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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ART ACTIVISM: NOT JUST VISUAL APPEAL BUT A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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#### Abstract

As children, we are always taught to look at something in the world using the 3 “W’s”- What, When, and Why? So, when the researcher had the opportunity to explore the current role of art in shaping society, she delved deep into it. She questioned ‘what’ art portrayed to individuals, ‘why’ people were subconsciously influenced by the art around them, and ‘when’ was the right time to use this creative tool to make an impact on society. She was pleasantly surprised to learn that even the primal forms of art in history had played an important role in social movements like the outbreak of feminism and political propaganda like war. She wants to explore the positive and negative sway art has over its audience. On an optimistic note, the researcher wants to explore a new model that can revolutionize the scene of social movements – art activism. Artistic Activism is a dynamic practice combining the creative power of the arts to move us emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change. The goal of activism is Effect, and the goal of art is Affect- but can these goals intertwine to create something revolutionary? On the pessimistic note, she wants to explore how role stereotypes and the inequality depicted -not only in historic but in also contemporary art-manipulates our perception of the world and contributes to those suffocating labels in society. Can the mere subject of an artistic piece encourage our behaviour towards a certain aspect in society? Through a journey exploring the bane and boon debate of art’s temporal power, the researcher hopes to establish its undeniable impact on both society and its individuals.

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#### Introduction:-

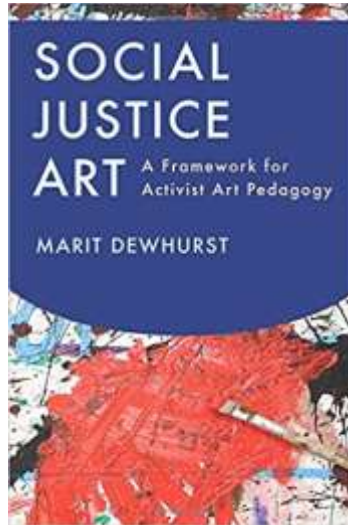
Art Activism is a practice combining the creative power of the arts to move society emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change.

Activist art originates from the intersection between the artistic and political climate.

In the art world of the late 1960s to the 70s, performance art worked to broaden aesthetic notions within visual arts and traditional theatrical performances, blurring the rigidly construed distinction between propaganda and art. At that time the *social justice movement* was known for its influential cognitive and communication styles that included irrefutable statistics.

The world changed faster than ever triggering a rapid transformation to ensure survival. People became increasingly aware not only of the problems we faced, but of the evolution needed to take place to realize them. People opened their minds to different ways of interacting with each other and their surroundings, as well as new ways of defining activities and their purposes. These tectonic shifts impacted the invisible spheres of culture and consciousness. The necessity for art to transform its goals and become accountable in the planetary whole became imperative.

Artists realized that Art had a 'useful' role to play in the larger sphere of things. Many artists reconceived their roles by infusing a sense of purpose, even though there no comprehensive theory or framework to encompass what they are doing. This was accepted widely and led to a conviction that the "masses" are capable of understanding or of making art. Art allowed social movements to win hearts and minds, ensure that the advocate's skills and techniques were balanced with both emotional approaches (to win the hearts) and cognitive approaches (to win the minds).



In his groundbreaking book *Social Justice Art: A Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy*, arts educator Marit Dewhurst has examined how art is an effective way to engage students in thinking about the role they might play in addressing social injustice. Using interviews and observations of sixteen high schoolers participating in an activist arts class at a New York City Museum, Dewhurst identified three learning processes in the act of creating art that have an impact on social justice: connecting, questioning, and translating. Dewhurst outlines core strategies for an "activist arts pedagogy" and offers suggestions for educators seeking to incorporate activist art projects inside or outside formal school settings.

Overtime, artists have created work using political subject matter, but in the past few decades, many have become more conscious of it. Now, community involvement is the common theme throughout many of the other forms of activist art. For some people, the phrase "activist art" calls to mind traditional-format artwork that is overtly political in its content. This is not the only format that exists under the umbrella of arts activism. Today, Activist art exists in many different forms - from public art (murals, performance interventions) to community-based projects, for example. They all take and share the belief that art does not belong to an economic elite but is a communal resource where the line between creators and viewers is often blurred.

There are two kinds of activist art:

1. Deconstructive which aims to tear down outmoded world view often through irony and parody.
2. Reconstructive which aims to build a new cultural option upon the ruins of outworn systems.

The difference between the two is the difference between cynicism and hope. As artists begin to question their responsibility and perceive that 'success' in capitalist, may not be the enlightened path to the future, they now see their role as demystifier or as cultural healer. So far, we have seen a lot of deconstructionist postmodern expressions in the arts. Artists, in recognizing the dysfunctionality of modernist frameworks, have turned towards aesthetics of the absurd and isolating leading to the surfacing of reconstructive activist art.

Many theories provide a framework for Art Activism. *The Social Games Theory (SGT)* is one such theory which provides an explanation for why emotional pathways is so easily accessed by art. The concept of socially conditioned rationalities provides activists with clues into art's ability to access an observer's emotional pathway—the peripheral route of persuasion. This theory examines art's capacity to condition behaviours or rationalities within humans and suggests that the development of decision-making skills, relational patterns, and rational processing. Notable among other frameworks is Strategic peacebuilding, a term relatively new to the field of social justice and one worthy of adoption by art activists, embraces four distinct *strategies*:

1. Waging Conflict Non-violently
2. Reducing Direct Violence
3. Transforming Relationships:
4. Building Capacity

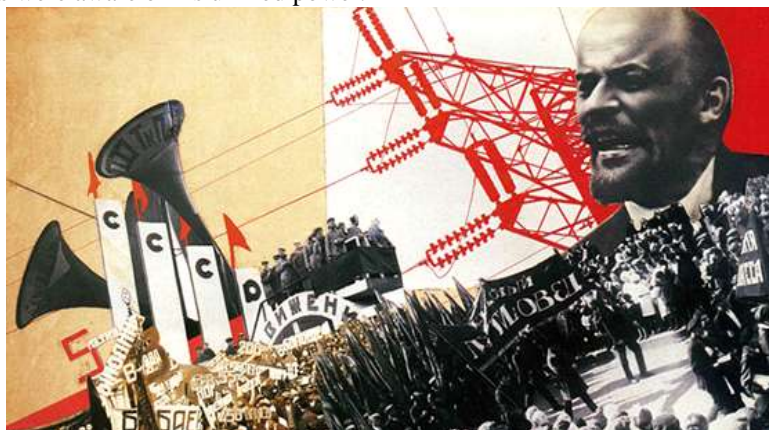
Another theoretical framework attempts to suggest definition of intended target for the activist art. One suggested approach for art activists is to target powerful organizations or social orders with the goal of the former is to challenge and destabilize the powerful social order. The second approach is to target powerless organizations or marginalized movements with the goal of the latter is to empower, unify, and stabilize the powerless, fledgling movement.

Like all practices that manifest itself in society, in today's world, Art Activism too is governed with respect to the rules and regulations which its practitioners must keep in mind. On January 22nd, the Cyberlaw Clinic at the Berkman Klein Centre for Internet & Society released a multipart Guide to Protest Art. This was a series aimed at educating people across the political spectrum who were using art to engage in civic dialogue. Written by Clinic staff and students, the guide was inspired by the resurgence of political art after the 2016 presidential election. The guide wanted to help in minimizing risks artists faced regarding copyright, fair use, and cyberlaw issues. This would allow them to maximize the impact of their work free of legal constraints.

1. Trademark: what trademark protects, and when you can use another person's trademark (with or without their permission)
2. Rights of privacy and publicity: legal rights of privacy and publicity, which are implicated when protest art features real people
3. Sharing and merchandising your work: licensing your work including with Creative Commons, using disclaimers, and making money.

The human mind is innately susceptible to the persuasive power of images. Many examples show that successive empires were built and sustained power through designing a visual environment that communicated messages crafted to transmit the ideas they wanted to be placed into peoples' minds about the social order.

Art historian Nigel Spivey highlights that Persepolis, the first empire in the world, was won largely on the influence of Art. Darius, the emperor of Persepolis, used pictures to communicate with the people who lived in the lands he conquered. Even though their language differed, the people were impressed with the idea of Darius's power by the narratives that ornately decorated Persepolis, which included pictures of diverse peoples giving Darius tribute. Coins were also utilized as their surfaces illustrated an icon of Darius which was carried throughout the empire to ensure that all subjects were aware of his unified power.



A more recent example is the treatment of artists living under fascist regimes of the past century. In the USSR, artists were strictly delegated to produce work in specific styles and with specific subject matter, all of which was to the unfaltering glorification of the state. Styles and content that began to suggest simply different ideas and sensibilities were harshly censored. Political controllers saw that by preventing freedom of expression, they were able to prevent people from exercising other freedoms as well, and from uniting, connecting, and organizing around value systems that undermined the interests of the dictators.

To have a just society in which people feel some responsibility about not exploiting each other, it is necessary for people to be imbued with a sense of compassion, which is based largely on empathy. Art has emerged as a powerful instrument among the many ways of helping to cultivate empathy.

