, 2014-2015. Photo by © Cristina Vega.

34 See also Bell (2020) on how storytelling can be used in this way.

3.3 Supporting gender norm change indirectly

Feminist artivism can also support gender norm change indirectly, mostly by supporting movement building. Art does this by motivating action, bringing people together, as well as strengthening the identity of social movements.

Motivating action

As previously discussed, feminist artivism fosters a sense of agency, sparks critical thinking and appeals to people's emotions, such as anger, indignation and hope. In doing so, feminist artivism can not only raise awareness about gender inequalities but also encourage people to take action to address them (Sandoval and Latorre, 2008; Bell 2020, citing Boler, 1999; Ioanide, 2019). For example, Mexican artist Vivir Quintana's song about femicide, *Canción sin miedo* ('Song without fear'), has been described as a rallying cry for protest because of her powerful lyrics. The song, which is now considered a 'feminist hymn' in Mexico, says:

> *We sing without fear, we ask for justice. We yell for every woman who has disappeared. Let it rumble loudly: we want each other alive! The perpetrator must fall, hard! I will burn everything, I will break everything, if one day some guy shuts your eyes. Nothing silences me anymore, everything is more than enough. If they touch one of us, they touch all of us.*[35]

Bringing people together

Artivist projects can also provide opportunities for people to connect, and connect emotionally, with like-minded others – especially artivist projects that are collaborative or participatory (hooks, 1995). Milbrandt (2010) found, for instance, when doing an arts-based project with high school students on undocumented migrants' restricted access to higher education, that art encouraged connections between people and nurtured feelings of belonging and trust. Art can also nurture emotional ties among people by prompting individual and collective cathartic experiences (Streeten, 2020). For example, Martin (2023) documented this as one of the effects experienced by the collective Decidir Nos Hace Libres (Deciding Makes Us Free) and the national non-governmental organisation Flora Tristán in one of their protests in 2019 in Lima (Peru). Participants in this protest, calling for free, safe and legal abortion, occupied the space outside the Ministry of Health and the National Hospital with a two-act feminist performance and recounted how the experience brought them together personally and politically. Art, moreover, can help bring different groups of people together, broadening the social base of movements (Serafini, 2018). Music, for example, particularly genres popular with younger audiences, such as hip-hop, reggaeton and rap, can help movements appeal to young people who might have otherwise not engaged (Armstead, 2007).

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35 Original lyrics in Spanish: *'Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia. Gritamos por cada desaparecida. Que retumbe fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas! ¡Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida! Yo todo lo incendio, yo todo lo rompo, si un día algún fulano te apaga los ojos. Ya nada me calla, ya todo me sobra. Si tocan a una, respondemos todas.'*

