

ARTISTIC ACTIVISM AND ART CAMPAIGN INTERVENTIONS

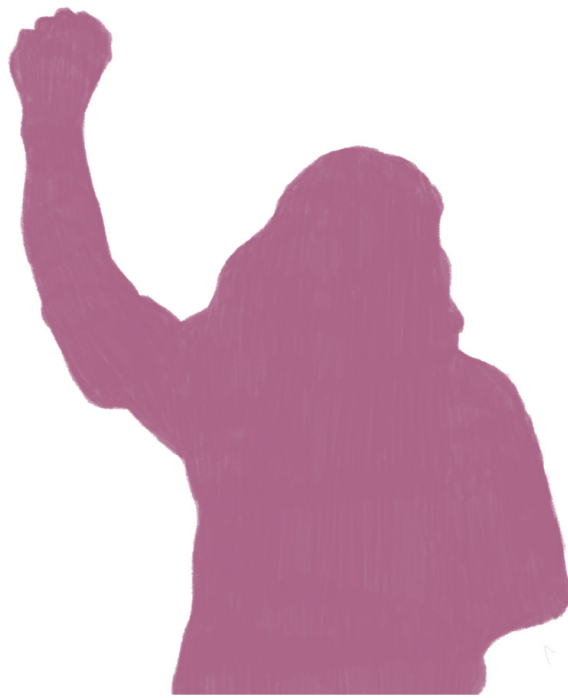
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Exploring Gender and
Power through/in Art

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COLOPHON

Authors: Sara Šabec, Marián López Fernandez-Cao, Carolina Peral, Isabella Mileti, Julia Nyikos, Eleonora Schulze-Battmann and Vera Varhegyi.

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POWER is composed of the following members (in alphabetical order):

- **City of Women (CoW) The Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture, Ljubljana, Slovenia.** <http://www.cityofwomen.org/en>
- **DADAU (de l'art et de l'autre). Paris, France.** <https://delartetdautre.com/> (coordinator)
- **EARTDI, Research group in the field of art and psychosocial inclusion, University Complutense of Madrid, Spain.** <https://www.ucm.es/eartdi>
- **Elan Interculturel, intercultural organisation, Paris, France.** <https://elaninterculturel.com/>
- **MOH - Mobility Opportunities Hub, sociocultural association in Bari, Italy.** <https://www.mohbari.eu/en/>

Visual design of this resource book:

Graphic design: Carolina Peral, Ana Cebrián

Cover author: Ana Cebrián.

Translation and revision in different languages of the Project:

- English revision: Vera Varhegyi.
- French revision: Julia Nyikos, Elianor Oudjedi.
- French translation: Julia Nyikos, Elianor Oudjedi.
- Italian revision: Eleonora Schulze-Battmann, Isabella Mileti.
- Italian translation: Eleonora Schulze-Battmann.
- Slovenian revision: Sara Šabec
- Slovenian translation: Sara Fabjan
- Spanish revision: Marián López Fdz. Cao
- Spanish translation: Carolina Peral

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Artistic activism is a hybrid practice that combines the emotional impact of art with the instrumental impact of activism. It's been around for as long as people have articulated and communicated their aspirations through signs and stories, but in recent years artistic activism has gained widespread recognition in the educational, arts, philanthropist, and NGO worlds.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

To conceptualise the impact of artistic activism, one must first acknowledge that art and activism serve different roles in the world. When we think of activism, we often think of its impact. Activism, as the name suggests, is the activity of challenging and changing power relations. There are many ways to be an activist, but the common element is activity aimed at an identifiable goal: mobilising a population, changing a policy, or overthrowing a dictator. The goal of activism is simply to make an impact.

However, affect is a term we usually use when talking about the arts. Art usually has no such instrumental use. It's hard to say what art is for or against; their value often lies in showing us new perspectives and new ways of looking at our world. Its impact is often subtle and difficult to measure, and confusing or contradictory messages can be layered into the work. In fact, art always contains an excess of meaning: something we cannot exactly describe or name, but still influences us. Its purpose, if we can use that word at all, is to stimulate a feeling, spur us on emotionally, or alter our perception. Here, too, art moves us.