Interestingly, social justice and development groups are perceiving and have acknowledged this connection far more quickly than the “art world” is. Evidence of this follows in *South African artist and human rights advocate Jan Jordan’s* observation that societies in which the public has greater access to art tend to also have a better human rights record, whereas communities in which art is less available to the public tend to see higher rates of violence and exploitation. When people are encouraged with resources to help them recognize and contemplate beauty, they can relate to each other in ways that are beautiful rather than hurtful.

Through the vehicles of communication technologies and of capitalist economics, we have been drawn into cultural relationship with the people who inhabit other parts of the planet. This exposure is not limited to knowing about another peoples’ food or clothing; it involves encountering foreign value systems and worldviews. The biggest reason for division is the lack of understanding and respect. The arts and culture play a great role in bridging divisions and in shaping opinion. Frequent interactions with cultural leaders can help in bridging the gaps between nations and civilizations. Art can be constructed as a bridge among people, communities, even countries. The arts have the potential to persuade and alter stereotypes through their emotional impact. Lack of integration of arts and culture into policy and agendas represent lost opportunities. Case in example being the lack of support for artistic and cultural interactions between the West and the Muslim world. Once again, this comes back to the idea of cultivating empathy and a recognition of oneself in the “other” – a strength that can be utilized not only between individuals, but between whole societies.

#### **Curatorial Activism: An effective tool to confront barriers of structure and bias**

For long, the art system—its history, institutions, market, press, and so forth, privileges white male creativity to the exclusion of all other artists. It insists that this white Western male viewpoint, which has been unconsciously accepted as the prevailing viewpoint, to be adequate not merely on moral and ethical grounds, or because it is elitist, but on purely intellectual ones.”

For example, dismal representation of women and non-white artists in the re-opening of the Tate Modern, London, in 2016—of the three hundred artists represented in the re-hang of the permanent collection, less than a third were women and fewer still were non-white. In the permanent exhibition galleries at the Pompidou Centre, featuring art from 1900 to the present, less than 10% of the works are by women, and even less by non-white artists. It’s worse at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where today less than 4% of the artists in the modern art section are women, with no non-white artists.

Blockbuster exhibitions are also subject to appalling levels of discrimination. The gender and race breakdowns of the Venice Biennale are a case in point. In the 2017 edition, entitled “Viva Arte Viva,” curated by Christine Macel, women artists comprised only 35% of the participants. European and North American artists dominated the 2017 edition, with 61% of participants coming from the two continents. The racial demographics of the show were particularly disheartening, especially given the widespread vocal activism of groups such as Black Lives Matter: a mere 5 of the 120 artists were African American—just one of whom (Senga Nengudi) was a woman.

Despite this very public criticism, when the Whitney Museum of American Art opened its new location in New York in 2015 with an inaugural exhibition entitled ‘America Is Hard to See’, showcasing works in its permanent collection and spanning a period from the 20th century to the present, it was an astonishing 69% male and 77% white—which amounts to serious curatorial malpractice.

Most curators didn't seem concerned with equality in representation or a diversity of voices. Nor did they acknowledge that the contemporary art world is sexist, racist, oppressive, and that they are playing a critical role in this "centralized system of apartheid," as Gerardo Mosquera rightly calls it. Many artists have made progress since the 1970s but the statistics remain quite grim. This urgent need for a re-evaluation of mainstream (non-activist) curatorial practice has led to Curatorial Activism, the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is also a manifesto for change in the art world. It demands that we resist masculinism and sexism, confront white privilege and Western-centrism, and challenge hetero-centrism and lesbo-homophobia. It insists that there is a moral emergency in the art world; indeed, there has been for a long time. This practice commits itself to lend a voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether. It focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.

There are numerous "curatorial activists" working worldwide who are addressing issues of discrimination head-on. Many have and are working towards ensuring that the under- or un-represented, the silenced, and/or the 'doubly colonized', are no longer ignored. Each has dedicated their curatorial endeavors almost exclusively to visual culture in/from the margins—that is, to artists who are non-white, non-Euro-American, as well as women, feminist, and 'queer'-identified artists. These curators have committed themselves to insurrectionist initiatives that are leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, as well as posing curatorial "strategies of resistance," provoking intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, which, in the end, offers up signs of hope and affirmation. Some have tackled history and have re-inserted artists—women and LGBT artists, for instance—back into a narrative that has left them out altogether simply because of their sex and/or sexuality.

### **Protest Art: An effective counterbalance to unjust political propaganda**

What differentiates "art for art's sake" from political art is that political art intends to influence the world. Artists in the 1930s did sully themselves and their artwork with political content. They had solidarity with the 99% against the ruling elites who had increasingly monopolized the wealth of that period. Artists had that solidarity with workers and poor people because they saw themselves as workers and poor people. Political art rose in the 1930s then fell in the period between World War II and the late 1960s; a marginalized group of artists kept the flame burning during this conservative period before it blossomed again.

History has several examples to highlight the impact of art on politics. The Great Depression was the first time in US history that a widespread movement of artists began to address politics. They actively found ways to influence society through exhibition and distribution of their work. Artists organized exhibitions around social and political themes such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, anti-lynching, anti-fascism and workers strikes. Many artists of the time joined and organized for political objectives and in 1936, the American Artists' Congress was formed as part of the Popular Front of a united Left against fascism. The Artists' Congress represented the height of artists' political involvement in the 1930s. They raised money for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighting the Fascists in Spain, and they were responsible for bringing Picasso's painting *Guernica* to New York where it remained until the death of the dictator Franco. They pressed the US Congress to establish a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts. In 1934 the Federal government was just starting to get involved in the arts. The Coit Tower murals in San Francisco were the first mural project of the Roosevelt Administration. The murals faced media and politicians' calls for their destruction due to controversies over several Communist references. The San Francisco Chronicle branded them "red propaganda". At the same time the dockworkers went on strike on the waterfront. Artists in San Francisco supported the waterfront workers when they went on strike against low wages, long hours, and terrible working conditions.





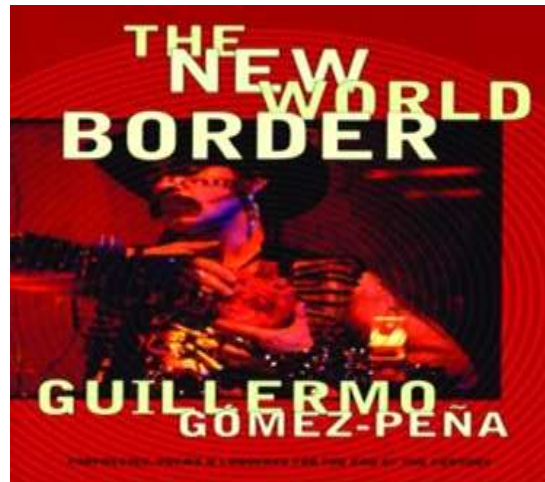
Another great of political art is the book *White Collar* written by Giacomo Patri, a newspaper illustrator. In this novel, with only images and no text, Patri told a story of the increased political radicalization of the central character to reflect the economic despair that white-collar workers shared with blue-collar workers during the Depression.



Overtime, Art Activism has supported many other political agendas. An example of the resurgence of political art and organizing is seen in the struggle around the I-Hotel (International Hotel) in San Francisco. With the post war prosperity of the late 1940s, redevelopment and urban renewal became the focus of cities around the country. Artists-activists engaged with visions, words, sound of community affection, struggle and resilience by creating work that touched the imagination of audiences.



Mission Grafica was founded in 1982 by artists Jos Sances and Rene Castro. One of their major focuses was on Central American solidarity with the struggles going on there against US sponsored right-wing governments and paramilitary groups. In the early years Mission Grafica created hundreds of screen-print posters with artists from around the world.



Another approach to political art can be seen in the show called New World Border. Artists were invited to create posters and prints about the border wall that the US is building on the US/Mexico border. The exhibit is set up to travel easily with lightweight artwork ready for hanging. The work has been shown at community centers, high schools, galleries, and colleges. Many of the venues have connected the art show to their own programming about the border wall and other border issues. This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning - does political art have an impact on the world? The right-wing response is to say art never stopped a war, art didn't stop lynching, art didn't save the I-Hotel, nor did it end repressive attacks on homeless people. But art does not exist in a vacuum. It is a part of culture. And political art that stands up to the repressive forces of society is a part of the culture of change. Political art does have effects in the real world, it is clearly part of the force, not the only force, but part of the force that keeps the human spirit alive. It keeps the flame of justice burning. It keeps memory alive. It moves with the struggles and moves those struggles forward.

### **Feminist Art: An accurate representation for women's rights and principles**

The feminist art movement refers to the efforts and accomplishments of feminists internationally to produce art that reflects women's lives and experiences, as well as to change the foundation for the production and perception of contemporary art. It also sought to bring more visibility to women within art history and art practice.