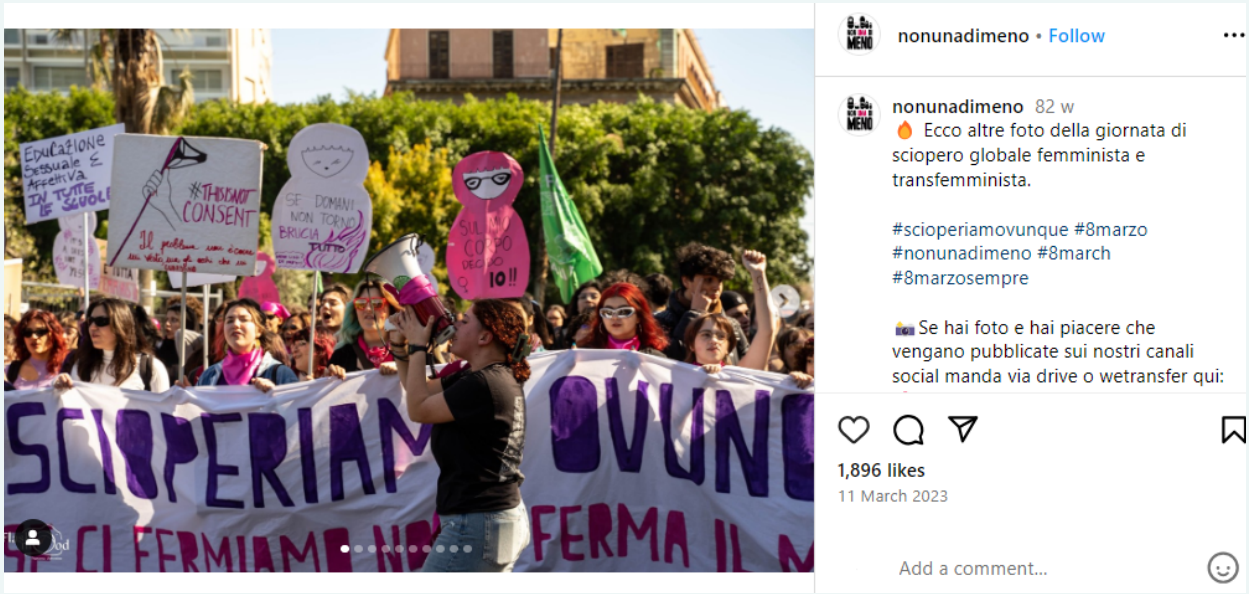
Strengthening movement identity

Artivism can strengthen the identity of movements, for example, by conveying their histories, values and worldviews, or through the use of humour.

Exemplifying the former, Mandolini (2022) argues art plays this role in Non Una di Meno Italia. For example, in their campaign against obstetric violence, Matrioske Parlanti Contro la Violenza Ostetrica ('Matrioska Dolls Speak Against Obstetric Violence'), the collective used drawings of matrioskas.[36] The matrioskas – whose 'belly ballons' featured messages denouncing obstetric violence – showed features representing gender and racial diversity (see Figure 18). Mandolini (2022) argues that drawing the matrioskas in this way signalled that the movement was intersectional and thus welcoming of diverse groups of women and people of other genders. In other words, she argues that by creating serialised images that communicated unity and diversity simultaneously, Non Una di Meno successfully reached and rallied women from diverse constituencies. According to Mandolini (2022), art served a similar purpose for the Italian feminist collective Luchadoras, which runs a women's shelter and a feminist centre in an occupied urban space, as it uses art to communicate the movement's intersectional identity.

Exemplifying the latter, Streeten (2020: 134, citing Critchley, 2002) writes, 'humour will not be humorous to everyone, but only to those who "get it" … [as] humour and jokes are highly context specific'. In other words, for art to be humorous, people need to have something in common – such as knowledge, experience, values, etc. By drawing on these commonalities, humour emphasises them, drawing a line between those who get the humour and those who do not, which in turn strengthens group identity. On this basis, Streeten (2020) argues that feminist cartoons have been, and continue to be, central to the feminist and LGBTQI+ movement in the UK.

Figure 18: Protest on International Women's Day (2023) in Pavia, Italy



Source: www.instagram.com/p/CpqptBnj2yP

36 Obstetric violence refers to any harm 'inflicted during or in relation to pregnancy, childbearing, and the post-partum period' (Chadwick, 2021), or during the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare services (Jimenez Thomas Rodriquez, 2022).

Artivism can also help sustain a movement over time. By creating spaces where people come together, by allowing for individual and/or collective emotional release, and by engaging in 'play', artivism can support collective self-care (Tillet and Tillet, 2019). In doing so, artivism can promote and sustain a regenerative form of activism – in other words, an activism that is caring towards activists themselves, that does not exhaust their energies in the short term and prioritises their personal well-being (Westwell and Bunting, 2020). This potential impact of artivism is, however, yet to be documented in existing literature.

Artivism can also aid a movement's fundraising efforts, as well as increase its visibility in the media (Serafini 2018, 2020; Mandolini, 2020).[37] In some contexts, it can also help diffuse tensions with the police as it can be perceived as a 'non-threatening' form of activism (Serafini, 2018).

The impact of artivism on movement building, however, is not without tensions and it can present a dilemma for movements. As Serafini (2018) shows in her study of a climate justice movement in the UK using choirs as protest, art is a way of bringing different groups of people together, allowing movements to build broad bases. Yet, as artivism also needs artistic skills, and as most people may not have them, artivism can also create barriers to participation, as well as counteract the movement's values – for example, of inclusion. Yet, if artistic skills are not prioritised, the effectiveness of the movement's use of art might be jeopardised.

