The ‘Protest. Change. Action’ issue of Framework explores art as social activism, art protest and the potential for art to create change.

As Adorno famously stated “all art is an uncommitted crime”. By its very nature art is political, taking place in a public space and engaging with an already existing ideology and dominant discourse. From Picasso’s ‘Guernica’ 1937 in which captured the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War to John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s ‘Bed In’ against the Vietnam War, Pussy Riot’s post punk protests to Ai Wei Wei giving Tiananmen the middle finger, social action in art has permeated history. Art can open up a space for the marginalized to be seen and heard. Artists utilise art as a tool to evoke social change by producing knowledge and provoking action, solidarity and awareness, or simply as Richard Bell said, a means to “get away with almost anything in the name of art and not get arrested”. This issue is brimming with evocative and varied approaches to protest in contemporary art, bringing to light what it means to stand for something, and act upon that belief.

Thank you to the writers for their hard work and inspiring ideas, and thank you to the Arc UNSW Art & Design team for their sharp eye, zest and encouragement.

If you would like to contribute to the next issue of Framework please get in contact:

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Anna May Kirk
BUT WE HAVEN’T FORGOTTEN THEM.

EMMA-KATE WILSON

PHOTOGRAPHY EMERGENCY & DESIRE IN HONG KONG

LILY CHAN

CILDO MEIRELES: INSERTIONS INTO IDEOLOGICAL CIRCUITS

PHILIPPA LOUEY

ON THE BODY

CYMA HIBRI

WOMEN IN PROTEST

CATHERINE WOOLLEY

PROTEST.

CHANGE.

ACTION.

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'I walk therefore I shoot': Photography emergency & desire in Hong Kong

By Lily Chan
“DEAD POWER IS EVERYWHERE AMONG US”

The landing to Hong Kong was inarticulate, I once wrote, much less technically precise than I thought it would be—buoy declared itself, and there was a sureness as it hit the tar that was how surely I felt arriving in my father’s city. A sureness, as it turned out, to be short-lived as I began to photograph what I saw: the city in all its premature love, the poor merits, if any, of its public housing solutions, the density and roughness of the population, which had left many stray dogs sorely abandoned, and I saw them gleaming, asleep in pot plants along the sidewalk, sadly and peculiarly human-like. That summer we saw one of the worst fires in Ngau Tau Kau, a fire that engulfc a small storage industrial building for four whole days, and on most mornings, that was all I saw.

For a month I wrote on a small desk overlooking the city, mostly emails, detailing the banality and exhaustion of my days, the heat and my hopes for photographing. I had come to photograph. I had come, because when I arrived in Hong Kong that summer, I had just fallen out of love, and because I had re-discovered the joys of taking pictures and looking at them too: Raghubir Singh, René Burri, Pinkhassov; Sightwalk 1999 - in all its unfolding patterns of light and life. I had packed one book with me in my luggage, What is found there: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics by Adrienne Rich - thinking it might matter to me there, much more urgently even, as it had a year ago in some mild space of the library aisle when I was looking for other volumes of her poetry, and just when I was beginning to feel at a loss with my art.

“The impulse to enter, with other humans, through language, into the order and disorder of the world, is poetic at its root as surely as it is political at its root.”

But I did not read it again, nor had I written as much as I had hoped to, and instead I found myself travelling daily down the coastlines of the city, a mountainous bus route I enjoyed and often took again and again. It was on one of these occasions that I found a rock in which I could eventually lie upon, further away from anybody, than I had ever been, in the southernmost peninsula of Hong Kong island.

Here, in this city that has no mutual affection nor apprehension for my being, I only utter what I can, in the only language I know: the photographic utterance, which is the simple act of winding the film, and then click. The utterance.

These acts are small. I witnessed the ginger being clumsily prepared, the men in Kennedy Town with their soft-boiled eyes, who often sat, shirts covered in grime, outside car garages made of wasteland metal. In a metropolitan district far from the sea, a large shrimp flies out of nowhere, and it’s splattered body lies aghast, naked, in the middle of the bustling path. It is my small and immediate reaction to photograph this. The (uncontainable/unattainable) desires of the city in sharp intersection.

