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# Feminist Artivism: The Personal is Political. Art, Decoloniality, and New Feminine Imaginaries

*Almendra Espinoza Rivera*<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In this article I propose that feminist activism is articulated as a contact zone between art and socio-political movements, an articulation that today is expressed with particular strength among Latin American feminisms. I also argue that feminist activism de-eliticizes and cracks the colonial guidelines of the fine arts, both in its theoretical production and in its artistic praxis. The new aesthetic proposals of feminist activism invite us to use artistic platforms as a form of protest against the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist violence exercised on our feminine racialized bodies. Moreover, feminist activism places at the service of feminist social demands, inviting us to deconstruct the imaginaries of the feminine and to denaturalize patriarchal violence. In this text I expose some feminist activist works to exemplify some of my main ideas. Also, related to the exhibition “Reclaiming the body: feminism, territory, and community” organized by *Un curso propio* (2022), an academic-activist group to which I belong, I briefly present the installation *Mujer Basura* by the collective La Marcha de las Putas BS.AS.

**Keywords:** Artivism • Latin American feminisms • decolonization and de-eliticization of art • patriarchal violence • female image

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## Introduction

Colonial hegemony not only includes questions of power, authority, and credibility, but has also shaped aesthetic representations in culture over the centuries. In this way, arts have become an efficient tool to fix the narratives and ideologies of those who hold the authoritative voice to define aesthetics, canons, imaginaries, what is beautiful and what is not. I found it very interesting to discover that the present debates regarding the essence of art, its purpose, and its aesthetics are essentially a post-neoliberal continuation of what had already been raised in the 60s and 70s about art and politics, as Nelly Richard did in *Lo político en el arte: arte, política e instituciones* (1997) (*The Political in Art: Art, Politics and Institutions*) or Lucy Lippard in her essay “Trojan Horse: Activist Art and Power” (1984). With this background in mind, I believe it is no coincidence that current artistic-cultural expressions question capitalism, and embrace decolonial and intersectional visions, which are beginning to penetrate the academy, and those institutions that claim the right to produce and validate knowledge.

In the case of Latin America, I believe that the contribution of feminist art to the new decolonial epistemes is undeniable, which reminds me of the words of Anibal Quijano and his call for “*revolución epistémica*” (epistemic revolution) from all fronts (Quijano 2014). What is woven in Abya Yala between the artistic and socio-political spheres is not accidental. In a territory scarred by social conflicts, racialised actors, impoverished and violated by a modern colonial system (Espinosa Miñoso 2016), the art scene could only be an instrument to capture and respond to these problems. And it is precisely in this conjunction between the socio-political and the cultural where Latin American feminisms articulate a new way of producing and narrating the artistic and aesthetic. In this sense, as a feminist and Latin American woman, I find it fascinating to witness the articulation between artistic praxis and the feminist gaze by artistic-cultural collectives and groups, such as Guerrilla Girls or LASTESIS, to name just a few. And likewise, how these practices connect with the theoretical and critical development of art history, in thinkers such as Griselda Pollock or Catherine McCormack. In both cases, artists and art thinkers open new doors to rethink art and the place of the feminine in cultural production. On the one hand, the transformative potential of art and performance is clear and necessary. Art from bodies and for bodies, collectivised art, appropriated through common experiences (LASTESIS 2019; 2021). On the other hand, women must write about women and bring women into writing to show their meanings and significance into the history of art. Women begin to reclaim knowledge of themselves, of their fantasies and pleasures, they begin to relate the uniqueness of their bodies and their languages (McComarck 2021).

When female artists began to play a more active role and made both their art and its power within activism more visible, they took a more direct and confrontational approach in their choice of subjects, using a language that left no one indifferent. It can be about pleasure and empowerment; it can tell us that there is no one way to be a woman, it can tell us about the struggles that women went through throughout history, throughout colonialism, throughout the development of racism, throughout the development of capitalism. There is an enormous power to mobilise consciousness because of the dialogues between women’s narratives of art history and feminist artistic productions.