Box 7: Artivism and community-building

The way in which artivism supports movement building by bringing people together can also support, more broadly, community-building efforts. This may be particularly relevant when trying to bridge gaps between different groups, such as when polarising views on gender equality emerge within a community. In these cases, the ways in which art can support conflict resolution are also useful. For example, as literature on art and peace studies highlight (see Annex 2), art can: humanise the 'other', fostering understanding; enhance peacebuilding skills such as careful listening, self-awareness and creativity (Cohen, 2015); and nurture a sense of commonality, reaffirming collective identities and belonging (Guerra et al., 2019; Bräuchler, 2022).

3.4 Artivism's impact

According to existing literature, factors that can influence the reach and impact of artivism are:

1. **Modality of artivism**: art, for instance, that circulates exclusively within cultural spaces is more likely to have a smaller audience when compared to artivism that occurs in public spaces, and the impact of a piece on its audience may differ depending on whether it uses participatory methods or not, since these propose different depths of audience engagement.[38]
2. **Replicability and sustainability**: whether they are easily replicated and adapted (Serafini, 2020) and whether they can be sustained through time (Lacy, 1995). For example, Serafini (2020) argues that the success of Las Tesis' *Un Violador en tu Camino* dwells on the fact that the performance does not require any material resources, and that its lyrics can be easily adapted to different languages and contexts.

37 For example, Mandolini (2020) describes how, for the Italian feminist collective Luchadoras, engaging in artivism and selling the resulting piece was also a means to fund their struggle. This is also a common strategy used by feminist collectives in Latin America.

38 This is in accordance with experiential or constructivist learning theories that maintain being involved in an activity increases message take-up (Kolb, 1984).

3. **Cultural resonance**: according to Whittier (2017), it is also significant whether artivist projects are culturally resonant or not – the more resonant they are, the more likely they are to reach mainstream outlets and audiences, reaching a wider audience.[39] Leavy (2020) and Tarr et al. (2018) also stress that artivism needs to be culturally appropriate and draw from art forms that are significant in/to the context in question. By allowing people to express themselves in culturally relevant ways, artivism can thus be a tool to 'vernacularise' feminist struggles and increase their reach and take-up (Levitt and Merry, 2009). Studies have shown how activist movements in Senegal and Cuba have utilised hip-hop's historical local meanings, such as its association with struggle and aspirations for a better life. These movements have adapted these meanings to their specific causes: the Y'en a Marre ('Fed Up') movement in Senegal for democracy and youth participation, and the feminist movement in Cuba for the rights of women and queer people (Armstead, 2007; Thiel, 2017).
4. **Gendered perception of arts**: as D'Ignazio and Klein (2020: 29) argue, aesthetics are linked to 'emotion… embodiment and expression, embellishment and decoration'. As such, they have often been associated with femininity, and thus seen as less valuable vis-à-vis rationality and other qualities historically linked to masculinity. This can result in artivism being more easily dismissed or ignored. Fragapane (2023) describes how in her work on data visualisation, making visualisations aesthetically pleasing, has undermined their perceived legitimacy and functionality, leading to critiques of her work as 'pretty but useless'.

However, understanding the impact of feminist artivism is complicated by the difficulty of singling out the effect of one or various artivist projects when there have been multiple and different types of actions taken to achieve the desired outcome. These difficulties in tracking impact may explain the existing focus on theorising, rather than evaluating, impact in the current literature on feminist artivism (as mentioned in the Introduction). Moreover, these difficulties add to the constraints associated with funding and consequently project design. In the context of scarce funds for the arts in many countries, prioritising time and resources for measuring impact is unlikely to be a priority.

Evaluating gender norm change adds to this complexity. This is because gender norm change, as discussed in Section 2.3, is a slow, long-term process, as well as one that can be reversed. Knowing the impact of feminist artivism would thus entail monitoring the impact of a given piece (or pieces) of work on people over time and understanding how they interact with other drivers of change.