The power and potential of artistic activism lies in the combination of effect and affect. As any seasoned activist can tell you, people do not just soberly decide to change their minds and act accordingly, they are moved to do so by powerful emotional stimuli, be they love, hate, fear, hope, or compassion. So, when it comes to stimulating societal change, impact and affect are intertwined. We might call this the affective effect or effective affect.

When it comes to what artistic activism does or can do to transform culture, empower people, and bring about change, there is even more disagreement. Some artistic activists identified the goal of artistic activism as awareness through access to information, with the understanding that infor-

mation must be presented in a way that appeals to the senses and creates affective connections. Others emphasised the ability of artistic activism to encourage conversation and turn ideas into something that is collectively created, not received. While others see the use of artistic activism to disrupt the hegemony of dominant society and open spaces for dissent. Still others understood the power of artistic activism to fill these spaces and provide alternative templates for seeing, being and doing. And some artistic activists saw the role of artistic activism in merging with other methods of bringing about social change through alignment with social movements and social organizations.



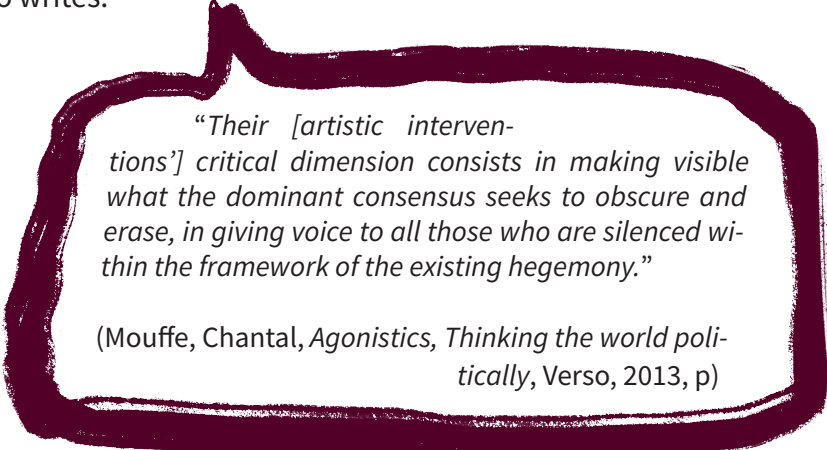
The ability of artistic activism to surprise us – to show up in unlikely places (e.g., not a gallery) or take on unfamiliar forms (e.g., not a protest march) provides an opportunity to disrupt people's preconceived notions of art and protest, and their predetermined ideas about the messages we are trying to communicate. Artistic activism creates an opportunity to bypass seemingly fixed political ideas and moral ideals and remap cognitive patterns. Surprise is a moment when hearts can be touched and minds reached, and both changed.

Artistic activism's ability to escape easy categorization is a benefit in societies where protest is a commonplace. Whereas traditional forms of protest, like marches, need to constantly increase in size or scope, or descend into violence, to become noticed (and newsworthy), the creative innovation at the heart of artistic activism provides something uncommon, or out of place, that can attract attention and become memorable. The boundary slippage of artistic activism works equally well in repressive regimes where overt political protest is prohibited, yet artistic practices are tolerated. Slipping under the radar, artistic activism is not identified as "politics" to authorities while still being able to communicate a social message to the public.

HOW TO CREATE ARTISTIC CAMPAIGN INTERVENTIONS?

Start with chemistry and a shared horizon

When planning a collaboration with a group or partners, start with a friendship and an idea that excites everyone involved. Something on the horizon, something you aspire to and that makes your eyes sparkle with joy when you think about it. That enthusiasm is the starting chemistry you need when you embark on an art campaign together, a journey of trying things out in different directions, tweaking, and adjusting the terms of the plot and narrative until the pieces of the various puzzles fall into place. Share the intention for a subversive action, something that shakes the dominant hegemonic order that manifests itself in one way or another in public space. Intuitively look for an antagonistic moment in the realization of an artistic political action. Antagonism as a driving force for the political potential of artistic interventions is also formulated by Chantal Mouffe, who writes:



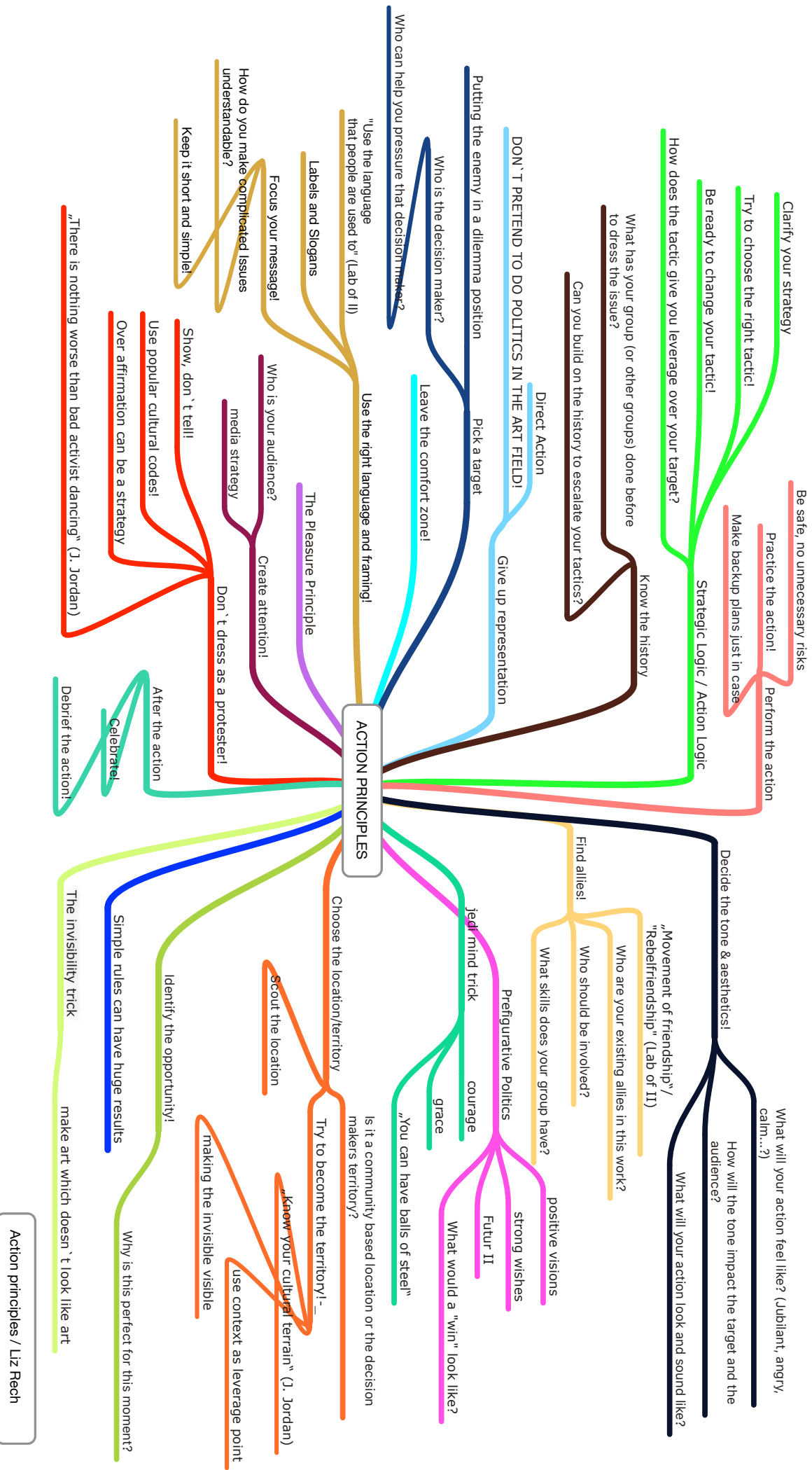
“Their [artistic interventions] critical dimension consists in making visible what the dominant consensus seeks to obscure and erase, in giving voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.”

(Mouffe, Chantal, *Agonistics, Thinking the world politically*, Verso, 2013, p)

This view of people, public space, and art implies that public space is not always a space of harmony or consensus but can also be a space of conflict. A conflict that is constantly present, that lies dormant, that is silenced, that is muffled under a carpet. An artistic intervention can help to break this silence and thereby challenge the hegemonic order and move it to a more favourable point of view. This can be done through art campaign - performative act connected to public space and the subsequent documentation and mediatization through different social media.