From both fronts, spaces are opened and promoted for new visual practices that do not ignore the political and the social. The well-known phrase “the private is political” penetrates the praxis and theory of contemporary art with new airs. In this sense, activism presents a challenge for Latin American feminisms, and for the Global South, as it resignifies traditionally colonial spaces<sup>2</sup>, proposing other ways of inhabiting them, making visible and contextualizing phenomena hidden by colonization<sup>3</sup> to disarticulate them. Similarly, for art history, this cultural revolt implies looking more closely at the artistic production of activism and thinking critically about the diversification of the aesthetics of the feminine.

Finally, it is in this context that the exhibition “Reclaiming the body: feminism, community, and territory”<sup>4</sup> held in the German city of Heidelberg, in November 2022 displayed the proposal of more than fifty Latin American feminist art collectives, which, through different techniques such as weaving, photography, performance, video, among others, defy the mandates of the fine arts, the Western aesthetic ideal, and masterfully reveal the multiple patriarchal violence. The ‘body claim’ implies a new construction of the feminine imaginary, challenging the “male gaze” and its judgment of the female body as a mere object of contemplation. To exemplify the contact zone between art, society, and feminism, I briefly address one of the performances exhibited in Heidelberg, entitled *La Mujer Basura* (The Trash Woman), a work elaborated by the Argentine collective La Marcha de las Putas BS.AS. The work was exhibited through a photographic montage of eight images that show the artistic intervention in two scenarios: in an open landscape and the other in the middle of the urban space in view of passers-by. *La Mujer Basura*, fully complies with the idea of critically deconstructing the institutionalism of art and aesthetics. Inviting us to rethink the place that the feminine has occupied as object-subject, not only under the creation of the “male gaze”, but also in artistic-cultural expressions, which as activism indicates, are representations of society, politics, and power relations throughout history.

2 As Quijano and Wallerstein explain (*La americanidad como concepto, o América en el moderno sistema mundial*, 1992) coloniality began with the creation of a set of states assembled in an interstate system of hierarchical levels. Those at the bottom were formally the colonies. But that is only one of its dimensions, for even once the formal status of colony was over, coloniality did not end; it has persisted in the social and cultural hierarchies between the European and the non-European. A way of investigating the colonial matrix in artistic practices in Latin America is to analyse its counterpart; artistic practices that are denouncing, questioning or criticizing this colonial matrix; experiences that seek to break with these colonial legacies.

3 Hidden by colonization as structurally patriarchal violence: state, institutions or public order. As expressed in the song of the feminist collective LASTESIS:

It's the pacos (police).

The judges.

The state.

The president.

The oppressive state is a male rapist.

Original version:

Son los pacos (policías).

Los jueces.

El estado.

El presidente.

El estado opresor es un macho violador.

4 It was organized by the interdisciplinary discussion group *Un curso propio* in collaboration with Karne Kunst and Xochicuicatl from Berlin. For more information visit the website <https://uncursopropio.com>

## *La Mujer Basura* (The Trash Woman)

Las mujeres de la bolsa somos muchas y salimos de ella para que no haya ni una menos. Hay una historia política de la bolsa. Si la cartera era mítica-mente revoltijo cosmético, dejó de serlo cuando escondió armas revolucio-narias, panfletos militantes, cuadernos de estudio, libros y planos; la bolsa la amplía y hace funcional. ¿Y la bolsa de basura? sacarla implica expulsar afuera del hogar los desechos de la vida productiva. Cuando aparecieron las bolsas de consorcio, el objeto pasaba del espacio que el feminismo llamó del trabajo invisible a herramienta laboral del encargado de edificio; la utilería del asesino hoy incluye la bolsa y el container, la cloaca y el pozo ciego en donde la razón práctica devela un horror semiótico: las mujeres son basura. [...] Que la bolsa se transforme en el símbolo del luto popular y compromiso para que no haya ni una menos.

(María Moreno – Museo del Libro y de la Lengua, Buenos Aires)<sup>5</sup>

I chose the performance entitled *La Mujer Basura* (The Trash Woman)<sup>6</sup> (fig. 1-8) since it concentrates and exemplifies the conjunction between the personal as politic (Hanisch 1969) and the relation between art and politic. On the one hand, the political content of the performance as well as the collective work behind it, perfectly embody the conjunction between art, activism, and feminism. On the other hand, the taking of public space (such as demonstrations, parks and neighbourhood public spaces frequented by citizens) challenges the institutional traditionalism of art through an aesthetic that subverts the female image, which in turn challenges society about a real problem, feminicide, but that by now seems to have been natu-ralized.