Yet, there is a solid body of evidence on the impact of art on gender equality outcomes. It comes, however, not from the literature on feminist artivism, but from the use of arts-based approaches to gender equality in the development space. Available project evaluations demonstrate art's power to raise awareness, reach a wider population, motivate participation, facilitate dialogue, practise solutions and prompt changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2025). Moreover, various evaluations of participatory theatre emphasise how making art – particularly, being involved as a facilitator rather than as a spectator – is more likely to have a transformative power on people. This is in accordance with learning theories that maintain teaching is the highest level of engagement with a topic and that teaching is the best way to learn (Kobayashi, 2019). This body of evidence, however, speaks

39 However, Whittier (2017) also argues that, in some cases, work that is able to reach mainstream media may not be the most critical.

mostly of short-term outcomes, as most evaluations were conducted immediately post-project, and when referring to multi-component projects, evaluations are often unable to isolate the impact of art (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2025).

Thus, while these evaluations do not refer to grassroots uses of art, they do provide solid and transferable evidence of the potential of artivism for gender norm change. This is important, as evaluating the impact of the feminist artivism of social movements and artists may be inherently more challenging than evaluating the use of art in development programmes. This is because artivism may interact with people more sporadically and for briefer amounts of time compared to programme work, making it more difficult to isolate its impact from other factors and to track its effects in the long term. However, artivism undoubtedly increases people´s exposure to feminist messages and, as available project evaluations show, repeated exposure is key to driving change (Ibid.). Thus, even if artivism solely increases people's exposure to feminist messages of change, it is performing a crucial task in bringing about gender norm change.

4 Conclusion

Feminist artivism has directly contested gender norms that negate political voice and agency for women and people of other minoritised genders, as well as those that assert patriarchal authority over women's bodies and representations, and over public spaces. Feminist artivism, moreover, can also be used as a medium to transform other oppressive gender norms. This can be done directly and indirectly: directly, by contesting patriarchal gender norms and supporting the creation of alternative gender-equitable norms, and indirectly, by supporting movement building. The role of art in mobilising emotion and bodily experience is central to the potential of feminist artivism to change gender norms, as well as a crucial component that can make gender norm change stick.

This potential of feminist artivism to effect gender norm change is of special importance in the context of democratic deterioration and backlash against feminism and LGBTQI+ rights. This report shows how artivism can offer something distinct from non-artistic forms of activism that is necessary for gender norm change. It can allow non-verbal expression, appeal emotionally, involve the body and the senses, and nurture the imagination. Art can be an important avenue for dissent and resistance in contexts where civic space is shrinking. It can strengthen feminist and LGBTQI+ movements and their resilience in the face of backlash, make gender norm change more resilient, and bridge gaps between people in the face of increasingly polarised views on gender equality. Artivism, more broadly, can also support democracy: it can bring people together, foster collaborative modes of working, widen representational power, and help people look ahead with clear visions of social justice in mind.

The success of feminist artivism is evident. The number of comic books offering alternative representations of diverse groups of women is vast, feminist movements are adopting songs as strong symbols of their struggles, art installations echoing the same message or themes (such as those displaying the clothes of GBV victims-survivors) can be seen in multiple locations, and performances such as that by Las Tesis have travelled worldwide. Yet, the effectiveness of feminist artivism in transforming gender norms is more difficult to document.

Despite these challenges, evaluating its potential is crucial to understand if artivism creates a lasting impression that opens the possibility of change, if it drives home a message previously heard, how it interacts with other drivers for gender norm change (such as legislation and policy, education curricula and so on), what increases its chances of success and how all of this varies by context. In doing so, studies of artivism's impact can further our understanding of the pathways of change outlined in this report and how the transformative potential of artivism plays out in different contexts.

Documentation is crucial in a funding landscape that prioritises measurable outcomes. Demonstrating the effectiveness of artivism is essential for countering the perception that art is a less valuable path for social change and for securing ongoing financial support. This is important not only to ensuring the continuation of artivism, but to ensuring the well-being of artivists as they need resources to deal with the risk of violent retaliation. However, given the inherent challenges of measuring artivism's impact on gender norm change, researchers and donors should explore creative approaches to evidence gathering.

Solid theoretical frameworks outlining the unique advantages of artivism compared to conventional activism and/or compelling anecdotal evidence should be considered valuable forms of validation. This is especially relevant for artivist projects with limited direct interaction, which may not lend themselves to traditional impact assessments, yet be highly valuable. While artivism alone may not be sufficient to fully transform gender norms, it is an indispensable component to gender norm transformation. Shifts in the narratives and representations within art are essential to this process. The significance of art as a catalyst for gender equality cannot be underestimated.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Notes on methodology

The following table indicates the search terms used for both the literature review of academic and grey literature on (feminist) artivism, and the more rapid review of the different theoretically relevant bodies of work.

