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Original Article

THE ENIGMA OF VIOLENCE REPRESENTED IN THE VISUAL ARTS: ADDRESSING THIS "CULTURAL" PHENOMENON AGAINST WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of art from the perspective of gender-based violence, which is underpinned by inequalities and social norms that perpetuate discrimination. In addition to its consequences, it has an impact on the physical and emotional health of victims, making it essential to adopt intervention strategies that use art as a therapeutic tool to facilitate the expression and communication of their experiences. The aim of this study is to analyse the relationship between gender-based violence and art, focusing on the role of artistic expression in exposing and preventing this phenomenon. Of particular note is art's contribution to raising social awareness and to building a culture based on equality, respect for human rights and the rejection of all forms of violence. The methodology is based on a descriptive and qualitative approach to this socio-cultural phenomenon, drawing on bibliographic and web-based sources, observation and analysis of works from different artistic movements (installations and performances), and a theoretical review of key authors relevant to the study. The results highlight that art is not only an aesthetic expression but also serves as a tool for speaking out, raising awareness, education and social transformation, as well as for promoting equality and behavioural change in society. Studies show that works of art raise public awareness, helping to expose abuses of power and encourage social change. It can be concluded that experimental work in art offers a perspective of freedom and resilience in the face of these assumptions, regardless of age, status or socio-economic background, as a means of combating stigmatisation and promoting psychosocial development, thereby enabling a balanced and sustainable way of life.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Aesthetic Expression, Emotional Recovery, Social Transformation, Activism

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence represents one of the most serious contemporary challenges in the fields of human rights, public health and social justice, affecting individuals and society across different socio-cultural contexts. Its persistence is linked to structural gender inequalities and historically constructed power relations, which contribute to the perpetuation of discriminatory and violent practices.

In recent years, art has increasingly established itself as an important space for critical reflection, resistance and social intervention in the face of this phenomenon. Various artistic expressions — including the visual arts — have helped to bring to light experiences that are often silenced due to gender stereotypes regarding the causes and consequences of violence. As a cultural practice, art is not limited to the representation of reality, but actively participates in the construction of meaning, raising awareness

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and bringing about social transformation. The relationship between gender-based violence and art has been the subject of growing academic interest, reflecting the recognition of the potential of artistic practices as tools for denunciation, remembrance, education and the defence of human rights. However, an analysis of artistic representations of gender-based violence enables us to understand how art contributes to deconstructing narratives of inequality, strengthening the voices of victims and encouraging cultural changes geared towards gender equality. Violence arises from the "manifestation of an exploitative and domineering system, socially constructed on the basis of historical, economic, social and cultural factors" Lisboa (Ed.). (2006). "Violence at the civic, social and human levels" Velázquez (2003). In this regard, according to Walter Benjamin, 'a work of art has value only if it portrays reflections of the future through new art forms and social changes' Benjamin (1992), reinforcing the idea that artistic production reflects historical transformations in society. However, Money and Ehrhardt highlight that "gender identity and artistic experience trigger art as a reflection of collective desires", highlighting the interrelationship between identity, cultural expression and processes of integration, by enabling emotional experiences of artistic objects, as Money and Ehrhardt (2000) point out 'against gender inequalities'.

Chadwick argues that emotional and psychological characteristics 'traditionally' associated with the masculine and the feminine, from the perspective of the writer and the artist, shape the image of the work of art.

INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

PROBLEM

The study addresses the issue of gender-based violence and its social, psychological and cultural consequences in the visual arts as a medium for representing, denouncing and reflecting on this phenomenon. Gender-based associated with social and cultural structures that contribute to its reproduction and normalisation Segato (2016), Federici (2018). Throughout history, art has played a significant role in representing social reality and power relations, bringing conflicts, inequalities and different forms of violence to light. Works such as Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* are prime examples of the use of artistic language to depict the suffering and destruction caused by war. Similarly, Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* offers a critical reflection on reason, irrationality and certain social behaviours, highlighting art's capacity to stimulate a critical interpretation of reality Tate, (n.d.). In the specific context of gender-based violence, feminist art has played an important role in challenging the invisibility of women, criticising patriarchal structures and questioning representations of the female body and identity. Feminist artists and collectives have used different visual languages and strategies to denounce discrimination, inequality and power relations present both in society and within the art world itself Nochlin (1971), Pollock (1988).