5 “There are many of us women in the bag and we came out of it so that there is not one less. There is a political history of the bag. If the purse was mythically a cosmetic jumble, it ceased to be so when it hid revolutionary weapons, militant pamphlets, study notebooks, books and plans; the bag enlarges it and makes it functional. And what about the rubbish bag? Taking it out implies expelling the waste of productive life from the home. When the consortium bags appeared, the object passed from the space that feminism called the space of invisible labour to the labour tool of the building manager; the props of the murderer today include the bag and the container, the sewer and the cesspit where practical reason reveals a semiotic horror: women are rubbish. (...) Let the bag become the symbol of popular mourning and commitment so that there will not be even one less”. Translation by the author. The original text can be found in the following link: <https://latfem.org/maria-moreno-una-lectura-politica-de-la-bolsa/>

6 Installation by the Argentine collective La Marcha de las Putas BS.AS. More information about their work can be found at the following links [https://www.facebook.com/MarchaPutasBA/?locale=es\\_LA](https://www.facebook.com/MarchaPutasBA/?locale=es_LA), <https://linktr.ee/paulanaanimtelis>





Figs.1-8. *La Mujer Basura* by Colectivo La Marcha de las Putas BS.AS, photos by Patricia Ackermann documenting the performance, 2018 exhibited at "Reclaiming the Body: Feminism, Community, and Territory." Heidelberg, 2022. Taken from the Exhibition "Wir Kämpfen" Karne Kunst and Xochicuicatl, Berlin 2018-2021.

*La Mujer Basura* (2016) initiates a ritual of passage for the emancipation of women through a performance work that repairs the memories of victims/prey while denouncing rape culture. By synchronicity, by inspiration, by empathy, the symbol of the Woman in the Bag became art, journalism and action, uniting all the denunciations in a single icon.

*The trash woman* situates the real in her reality. If performance places the appearance of the body as a central element in the constitution of the work, what distinguishes *Trash Woman* is that she presents a body that is more than a work, it is the real: Her presence announces that the work is alive but that the real is dead.

*Trash Woman* bursts into space, crushing time, presents femicide and gives a true testimony that shows that it cannot be justified or romanticised in any way.

The activist work *La Mujer Basura* appropriates the public space, making the invisible visible, reclaiming the body and denouncing the violence to which it is subjected. Like *La Mujer Basura*, the performance allows to exhibit the conditions of inequality of women, and more concisely, the consequences of patriarchal violence. Authors such as Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker (1987) have argued that performance exempts itself from the restrictive and traditional character of artistic montage, allowing it to embrace hybrid and transdisciplinary artistic expressions, granting a creative freedom that presupposes an escape from the institutional impositions of art. Performance offers feminist activism the possibility of creating new meanings, since it does not need to respond to an overwhelming history, prescribed materials and forced contents. In this sense, *Trash Woman* through performance recovers the ritual function, as the origin of the arts, undifferentiated and as an experience for the (re-)evolution and transcendence of subjects and communities. It creates a point of congruence between bodies, the surrounding environment and collective memory. For messages and symbols to circulate in a creative, ecstatic, multisensory and transpersonal way, with the purpose of invoking a greater knowledge of reality and its becoming (Naanim Telis 2016).

*La Mujer Basura* expressly creates that nexus between body and activism, where women become subject and object of action, where the bodies exposed, as female bodies, know that they have been massacred, disappeared to be prostituted, exhibited and beaten, and communicate in situ, how the culture of rape and patriarchal violence coerces them, and that what each body embodies in individual terms extends equally to the whole social body. In this sense, subjectivity is intertwined with political, historical, cultural, sexual, and ideological meanings (Mayer 2004). The symbol of the woman in the bag became art, journalism and action uniting all the denunciations in a single icon (Naaim Telis 2016). This woman places the real in her reality, where the performance places the appearance of the body as a central element in the constitution of the work, making the trash woman a representation of a body rather than a work: “Su presencia anuncia que la obra está viva, pero que lo real está muerto” (Her presence states that the artistic work is alive, but that the real is dead) (Naaim Telis 2016, w.p.). *La Mujer Basura* bursts into the public space presenting again the act of femicide as if it was true; it is more of a real-time recreation than a factual act. It confronts the social legitimization of the murder of women and the naturalization of patriarchal violence as part of women’s lives.