Table A1: Search terms

Theme	Search terms
Feminist artivism	**English:** TS= 'feminist movement' AND TS='art activism' OR 'artivism' OR 'activist art' OR 'art' TS= 'feminist movement' AND TS='music' OR 'performance' OR 'theatre' OR 'cartoon*' OR 'comic' OR 'photography' TS= 'feminist artivism' OR 'feminist art activism' OR 'feminist activist art' TS= 'feminist artivism' OR 'feminist art activism' OR 'feminist activist art' AND TS='music' OR 'hip hop' OR 'performance' OR 'theatre' OR 'cartoon*' OR 'comic' OR 'participatory art' OR 'visual arts' **Spanish:** TS= 'movimientos feministas' AND TS='arte' OR 'artivismo' TS= 'artivismo feminista' OR 'arte feminista' TS= 'artivismo feminista' OR 'arte feminista' AND 'música' OR 'hip hop' OR 'performance' OR 'intervención' OR 'teatro' OR 'cómic' OR 'artes visuales' OR 'arte participativo'
Art and social justice	TS= 'social movement' AND 'art activism' OR 'artivism' OR 'activist art' OR 'art' TS= 'art' AND 'social justice education' OR 'art for social justice education' TS= 'art' AND 'peace' OR 'peace studies'; TS= 'art' AND 'mediation' OR 'peace negotiation' TS= 'art' AND 'social justice' TS= 'art' AND 'therapy'; TS= 'art therapy'; TS= 'art therapy' AND 'social justice' TS= 'art' AND 'research methods'; TS= 'arts-based research methods'; TS= 'arts-based research methods' and 'social justice'

Annex 2: Bodies of literature on art and social justice

The following table summarises some of the key messages of each of the body of literature linking art and social justice that was reviewed for this report.

Table A2: Art and social justice: some key take aways from different bodies of literature

Body of work	There is a focus in this body of literature on the use of art for:
Art and social movements	**Contributing to community/movement building:** Arts can empower, deepen commitment to, express, or reinforce a movement's agenda and identity, build emotional connections, and/or provide aesthetic pleasure and joy (Reed, 2005; Serafini, 2018). Art can also provide imagery and narratives, as well as provoke emotions, that persuade people to action and that support collective identity formation (Milbrandt, 2010; McKee, 2016). Art can also help defuse conflict by being able to capture and transmit multiple perspectives (Milbrandt, 2010). **Communicating a movement's agenda more effectively:** Art can communicate ideas (Thiel, 2017; Latorre, 2019), and do so 'across boundaries of age, class, religion and even ideology' (Milbrandt, 2010: 8) in less overt and confrontational ways. This refers to both the critiques and the solutions articulated by movements, as well as to internal communication within the movement and externally (Stammen and Meissner, 2024). **Supporting a critical reading of social reality:** Art can be used to explore the complexity of social issues by 'evoking emotions and meanings [which are] not easily reduced to narrow ideological terms' (Milbrandt, 2010: 13). Art can be used to defamiliarise or de-normalise social injustice (Tucker, 2010). **Supporting visions of social justice:** Art can also play a key role in creating a new sense of the possible and alternative visions for worlds 'otherwise' (ibid.; McKee, 2016; Serafini, 2018, 2022). **Enacting movement goals:** 'Arts not only can support activist goals, sometimes they directly achieve the goals and purposes of a movement' (Milbrandt, 2010: 10, citing Anderson and Milbrandt, 2005; Reed, 2005; Serafini, 2018).
Art and psychology	**Consciousness-raising:** Therapists can use art as a way of learning and self-reflecting on how their practice is influenced by, and reproducing, power relations and biases (Talwar, 2018; Collier and Eastwood, 2022). Art can also be used to raise awareness of situations of violence and abuse, such as GBV, in accessible and non-threatening ways (Malchiodi and Miller, 2011). **Uncovering 'invisible' issues:** Art can be a useful instrument to help people uncover detrimental unconscious patterns – through verbal or non-verbal avenues (Collier and Eastwood, 2022). **Helping to disclose and process trauma:** Art makes 'telling without talking' possible, supporting disclosure of trauma and providing an entry point to sensitive conversations (Malchiodi and Miller, 2011). Moreover, art therapy 'can assist in emotional stabilization, validation of feelings, reduction of anxiety and fear' (Malchiodi and Miller, 2011: 337, citing Miller, 2009). Making art can also allow for sensory relief (ibid.; Malchiodi, 2011).