I wandered from one district to the next, photographing what struck me, at times, what was not allowed. Yau Ma Tei was a disarray of fruits, shredded cardboard, of panicked and pronounced sellers, and it was there in one of the crooked alleyways that I photographed a twisted body, his upper-half naked, so sufferingly cast under the yellow-green light. His mocking and disgruntled voice, more surprising than anything else, yells: what is there to witness? What is worth seeing about my dreadful, bright body?
I had always been ambivalent, doubtful perhaps, of the truly generative ways in which poetics could occupy, engage, most of all, meaningfully — with the material conditions of my milieu. I fumble to write this, because I feel these ambivalences, although I knew I am not the only one, nor am I the first to question why there is so little exchange between the two: poetics and politics, in our engagement with everyday life. Where political awareness is standard, but not poetic awareness, I have forgotten my fears, my desires, and I tremble to start where I might begin, the possibilities of how it might become.

“Dead power is everywhere among us,” Muriel Rukeyser writes, “in the forest, chopping down the songs; at night in the industrial landscape, wasting and stiffening the new life; in the streets of the city, throwing away the day,” — and I am reminded that where there are systems that deprive some voices to be heard and others to be silenced, then the very act of speaking (and hence the very act of picking up a camera) is a political one, and that the task to re-arouse it can be done by putting the eye to the viewfinder, or putting pen to paper.

So much of this space, a territory of inertia — the tendency of a body to maintain its state of rest or uniform motion unless acted upon.

Perhaps what I am looking for, in the seeds of what I write and in its unknown fruits, is a kind of knowledge more receptive, and much more imaginative...to the present and eventual becomings of the people in this city. That there might not be a seen/observed relationship between the world and photo-taking (as has been in the history of photojournalism) - but something much more discursive. Perhaps it was only in afterthought — a different kind of seeing - that I saw the little boy on the shoreline become part of a leaf in the distance, his body just beginning to latch onto the trunk; or the burden of long bamboo poles a man had been carrying, shared (only in photographic illusion) upon the shoulder of another man in quick passing. Sad remembrances, possible imaginings.

A photographic utterance which briefly spoke of another kind of utopia. My own, or his? A question I ask myself. There was the seeing of the moment, quickly captured by the camera, an act I reminded myself that was more than just witness. And then there was the afterthought, details I had not noticed, but said more about the history of my body, what I possibly yearned for in this city that was not my own, its own conditions of persistence and survival. The man, as he crosses my path, in slow ricochet. My memory, rewriting another kind of language, another kind of politics: another way of living. And so, as Rukeyser writes: We wanted something different for our people. Not to find ourselves an old, reactionary republic, full of ghost fears, the fears of death and the fears of birth. We want something else.

Image by Lily Chan
BUT WE HAVEN’T FORGOTTEN THEM.

Emma Kate Wilson
On Monday the 22nd of September The Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney’s CBD will be transformed into a spectacle of 15,000 bleached, gypsum plaster reinstated shields, organised on the ground. They will wrap the trees, extending beyond the physical layout of the gardens into the metaphoric space of the Garden Palace. The Garden Palace; an architectural masterpiece by James Barnet, big enough to fit six of the QVB within it, was created to exhibit “Australia’s blooming trade”. This dominating building was created in 1879 before it burnt to the ground three years later in 1882.

No one knows why the building burnt down, yet Jonathan Jones, a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi artist based in Sydney, is demanding we think about the horrendous tragedy.

Jones was the winner of the 32nd Kaldor Public Art Projects, in which artists were offered the opportunity to transform a part of Sydney with their “Very Good Idea.” Jones’s idea was one to which the audience are invited to examine the barrangal dyara, the skin and bones, of the Garden Palace. Whilst the Palace hosted trade exhibitions, it also became the prison for the largest collection of Indigenous artefacts. Items that they claimed to be from warfare were burnt to the ground, leaving a massive hole for many Indigenous Australians. Jonathan discovered the missing gaps trying to find his own family’s history and realised the huge scale of loss from the south-east communities of Australia. Alongside the “warfare” that was shown in the ethnological collections, the objects used by women and children were trapped in the basement. Hidden from the public to promote the imperial terra nullius, “nobody’s land”. Jonathan Jones draws upon the loss and pain of his physical connection to Country, hoping with this project no one else has to suffer the pain he felt 20 years ago.

