



ART as Activism: The Influence of Visual Arts on Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of visual arts and social movements, examining how artists use their work as a form of activism, or "artivism," to address and challenge social issues. By investigating the historical and contemporary roles of visual arts in social movements, we provide a comprehensive understanding of artivism's potential and limitations. Through case studies of artists from diverse geographies and social contexts, we highlight how visual arts have been employed to inspire social action and foster collective identity. Additionally, we discuss the implications of integrating artivism into arts education to promote active social participation and engagement with global issues.

Keywords: Artivism, Visual Arts, Social Movements, Activism, Collective Identity.

INTRODUCTION

In the art world, a common question is, "How can artists enrich aesthetics and, at the same time, question social issues?" Society changes, and so does the art world. This article seeks to examine the real scope of visual arts' social participation, namely artivism, as an alternative to hegemonic and non-critical contemporary art practices. We present artivism's current limitations and effective working strategies for challenging relevant situations through investigating specific experiences in different political and social contexts. The authors aim to provide a comprehensive study of the relationship between artists and society by evaluating the dynamics of the art world from the perspective of responsible social action [1, 2]. Thus, the objectives of this paper were threefold. The first aim was to create a clearer understanding of concepts such as social participation, activism, and artivism, linking this concept as a lens for visual arts. This study sought to identify practices rooted in the social realities of contemporary artists to describe how the visual medium reveals a critical voice, explores and interprets social realities, taking part in the spheres of temporal action. The second aim was to learn and discuss experiences of visual artists in different geographies (Indonesia, Mozambique, Brazil, France, Italy, and the USA) that work in order to inspire social action. These examples are intended to illustrate pluralities of the social art participation, ranging from collaborative and community art to popular visual arts and counter-culture. Understanding these dimensions, the final aim was to infer about the role of arts education in the photos presented with regard to artistic education, making room for active social participation while also tackling controversial issues, embracing interactivity, collaboration, and commitment [3, 4].

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ART AND ACTIVISM

In order to align art and activism, a deeper understanding of the historical connections between social movements and creative action can be useful. Collective groups of people have engaged in joint efforts to end wars and rectify economic injustices throughout history; while the contemporary approach to social movement organizing often prioritizes tasks and accomplishments, action in more collective spaces brings people together and helps to maintain organized resistance. Social movements are also deeply invested in creativity and the expression of collective identity through culture and art. From the creation of pamphlets and posters to the performance of songs and dance, art "creates a sense of collective identity" and bolsters the confidence and morale of those engaged in social protest. This historical and ongoing

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connection between activism and art addresses the connections between art, social change, and "aesthetic cosmopolitanism" - the desire to be artistic and cosmopolitan that is connected to broader struggles for social justice [5, 6]. Drawing on a historical understanding of the role of art in social movements, this article examines the ways in which visual art has the ability to influence the framing of political struggles and the formation of identity and collective memory. Art influences viewers' thinking and actions, helping to put a face to social suffering or make art an essential tool through which people can understand the complicated nature of social movements themselves - helping to foster an "expanded understanding of 'us' in the communities of suffering." In particular, scholars have placed a great amount of focus on the role of visual arts within street protests; whether as the protest catalyst, for the skilled production of movement materials, inside or surrounding protests, or essential tools within government interventions, art is a ubiquitous tool of collective action for social and political change. By understanding art as essential to social change, it is possible to define and clarify the role of art within social movements in order to see how it transforms societies. Movements - even those that do not succeed in their specific aims - are nevertheless able to move societal resources around, transforming the power relationships in existence at a given time [7, 8].

KEY CONCEPTS IN VISUAL ARTS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

One of the biggest challenges in interdisciplinary work is developing a dialogue that is comprehensible outside of the jargon-rich confines of one's discipline. In this section, I provide brief overviews of three key concepts in this paper: art, social movements, and visual representation. These concepts are not comprehensive in their exploration of each domain, but are merely designed to provide non-expert readers with an introduction to the terms as I use them in this paper [9, 10, 11]. Art can be anything, the work of action through presentation. As an action, art engages participants in complex ways. The "artist" brings materials and skills specific to the creation of image, sound, object, or phrase to the meeting between "art" and participant. These new forms affect participants visually, aurally, or rationally through image, sound, and language sequentially and/or simultaneously. Art also reaches participants on an emotional level - sometimes by intensifying previously held beliefs, but also in ways that transgress cultural or individual norms. When it comes to defining art, however, artists and scholars have no concrete boundaries. The resulting diversity in its creation and effect is vast. In order to understand how the visual arts influence social movements, I conduct a descriptive analysis of the visual record of four first wave feminist organizations through their printed visual materials [12, 13].