Body of work	There is a focus in this body of literature on the use of art for:
	Regaining a sense of agency: By helping people express trauma, the use of art in therapy can counter a feeling of being unable to talk – common after trauma (Talwar, 2018). **Communicating and planning in unsafe situations:** Art-based work (for example, drawing and collage-making) can be used to respond to a difficult situation. By using it as a method to illuminate strengths, needs and social networks, it can help decision-making skills, as well as increase a sense of control over the situation (Riley and Malchiodi, 2004; Malchiodi and Miller, 2011; Tripp et al., 2019). Making art can also help focus attention when emotionally distressed (ibid.). **Other notes:** This body of work also notes the potential of art to bring people together. However, art therapy is not necessarily socially transformative (Talwar, 2018). Recent critiques in the field have focused on the lack of attention to how power structures and relations affect individuals (ibid.; Collier and Eastwood, 2022).
Art and education	**Promoting dialogues on social (in)justice:** Art can allow 'marginalized voices to break through' (Bell, 2020: 15) and express their experience of injustice and demands (Dewhurst, 2014). Bell (2020), for example, discusses how literature, storytelling, poetry and visual arts can provide an entry point for analysis and discussions of racism. The use of stories can defuse tensions and allow people to enter the conversation more easily and in less defensive manners. **Inquiring and consciousness-raising:** Art can help people make sense - intellectually, bodily and emotionally, and in a critical way – of the world around them, as well as learn about themselves and the 'Other' (Sullivan, 2012; Bell, 2020). Thus, the use of art can foster critical thinking skills and critical understandings of social justice issues, inspire commitment and mobilise people to action (Bell, 2020). **Nurturing a sense of agency:** The use of art can allow people to 're-evaluate their own sense of power and their image of themselves as hopelessly marginalized non-citizens' (Stabler, 2012: 167). Art as a way of learning through inquiry puts into practice a Freirean approach, allowing learners to claim an empowering epistemological role (Dewhurst, 2014; Bell, 2020). **Imagining alternatives:** By providing a platform for marginalised groups to express themselves, art can challenge dominant representations and narratives by providing counternarratives and counter-representations (Dewhurst, 2014). Art can help people, more broadly, to imagine the societies they want to create (Quinn, 2006; Quinn et al., 2012); by mobilising empathic engagement, art enables the necessary affects for imagining otherwise (Bell, 2020, citing Bell and Desai, 2011). **Other notes:** This literature focuses mostly on young people and on the possibilities of participatory artmaking as pedagogy for social justice. It focuses mostly on the process of making art and its impact on the student. Social justice art education is influenced by feminist, LGBTQI+ and disability movements (Quinn et al., 2012), as well as Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Dewhurst, 2014).