From this loss Jones is demanding we pay attention to what happened in the Garden Palace by activating the space occupied by the shields with soundscapes from eight different language groups ranging from the Murray River up to Queensland. The gardens become a collaboration of sculpture and sounds from Sydney Language, Gamilaraay (Northern NSW), Gumbaynggirr (Along the Pacific coast, from the Nambucca River in the South to around the Clarence River in the North and the Great Dividing Range in the West), Gunditjmara (Western Victoria), Ngarrindjeri (lower Murray River, western Fleurieu Peninsula, and the Coorong of southern, central Australia), Paakantji (Mildura across the Victorian border to Queensland), Wiradjuri (central NSW) and Woiwurrung (central Victoria). Through these sound activated spaces, Jones wants the audience to engage with the stories of the land, taking language out of the classroom and into everyday life in order to connect with Country.

Jones has also created a native meadow of kangaroo grass, at the heart of where the Garden Palace’s dome once stood beaming out to the harbour heads. As you enter the grassland, a disruption to the formal elements of the garden, you can hear the Wiradjuri language of Uncle Stan Grant. He invites us “to remember.”

This echoes again through the children’s voices as they learn “to remember the knife” and then the teacher reminds them “to remember the knife’s edge”. The palace amplified the lies that were and continue to be told surrounding the importance of Country. Yet, the tall grass with its sculptural flower heads absorbs the audience into the history, questioning these narratives that the colonial powers had dominated for hundreds of years. Jones has worked extensively with Uncle Bruce Pascoe to understand the hidden truths of Aboriginal agriculture. Truths denied to us to prevent questions like: “Why do we Australians allowed sheep to mow it down?” Jonathan Jones will not let you hide from the truth today.
Wesley Enoch describes how the land has its own power. Perhaps the land underneath the Garden Palace was so scarred from the defoliation from the settlers it caused its own tragedy. Today the community are coming together to remember the loss, but as Uncle Stan Grant senior says about the language coming back onto people’s tongues: “it’s woken up now, and it’s going like wildfire, spreading everywhere.” The culture identities are echoes through the earth, and Jonathan Jones’s Project in the Botanic Gardens of Sydney allow us all to explore these truths. The great fire of 1882 caused so much devastation yet as an element of Country it helped cleanse the land, removing the imperial vision of the Garden Palace and brings us to barrangal dyara to let us reveal the layers.

Jonathan Jones and Kaldor Public Art Projects have worked together to build action in Sydney and Australia. Whilst the view of terra nullius is no longer accepted, stereotypes still exist. Racism is accepted as Australia’s dirty little secret. Barrangal dyara is bringing change, the poor treatment of Aboriginals should no longer be accepted, the language groups should be taught in every school bringing non-aboriginal children into the culture of Country they live on. This is sacred land and the sounds have meanings beyond what we can comprehend, instead, they exist as a place in which we lend ourselves to Country. Jones reflects on the change already happening in the two years that the project has been in development: Uncle Stan Grant has been awarded an honorary PhD and has featured in the New York times for his revival of language and Uncle Bruce Pascoe has been given the NSW Premier’s Book of the Year literary award for Dark Emu, his book investing the truths around Aboriginal agriculture.

Barrangal dyara is formed together as part of the communities who suffered the loss, the Gadigal Elders Uncle Charles (Chicka) Madden and Uncle Alan Madden have worked with Jonathan Jones and the Sydney Language to welcome the project into Sydney. You are invited to witness this amazing moment in history and most importantly to witness this project is not just about loss, but reawakening the language nationally and inspiring social change for every community.
Cildo Meireles: Insertions into Ideological Circuits

A glitch in the system.

By Philippa Louey
Political art is readily understood as a loud and confrontational beast, yet this need not necessarily be the case. Attention should be paid to the artworks that act as glitches in the system, those that disrupt and undermine political structures and their dominant ideologies. These artworks often reach out to viewers who may otherwise be disengaged with artworks of political critique.

Cildo Meireles' series 'Insertions in Ideological Circuits' employs such strategy by reclaiming mediums of ideological communication, and via appropriation and recirculation, he critiques political structures from within the very systems established to enforce their power.

Emerging during the 1960s (a decade often fetishized as the contemporary origin for radicalized political art and activism) Meireles came into adulthood during a period reverberating from cries of national and global political dissent. Whilst Modern premises of capitalist and imperial expansion were facing vicious critique across Europe and North America, his home country of Brazil was simultaneously suffering under the oppressive hand of military dictatorship. Belonging to his 'Insertion' series, Coca-Cola Project (1970) collapsed the boundary between art and politics, and provocatively exploited their entanglement in order to protest Brazil's political system.