Brainstorm together and come up with a common idea

After contact has been made, another brainstorming session usually follows. What do you want to achieve? What is the difference you want to make? How will you do it? Try to find common ideas, (pop) cultural symbols or codes that can be subverted or challenged for a joint campaign intervention. The symbolism should appeal to a wider audience so that it can be understood by many different people, but still be crucially different and inherently provocative. Key considerations are also where the intervention will take place and what the local culture or terrain is like. The principle of action that comes to mind is “know your cultural terrain.” Choose an artform and prepare the playground. Use the action principles below as an asset.



Action principles / Liz Reich

Localizing the spatial narrative context

When planning an intervention, think about the place where the intervention will take place. Place carries a context with a specific meaning. Could be connected to the history, cultural, social, political, or individual context. What does the place articulate, what hegemony does it manifest? Does the intervention in this place support the narrative of the intervention? What would you want to change in that place? Which artform would be the best for it?

Peaceful and in the long run, but have in mind risk assessment

Artistic activism and art campaign interventions, as a cultural approach, are inherently non-violent and take time to develop. Artistic activism is aimed at hearts and minds, not bodies or buildings. The goal is not to force compliance, but to persuade by creating moving experiences that prompt people to question the world as it is, imagine a world as it could be, and join to make that new world real.

Creating and sustaining lasting change demands a change in values, beliefs and patterns of behavior, that is: cultural change. While changing laws and policies are essential, laws will not be followed nor policies enacted unless people have internalized the values that lie behind them. And while marches, rallies and protests are important, they won't have lasting impact unless the issues resonate with people. Culture lays the foundation for politics. It outlines the contours of our very notions of what is desirable and undesirable, possible and impossible.

In planning, still be aware of the risk you might take. To do this, it is important to make a risk assessment of what the possible outcomes of the actions can be and what consequences it brings.

Mediatization and Documentation

As the action is taking place, record and photograph it. Create a video with the key moments you want to highlight to promote the campaign itself. Create an online campaign, find channels where it makes sense to round it up and spread the idea to other people.

BELOW YOU CAN FIND 5 EXAMPLES THAT WILL HELP YOU TO CREATE YOUR OWN ART CAMPAIGN

1. Queering Beehives

Organisation: City of Women



In the art campaign Queering Beehives look into memory cultures and how to respond to the erasure or unknown LGBTQIA+ histories in Koroška, but also how to mark and inscribe new histories lived today. Central intention was to find a traditional craft and to queer the medium. We came up with the beehive plates: Panjska končnica.

The idea is to queer the traditional Slovenian beehive plates and put them up in the region to mark personal LGBTQIA+ histories of the participants and install them during the Pride. Stories like my first kiss or the first Koroška Pride and so on. (Thinking also of the project Queering the Map: <https://www.queeringthemap.com/> and the Trans March in Bogotá, where the community put up ceramic plates to commemorate trans femicides.) The plates would be made on one weekend prior to Pride and on the Pride weekend together with local queers. This both works as a workshop teaching individuals how they can reproduce this technique on their own and generates enough plates to be put up during Koroška Pride itself. To spread the message, members can also take a plate and bring it to their region as we would like to also engage people who don't live in large cities.

Instead of using only the medium of painting on wood, we propose to queer already existing motives that appear on Panjske končnice. Approximately half of the 600 motives are secular and straight/cis coded - e.g. A woman dragging her drunk husband from the pub, a man carrying a woman on a cross, the devils mill where women are turned young, etc. All of these can be adapted to queer experiences/stories. E.g. - two women carrying patriarchy on a cross.

The queer mill where people transition. (Of course, these are just examples, and the real plates should more concretely reflect the individual's story as mentioned above - first Pride, first kiss, coming out, attack on one's queerness, etc.) Many of the traditional wooden plates also have text, which offers us some space to elaborate on the motives. Three plates are also put up in the name of Koroška Pride itself - place of the parade, old building, and new building due to open in August. Thus, the project intends to start a tradition of marking and archiving of collective and individual histories in a similar fashion to memorial plaques of events that have been considered nationally/regionally important up to this date. The action does not intend to necessarily generate a controversy followed by media interest, but rather serves as a community building intervention in public space, embracing LGBTQIA+ people locally.