The performance challenges the “male gaze” (Mulvey 1989) in art and the historical objectification it has drawn on the female corporality: its claim to possess it and sculpt it for its use and discarding. These women break with the patriarchal archetypes of saint, mother, maiden, prostitute, witch.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, the pleasure of looking has been divided into active/masculine and passive/feminine. The “male gaze” projects its fantasy onto the female figure,

which is stylised accordingly. In her traditional exhibitionist role, the woman is looked at and exhibited at the same time, and her appearance is coded to cause a strong visual and erotic impact, so that she can be said to connote being looked at. In the face of this description, *La Mujer Basura* breaks with the erotic and the passive, because through its narrative, through the montage of her putrid murder, questioning and pointing directly at the patriarchy, reproaching it for its femicide crimes.

*La Mujer Basura* uses the female body as a tool for protest. It challenges the history of Western art that has hung or sculpted female flesh for the use and enjoyment of the “male gaze”. *La Mujer Basura* masterfully elaborates the claim of collectives such as the Guerrilla Girls came up with that question as early as 1989: “Do Women have to be naked to get into the museum?” (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-ricardo-colmenares-melgarejoworks/guerrilla-girls-do-women-have-to-be-naked-to-get-into-the-met-museum-p78793>) The colonial and patriarchal history of art, which exhibits in cabinets and museums these female bodies without agency, must now confront the exhibition of these bodies on the street. Likewise, the woman inside the bag creates a disruption of the passive body exhibited for male enjoyment, as happened for centuries with the consecutive production of the Rokeby Venuses (McCormack 2021). Here, the fantasy of enjoyment is abruptly interrupted by femicide.

*Trash Woman* cleverly plays with the same elements that the “male gaze” and the history of art have exploited and profited from: a female flesh, naked, lying down, passive, but no longer useful for fantasies of ‘enjoyment’, because it is dead flesh and speaks about its death with a clear message: “the rapist is you” (LASTESIS 2019; 2021), the murderer is the patriarchy in its various forms, and in the one that concerns me in this work, in its perhaps most massive form and at the same time detached from all ideological responsibility: art. Finally, it seems to me that feminist activism, and performances such as that of *La Mujer Basura*, fully comply with the idea of critically deconstructing the institutionalism of art and aesthetics. Inviting us to rethink the place that the feminine has occupied as object-subject, not only under the creation of the “male gaze”, but also in all artistic-cultural expressions, which as activism indicates, are representations of society, politics, and power relations throughout history.

## Artivism or Activist Art: Zone of Contact between Art and Politics

The relationship between art and socio-political struggles is not new, nor is the relationship this conjunction has with collective artistic work. To name an emblematic case, this confluence happened at the time when the artistic avant-garde began to confront the dominant paradigms of Impressionism.

The historical avant-garde was characterized by bringing together artists in spaces of creative collaboration, who gradually began to abandon the ideals of capturing on canvas the ‘light’ and the ‘instant’, setting up as a new subject of inspiration the socio-political reality. The collective artistic work prior to World War II focused on creating sustainable alternatives to the



commodification of life, visions that became politicized with the advent of the postmodern era, nurtured by the social movements and the anti-war counterculture of the 1980s (Stimson and Sholette 2007). Theoretical references to artistic praxis with explicitly political implications began to develop strongly in the 1970s with the feminist movements in the United States and the leftist political movements in Latin America (Navarro 1989; Deepwell 2020). In an America differentiated by its north-south social and economic contexts but equally victimized by colonial structures of domination such as racism, patriarchy and capitalism, new forms of collective artistic work emerged that embraced these issues. In the 1960s and 1970s among artists and activists in North America it was stated that activist art had the quality of moving between art institutions, communities, and local political contexts. Such art was not assigned a genre, but rather a commitment to social change through a variety of methods and means more pragmatic than idiomatic (Lippard 1984). Meanwhile in the south, as occurred at the Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano de la Universidad de Chile (Institute of Latin American Art of the University of Chile) in the 1970s, there was a discussion on how art should place its instruments at the service of society so that its message could reach those repressed under dictatorship, empowering them with a revolutionary clarity. In this way, a revolutionary didacticism was proposed that could allow the artist to shake the critical conscience of society, pushing art and reality towards a utopia of social change pre-formulated by politics (Richard 1997). So far in the 21st century, from the contact between art and politics, there are some conceptual consensuses on the product between the two, which are known as artistic activism and activism. On the one hand, artistic activism is understood as a set of artistic strategies that transform the understanding of politics and ourselves within the power dynamics that structure everyday existence; in the substance of the infrastructures of economic, political and technological networks that frame the ways in which we experience reality (Thompson 2015).