In the 1970s, society started to become open to change and people started to realize that there was a problem with the stereotypes of each gender. Feminist art became a popular way of addressing the social concerns of feminism that surfaced in the late 1960s to 1970s. Over fifty years ago, "the first feminist challenge was levied at the history of art with the publication in 1971 of Linda Nochlin's essay Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Nochlin chaired the College Art Association session in 1972 entitled "Eroticism and the Image of Women in Nineteenth Century", a great space where feminist language and thinking influenced concepts of art history. The session discussed the ways in which "raw sexism in the creation and use of female imagery was so memorably exposed," which called for the need of decolonization within art history with regards to systemic beliefs and practices regarding the image of women or a woman.

### **Body as Medium**

Artists have often distorted images of bodies, changed their bodies with other materials or performed self-mutilation not only to shock, but to convey a deeply felt experience in the most visceral manner through their artwork. Artist Ana Mendieta used blood and her own body in her performances, creating a primal, but not violent, connection between the artist's body, blood, and the audience (and nature). Mendieta and many other Feminist artists saw blood as an important symbol of life and fertility directly connected to women's bodies.

### **Sexual Equality and De-Objectification**

Many Feminist artists illuminated an imperative to end sexism and oppression with works that went against the traditional ideas of women as merely beautiful objects to be visually enjoyed. As Lucy Lippard stated, "When women use their own bodies in their artwork, they are using their selves; a significant psychological factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject." These works compelled viewers to question society's social and

political norms. For example, Dara Birnbaum used video art to deconstruct women's representation in mass media by appropriating images from television broadcasts into her video-collages, re-presenting them in a new context.

### **Domesticity and Family Life**

Miriam Schapiro coined the term "femmage" to describe works she began to make in the 1970s that combined fabric, paint, and other materials through "traditional women's techniques - sewing, piercing, hooking, cutting, appliqueing, cooking and the like..." This put a spotlight on "women's work" as a viable contribution to the category of traditional "high art."

### **Art and Feminism**

Twenty-First Century Perspectives assembles, to use Martinis Roe's term, a 'culture of practices. These practices traverse art-historical retrieval and analysis of women artists' work, to the scrutiny of feminist aesthetics in their diverse forms, and the documentation and evaluation of feminist political associations. This editorial strategy was elaborated some 40 years ago under very different institutional conditions in the Australian feminist art journal LIP and related Women's Art Movement initiatives. In their estimation, feminism is neither a political identity, nor a prescribed set of cultural practices, nor indeed is it a space of uncritical, neo-liberal 'choice'.

### **Environmental and Ecological Art: A path for civic progress and sustainability**

Although ecology has received little systematic attention within art history, its visibility and significance has grown in relation to the threats of climate change and environmental destruction. We are currently witnessing major artistic and activist practices focused on environmental crisis and conflict, which is in turn sparking interest in critical genealogies of environmentally oriented visual culture. The explosion of work on ecological themes is taking place in fields of visual culture that extend far beyond institutional art practice, including broadcast and online media, experimental video and film, creative activism, and collective social movements.

Environmental art is a range of artistic practices encompassing both historical approaches to nature in art and more recent ecological and politically motivated types of works. The term "environmental art" often encompasses "ecological" concerns but is not specific to them. It primarily celebrates an artist's connection with nature using natural materials. Artists considered to be working within this field subscribe to one or more of the following principles:

1. *Focus* on the web of interrelationships in our environment—on the physical, biological, cultural, political, and historical aspects of ecological systems.
2. *Create* works that employ natural materials or engage with environmental forces such as wind, water, or sunlight.
3. *Reclaim*, restore, and remediate damaged environments.
4. *Inform* the public about ecological dynamics and the environmental problems we face.
5. *Revise* ecological relationships, creatively proposing new possibilities for coexistence, sustainability, and healing.





Within environmental art, a crucial distinction can be made between environmental artists who do not consider the possible damage to the environment that their artwork may incur, and those whose intent is to cause no harm to nature. For example, despite its aesthetic merits, the American artist Robert Smithson's celebrated sculpture *Spiral Jetty* (1969) inflicted permanent damage upon the landscape he worked with, using a bulldozer to scrape and cut the land, with the spiral itself impinging upon the lake.

Sustainable art is produced with consideration for the wider impact of the work and its reception in relationship to its environments (social, economic, biophysical, historical, and cultural). Some artists choose to minimize their potential impact, while other works involve restoring the immediate landscape to a natural state. Leading environmental artists similarly leave the landscape they have worked with unharmed; in some cases, they have revegetated damaged land with appropriate indigenous flora in the process of making their work.

Ecological art, also known as Ecoart, is an artistic practice or discipline proposing paradigms sustainable with the life forms and resources of our planet. It is composed of artists, scientists, philosophers, and activists who are devoted to the practices of ecological art. Historical precedents include Earthworks, Land Art, and landscape painting/photography. Ecoart is distinguished by a focus on systems and interrelationships within our environment: the ecological, geographic, political, biological, and cultural. Ecological art involves numerous diverse approaches:

1. Representational artwork: reveals information and conditions through image-making and object-making with the intention of stimulating dialogue.
2. Remediation projects: reclaim or restore polluted and disrupted environments – these artists often work with environmental scientists, landscape architects and urban planners.
3. Activist and protest art: engage, inform, energize and activate change of behaviours and/or public policy.
4. Social sculptures: are socially engaged, time-based artwork that involve communities in monitoring their landscapes, and take a participatory role in sustainable practices and lifestyles.
5. Ecopoetic art: initiate a re-envisioning of the natural world, inspiring co-existence with other species.
6. Direct encounter artworks: utilize natural phenomena such as water, weather, sunlight, plants, etc.
7. Didactic or pedagogical works: share information about environmental injustice and ecological problems such as water and soil pollution and health hazards through education.
8. Lived-and-relational aesthetics: involve sustainable, off-the-grid, permaculture existences.

Contemporary ecological art has been articulated across interdisciplinary and scholarly groups in terms of life-centered issues, community participation, public dialogue, and ecological sustainability. The following four orientations have been identified:

1. *Environmental design/Sustainable design* – Some artists work with nature as a resource for aesthetic endeavors.
2. *Ecological design* – Artists who work in ecological design create art that is contingent on direct experiences and interactions with a particular place where the art is created.
3. *Ecological restoration* – Some artists attempt to alert viewers to environmental issues and problems through scientific exploration and educational documentation. They seek to restore fragile places and educate the public to the systemic character of bioregions using communication, ritual, and performance.
4. *Social restoration* – An ecological ethic where humans live in relationship to larger communities of life to catalyze socially responsible artwork. Socio-ecological artists critically examine everyday life experiences.

Art and activism do different work in the world. Activism, as the name implies, is the activity of challenging and changing power relations. There are many ways of doing activism and being an activist, but the common element is an activity targeted toward a discernible end. Simply put, the goal of activism is action to create an Effect.

Art, on the other hand, tends not to have such a clear target. It's hard to say what art is for or against; its value often lies in providing us perspective and new ways to envision our world. Its effect is often subtle and hard to measure, and confusing or contradictory messages can be layered into the work. Its goal, if we can even use that word, is to stimulate a feeling, move us emotionally, or alter our perception. Art, equally simply stated, is an expression that generates Affect.

At first glance these aims seem at odds with one another. Activism moves the material world, while Art moves the heart, body, and soul. We're moved by affective experiences to do physical actions that result in concrete effects: Affect leads to Effect. We might think of this as Affective Effect, or perhaps, Effective Affect. Or, combined in a new word, Æffect (pronounced Aye-fect).

Artistic Activism is a practice aimed at generating Æffect: emotionally resonant experiences that lead to measurable shifts in power.

### **Artistic Activism Thrives in the Contemporary Landscape**

To operate successfully on this cultural topography we need to observe, analyse and respond creatively. The principles governing civic action are more likely to be found in the worlds of popular culture and entertainment, and artistic expression and reception, than in textbooks of political science. Acknowledging that the political landscape is also a cultural landscape opens up new terrain to work upon. Whereas art tends to be limited to museums and galleries, and activism to street demonstrations and state houses, artistic activism is at home in town squares and shopping malls, on billboards or through social media...as well as galleries and state houses. This new terrain, neither overtly “arty” or “political” is more familiar and safer to an audience than a museum or a rally, and thus makes artistic activism more attractive, approachable, and friendly than traditional art or activist practices. Artistic activism – as an affective image, performance, or experience – is also well suited for an age of cell phone cameras and social networks. People don’t share policy papers; they share things that move them.

### **Artistic Activism Has Been Used Throughout History**

In the struggle for Civil Rights for African Americans in the US, for example, activists drew upon the stories and songs and participatory culture of the black churches, staged media-savvy stunts like Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus, played white racist reaction against peaceful protesters as a sympathetic passion play during the campaign to desegregate Birmingham, Alabama, and, most famously, used imaginative imagery (and popular cultural references) in a speech to call America to task for its racist past and articulate a dream of a better future. While Martin Luther King Jr is now largely remembered for his example of moral courage, social movement historian Doug McAdam’s estimation of King’s “genius for strategic dramaturgy,” likely better explains the success of his campaigns.