Coca-Cola Project scathingly attacked Brazil's military rule and the influence of American imperialism and capitalist consumerism. Removing glass bottles from circulation, Meireles inscribed the bottles with Anti-American or subversive political statements before returning them to the circuits of exchange where they were recycled, refilled and redistributed throughout the nation.

"HE CRITIQUES POLITICAL STRUCTURES FROM WITHIN THE VERY SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED TO ENFORCE THEIR POWER."

Cildo Meireles, Insertions Into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project, 1970
Such inscriptions included "YANKEES GO HOME" or "STRAIGHT ELECTIONS." When filled with dark soda the inscription was visible however as the bottle emptied, and the glass became transparent, the message became progressively invisible – qualifying it for recycling where it would continue to circulate through Brazil's exchange system. This process enabled Meireles to circumvent government censorship and deliver his messages of dissent into the everyday lives of a broad, indiscriminate Brazilian audience.

Much like other Brazilian artists at the time, Meireles explored the multisensory capabilities of art and worked to move art beyond retinal bounds. Therefore, although items from his Coca-Cola Project artwork were later shown in museum exhibitions, Meireles considered them as relics of his work - with the true pieces of art being those circulating through Brazil's population. For similar reasons this work has never been put up for sale, and remained as common property of the people until the bottles naturally fell out of the circulation. As such, Coca-Cola Project epitomises a Marxist critique of 1960's and 70's Brazil: undermining one of the most powerful symbols of capitalist expansion by vandalising its mechanisms of production and distribution, in order to reject an economic system that sat under the totalising control of military rule.

Meireles' art infiltrated the very systems that enabled military rule and capitalist expansion in Brazil, and used these circuits to disseminate his messages of protest to an audience geographically, economically, age and gender inclusive. The autonomous and surreptitious nature of his Insertions in Ideological Circuits series furthermore empowered fellow Brazilians to similarly distribute these critical messages, therefore affecting his audience towards action. Meireles pioneered a unique set of methodological and theoretical possibilities that enabled art to poignantly critique structures of power and actively engage diverse populations in discourses of protest.

References:


On the Body

By Cyma Hibri
Francis: Meat and gore.

That is what I saw in the first Francis Bacon piece I came across, appropriately titled Figure With Meat. I was unsure whether it was animal or human flesh. That intrigued me further, compelled me to keep looking. In the next painting, it was a face that wasn’t really a face. As though the man’s visage consisted of a viscous paint that got stirred almost to total anonymity. Anonymous but so real, so much the face of a person I felt I knew. This was the first time I remember feeling something from simply looking at art. Most people have this experience. It’s only normal to react so strongly to what imitates humanity in the most compelling, expressive manner. But this was a little different, for I had just experienced my first viewing of my favorite artist.

The notion of the body, in its broadest sense, hadn’t really come to my attention before that fateful first viewing of Bacon’s work. I had developed an if barely there understanding of the concept of the self, but it was one which somehow completely excluded the physical body. I wasn’t really aware of my own body, in the sense that I am now.

I vividly remember sitting at home, looking through Bacon’s work on a pixelated HP screen with my dad, feeling a new wave of emotion roll through me with each click on a different painting. Whether that emotion was triggered by the confrontational nature of Bacon’s works, or the absurd realness in his depictions of uncensored life; or the sheer beauty of the human figure, I am still unsure. But that quiet, simple moment of looking at pictures on the web had shifted my perspective, and my artistic focus, entirely toward the figure. It was an obsession from that point onward; anything I drew, whether a small doodle or a watercolour I slaved over for hours, was inspired by something human.
Lucian: Full-frontal and unapologetic.

I remember the third term of my 11th grade art class as being the most influential upon my art within my high school career. The semester’s topic was the body in art and, unexpectedly, I wasn’t interested. Art theory had previously impelled me to fold my arms on my desk and doze off, and despite my passion for the subject matter, I wasn’t roused in the slightest. Then I came across the works of Lucian Freud.

In the weeks leading to that point, the class’ focus was on pre-twentieth century nude portraiture. Refined oil paintings of women shyly turned away from the male gaze, exposed but all the more submissive to her spectator. Those artworks always felt far too apologetic of their subject matter to be of any interest to me; it totally rejected the unmasked beauty a body in all its realness could offer.