On the other hand, and the definition that makes the most sense to me in the framework of what feminist art is and by the exhibition “Reclaiming the body”, is the one elaborated by Chela Sandoval and Guiselda Latorre (2008). For them, activism appears as a hybrid neologism that means work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism, and who are committed to the transformation of themselves and the world. In the origin and development of activism from the 1960s to the present, the influence of ‘mestizo’ or transcultural consciousnesses, as well as communities from or settled in the global south, seems undeniable. Such consciousnesses, which provide access to a myriad of cultures, languages, and understandings, require the ability to negotiate multiple worldviews. Through activism, a conscious awareness of conflicting identities is expressed, allowing them to create new angles of vision that challenge oppressive modes of thought (Sandoval and Latorre 2008). From the fusion of these identities and the gentrification and saturation of urban areas, the activists break the structure of conventional communication, bursting into the social space to draw attention and inoculate thought in their receivers. They do it through emotionality, subjectivation, rupture and invasion of spaces, adapting non-artistic means and times to artistic expression. Activism is therefore a call to action, making the viewer aware of his or her own power. This art comes to challenge traditional standards of aesthetics and beauty and subverts the very notion of aesthetic object. In a dynamic progress, activism changes materials

and media, practices and styles, roles, and rituals, and ceases to be idiomatic in the art world to become pragmatic in social life. Both intentions and 'doing' focus on the creative process itself rather than on the result (Aladro-Vico, Jivkova-Semova, and Bailey 2018).

In the 21st century, art in the Americas has been taken to the streets again to break with the elitism and academicism of culture, to denounce the racist and patriarchal view of the artistic subject/object. With new means and language, artivism or the political in arts, expose to the public the social problems that affect a territory impacted by colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Aladro-Vico, Jivkova-Semova, and Bailey 2018). Artivism nowadays challenges loudly political parties and governments, but also the new 'industry' of academia, the colonial roots of museums and the instruments of the European fine arts. In the present, artivism has shown its strength and relevance as art and social theory. In recent social movements on the (Latin) American continent, the political in art (Richard 1993) has served to represent realities and alterities, vindicating collective creative and reflexive praxis, in societies where the social network was torn apart thanks to the efficient shock policies implemented by the dictatorships of the late 20th century. By implementing a culture of consumption, it lobotomised the social circle and generated 'apolitical' actors without a voice, and even more, without an opinion. Artivism has allowed to raise narratives of the historical beings of the continent and has transformed Western aesthetics and techniques on the canvas, or on the wall, as well as in the spaces of thought, which are now defended by new knowledge-producing subjects.

## Feminist Artivism: De-eliticization and Decolonization of Art

Feminist artivism has played a fundamental role in the art/activism relationship, such as the use of different cultural expressions by feminisms in the 1970s, which attempted to form organisational structures for women to resist patriarchal propaganda, which denigrates and controls the imaginary of the feminine (Lippard 1976). In retrospect, it can be argued that feminist art has contributed to recovering peripheral expressive forms and, at the same time, has warned about the non-neutrality of language and art, promoting intersectional reflection on gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and social class. From here, the notion of individuality and artistic genius is questioned to promote collective experiences and to value the personal as political, as opposed to the supposed existence of art as a universal and neutral expression. The de-eliticization and decolonization of art has been central to feminist artivism. With the expansion of the modern world-system (Marcelle 2023), through colonization(s), it extended art as an autonomous activity, founding academies, museums, etc. The circulation of goods, ideas and people in the new world-system was reflected in the artistic production of different countries and communities, which adapted Western aesthetic norms to their local experiences and realities. The reproduction of coloniality in the so-called peripheral or Global South countries reserved art to the expressions of the hegemonic national culture and led the great majority of artists to try to imitate the currents of the Global North to obtain recognition from the hegemonic institutions of the artistic circuit. Faced with this scenario, decoloniality and de-elitiza-