Youth participants in the campaign: Neža Oder, Nika Uhan, Urška Mori, Praprotnik Tisa, Knez Lea, Sekereš Hana, Arih Petra, Mlakar Rebeka, Višner Eni, Tomaž Žiga, Frece Gaja.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/9XtaMIDgrWc>

2. Ironic Road bans to reclaim our city

Organisation: Mobility opportunities hub



Cities do not only belong to people who love them but above all to those who take an open and responsible attitude towards the network of relationships, encounters, exchanges, differences, needs and narratives that unravel along the urban web. Every day, we live in the South of Italy, where, despite the contradictions and socio-cultural gaps that are still present, the need for emancipation from gender-related stigmas grows stronger.

For this reason, in hoping to build a more inclusive present and future, we thought it was necessary to start from the streets of our city, Bari, to highlight a phenomenon that, in one way or another, concerns everyone: we are talking about catcalling.

Is it possible to reclaim urban space by making it a place of political struggle? Is it possible to fight discrimination disguised in everyday life through creative and ironic actions? These are the questions from which we started to develop our artistic campaign. We have thus created 'road bans' to reflect ironically against the phenomenon of catcalling.

We proposed a pedagogy of gender equality, through play, by re-educating ourselves to shape the world without prejudice and in mutual respect of differences, with irony and lightness, precious allies of the greatest achievements. Furthermore, we want to experience public spaces in a new and conscious way.

Equipped with papers and markers, we took a moment to think about how many prohibitions and limitations come to people, especially women, even in places of leisure, without us even realising it. We created alternative road bans to inspire a reflection on misogyny. We believe that irony, combined with a great dose of awareness, is the most suitable tool to reclaim urban and 'human' space. How would you react if you saw road bans with "tits are banned"? Or "short skirts are illegal" written on them?

Our artistic campaign has been not only in the streets. It has a hybrid form. We have produced and published various content on our social media channels as well, especially Instagram, to spread even more the word about our aim.

Our final act has been to reclaim our streets by hanging the road bans in our city. And we must say it: it was liberating, and we felt empowered.

Youth participants in the campaign: Angelica Nisi, Beatrice D'Abbicco, Carmen Sportelli, Giuditta Giuliano and all the participants who attended the workshop.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/PKc5VoYiPto>

On the walls, we had fanzines, collages, posters and other things produced during the previous workshops. Photographs of previous workshops were also exhibited, and a text was hung up next to them so that people could better understand the process behind them.

We set out to create a listening room where visitors could sit and listen to the podcasts that had been recorded for the project, too, which they really enjoyed.

We also printed out some literature on the topic of gender that we hung up on the wall using hangers so that people who were not very familiar with the topic could grab some of the texts chosen and have a look.

In encouraging previous workshop participants to present their work, we were able to involve them in the creation of an artistic campaign, its process and how it unfolds in the moment, so that they could replicate it if they wanted to, but, most importantly, so that they knew that their effort, work and participation was valued and recognised.

This also helped foster their autonomy and independence; we were, thus, able to encourage them to choose for themselves how they wanted their work to be presented, to talk about the project and the way they experienced it, to show what they learned from it, etc... which in turn helped us greatly in making sure the day was going smoothly.

In the afternoon, we organised activities on the topic of gender so that the exhibit could become more dynamic: for instance, one activity was focused on understanding how people related to the concept of gender identities and boundaries in their everyday life. One former participant also shared a text he had written on the topic of masculinity in front of an audience, and we set up a Q&A following the reading.

The artworks exhibited that had not been produced within the bounds of the POWER project were presented to visitors throughout the day using art mediation techniques. Some of them were photographs, other paintings, and videos, too. For the videos we had chosen to show, we set up a corner in the room where the videos were played on repeat so that anyone could just pop in and watch them.

Feedbacks were very positive: most people found the exhibition interesting and interactive, and appreciated the fact that we - members of the Elan staff but also former participants - were available to provide them with more context and information on the POWER project and on the topic of gender and art more broadly.