Body of work	There is a focus in this body of literature on the use of art for:
Art and research methods	**Inquiring:** Art creates entry points for inquiry by fostering connections between disparate elements, thus it can be used to explore and communicate complexity. It can also create a 'playful' atmosphere that is more conducive to approaching sensitive or taboo topics (Leavy, 2013, 2020; Forcer et al., 2022). Arts-based inquiry also offers a different mode of knowing. As it engages the body and emotions, it is sensorial and kinaesthetic (Forcer et al., 2022). Various authors highlight the use of art to research, particularly, identity. **Democratising knowledge:** Art can be used to communicate information in different ways and to different audiences (Finley, 2017; Tarr et al., 2018). **Mobilising empathy:** Art is attentive to the senses and emotions, and thus engages them in our responses to the art piece in question (Leavy, 2013; Finley, 2017). Aesthetic inquiry can, for example, not only communicate an experience but recreate it for the audience, communicating not only cognitively but emotionally (Hanauer, 2010; Forcer et al., 2022). Art also appeals to people's emotions through its interactive and 'playful' character – and produces, for example, curiosity, enjoyment, openness and trust. **Working with others:** Art can provide an alternative way of engaging and working with research participants. It can support participatory methodologies, where participants engage as co-creators rather than research subjects. In doing so, arts-based methods can nurture participants' sense of agency (Forcer et al., 2022). **Other notes:** Arts-based methods can be part of participatory or non-participatory qualitative methodologies, but are often part of action-research projects to prompt change in participants and/or the audience of the final output (Tarr et al., 2018). The use of art is closely linked to critical (postcolonial and feminist) scholarship on research methods (Finley, 2017; Leavy, 2020).
Art and peace studies	**Countering simplified narratives:** Art can support 'narrative complexity' away from a mindset 'where one view is always right, with simple cause and effect and a stable, static context', and thus make space for peace processes or remove blockages therein (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021: 42). **Supporting conflict resolution processes:** Art can communicate issues – or dimensions thereof – through non-verbal means, outside of rational engagement, and in non-threatening ways (Kim et al., 2016; Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024). It can also foster empathy and understanding, humanising the other party(ies), support personal rapport between key players and enhance peacebuilding skills such as careful listening, self-awareness and creativity (Cohen, 2015; Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024). **Transforming conflict resolution processes:** Art can make peace processes 'more accessible for a wider range of stake holders, particularly women and communities otherwise marginalised during formal talks' (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021: 63). **Building public support for peace processes:** Art can be a way in which a narrative for peace can be subtly or explicitly communicated, as well as a tool through which a vision for a peaceful future can be imagined and articulated. (Lederach, 2010; Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021). It can facilitate 'new perspectives on old narratives and a shared space for co-creating new narratives' (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021: 78).

Body of work	There is a focus in this body of literature on the use of art for:
	Rebuilding communities: Art can nurture social cohesion by bringing people together across social divides, creating spaces for peaceful social interaction, reclaiming public spaces, nurturing a sense of commonality and reaffirming collective identities and belonging (Guerra et al., 2019; Bräuchler, 2022). **Collective healing:** Art can support collective healing from trauma. It can provide a medium through which people can confront and process trauma, as well as express and communicate their experiences. Art, thus, can prompt the recognition of trauma and relations of solidarity (Guerra et al., 2019; Bräuchler, 2022; Campbell and Jankowitz, 2024). **Other notes:** This body of literature also discusses how art can enhance people's sense of agency (Guerra et al., 2019; Bräuchler, 2022). It also emphasises the importance of art being contextually relevant (in general and in its specificities), as well as of it needing to be 'curated sensitively, carefully and strategically' (Dahrendorf and Reichert, 2021: 75; Guerra et al., 2019). It also emphasises that while art can create openings for peace, a combination of processes and structures need to support it (Bräuchler, 2022).

Annex 3: Some art movements and proposals linking arts and social change

The following table summarises the key ideas and developments of some of the arts movements and proposals that see art as having an active political role in bringing about social change.

Table A3: Art movements and proposals that link arts and politics

Epic theatre	Popularised by Bertolt Brecht in the early to mid-20th century. Epic theatre rejects traditional forms of theatre on the basis that they nurture escapism though 'illusionism' and emotional 'intoxication'. Epic theatre aims, instead, to transform the spectator into a 'critical agent' using: a linear and fractured structure that prevents the spectator from emotional engagement; multilayered and multifaceted content that presents a variety of points of view; and a disengaged acting style that prevents emotional transference. Epic theatre is also known as dialectical theatre (Silberman et al., 2018).
Dadaism	Proposed by writer Hugo Ball in Switzerland in 1916. The art movement was a reaction to World War I and, as such, had a strong anti-war and anti-bourgeoisie ethos. Understanding art as a tool for political critique, it aimed to show the senselessness of the war's violence, as well as the nationalistic attitudes and societal norms of the bourgeoisie that they saw as responsible for the war. Dadaists also questioned the role of art and art institutions in maintaining the status quo (which resulted in its making of 'anti-art'). A branch of this movement also aligned itself with communism and their work (mostly collages and photomontages) was used as political propaganda (Hopkins, 2004; Anania, 2022; Tate, 2024b).
Surrealism	Consolidated in the 1920s with André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Emphasising the power of the unconscious, it challenged societal values and norms, searched for intellectual and artistic freedom, and advocated for a new reality where creativity and imagination would replace industrial society and its alienation. This translated for many artists into a commitment to political freedom, with many of them becoming vocal opponents of fascism and colonialism and vocal supporters of Republicanism, the civil rights movements, and the 1960s student movement, among other struggles (Hopkins, 2004; ArtGallery, 2024; Tate, 2024a, 2024f).
The Casablanca Art School	Began in 1962, as Farid Belkahia, Mohammed Chabâa and Mohamed Melehi assumed leadership of the Art School in post-independence Morocco. Influenced by Morocco's search for a national identity free of colonial influences, the modernist Casablanca movement sought to recover Moroccan and regional artistic practices, while breaking with Western classical traditions. This challenged the division of art from craft, an act they saw as a political one, as the division between these was inherently political (and which they saw, more specifically, as a colonial one). It also encouraged artists to be socially engaged. It took art to public spaces because of a concern with art's accessibility and societal role (Tate, 2023; Montazami, 2024).