### **Artistic Activism is Accessible**

Because artistic activism crosses boundaries, it not only opens multiple access points for creators and audiences, but also for mass media outlets who may cover events in both arts and politics sections, and for funders who can support projects with arts and culture grants as well as through social justice portfolios.

### **Artistic Activism Stimulates a Culture of Creativity**

Artistic activism is more than coming up with creative tactics – it stimulates a culture of creativity that extends from tactics through goals to overall campaign planning. Drawing upon creative processes familiar to arts and design, artistic activism encourages brainstorming, quick sketches, multiple iterations, rapid prototyping, a spirit of play, and the acceptance of failure. Approached as a creative process, we are more apt to see multiple solutions to problems, and new pathways to attain our objectives.

### **Artistic Activism Energizes People and Organizations**

Artistic activism is a way to connect with the artist inside of every activist and the activist within every artist, redrawing connections so that artistic activism generates fun and pleasure rather than sacrifice and guilt and, in the process, reintegrating and re-energizing our lives.

Re-energized people revitalize the institutions they work within. In this way, artistic activism is a form of organizational self-care. The purpose and play of artistic activism can reanimate “dead” cultural and civic organizations like museums, galleries, and NGOs from the inside out — but also from the outside-in creativity is infectious. As fun as artistic activism is for those doing it, it’s also exciting for those people on the outside experiencing it.

### **Artistic Activism is Peaceful and Persuasive**

Artistic activism, as a cultural approach, is inherently non-violent. Although groups have used creative methods for violent ends (most infamously the Nazi Party) the tactic itself is peaceful. Artistic activism is aimed at hearts and minds, not bodies or buildings. The goal is not to force compliance, which art can never do, 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. Artistic activism is Æffective power.

### Research Methodology:-

As part of the research, the researcher has analysed various case studies to draw out similarities and differences between the use and perception of colour in society.

List of Case Studies
Case 1- Racism and Art Activism: An insight into the 'Black Lives Matter' Movement (July 6th,2020)
Case 2- Artists Arrested in Cuba for Protesting Decree Censoring the Arts (December 5th, 2018)
Case 3- Evolution of Protest Art (July 7th, 2020)
Case 4- A brief look at protest art in India, and how it is challenging bigotry and dogma (July 30th,2017)
Case 5- Does Creative Art Activism Work? The Copenhagen Experiment (October 4th, 2019)
Case 6- 'The Art of Protest' delves into past and contemporary activism (December 4th, 2020)
Case 7- Cases on Appropriation Art and the Law (February 25th, 2014)
Case 8- Interview with the Centre for Creative Activism (March 17th, 2014)
Case 9- Activist Art: How is it Affected by social media? (April 19th, 2017)
Case 10- The Useful Uselessness of Art Activism (January 1st, 2019)
Case 1
Racism and Art Activism: An insight into the 'Black Lives Matter' Movement
Cary Mallenbuam- July 6th, 2020
<a href="https://amp.usatoday.com/amp/3195704001">https://amp.usatoday.com/amp/3195704001</a>

As thousands of Americans lend their voices to protests, artists are letting their brushes speak of racial reckoning. They're coloring streets with the words "Black Lives Matter." They're spray-painting walls with memorial images in rainbow hues. They're illustrating fists, flowers, and faces and sharing them on Instagram. They're acting on an urge to create, spurred by the pain of George Floyd's death and the global pandemic. Although the term, activism, feels new, the idea that artists also serve as activists and leaders of cultural change has a deep-rooted history.

"Artists have always been at the lead of protest, resistance and hope in Black communities and other marginalized communities across the country," says Aaron Bryant, the curator of photography and visual culture at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.



Veiga-an artist- took this opportunity to pay a tribute to George Floyd- a black man who was suffocated under the knee of a white police officer. Veiga's realistic style and colourful palette made for a breathtaking and breath-giving mural:

The image of Floyd looks as though he's coming back to life. He started a movement to beautify walls and honour the memory of Black people across the country. "We're the visual historians of current times," Evans says. "I tell a lot of artists; you have to document what's happening today. I advocate for more artists to use their work to create messages and talk about what they're going through in society."



In 2017, Teddy Phillips created a free app filled with his bright, color-blocked art called “For the Culture.” It’s a trivia game about Black culture with more than 50,000 downloads in the Google Play store. “For the Culture” is something Phillips, 31, says a lot. “It’s really for my ancestors. I want to pay homage to them as much as possible.” That’s why he included the phrase inside the giant.

“I” in the “Black Lives Matter” street mural in Seattle.

Kinship and activism go hand in hand for Phillips. He wants to follow the example of his grandfather, an activist who marched with Martin Luther King Jr., and illustrate everyday heroes like his mother, a nurse. He wants to send a message to the kids where he grew up: to be proud and aware of their roots.

“As a collective, artists illustrate and impact history. As individuals, they have their own unique stories behind their art.

#### Case 2

Artists Arrested in Cuba for Protesting Decree Censoring the Arts

Jasmine Weber- December 5th, 2018

<https://hyperallergic.com/474525/artists-arrested-in-cuba-for-protesting-decree-censoring-the-arts/>



Cuban artists were arrested after planning a sit-in at the Cuban Ministry of Culture to protest Decree 349, which puts in place unprecedented censorship of the arts and will take effect December 7. Since July, Cuban artists and activists have tirelessly organized in opposition to Decree 349, a new regulation pertaining to artistic freedom and institutional censorship in the Republic. The vague parameters of the decree, set to take action on December 7, regulate any artistic and cultural activity in Cuba, leaving them subject to government censorship. The artist-activists opposed to the statute have hosted frequent protests, performances, and events, resulting in multiple arrests in the process. They have also undertaken legal measures calling for a meeting with Abel Prieto, the Minister of Culture, to no avail.

The decree, signed by newly instated President Miguel Díaz-Canel in April and published on July 10, essentially grants the Cuban Republic complete control over independent artistic production in the private sector. Banned content includes.

use of national symbols that contravene current legislation; b) pornography; c) violence; d) sexist, vulgar and obscene language; e) discrimination due to skin color, gender, sexual orientation, disability and any other harm to human dignity; f) that attempts against the development of childhood and adolescence; g) any other that violates the legal provisions that regulate the normal development of our society in cultural matters



Decree 349 allows government officials to shut down concerts, performances, galleries, and art and book sales if they do not comply with the strict list of prohibited subject matter. It also restricts artists from commercializing their work without government approval.

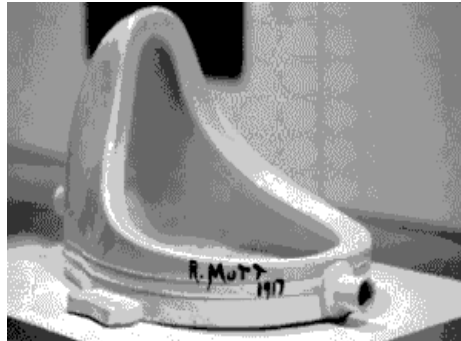
In August, Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara told Hyperallergic, “For government systems, it is impossible to control art, because it is capable of being born of the most unexpected places and situations. In these moments of such fragility and therefore repression, art is a very powerful weapon and the system knows it.”

Case 3:

EVOLUTION OF PROTEST ART

Ruth Millington, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

<https://ruthmillington.co.uk/11-famous-protest-art-examples/>



Over the last 100 years, artists have been outspoken protesters on issues from LGBTQ+ rights and feminism to equal-pay and anti-racism. Protest artwork can question, disturb and even change the status quo. *Silence = death* became Keith Haring’s slogan for AIDS awareness in the 80s. The Guerrilla Girls have fought for gallery representation of female artists. Ai Wei Wei speaks out against the Chinese government. Today, protest art is coming back into fashion, and – in a social media, visually-rich world – it is more important than ever.

#### **Dada & anti-war protest art**

Who were the pioneers of protest art? It’s difficult to say exactly but the Dada artists were one of the first groups to become known for activist art. The movement began around 1916 as a reaction to World War I and the nationalism that many thoughts had led to the war. Around 30 artists, including Marcel Duchamp were intent on opposing bourgeois culture. They are best known for their use of ready-mades – everyday objects presented as art. Duchamp’s choice of a urinal challenged and offended even his fellow artists.



#### **Diego Rivera & mural protest art**

Diego Rivera was one of the leaders of the Mexican Mural Movement of the 1920s. He created popular political murals throughout Mexico that included attacks on the ruling class, the church and capitalism. Instead, he promoted communism and socialism, and wanted to protect workers’ rights. Rivera deliberately painted large-scale murals on public walls (in opposition to what he regarded as the elitist character of paintings in galleries and museums). He claims to have been arrested for his protest art, but no evidence exists for this.



### American artists protest the Vietnam War

In 1965, as the Vietnam War escalated, American artists began to move away from abstraction and into a more direct commentary on the world. The war brought about a sudden shift toward representational, satirical and often cartoonish protest art attacking the war and elected officials. The war changed art, turning artists towards activism. Yayoi Kusama staged actions in New York, counteracting violence with activism in the form of naked body painting happenings and orgiastic love-ins.