tion take place through the practices of artist collectives, to which art researchers and critics are added. Through situated practices and discourses (Haraway 1988), and with diverse disciplinary tools, they rethink and challenge the ways in which aesthetics, art and its institutions have perpetuated the reproduction of the colonial structure of power. Furthermore, in order to decolonize and de-eliticize art and institutions, it is not enough to incorporate diversity into the power structure (such as the inclusion of racialized or feminized artists in exhibitions), but more importantly, to identify the positions of privilege and subalternity between individuals and institutions in the colonial power structure in order to dismantle it.

When doing my research for this article, I saw Bruno Piglhein's *Egyptian Sword Dancer* at the exhibition "Femme Fatale. Blick – Macht – Gender" at Hamburger Kunsthalle. The painting perfectly illustrates the idea of the "male gaze" over the feminine and colonized women, as the orientalization of this kind of women. It features an eroticized figure with a powerful, dangerous presence. The depiction resembles representations of the biblical temptress Salome. The subject's curly black hair, the exotic-looking jewellery and the title of the painting situate her in the Orient, not as a real place, but rather as a European construct, a fictional image of the Eastern world. The female figure is marked as 'other' set apart from the European society. Under the "male gaze", this 'kind' of women serves the purposes of distancing and detachment, it is an intended to legitimize the display of exoticization and objectification of women body (Femme Fatale 2023).

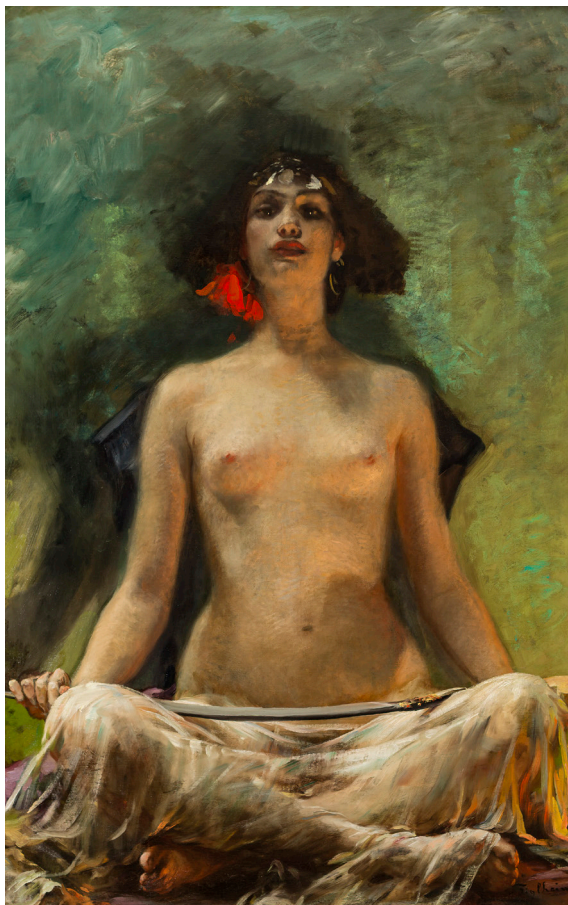


Fig. 9 Bruno Piglhein, *Egyptian Sword Dancer*, 1891, oil on canvas, 138 x 89 cm, private collection. Photo: wikimedia commons.