Contemporary artistic practices, notably installations, performances, photography and urban interventions, have also made it possible to bring the issue of violence into public and everyday spaces, helping to raise its profile and increase social awareness. In this context, this article seeks to analyse how the visual arts represent gender-based violence and to understand their contribution to raising social awareness, denouncing violence and promoting equality. To guide the research, the following initial research questions were defined: Contemporary artistic practices – notably installations, performances, photography and urban interventions – have also made it possible to bring the issue of violence into public and everyday spaces, helping to raise its profile and increase social awareness. In this context, this article seeks to analyse how the visual arts depict gender-based violence and to understand their contribution to raising social awareness, denouncing violence and promoting equality. To guide the research, the following initial questions were defined:

- How is gender-based violence depicted in the visual arts?
- What artistic strategies are used to denounce and challenge violence against women?
- What is the role of the visual arts in raising social awareness of gender-based violence?
- To what extent can art help to challenge stereotypes, power relations and gender inequalities?

The analysis of these questions seeks to highlight the potential of the visual arts as a tool for critical reflection and social intervention, recognising their capacity to give visibility to experiences of violence, challenge power structures and contribute to a culture of equality, respect and non-violence.

STATE OF THE ART

THE 'CULTURAL' PHENOMENON OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This phenomenon arises from gender relations characterised by violent and/or intimidating practices; although it has taken on a global dimension, it remains a pressing issue in everyday life, as evidenced by the persistence and diversity of the reports recorded. Violence is a multidimensional phenomenon that goes beyond physical aggression, encompassing psychological, symbolic, structural and cultural forms that reflect power relations present in society Galtung (1969), Bourdieu (2001). In the artistic field, violence is represented as a social and cultural event that enables an understanding of the means of domination, exclusion and resistance.

In this way, art takes on a dual function: it represents violence and, at the same time, questions the structures that produce and legitimise it Rancière (2004). Throughout history, the subjugation of women has manifested itself as 'the first class oppression of

women by men' and has reflected the 'proclamation of a conflict between the sexes' Engels (1980). From a Marxist perspective, women's struggle for a place in the labour market grants them autonomy and economic independence, as Anália Torres notes: "the asymmetrical mechanisms of gender discrimination, identified as a social category, are varied and imperceptible" Torres (2004).

Despite advances in the status of women in this century, 'a culture of stereotypical violence rooted in hegemonic masculinity' persists, characterised by jealousy and subjugation within the marital sphere Magalhães (2007). Françoise Collin argues that "there is a socialisation of the sexes in terms of power, across cultural, private and public spheres" Collin and Kaufer (2005), whilst Neves (2008) points out that feminism has revealed situations of violence "in spaces free from coercion and violence". In this sense, 'in the historical and cultural workshop of masculinity', self-control takes on a cultural dimension; indeed, for Giddens (1991), the 'self' and 'self-direction' are factors that regulate impulsivity, whereby violence underpins personality, prevents failure and reinforces hierarchy (ibid., p. 10). Hatty (2000) highlights this concept as an 'imperial self' directed against women in contemporary society. Finally, the aim is to discuss the contribution of art to social awareness and to a culture based on equality, respect for human rights and the rejection of all forms of violence.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative approach, of an exploratory and descriptive nature, with the representation of gender-based violence in the visual arts as its subject of study. It seeks to understand how different artistic expressions can contribute to reflection on, the denunciation of, and the raising of awareness of violence against women, whilst also considering the power relations and situations of inequality present within the artistic context.

To carry out the study, a review of the specialist literature was conducted, drawing on books, academic articles, dissertations and other academic publications relating to gender-based violence, patriarchy, power relations, feminism and art as a form of social intervention. The contributions of various authors enabled us to provide a theoretical framework for the issue and to understand its social, cultural and political dimensions.