Her first *Anatomic Explosion* featuring naked dancers took place on 15 October 1968 opposite the New York Stock Exchange, and was prefaced by a press release that stated, 'The money made with this stock is enabling the war to continue. We protest this cruel, greedy instrument of the war establishment.'



### Paula Rego & abortion rights

In 1998 Paula Rego created a series of work entitled- The Abortion Pastels. Rego created her work in response to a referendum to legalise abortion in Portugal, which was very narrowly defeated. Each canvas depicted the image of a woman undergoing an unsafe abortion.

Rego recalled the whispered secrets of women in the gallery while looking at her artworks. In turn, after being exhibited, her work is stated to have been integral in changing public opinion. It's a powerful example of feminist protest art impacting on local and national views.

Case 4:

A brief look at protest art in India, and how it is challenging bigotry and dogma

Radhika Oberoi- July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<https://www.firstpost.com/living/a-brief-look-at-protest-art-in-india-and-how-it-is-challenging-bigotry-and-dogma-3840265.html>

The online poster for the Not in My Name protests is perhaps the most recent example of art's vital role as a challenger of bigotry and dogma, as the vanguard of a new order, as a non-conformist of remarkable eloquence.



Its primary visual — an illustration of a blood-spattered *chappal*, with an iron rod by its side — evokes the desolation of a street after the carnage, the moments of uncertainty after a rioting mob have retreated and all that is left of the mayhem is a piece of footwear stained with blood. It also brings to mind several agonizing questions: Did the wearer of the *chappal* escape the riot? Did he die in its midst? Was the iron rod used to disperse the crowd or to beat the wearer of the *chappal* to death?

Art, when it intrudes upon the political conversations of the day like an uninvited interlocutor, becomes an engaging, and often, shocking, dissenter. It becomes the medium through which seething collective anger finds a visual vocabulary to express the type of dissent described by civil rights activist and the first African-American US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall: “We must dissent from the fear, the hatred, and the mistrust.” A photograph by Kishor Parekh, from his series *Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth*, sparked-off the idea for the poster. The photograph is that of a boot on an empty street. “We have become immune to images of death and violence,” says Sen, of the origins of the poster. “But the footwear told the story of the riot more powerfully than images of dead people.” The *chappal* on the Not in My Name poster became Sen’s rendition of Parekh’s photograph, and an insignia of the citizens’ protest. “Protests are a form of public art,” Sen emphasizes, “they operate at the same level of symbolism as performance art, and the blood-stained chappal became a strong motif of this particular movement.”



In India, collectives of artists, writers, scholars, and activists, like Sahmat — The Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust and Committee — have used the poster to challenge the dominant discourse around political events, particularly the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992. Sahmat’s posters for a Sufi-Bhakti performance, titled *Anhad Garje*, or ‘the silence reverberates’, a phrase used by the medieval poet, Kabir, were 32 x 23 inches of silkscreen that responded to the razing of the mosque with a simple line printed at the bottom: *Come to defend our secular tradition*.

The cartoons of Suhail Naqshbandi, who works for the Kashmir daily *Greater Kashmir*, are popular on social media for their scornful and sometimes (unavoidably) melancholic reflection of the unrest in Kashmir. There’s one in which a Kashmiri man is shown holding up an intravenous drip, attached to the arm of presumably a dying son. This part of the sketch is titled *Fact*. Adjoining it, in a section titled *Fiction*, a TV grab shows the same Kashmiri, with his arm raised. The IV drip is cut off from the screen, and the words *Stone pelter, Terrorist* appear on the scroll below the image of the Kashmiri. Yet another sketch is of chief minister Mehbooba Mufti ushering a group of children, whose eyes are bandaged as they have been blinded by pellets, towards a ‘dark future’. The cartoon is titled *Un “pellet” able truth*.

Case 5:
Does Creative Art Activism Work? The Copenhagen Experiment
Stephen Duncombe and Silas Harrebye- October 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2019
Link: <a href="https://creative-generation.org/blog-1/does-creative-activism-work-the-copenhagen-experiment">https://creative-generation.org/blog-1/does-creative-activism-work-the-copenhagen-experiment</a>



Loud fart noises continue emanating from a bright red sound system mounted on a bicycle frame and parked in the middle of the bridge. Over the sound system a large banner flies, and across a bright red and yellow background are the words: “This Shit is an Issue,” accompanying a picture of a mound of cow dung. Positioned at points in the middle of the bridge are four cows, handing out flyers to passers-by that call for a tax on meat production to limit methane gas that is harmful.



“What’s going on here?” was a question heard many times over the course of those three days. There were two ways to answer that question. The first: this is an activist intervention to convince people of the harmful effects of meat production on the climate. The second answer: This is “The Copenhagen Experiment,” the first, and so far, only, public experiment comparing conventional and creative forms of activist interventions.

Over the course of three days in 2018, the authors and their research team mounted multiple activist interventions around a current environmental issue on a popular and well-travelled bridge in the middle of Copenhagen, Denmark. Each day a conventional activist intervention: public speaking, petitioning, or flyering, was paired with a “creative” way of accomplishing the same task in a classic A/B experimental model. Volunteer observers watched interactions and took notes, interviewers stopped passers-by to ask their opinions and gather contact information, a camera person filmed the interactions to capture micro-dynamics and general movement patterns, and a survey was sent out two weeks later to inquire about recall and resulting action.

Findings include:

1. Conventional activist methods of approaching individuals to talk to them about an issue, gather signatures, or receive a flyer are, in general, not positively perceived or received.
2. Words and phrases used by respondents to describe the different forms of interventions are markedly different. “Annoying,” “lecturing,” “predictable,” and “unnoticeable” were frequently used to describe our conventional forms of activist intervention. Words like “funny,” “different,” “surprising,” and “captivating” were used to describe the creative interventions.
3. The novelty, surprise, humour, and “productive confusion” of creative forms of activism disrupted people’s everyday automatic way of thinking about issues and activism, attracting attention, stimulating curiosity, and creating openings for new social interactions and political impressions.
4. In nearly every quantitative measure we employed: observations of interest, number of signatures gained on a petition, the quantity and speed of flyers handed out, the creative approach proved more successful than the conventional one in attaining the desired objectives.



5. Qualitative measures suggested a more positive immediate reception of creative forms of activism. Creative interventions also tended to be recalled more vividly, with better informational retention, and lead to more follow-up actions than conventional forms of engagement.

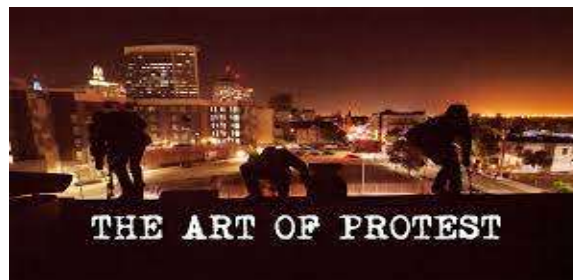
Case 6:
'The Art of Protest' delves into past and contemporary activism
Nick Kolenda
<a href="https://uhighmidway.com/9534/arts/the-art-of-protest-delves-into-past-contemporary-activism/">https://uhighmidway.com/9534/arts/the-art-of-protest-delves-into-past-contemporary-activism/</a>

In 2017, Donald Trump announced he would like to be buried at the Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, New Jersey. After the statement was made, Indecline, an activist collective made up of anonymous artists, snuck onto the golf course in the middle of the night and built their own cemetery for some of the things they believe Trump has buried. They put tombstones in the ground reading "Here Lies Our Future," "Here Lies Decency" and "Here Lies the American Dream."



This artistic endeavor and many more are captured in Indecline's documentary "The Art of Protest," a 45-minute film released Oct. 13 and which can be viewed for free on the Indecline website or Rolling Stone website. In 2018, Indecline started work on the documentary to tell the story of protest art and to call on artists to use their art as a tool to fight injustice. The film contains interviews with artists and activists.

This film is meant to inspire the viewer and shows the power of protest art. Protest art can get people talking about important issues, it can get them to laugh at the people in power who work only to serve their own interests, and it can take back the streets and public spaces with a message to fight injustice.



"Take up space, take up as much space as possible, be as loud as possible, make things with your hands, make physical things and get out there and make something," artist Maryl Pataky said. The pacing and editing in "Art of Protest" is very fast and, while it conveys its message well, it does not allow enough time for the viewer to take in the individual pieces of art. Some of the pieces are massive and deserve more time for the viewer to appreciate.

Another unnamed member of Indecline said, "There's no drug more potent than the spirit of rebellion. If you're able to implement joy, you're arming yourself with a psychological attribute that your oppressor does not have." This film, while feeling manipulative at times, is effective at communicating its message and inspires the viewer to stand up and raise their voice, or brushand put their message into the world as well.

## Case 7:

Cases on Appropriation Art and the Law

Fordham News – February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014<https://news.fordham.edu/arts-and-culture/top-10-cases-on-appropriation-art-and-the-law-2/>

Law and art have always had a curious relationship. While artists love to push legal boundaries, some contemporary artists, particularly artists who appropriate from works by other artists, have gotten themselves into a host of disputes involving copyright and trademark law.