Youth participants in the campaign: Han Wu, Afaq Akhlaq, Amélie Desson, Valentin Lehmann, Sohrab Abd

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/rcvDgU0aag4>

4. Mail art campaign

Organisation: De l'art et d'autre



The notion of “empowerment” was at the core of our workshop and art campaign. Although there are many approaches to understand this term, the interpretation we wanted to emphasise was the idea that a learning process can be beneficial on both an individual and collective level.

The aim of our workshop was to share a methodology and some technical and artistic tools to equip participants to lead a campaign on the issues that are important to them. We chose “mail art” as a model to carry out a campaign to raise awareness about gender inequalities in the art world.

Mail art seemed to us an appropriate model for several reasons: it is an artistic movement without hierarchy among participating members, anyone can become a mail artist, it aims to question and subvert the official system of the art world, the messages conveyed are devoid of violence, on the other hand, humour is often used, the artistic production of mail art is very low cost and accessible to all, the network between members is decentralised, and, above all, mail art is based on the idea of interactivity.

During the workshops, participants were asked to create mail art pieces, artistic postcards. The products had to convey a message of awareness about gender inequality, and more specifically about the situation of women artists in relation to museological practices, the underlying laws of

the art market or historiographical discourses.

Participants could try several artistic techniques; collage, ink drawing, subverting classical images, and the making of artist stamps on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the writing of visual poetry, acrostics, collaborative texts, etc.

A series of lectures punctuated the hands-on sessions. The first paper gave a detailed overview of the mail art movement, its origins, techniques, networkers, stamps, and presented examples of pieces of mail art from exceptional private collections, notably that of Géza Perneczky and Niels Lomholt. A second presentation focused on a few women mail artists, and on women artists who combined drawing and text in their work or correspondence. A third presentation was dedicated to a historical survey, to the origins of the postcard and the images and caricatures of the suffragette movement that early 20th century postcards conveyed. A last presentation explored the beginnings of correspondence in Antiquity (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and the Roman Empire), the different media used, the types of messages exchanged, and the small pieces of information we have on the few female senders in the Ancient World.

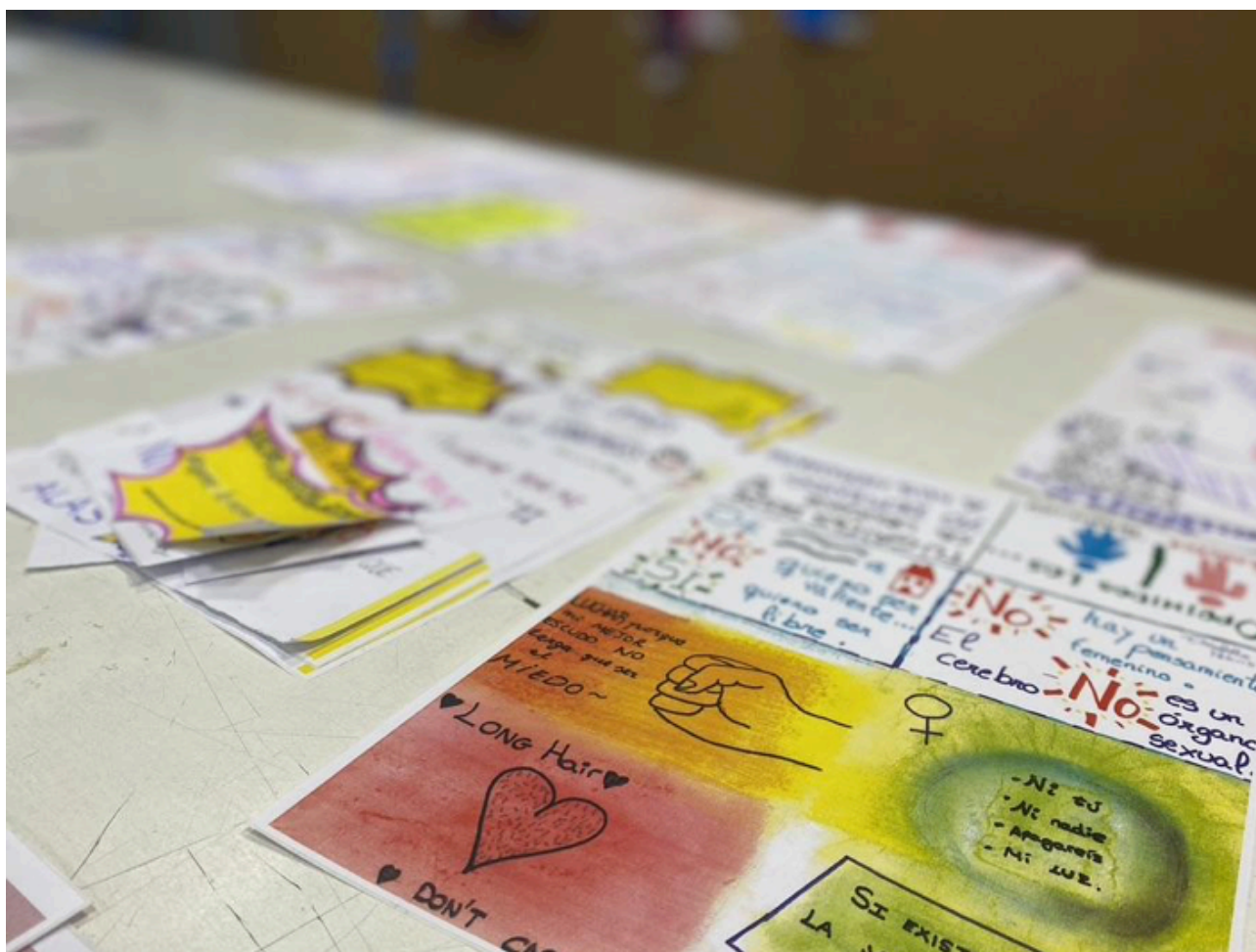
At the end of the workshop, a small exhibition presented all the cards; videos and photos were recorded in order to document the creative processes.