Feminist activism, on the one hand, not only calls to question the imaginaries that art produces about subalterns and women, but also to make public use of cultural platforms that have historically been dominated by white, bourgeois men. For feminist activists, art engages with feminist politics and politics reinvents art, contradicting the idea that feminist art is a mere aesthetic style (Deepwell 2020). On the other hand, the decolonial feminist artist consciousness has individual and collective narratives at its center under an intersectional gaze, that is, feminist activism, in addition to taking over the public space of cultural practices, makes visible and problematizes imaginaries involving gender, race, and class. Feminist activism challenges and rewrites the history of Western art, which has developed from a system that values the individual artist as a genius, perpetuating him or her in museums and the global art market. In this sense, feminist activism's ability to surprise, to appear in unlikely places (outside galleries and museums) or to take unfamiliar forms (performances in public space), provides the opportunity to circumvent seemingly immovable political ideas and moral ideals and to rethink cognitive patterns (Thompson 2015). Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect for me is that feminist activism has challenged the hegemony of the "male gaze" on object-subjects in artistic production. That is, the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1989) refers to the concept of the predominance of the male perspective that represents the systematic use of male control in society and its impact on it. This concept was attributed by the feminist film director and theorist Laura Mulvey who in the 1970s called attention to how women in "the seventh art"<sup>7</sup> were mostly portrayed as objects at the service of heterosexual male fantasies. The "male gaze" is applicable to other artistic genres and basically adopted in the different spheres of everyday life, as in the case of models of colonial and patriarchal domination (Femme Fatale 2023).

In short, feminist activism seeks to open new spaces and deconstruct the institutions of modernity and denounce forms of patriarchal domination, particularly violence against feminized bodies. To these ends, feminist activism makes visible the places of enunciation and builds relations of equality among the plurality of ways of experiencing the world.

## Feminist Activism: Denouncing Patriarchal Violence and Deconstructing the 'Feminine Image'

As I pointed out before, the emergence of activism is closely linked to "the personal is political", a slogan from which it follows and insists that individual experiences are directly connected to the collective. Feminist artists engage their gaze and their 'art pieces', to give visibility and voice in social reality to those subalternized subjectivities that fall on feminized and racialized bodies. A central axis of the genesis and existence of feminist activism is patriarchal violence. Among the first activist projects, the anti-rape movement (Bevacqua 2000) in the United States in the 1970s stands out, through which a collective exercise was carried out to collect the personal experiences of women and the need to change the act of rape as an act of "passion

7 "settima arte" was coined by the Italian film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo in 1921, considering filmmaking to be a new art combining the six previous arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, and poetry.

Marco Daniele. "Le Drame Visuel: Ricciotto Canudo e la settima arte." *Sinestesieonline* 6, 21 (October 2017): 1-13.

and sexuality instead of power” (Herrera 2020, 12). Here the role of art and its forms were fundamental; creating new collaborative visual languages that materialized the trauma, and that focused on the artistic process rather than the aesthetic art piece. Literature, performance, street interventions, site-specific projects, fanzines, among other artistic expressions, allowed defining and understanding violence in specific cultural contexts, and promoted and strengthened community organization and public participation and collaborative work (Lacy 2010).

In the present century, and particularly in the context of Latin American feminisms, feminicide has become the main issue of patriarchal violence. Based on feminicide, activism in the region is developing interventions and diverse cultural expressions with great mastery, which are undoubtedly woven in a flow that dialogues with the actors of socio-cultural and sociopolitical spaces, as well as with the intellectual and academic world. To better understand this collaborative process, it is necessary to recall the legacy of women's organization against state violence in Latin America, a violence that was accentuated during the dictatorships promoted in the continent under the influence of the United States in the framework of the Cold War. Then with the development of anti-neoliberal and decolonial theoretical frameworks proposed by feminist activists and academics, it was intended to move the structural criticisms that link neoliberalism and the State(s) with gender violence (Segato 2016), as well as to deconstruct the individuation process of neoliberalism, in particular on how neoliberal economics feminized poverty linking it to gender violence (Gago and Cavallero 2020). Feminist activist cultural proposals express a broad awareness of the potential of art and its role in social change. Feminist activism engages in critical and mobilizing artistic practices that seek to highlight the lives of those silenced under the shadow of patriarchal violence. This mission not only reinvents art and its manifestations but also calls for taking over traditional cultural institutions (museums, galleries, universities) and redefining the street as a field of socio-artistic interaction. Interventions in public spaces are accompanied by virtual actions that transform the places where women are subjected to daily violence; in these platforms, shared knowledge and recognition empower their actors as well as their spectators (Herrera 2020). Another important topic that feminist activism has rethought and shaped with mastery and creativity has been the classic imaginaries of the feminine in the field of art: saint, mother, prostitute, witch (McComarck 2021). Feminist art rebels against the subaltern condition of women, subverting the feminine in its passive, contemplative and stimulating condition for the “male gaze”. In line with the anti-rape movement and the fight against feminicide, the feminine assumes a conscious stance both in artistic production and in the theoretical field, adhering to the struggles in the social field, associated with civil rights, the denunciation of human rights violations, and the distribution of labor. The feminine is significantly re-dimensioned in the artistic field and subverts its passive role for an active one: when women use their own bodies in their artistic work, they are using themselves, a signifying factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject (Lippard 1976). Feminist activism redefines the feminine aesthetics of a feminist aesthetics, challenging psychoanalytic theory that cloisters femininity by the ‘absence of’ an unfinished form in contrast to the masculine, positively recovering the marginal character of the feminine and its performativity in limit situations, especially when confronted with the tensions imposed on it by dominant discourses. Nelly Richard (1993) defines “feminine