In this case, Shepard Fairey, a famous street artist and brand personality, was sued by the AP for his appropriation of a photograph of Barack Obama that he used to create the iconic “HOPE” poster for Obama’s presidential campaign.

The case eventually settled, but the questions raised regarding the limits of fair use continue.

**Mattel Inc. v. Walking Mt. Prods**

A photographer took a series of pictures of Barbie dolls, titled “Food Chain Barbie,” which included the famous doll in a series of poses, sometimes with food, and at other times accompanied by vintage kitchen appliances. Walking

Mt. used the photographs to comment on Barbie’s role in creating a culture that objectified women. Mattel was incensed and sued for trademark and copyright infringement. Mattel lost.

**Hoepker v. Kruger**

A well-known German photographer sued contemporary American artist Barbara Kruger for her use of a photograph of a woman with a magnifying glass. Kruger cropped and enlarged the image, and then superimposed three large red blocks containing words that read, “It’s a small world but not if you have to clean it.” Given that the photograph was in the public domain in the United States, Kruger won the case.

**Plesner v. LVMH**

In this case, one of the few international cases involving appropriation art, Nadia Plesner, a Danish artist, was sued in The Hague by luxury manufacturer Louis Vuitton for her appropriation of one of its bags in a painting entitled Darfurnika. The painting merged political and fashion icons to draw attention to the political situation in Darfur. Plesner won on freedom of artistic expression grounds.

**Wojnarowicz v. American Family Association**

In this action, David Wojnarowicz, a famous multimedia artist and gay rights activist, sued the American Family Association. At issue was a pamphlet prepared by the AFA that displayed cropped images of Wojnarowicz's work over the caption "Your Tax Dollars Helped Pay For These 'Works of Art.'" He won an injunction, forcing the AFA to publish a corrective advertisement.

Case 8:
Interview with the Centre for Creative Activism
Regine- March 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2014
<a href="https://we-make-money-not-art.com/interview_with_center_for_creative_activism/">https://we-make-money-not-art.com/interview_with_center_for_creative_activism/</a>

The Centre for Creative Activism *is a place to explore, analyse, and strengthen connections between social activism and artistic practice*. For the past few years, CAA's founders Steve Lambert and Stephen Duncombe have been traveling around the U.S. (and increasingly Europe) to train grassroots activists to think more like artists and artists to think more like activists. The objective isn't to replace traditional strategies with unbridled inventiveness but to use creativity as an additional tool that will help them gain more attention, make activism more approachable and that will, ultimately, make campaigns more effective.

**Hi Steve and Stephen! In Europe at least, 'socially-engaged' exhibitions seem to have become very trendy. Is there any way an artist or curator can engage with meaningful artistic activism inside an art gallery or a museum?**

If the artists intention and goal does lead them to a gallery or through a museum, they need to be aware of the context of their practice. Galleries and art museums are, by and large, set up to display works of art that are then looked at or watched by others. This encourages a social relationship of spectatorship, with all its attendant political ramifications. It also can tend to "reify," politics be it social problems or social struggles. In these cases, politics becomes an object for contemplation, or – perversely – appreciation, rather than action. As we like to say, political art is not necessarily art about politics, but art that acts politically in the world.

**One of the projects run by the CAA is the School for Creative Activism, a training program for grassroots activists. Could you tell us about those workshops? What can activists expect from them?**

On Friday we give an overview of what artistic activism is and isn't and cover contemporary examples. Saturday, we go through the history of this work – usually going back 2000 years or more with some big gaps along the way. The rest of the day is a mix of lecture, discussion, and activities around cultural, cognitive, and mass communication theory. Sunday is hands-on practice where we put all we've learned into play on a sample campaign. We're both professors and teachers. Duncombe has a doctorate in sociology and has extensive activist roots and Lambert brings his expertise in communications and fine art. We take all this information, condense it, and make it relevant and useful for working activists. We also get a few artists in the room to add perspective.

**Do you have a couple of examples of workshops that lead to particularly fruitful actions? Which brings me to the question you ask to the artists you interview: "How do you know if it works?" What are the criteria that help you establish whether a work has had any social or political impact?**

The first question to ask is "What was the artist trying to do?" If an artist set out to be successful in the art market, there's no real sense in being critical of their lack of political impact because that wasn't their intention. Better questions are, did they succeed in what they set out to do? And were those goals ambitious enough?

**Have artists and activists the same definition of what constitutes a successful action?**

No. That's both the problem and the promise of artistic activism. Activism tends to be very instrumental: the goal is to change power relationships and you have clear objectives that result in demonstrable change in the "real world." Art tends to be expressive, interested in making something new and unique. With art there are indirect results, or perhaps no instrumental result at all. And most art is experienced outside of the "real world," in special refuges like

museums and galleries. These are often at cross purposes to one another. They are often hard to reconcile. It's not easy! It is an art. But when you can do it, it makes for powerful activism (and profound art).

Case 9:
Activist Art: How is it Affected by social media?
Pauline- April 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2017
Link: <a href="https://medium.com/@tlnlndn/online-artivism-digital-narratives-unite-the-world-1a92addc3526">https://medium.com/@tlnlndn/online-artivism-digital-narratives-unite-the-world-1a92addc3526</a>

Art is a meeting with the unknown. We inhale it and transfer into a theatre of perceptions, which brings a reaction to the notional and aesthetic, as well as an emotional hint of the unpredictable. It's a move forward that changes people. There, an artist meets an activist — in a process of change, in a force that impresses and impacts. In the postcapitalist era, with the almost global spread of the internet, the merger of the two often happens in the digital space rather than in the physical space. An increasing number of activists choose to work online, preferring the media of Facebook, Instagram or YouTube to good old-fashioned graffiti, happenings or live installations, in order to address a large audience. The goals vary from the traditional struggle against politics of the capitalist system and the commodifying of the arts to environmental and feminist issues. But can the technologies compete with emotions, screen with a face, or is online activism trapped in the egocentric cartoon personality of an online-engaged artist?

Dada has become Data. The Internet has evolved into a mass medium, with a deeper and wider cultural reach, greater opportunities for distribution and collaboration, and more complex corporate and political realities. Today, tweeting and blogging means raising public awareness, which is an essential step for organizing the protest. The Internet has truly become the best platform for impacting the world and will soon turn demonstrations into history.

The Internet has changed the conception, perception and distribution of art. It's harder than ever to maintain the copyright and a freedom of speech, and easier to lose the fight against consumerism, mass production and government surveillance. However, activists have learnt to use the new reality in their creative protest. The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei is one of the most prominent examples in this regard. Ai openly supports the idea that social media is an important tool for revolting against the existing political system. Since 2005, he has implemented an array of digital mediums to communicate and interact with his followers, both within China and worldwide.



Apart from using Twitter and Instagram, as well as having created numerous satirical memes and online videos, audio recordings and photos, the artist's best-known digital activism is blogging. For more than four years, Ai provided a worldwide social commentary, criticized Chinese institutional power, and gave his thoughts on art. He wrote about the Sichuan earthquake (and posted a list of the schoolchildren who died because of the government's 'tofu-dregs engineering'), reminisced about Andy Warhol and the East Village art scene, described the irony of being investigated for 'fraud' by the Ministry of Public Security, and made a modest proposal for tax collection. Ai's online activism led to his persecution for "tax evasion" by the Chinese authorities, and on June 1, 2009, his blog was shut down. Later, there was the artist's arrest and demolition of his Shanghai studio in 2011.

After the artist was refused by Lego to receive the Lego blocks for his prospective artwork about free speech at the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia for an *Andy Warhol/Ai Weiwei* (2015) exhibition in December two years ago, he was inundated with contributions by his supporters who saw his appeal on Twitter. Although it's unknown whether the last December exhibition could potentially lead to the change in Chinese governmental politics, society's hands-on support of the artist and its eagerness to act speaks for itself.



Case 10:

WEARING YOUR POLITICS ON YOUR SLEEVE: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL COLOURS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS The Useful Uselessness of Art Activism

Yvonne Lake – January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019Link: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/>

The extent to which art may be effective as activism is difficult to analyze. For one thing, such artworks vary considerably in their media and treatment. Artistic activity and production also take place within a wider culture, where ideas cross-pollinate between different fields of the arts and sciences, making the influence of art alone difficult to isolate and measure. In his 2014 essay “On Art Activism,” art critic, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys outlines the prerequisites for art activism’s success, as he sees them: a combination of design aestheticization and art aestheticization.

Design aestheticization is defined as the improvement of a tool by making it more pleasing to use. This could mean, for example, an update to a smartphone that makes the interface more intuitive but may also include symbolism associated with a political regime to make it more appealing. To admit that Nazi uniforms and paraphernalia are aesthetically pleasing is considered taboo and even some of our most treasured musicians have been chastised for doing so. Whilst I have nothing but contempt for the nature of Nazi ideology itself, to deny that its symbolism is aesthetically pleasing is to ignore the fact that it was created for that very reason, to seduce the masses into submission. In the context of art activism, design aestheticization would similarly involve enticing the viewer by illustrating a better, more appealing method of functionality for a targeted social system.