CASE STUDIES OF ARTISTIC ACTIVISM

Barbara Kruger, a feminist artist in the 1980s, appropriated mass media to make political statements against the media's images of women and their representation. In *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, bold text stating "Your body is a battleground" is laid across a black-and-white photograph of a woman, while beneath the words "I WANT. I NEED. I MUST HAVE." are repeated in red. The artwork's dramatic coloring and use of a female face powerfully conveys the message of feminism. Women in the 1960s and 1970s fought to have the right to control their own bodies, so Barbara Kruger has created this artwork to remind women what they achieved [14, 15]. To mark the Women's March in 2017 when US President Donald J. Trump took power, Kruger transformed the cover of New York's Sunday paper, so that "Who will write the history of tears?" was boldly positioned over the faces of people marching. The title *The New York Times* was appropriately changed to *Her New Times* to emphasize the feminist objective. Kruger's art page and information were created to be downloaded, printed, and added to the newspapers being sold on that day, expanding the message beyond the newspapers' subscribers and targeting the wider public [16, 17]. Barbara Kruger states, "I'm not saying I can change the world, but I believe that art—at its best—inspires people to think about the world." This powerful message to inspire society continued with her artwork concept *Untitled (For John Lennon and Yoko Ono)*. Using mass media, Kruger challenged her viewers' thinking by asking them "Whose values?" placing these chilling words over a smiling, white couple after celebrating their wedding. These artworks confront the viewer, asking us to consider whether the advertisements presented in daily life are promoting truth and genuine values, or are being pushed upon us to further a corporate agenda. In addition to visual arts, performance art has also played a significant role in conveying powerful messages and promoting social change [18, 19, 20].

THE FUTURE OF ART AS ACTIVISM

The future of activism involves innovation and creativity. As our highly publicized, globally connected society is made to absorb more crucial stories and ideas, people become desensitized. But the images are the instantaneous attention-grabber to which the written word then constructs itself. It is said that 50% of one's brain is involved with just seeing. The focus we have on negative news often creates a bleak,

defeatist humanity. Desensitization to plights of misfortune, terrorism, racism, and ignorance alters perspectives. Those in battle are not personal to us because we have failed to receive them as persons, or goods worth value. The barrage of images to which human souls may become buried under provide no positive, spiritual drive to inform large groups in an uplifting and educational manner. Art provides this elite attribute [21, 22, 23]. When art as social consciousness features into schools and such programs teach young, lively minds what manifold art can do, much needed freshness to such messages' capacities are met. By creating a significant inward rapport of communication from self outward, people of various global locales can become more appreciated. Young generations see what adults have failed to recognize, awareness solutions are fostered. Through looking closely at art, new, private involvement in global issues is unleashed. Second and third generations become adept themselves at assessing the picture surrounding a problem or issue. Let us not forget, Progressive Education has much to do with seeking to improve one's social living unit and the group relation. Home town pride stretches far towards networked global-unity. Art, incorporating every other learning subject, stimulates communities to grow. The map of the world shows not merely physical dimensions, but social, spiritual, and moral betterment. With raised expectation to develop productive humanity, children realize we share fundamentally realized dreams of our thanks bequeathed to freely learned visual arts [24, 25, 26].

CONCLUSION

The fusion of art and activism, or artivism, has demonstrated significant potential in influencing social movements and effecting change. Historical and contemporary examples reveal that visual arts can amplify voices, foster collective identities, and challenge hegemonic structures. Through the lens of artivism, artists across the globe have employed their craft to address pressing social issues, from gender equality to political resistance. Integrating artivism into arts education can further empower future generations to use creativity as a tool for social engagement and transformation. As society continues to evolve, the role of visual arts in activism remains crucial in shaping a more just and equitable world.

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