Coming into my next art class, filled with dread after last week’s focus on Manet’s Olympia and its “revolutionary” portrayal of the body (big fucking whoop, a woman is actually facing the viewer with her nudity), I wasn’t expecting anything special. Until I saw her. Sue Tilley. There in all her glory, there in every tone and line and curve of her figure. There, full-frontal and unapologetic. That was art I wanted to see.

Yvette: Beyond Emotion.

Two years ago, I was lucky enough to meet an artist named Yvette Ten-Bohmer, a 27 year old painter working and living in the small beach town of Avalon in Sydney’s North. Soon after we met, I went to see her small studio, which also functioned as her home, in the garage of a single story house.

Among the chaos of spilt paint, cluttered papers and easels jutting out from all angles were masterpieces: most expressive oil paintings of figures in positions that exuded pure life and emotion. The colours intense and heady, the strokes ever-present and brazen. I had fallen in love with the human figure once again. The way the mingling of colour and line could evoke feeling in its most complex and potent form was stunning to me.

We then attended a life drawing class together. Despite the beauty of the models before me, and my desire to draw them, I couldn’t keep my eyes away from Yvette. I watched her draw in a way that was as expressive as her creations. Bold, swinging movements, a dance of charcoal on paper. Creating three line scribbles that so perfectly captured the shape and tone of the person standing in front of her. Unknown to me, it was the first time I'd see my role model at work.

Cinema: Eyes Wide Open.

Naked, convulsing bodies sway in the back of a dimly lit room, moving with a sexuality that was totally new to me. The camera tracks away from them, only to reveal more bodies, pulsating with even more vigour. Tom Cruise observes his surroundings, taken slightly aback by the pure carnality of it all. I watch these people, hypnotised by the art coming to life before my eyes. This was my first viewing of Stanley Kubrick’s Eyes Wide Shut (1999).

Then there was Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange (1971). Much darker in content than the former, but equally if not more beautiful in depicting the pleasure and pain of bodies in lust. Watching a naked woman yanked around and stripped of her clothing to the sound of Rossini’s La Gazza Ladra was equally as horrifying as it was gorgeous. It was as though Kubrick was directing a Ballet of Coitus.

These films were instrumental in shaping my understanding of the nude figure, now including the dimension of time. Motion became a new consideration in depicting the figure, and compelled me to seek out more films that would help me learn a little more about the body with each viewing. My eyes were wide open to the body in motion.
Sex: A New Phenomenon.

There was the figure in space, then the figure in space and time, and now the figure in sex. In my six years of obsession over the human form it is only in the last year and a half I have discovered the power of sex in depicting the wonders of the body.

As my sexual life blossomed, I was exposed to a whole new world of possibilities, many of which were beyond my previous understandings of sex. Through my sexuality, I began to see connections between humanity and the environment, other bodies and society at large. It was then that I couldn’t help but make art about sex. Every university assignment I received instantly turned into a new avenue through which I could explore sex and all its twisted divisions. I found connections in so much of our daily lives to this inherently human activity, I was convinced sex was the epitome of bodily interaction.

It turned out that what some like to describe as ‘vanilla’ sex didn’t cut it for me. As for so many, my sexuality developed into something much more than its physical embodiment. It became irrevocably psychological. I began playing with notions of perversion, of taboo, of right and wrong, of pleasure and pain within my sex life, which truly unleashed a new wave of creative inspiration.

This exploration of the darker corners of sexuality unavoidably reflected in my art, to the point where my parents and peers asked me if I was ‘OK’. As amusing as that was, I was definitely OK. I had experienced a totally new phenomenon.

It was then that I figured I had to be more courageous and raw in my art. That if I wanted to explore sexuality through art and not hack at tired tropes and conventional notions of sex, I had to get far more personal.

So, here is On the Body. An exploration of bodies on bodies, the body in art, and the links and connections through which I had landed upon my muse. It was somewhat difficult to finally face my own figure and close the distance between myself and my art, but I feel more liberated than ever before. It seems to me as though if I hadn’t explored my own body, I wouldn’t truly know bodies at all.
Women in Protest

By Catherine Woolley
Throughout the twentieth century, art has dynamically underpinned protest. Furthermore, women have been instrumental in exploring the intricate nexus between art and protest, and have demonstrated again and again the potential that art has in achieving social change. Particularly since the emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, women have been inventively utilising art as an agent to protest social discrimination. The two feminist collectives the Guerrilla Girls and Women on Waves have powerfully engaged with art to not only provide a strong political voice through which to represent women as a minority, but to actively provoke social change.