Art aestheticization, on the other hand, is the opposite of design aestheticization: it involves the reduction of a functional object to something dysfunctional and purely for display. The reason for employing this mode, Groys argues, is to critique a current system by presenting it as already dead. He provides as his example the permanent exhibition of Lenin’s corpse, as ordered by Stalin, which Groys claims was designed to kill off any longings for a return to Leninism. He adds that this form of aestheticization is a more effective method of destruction than iconoclasm, since the visibility of the old order and its treatment as a dead object does not allow for any nostalgia. In the artistic sphere, Duchamp’s seminal *Fountain* employs art aestheticization by transforming the urinal into a dysfunctional, decorative object.

Art activism, according to Groys, lies at the crossroads of both design aestheticization and art aestheticization. Art activism seeks to improve the present condition through political design, whilst also accepting the failure of the status quo and prefiguring its implosion. This contradictory position is hailed as a good thing and supported by the enigmatic claim that “only self-contradictory practices are true in a deeper sense of the word.” Only art, he writes, can allow us to envisage a reality outside of our present desires and expectations.

Art has lost its fun to get around the mistrust of the viewer. The viewers are given only a reflection of their own interests in the artwork, flattering their group identity, rather than transporting them into another way of experiencing the world. Furthermore, as we are no longer allowed to indulge ourselves, without social pressure to feel duped or ashamed of our privilege, then to be made to feel *something*, we are given *the worst* instead. As in Groys’ theory of art aestheticization, we see the defunctionalisation of the functional, the presentation of the status quo as already dead. This all leads to an art that dare not be art anymore, lest it be accused of manipulation or exploitation. In its place, there is a cynical double bluff at play.

### Case Analysis

The researcher has analysed all ten case studies by drawing similarities and differences between them, to prove her hypothesis.

### Similarities

All case studies have a common thread: the underlying motive. In all the situations we see a similar pattern: Injustice towards an individual or group stirs up emotions which lead passionate groups of individuals to creatively act out and express their disappointment. The motive and goal remain the same in all: to spread awareness among the public, educate society, and preserve basic rights. In Case 1, George Floyd’s death and the waves of racism, inspired young art activists to commemorate his memory on murals, adorn roads, and develop apps to support the community. In the second case, the protesters are trying to bring into the limelight the arbitrary censorship from the

government over artistic rights. In Case 3, the public was being educated about the bourgeoisie nature of war officials, abortion rights, and cultural conflict. In the fourth case, we see the poster highlighting religious unrest to the community. In the fifth case, the experiment strives to show through public intervention the effectiveness of creative forms on people's views and beliefs. In Case 6, the activists raised a voice to demonstrate to the people the double standard nature of the political powers. In the seventh case, we see the different laws and regulations that can protect spirited activists and the interests of people in society. In Case 8 and 9, we see a strong message to the public through different forms of mass media. Lastly, we see examine the different techniques the people respond to when they are educated about their rights. Thus, all cases are spun around a common theme: to instil the community with the power of knowledge and develop an opinion.

Cases 3,4,6, and 9- All these cases showcase the different mediums and forms art activism can use to deliver its message. They provide examples and reasoning of when art activism went beyond the conventional platforms and experimented with innovative mediums. In case 3, we first see the concept of utilitarian art activism, which strives to find the function in dysfunction. Marcel Duchamp repurposes a urinal to help create an impactful message. This marks the beginning of using every day, seemingly vulgar objects to pass a satirical comment. Yayoi Kusama too explored as she staged actions in New York, counteracting violence with activism in the form of naked body painting happenings and orgiastic love-ins. This redefined conventional art activism and took it to new heights. In the fourth case, we see religious commentary through silkscreen flags, typography, cartoons, and comic strips. Art activism began not only to be reported in newspapers, but became a section of the newspaper through comics, cartoons, and memes. In Case 6, we see demolition of property and extensive use of public spaces for creative activism. A golf course was manipulated to mirror a cemetery, a short film was aired to create public awareness, and tombstones were repurposed as posters. The natural and man-made surroundings were 'positively vandalized' to deliver a message. In the ninth case, we see the emergence of the social media as a desirable platform for art activism. The global nature of the internet, the digital spaces, applications, and technology become a desired medium of communication. The Internet has evolved into a mass medium, with a deeper and wider cultural reach, greater opportunities for distribution and collaboration, and more complex corporate and political realities. Today, tweeting and blogging means raising public awareness, which is an essential step for organizing the protest. Thus, we see the evolution of art activism from Dada to data, murals to media, and posters to performance art.

Cases 1,3, and 6- These cases highlight the causes, process, impact, and evolution of protest art. Case 1 talks about racism as a trigger for protest and social movements. It illustrates how protest offers the right amount of resistance, the urge to create, and a needed racial reckoning. Protest art here through murals and painting helped document unique stories, create messages, and highlight the correlation between kinship and activism. Case 3 delves deeper into the variety of causes of Protest Art by tracing its evolution. Protest art is seen as a spirit of nationalism during the World War, a comment on communalism and socialism, and an eye-opener on abortion and feminism. The case drives home a similar message as the former: the power of protest art to question, challenge, and change the status quo. The sixth case talks about 'the art of protest'. It feels protest art can get people talking about important issues, it can get them to laugh at the people in power who work only to serve their own interests, and it can take back the streets and public spaces with a message to fight injustice. It highlights the 'quick and impactful' nature of this type of art. Thus, all three cases highlight the effectiveness of protest art in delivering messages to the greater society.

Cases 2 and 7- Both these cases highlight the laws and regulations associated with art activism. Case 2 talks about how the public challenged Cuba's decree 349 that regulated artistic and cultural activity through government censorship. Decree 349 allowed government officials to shut down concerts, performances, galleries, and art and book sales if they do not comply with the strict list of prohibited subject matter. It also restricted artists from commercializing their work without government approval. At the end, the case leaves us with a message: it is difficult to control the nuances of art, but formal/primary control is an increasingly powerful weapon that can be misused. Similarly, in Case 7, we see the controlling effects of laws and precedents on artistic freedom. We see both sides of the spectrum: regulations that curb rights and regulations that preserve rights. Some artists push legal boundaries while some get into a host of disputes involving copyright and trademark law. Thus, both cases highlight the curious relationship between these two fields by discussing limits of fair use, commentary photograph, and directed, satirical merges of politics and art.

Cases 5 and 10- Both these cases serve as a critique as they analyse this model of art activism and evaluate its merits, demerits. The fifth case proves art activism to be a desirable model through its research methods of experimentation, natural observation, and interview. It finds conventional methods to not be received positively and

records public responses to these methods as ‘boring’ and ‘annoying’. Comparatively it proves creative intervention to result in a greater response of signatures and larger demonstrated interest. Positive words like ‘interesting’, ‘novel’, and ‘thought-provoking’ were associated with the creative form of activism i.e., the performance art. The tenth case examines the usefulness and uselessness of art activism by analysing the techniques employed by these creative activists. It shows the technique of design aestheticization- the improvement of a tool by making it more pleasing to use- includes symbolism associated with a political regime which makes it more appealing. Thus, both these cases throw light on art activism as a powerful alternative and tool to create change and awareness.

Cases 8 and 9- Both these cases highlight the interdisciplinary nature of art activists. They highlight the use of academic knowledge in creating significantly powerful and meaningful work. Through an interview, Case 8 outlines the views of two eminent members from The Centre for Creative Activism. One has a doctorate in sociology and has extensive activist roots while the other combines his expertise in communications and fine art. They take all the information studied within an academic curriculum, condense it, make it relevant and useful for working activists. It highlights how a range of knowledge in different spheres helps add perspective, deliver clear objectives, and offer contemplation. The ninth case gives us a specific example of the use of academic knowledge in practical situations. Ai Wei Wei’s interest and studies in literature helped him start a social commentary movement through a series of blogs that created ripples among his community. His writings and articles on Chinese institutional power, fraud, and earthquakes helped revolutionize the impact of art activism. Thus, art activism is an interdisciplinary model for social movements that channelizes academic knowledge into creative outlets.

Cases 3 and 7- Both these cases throw light on feminist art activism. Here, the work transcends the political, religious boundaries and focuses on feminism and women rights in particular. In Case 3, Paula Rego’s canvas depicts a picture of a woman undergoing an unsafe abortion. It’s a powerful example of feminist protest art impacting on local and national views. It makes its viewers aware of women’s rights, the boons of abortion, and calls for support from all genders. The seventh case, we see a photographer who took a series of pictures of Barbie dolls, titled “Food Chain Barbie,” which included the famous doll in a series of poses, sometimes with food, and at other times accompanied by vintage kitchen appliances. The photographer, Walking Mt., used the photographs to comment on Barbie’s role in creating a culture that objectified women. Similarly, artist Barbara Kruger used a photograph of a woman with a magnifying glass. Kruger cropped and enlarged the image, and then superimposed three large red blocks containing words that read, “It’s a small world but not if you have to clean it.” She commented on the domestic expectations of women and their oppressed nature, status, and worth in society. Thus, both these cases highlight the plight of women, lack of knowledge, and efforts to educate both women and the individuals around them to take amending action.