The Situationist International	Active from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. The movement was strongly influenced by Marxism and anarchism, as well as Dadaism and Surrealism, among other artistic movements. Understanding art as key in the struggle against capitalist exploitation, it sought to promote revolutionary subjectivity and agency, as well as express 'critical truths' to expose and challenge both state and capitalist institutions. As a result, the movement was also critical of art's commodification and eventually of artistic production itself. The group was a key intellectual influence on the 1968 student movement in France, as well as a supporting force, as it created visual art (graffiti, posters, etc.) that served as political propaganda (Matthews, 2021; Tate, 2024d).
Theatre of the oppressed	Augusto Boal – drawing on the work of Paulo Freire – proposed using theatre as an emancipatory pedagogy to help marginalised groups and individuals contest social injustice. The various models proposed by Boal – forum theatre, legislative theatre and others – have in common the blurring of boundaries between performers and audience, transforming the latter into what Boal (1974) calls 'spect-actors', and creating a space to discuss different ways of addressing social injustice and to claim the agency to do so.
Social sculpture	Proposed by Joseph Beuys in the 1970s. Social sculpture is based on the belief that life is a form of social sculpture that is shaped by all of society's members and that sculptures can play an active political role. His piece *7000 Oaks* (1982) consisted of planting 7,000 trees in Kassel (Germany), prompting questions about environmental justice and urban planning (Tate, 2024e).
New Genre Public Art	Proposed by US artist Suzanne Lacy in the 1990s. She describes it as a form of activist art that is often created outside of institutional art spaces, that creates a direct engagement between the artist and audience, and that aims to address social and political issues (Tate, 2024c). New Genre Public Art uses, moreover, 'visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives' (Lacy, 1995: 19).
Useful Art (Arte Útil)	Proposed by Cuban artivist Tania Bruguera in the early 2010s. It focuses on creating art that does not only critique social, economic, and political structures and dynamics, but also actively addresses them by creating and implementing solutions. It is based on an understanding of art as a process, as an act of 'doing', and of the audience or spectators as 'activated users'. It approaches aesthetics as an active rather than passive realm that has the power to change people's lives – even if on a small scale. The movement takes its name from the *Manifesto de Arte Útil* (1969) by Argentine artist Eduardo Costa. Arte Útil is intimately connected to Bruguera's 'Immigrant Movement International' (Arte Útil, n.d.; Bruguera, 2011; Tate, 2012).
Maintenance Art	Developed by US artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in 1969. As her *Maintenance Art manifesto* explains, this artistic movement emphasises labour and care, critiquing how the necessary 'repetitive tasks of sustenance, preservation, renewal, repair, and clean-up' (that is, maintenance) have been undervalued vis-à-vis tasks of innovation (that is, progress) (Fateman, 2017). In doing so, it aims to shed light on the 'patriarchal capitalist hierarchies' that are responsible for social inequality and environmental collapse (ibid.).

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ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – patriarchal gender norms.

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ALIGN Programme Office

ODI Global
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom
Email: **align@odi.org.uk**
Web: **www.alignplatform.org**

alignplatform.org

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