The Guerrilla Girls are a great collective of women artists who remain anonymous by wearing gorilla masks. As already evident in their pun on guerrilla/gorilla, this feminist group uses wit, humour and satire as well as hard facts and statistics in their protest posters to highlight the inherent sexism and racism in various museums’ selection of artists. The Guerrilla Girls often pose challenging questions such as “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met.” (1989) in their most famous work. By entirely embarrassing galleries, museums and other art institutions with irrefutable statistics, the Guerrilla Girls aim to encourage curators to start representing more women artists in their exhibitions.

The formation of the Guerrilla Girls was essentially motivated by involvement with a protest. In 1984, the ‘Women Artists Visibility Event’ protest responded to ‘An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture’ exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in which out of 169 artists, 86% were white males. The protest’s perceived lack of influence prompted the Guerrilla Girls to alternatively protest with humour and statistics. The Guerrilla Girls now thank MoMA “for making us so angry 30 years ago!” By entirely embarrassing galleries, museums and other art institutions with irrefutable statistics, the Guerrilla Girls aim to encourage curators to start representing more women artists in their exhibitions.

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However, this project serves as much as a symbolic gesture as an active practice. Women on Waves have in fact performed comparatively few abortions, but their boat rather predominantly functions as a media device that raises awareness for women’s issues. Dr Gomperts elucidates, “the fact that we can actually do abortions on the ships makes the media interested, the people interested in the campaign. That is how other women know about medical abortion.” Regardless of the number of women who undergo medical treatment, the organisation still actively communicates their ambitions to anti-abortion countries.

For Women on Waves, media is an essential component which allows their work to thrive. Media has become intertwined within contemporary politics and society, and therefore has become an effective tool in abetting the communication of political messages and provocation of social change. Women on Waves profoundly amalgamate the spectacle and media performativity as a communicative tool for in their protest art. The collective has received both supportive and reproachful responses as their boat docks into the harbours of various countries; however, their ability to project a message to an international public through media, therefore provokes a significant global dialogue and debate concerning these issues.

Women on Waves are another significant women’s collective founded in 1999 by abortion specialist Dr Rebecca Gomperts. The non-for-profit, activist art collective sails on a boat containing an abortion clinic to countries where abortion is illegal. As the boat is registered in the Netherlands where abortion is legal, the collective subsequently anchor in international waters, therefore can provide legal medical abortions under Netherlands law. Dr Gomperts states that the collective ultimately aims to diminish the number of fatalities caused by unsafe “back-street abortions” as well as advocate women’s right to health care and freedom of choice.

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Guerrilla Girls, “[no title]”, 1985-90; screenprint on paper, [420 x 560 mm; purchased 2003; © courtesy www.guerrillagirls.com

The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist:

Working without the pressure of success.
Not having to be in shows with men.
Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty.
Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
Having more time to work after your mate dumps you for someone younger.
Being included in revised versions of art history.
Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.
Moreover, the new branch of Women on Waves: Women on Web extends this global dialogue via the Internet. This website not only functions as an online medical abortion service, but contains a tab titled ‘share your story,’ inviting women to upload a portrait of themselves and express their experience of abortion. This effectively creates a dialogical online experience and powerfully provides a service just as significant as the medical treatment: an outlet to cope with grief. Women on Web encourage women to “break the taboo” and minimise the sense of shame correlated with abortion in society.

Women on Waves actively engage with social, political and historical realms to not only reflect a social issue, but resolve this issue. By identifying as an ‘artistic collective,’ Women on Waves ingeniously side-step certain political ramifications that may have been confronted otherwise, creatively affecting their political landscape and contributing to their social context. Women on Waves have successfully achieved social change in Portugal who legalised abortion in 2007, exemplifying the impact of art on politics and history.

The feminist collectives the Guerrilla Girls and Women on Waves reveal that women are highly active within the realms of both art and politics, and have profoundly influenced societal perceptions surrounding women’s rights. Ultimately, these two collectives also validate art as a powerful tool for not only representing women’s political messages, but actively provoking and achieving social change.