### Differences

There is one thread of difference that underlies all the cases: the type of people involved, their profession, and other qualifications. In the first case, we see a major role of artists who decided to add meaning to their wall paintings by painting murals to commemorate the victims of racism. They were then supported by the other groups of activists and then the public further propagated their endeavors. In the second case, we see ‘pure painters and artists’ who previously had no interest in social activism. Once they started raising their voice, they were joined by other interdisciplinary artists and activists. Here, the public played the dominant role in speaking and signing the petition against the decree: it was started by the artists but brought into reality by the common citizens. In Case 4, we see authors assuming the role of an art activist as they challenge bigotry and drama through their literature. It is their work which is converted by the artist and illustrator community. The experiment was carried out by undergraduate, graduate students who had experience in these fields and the help of professors and experienced people in the field. The next case was presented by an anonymous mob/group called, ‘Indecline’. Their identity is unknown, but they are rumored to be a passionate group of activists. The seventh case is more formal as the people involved are professional and certified lawyers, artists, and conservators. In Case 8, we have two founders of a company/center talking about the disadvantages and advantages of this model. One has a doctorate in sociology while the other has one in communications and fine art. In the tenth case, we see the views of an art critic and media theorist who provides a third perspective to this model.

Cases 2 and 7- Although both the cases present a similar topic, the outcome of this law and art activism relationship differs. In Case 2, the public took it upon themselves to actively protest against Decree 349. It was the public against the government, and it was not a formal argument (regulated by court)- it was an unstaged series of protests. Thus, the outcome was more severe: the protesting people were arrested for public displays of deviance and anti-

nationalism. In Case 7, the matter was formally presented and argued in court, with lawyers, judges, and precedents. Since it was a more 'white-collar' in nature dispute, the outcome was settlements of big amounts, petitions to sue, disenfranchisement, and legal consequences. This just proves to show the differences between primary/formal control and secondary/informal control.

Cases 3 and 4- Although both these cases examine protest art, one describes protest art executed in an Indian cultural setting while the other describes it implemented in an American/Westernised society. We can draw many cultural distinctions based on differences in causes, impact, and reaction of the society. In Case 4, we see protest art challenging the bigotry and drama in India. The poster was inspired by literary writings and its aim was to defend the secular tradition and religious practices of India. I feel in India, the topics of protest art involve around religion and politics primarily and are adapted by literature. Moreover, the emotion the protest art evokes is a 'melancholic' reflection rather than collective or aggressive anger. In India, the medium of protest art remains two-dimensional and often the artist/activist is unknown. These qualities are in stark contrast to what we see in Case 3. In the third case, the artists and activists like marking their working- taking credit for their views. Anonymity is not heavily prevalent in the American/Western counterparts. Although the subject matter is political in nature, we see a miniscule amount of art activism that targets religion. There is also greater transparency about women rights. The medium of communication too differs. In the West, there is a desire for experimentation and new materials. We see three-dimensional murals, sculptures, performance art, and manipulation of public space and property.

Cases 5 and 8- These cases examine the effectiveness of art activism. What differs greatly is their research methodology and approach of evaluation. Case 5 illustrates the Copenhagen experiment- the first, and so far, only, public experiment comparing conventional and creative forms of activist interventions. Each day a conventional activist intervention: public speaking, petitioning, or flyer, was paired with a "creative" way of accomplishing the same task in a classic A/B experimental model. Volunteer observers watched interactions and took notes, interviewers stopped passers-by to ask their opinions and gather contact information, a camera person filmed the interactions to capture micro-dynamics and general movement patterns, and a survey was sent out two weeks later to inquire about recall and resulting action. There was a clear control and experimental group, a theory, a hypothesis, and experimenters. The eighth case is an interview with the founders of CAA- The Centre for Creative Activism. The research method here varies as a series of questions are posed to Steve and Stephen who then elaborate on the positive impact of their venture. In this research methodology, we see small ripples of social desirability effect and the disadvantages of an interview method creep in. Although the conclusion in both the cases is same- that art activism is more effective- the interview is considered by researchers as a marketing strategy rather than proof. This also gives us an insight into how differently audience perceives an interview to an experiment.

Cases 5,8, and 10 – We see two different ends of the spectrum here. Although all three validate the impact of art and activism, their views and researched conclusions differ. Case 5 and 8 advocates for the interdisciplinary model of art activism. Case 5 clearly declares art activism to be a superior model through the means and results of the Copenhagen experiment. They substantiate their theory with evidence of positive immediate response and vivid memory of the staged event. Case 8 recognizes both sides of the coin. It recognises the problem and promise of creative activism: the different definitions of successful actions. They concluded that activism tends to be very instrumental: the goal is to change power relationships and you have clear objectives that result in demonstrable change in the "real world." Art tends to be expressive, interested in making something new and unique. With art there are indirect results, or perhaps no instrumental result at all. And most art is experienced outside of the "real world," in special refuges like museums and galleries. These are often at cross purposes to one another. They are often hard to reconcile. But when you can do it, it makes for powerful activism and profound art. In stark contrast Case 10, opts for a negative view on this model. The researcher feels that art has lost its fun in an attempt to get around the mistrust of the viewer. Exhibitors present work to appeal to reasoning and vanity, rather than providing seduction via aesthetics. The viewers are given only a reflection of their own interests in the artwork, flattering their group identity, rather than transporting them into another way of experiencing the world. Thus, the tenth case calls art activism to be a cynical double bluff at play. Here we see the differing levels of opinion and trust in the interdisciplinary model.

### Limitations:-

1. **Limited access to information:** Research materials were restricted to websites and online journals as the access to books was limited due to the pandemic. It was time consuming to establish a significant trend and correlation

between the variables. The topic explored the role of art in some historic events. It was proved tricky to obtain such dated information from new portals of information.

2. **Standardisation:** This was a bit tricky as the topic chosen for the hypothesis was very subjective-there was a large scope for discussion. One of the variables of social movements provided a diverse range of confounding variables to my hypothesis as the cause, nature, and intensity of these movements differ in various cultural spheres. The dependent variable - the effectiveness of art activism- is a proposed theory implemented only recently, so it was difficult to generalise its impact throughout the changing times. However, majority of the details and cases expressed opinions in a way that supported the researcher's hypothesis.
3. **Lack of empirical or quantifiable data:** Due to the subjective nature of the topic, data was collected in the form of statements, beliefs, and actions. All of this information is difficult to quantify/ attach a number to. Thus, statistical support to the researcher's hypothesis was lacking and difficult to provide.
4. **Lack of previous studies on the topic:** The correlation the researcher chose to establish a connection between is a relatively new one. Although various information was available for individual subtopics, there were very few sources that helped the researcher establish her hypothesis. Connections and relations had to be formed and explored independently. The interdisciplinary model proposed by the researcher is one that is still becoming known to other academics, resulting in a greater skepticism. At the end, when the hypothesis was put to test, the researcher's predictions were confirmed adding validity to her prediction.
5. **Conflicts arising from cultural bias and other personal issues:** Cultural background, and folkways associated with ethnicity, race played a differential factor in this project. Areas where the researcher thought views would be uniform, presented different views and opinions on account of culture bias or prejudice. Personal issues and previous experiences and correlations also hindered effective establishment of links during the methodology process. It was a sensitive area of research as it involved combing two very emotional spheres of art and activism. Moreover, both these communities have often faced extreme criticism and have had their role suppressed by society, which led to personal experiences to cloud the potential this model has.
6. **Formulation of research aims and objectives:** The researcher's formulated research aims and objectives present a broad research field, which need to be narrowed and examined separately for a better conclusion and clearer scope of discussion. The word 'art' presents a wide definition containing a tangible or intangible culture that is creative and has an emotional basis. Social movements too are a broad field, reflecting many types and forms. Each of these sub-topics need to be set in isolation and observed from an individual perspective.

### Conclusion:-

To conclude, the researcher's hypothesis - Art activism is the transdisciplinary model social movements need to use to redefine their impact in society and contribute to societal change- was verified. Through an intense exploration of articles, experiments, and cases, it has become apparent that artistic activism is about the long game. Creating and sustaining lasting change demands a change in values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour, 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. While marches, rallies and protests are important, they won't have lasting impact unless the issues resonate with people.

Artistic activism draws from culture, to create culture, to impact culture. An artistic activist might craft an image that prompts people to rethink how we look at reality or stage a performance which calls into question what values and institutions are "normal" in a society, or create an artifact prefiguring an alternative, better world. In each case, expanding, and prodding what we consider normal, possible, or even conceivable. If artistic activism is successful, the larger culture shifts in ways big and small.

To change the world, we need to imagine what a changed world might look like. These "utopian" visions are useful for setting pragmatic goals and concrete objectives and provide a loadstone to orient our direction, so we don't get lost. Most important, these ideas and ideals inspire us to get up and out in the morning to change the world and attract others to work with us. Through sound and image and movement, artistic activism can conjure up a vision of what could be in the future and communicate it to others in the here and now. Art gives us the vision. Activism helps us make the road to get there.

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