The documentary research was supplemented by consultation of digital and institutional sources, notably the official websites of museums, galleries, art centres, archives and the artists' own websites. These sources enabled us to gather information on the works, the contexts in which they were produced and the intentions underlying the various artistic practices analysed.

The main criterion for selecting the works was their relationship to issues of gender-based violence, inequality, discrimination, the representation of the female body and power relations. Various forms of visual art were analysed, namely painting, photography, installation, performance and urban intervention, with a view to identifying the strategies employed by artists in addressing these issues. The aim was to establish a link between artistic representations and the underlying social issues, particularly with regard to violence, gender inequality and forms of resistance and denunciation.

The study also considered certain artistic works produced by women and feminist collectives, as well as situations relating to the practice of male artists and to power relations and violence within the art world. This approach enabled the analysis to be broadened beyond the representation of violence in the works, to also consider the art world itself as a space where asymmetrical gender relations can be reproduced. The combination of a review of the literature, documentary research and the analysis of the works has enabled the development of an interdisciplinary approach to the issue. Ultimately, I decided to explore this theme, focusing on traumatic personal experiences, whilst viewing art as a means of raising awareness – not only as an aesthetic expression, but also as a form of communication, reflection, social critique and intervention, capable of helping to denounce violence and promote a critical awareness of gender inequalities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The study of the socio-historical relationship of the female gender in the art world has been made possible by analysing artistic production and the commodification of art, albeit with significant obstacles along the way, as Pollock and Rozsika Parker point out. Research led by these authors in the 20th century revealed that many women artists were mentioned in art treatises, such as that of Giorgio Vasari, but were often shrouded in cultural stereotypes that had persisted since the 16th century, intensifying between the 18th and 19th centuries. For Parker and Pollock, the evaluation of women's artistic output was characterised by hierarchical criteria and 'feminine' stereotypes, favouring male art and the work of masters and geniuses in the artistic field. However, the analysis of the conditions of production proposed by feminism aligns with the approaches of cultural theory and Marxism of recente decades, as discussed by Pollock with reference to authors such as L. Althusser, P. Hirst, J.O. Thompson and J. Lavrain, offering broad critiques of artistic production.

Within the realm of psychoanalytic theory, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler highlight the way in which subjectivity renders 'the woman' non-existent, highlighting the indignity attributed to the female gender. the role played by women in the theoretical construction of psychoanalysis.

Butler (1993) states that "we can consider that the very processes of bodies also constitute the territory of the inhuman", highlighting the dialectical relationship between subjects. In this context, Ana Gabriela Macedo observes that, historically, feminism was challenged in academic circles during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly through the discussions developed in **Gender, Identity and Desire**, linked to progressive ideologies and feminist critiques. Historically, art has been used to document conflicts, denounce injustices and preserve collective memory. According to Sontag (2003), images of suffering have a high potential to raise awareness, although their reception depends on the cultural context and the way in which they are interpreted by the public. Thus, the artistic representation of violence seeks not only to portray traumatic events, but also to provoke ethical reflection, empathy and critical awareness.

VIOLENCE IN ART: CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In the artistic sphere, violence is portrayed as a social and cultural phenomenon that enables us to understand the mechanisms of domination, exclusion and resistance. In this way, art fulfils a dual function: it depicts violence whilst simultaneously challenging the structures that produce and legitimise it Rancière (2004).

In the context of gender-based violence, artistic production plays a significant role in giving visibility to victims' experiences and challenging narratives that normalise inequality between men and women. Butler (2004) argues that violence is deeply linked to the ways in which certain lives are socially recognised or rendered invisible, Hooks (2000) contends that culture constitutes a privileged space for challenging systems of domination and promoting practices of emancipation. In this sense, various artistic expressions – such as literature, film, photography, theatre and the performing arts – have helped to expose gender-based violence, deconstruct stereotypes and stimulate public debate. Thus, the artistic concept of violence should be understood as a field of aesthetic and critical production that interprets, questions and denounces different manifestations of violence. Beyond its aesthetic value, art serves as a tool for education, raising awareness and social intervention, contributing to the development of a culture of respect for human dignity, gender equality and fundamental rights UN Women. (2025).