aesthetics” in art as the expression of woman taken as a natural, essentialist fact, and not as a symbolic-discursive category, shaped by the systems of cultural representation. Feminine art would represent a universal femininity, an essence of the feminine embodied in values and senses such as sensibility, corporeality, or affectivity. The feminine is the trait of distinctiveness-complementarity that alternates with the masculine, without questioning the philosophy of identity that regulates the inequality of the woman (nature)/man (culture, history, society) relationship sanctioned by the dominant sexual ideology. On the contrary, “feminist aesthetics” postulates woman as a sign involved in a “chain of patriarchal oppressions and repressions” that must be reversed through a consciousness that combats male superiority. In this sense, I agree with the Richards’ proposal that a feminist art seeks to correct the stereotyped images of the feminine that the masculine-hegemonic has subjugated. An art motivated by a critique of the dominant sexual ideology. An art that interferes with visual culture, disrupting the codes of identity and power that traditionally structure the representation of sexual difference to the benefit of hegemonic masculinity.

## Conclusions

Artivism claims the contact and result between artistic work and political militancy. On the one hand, the process and outcome of the art pieces no longer involve only a collective but are intended for a social body much broader than the one accustomed to traditional art institutions. On the other hand, the theoretical development of art history enters dialogue with decolonial theory and feminist theory, a dialogue that is situated in the eye of the crisis of the colonial-modern model and neoliberalism. According to the above, I would not hesitate to affirm that artivism, both in its praxis and in its theory, encourages a new collaborative movement that assumes an active role in social change, not only through radical intervention and critical reflection, but above all through the mediation and promotion of socio-cultural change and public access and knowledge.

In the case of feminist artivism, it is undoubtedly a perfect representative of “the private is political”, integrating in unison the different artistic-cultural expressions, the socio-political realities, and the proposals of feminist militancy. Whether in the institutional space of art or in street intervention, feminist activist works allow to disrupt the status quo of the colonial modern order, and at the same time denounce the structures of patriarchal domination that concern above all the feminine imaginary and the violence to which it is subjected (Verzero 2020). On one side, among the feminist activist practices, performance art stands out as a favorite art piece. This proposes new feminine archetypes, disobeying the mandate of the “male gaze”, traditionally modelling the female object-subject in the artistic work. On the other side, feminist performance and activist installations are erected from and for a collective ethos, transcending temporality and achieving a greater social reach, in terms of registration and dissemination. Through the interpellation to the standing public, the body is the support for the transmission of messages. Finally, feminist artivism has demonstrated eloquence over time. Through various artistic and theoretical exploratory processes, it has been able to unveil, denounce

and exhibit the structures of patriarchal and colonial domination, especially those that target women's bodies and the feminine. In relation to this long task, I think that the development of a new aesthetic is elemental to understanding any kind of artistic production coming from this activism. The capacity of aesthetic experience as a transformer of one's own perceptions of difference opens space for forms of knowledge that challenge cognitive, social, and political conventions (Kester 2011). It is precisely on such perceptions that the new aesthetics proposed by feminist activism promotes a critical analysis of the representations of the female body, which not only consists of evaluating what is represented and exposed to the public for consumption and internalization, but also who looks at it and in what space and time, asking ultimately where the power of the gaze resides (McCormack 2021).

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