Youth participants in the campaign: Blanche Cardoner, Laura Ferrini, Aliénor Amaté, Louise Rivet, Anna Chianese Manca, Julie Bernasconi, Cécilia Bouillé, Johanne Deffarges.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/df8wgazOBJw>

5. Violence or tradition?

Organisation: Complutense University of Madrid



The UCM's artistic campaign was developed by members of the UCM staff along with two artists, teachers, and artistic mediators, named Yera Moreno and Eva Garrido, both coming from the artistic collective "Colektivof" and the young participants in the IO5 workshop.

The main idea of our artistic campaign was to raise awareness about symbolic violence against women. Indeed, symbolic violence is a concept that was first coined by Pierre Bourdieu and it refers to invisible forms of violence against women, which are embedded in our own culture and that are not easy to recognise. Symbolic violence finds expression through mass media, art, religion, culture and even body language and helps to reinforce and justify violence against women and imbalanced power relationships.

The title of our campaign, “Violence or Tradition?” was inspired by two events which took place in the autumn of 2022 at the Complutense University. In the first one, male students shouted from every window of the big building of their residence halls offensive cries dedicated to the young women living in the nearby feminine residence Hall. In the second event, the video of the traditional chant made by the male players of the UCM rugby team of law studies was made viral and was criticised for being considered violent against women. In their song, the male students refer to the crime of rape and suggest that lawyers have the power over it. Interestingly enough, in both situations, the events were described by the students involved as part of a non-violent tradition. Analysing these claims, nevertheless, we strongly interrogate whether we should accept these acts of symbolic violence in the name of tradition.

The campaign was co-designed with students during a workshop where the young people participating in it had the opportunity to learn about activist art, feminist artists and performance. Different debates and dynamic activities were made, and all together designed a collaborative artistic response to these violent and sexist events. As a result, we decided to create stickers with different feminist slogans and stamps with feminist symbols. The group also decided to write down a manifest and to elaborate a feminist chant as a response to the rugby song.

The Art Campaign was conducted on the 25th of November 2022, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. That day, we marched around the faculty of education with our Manifest and we started to distribute stickers in the public space and in different Faculties of the University, as an act of information and resistance. Finally, we decided to read the manifest aloud and sing the song in the public space, near the Residence Halls of the University.

The young people found the campaign very empowering and felt that such debates and experiences should be more present at the University.

Youth participants in the campaign: Paloma Nova, Uma Hervás, Marina Domínguez, Kalus (Susana Galisteo), Pablo Lope GarciaLaura Guijarro and Silvia Zamorano.

Link to video: https://youtu.be/dXkOiXcKF_k



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