The extent of gender-based violence, often described as 'invisible and silent', has been depicted over time by artists and intellectuals from various countries. As Mayayo (2003) observes, "the hypervisibility of women in representation contrasts with their invisibility as creators" (p. 21); this highlights the artistic sphere whilst simultaneously making women visible, contributing to their objectification and reinforcing silence, whilst granting men disproportionate power in the world of representation. Violence may manifest itself through death, physical or psychological harm, developmental impairment, and deprivation WHO (2002). These forms of harm are frequently associated with suffering and neglect, which may be conveyed visually through colour, facial expressions, and body language.

Figure1



Figure 1 The Depiction Of Violence Through Art
Source: The Author's Own Works

Fiugre 2



Figure 2 The Depiction of Violence Through Art
Source: The Author's Own Works

It should be noted that the exercise of power and physical force also includes threats, intimidation and neglect, as well as physical, sexual and psychological abuse, self-harm, suicide, verbal abuse and deprivation, affecting 'families and communities' Dahlberg and Krug (2006).

In this regard, the typology of violence proposed by the WHO (2002) in the field of health distinguishes three forms: self-directed (suicide and self-harm), interpersonal (domestic violence) and collective violence, which occurs in social, political or economic contexts and involves lifelong deprivation Minayo (2007). Several authors characterise violence as a social phenomenon present across all social classe, noting silence as a common response. However, speaking out does not always prevent the perpetuation of violence; depending on the cultural or historical context, silence may be interpreted negatively or positively, manifesting itself as a prohibition on speaking out, a lack of communication, intimidation, or behaviour likely to trigger violence.

Figure 3

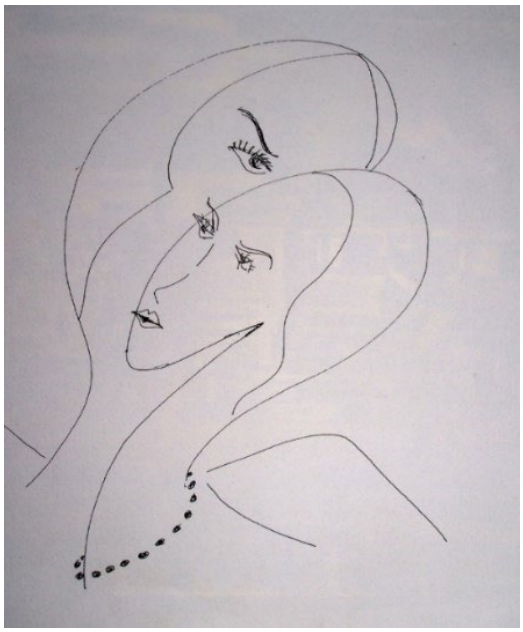


Figure 3 Silence and Intimidation
Source: Illustration by the author

From this perspective, the WHO report highlights the invisible aspects of violence, which manifest themselves within the family environment, at work, and in medical and social institutions, as well as the enforced silence of those who are prevented from reporting the violence they have suffered for fear of even more severe reprisals WHO (2002).

The studies identified address the silence surrounding violence, particularly amongst the most disadvantaged sections of the population; thus, Moraes et al. (2008) argued that the invisibility of the problem stems from the notion that domestic violence belongs to the private sphere, 'which should be dealt with amongst the people involved'. However, the authors also noted the lack of resources and knowledge that hinder the detection and identification of the problem, given that the perpetrators are expected to be responsible for the victim's protection.

According to Schraiber, D'Oliveira and Couto (2006), gender-based violence is a human rights issue, both at an individual and global level, in which duties and responsibilities remain unaddressed, referring to "this comparison with the objectification of the other".

According to Celmer (2010), in a study on violence against women, the feminist movements of the time had, as one of their main objectives, to raise awareness and demand that the State implement policies to address this phenomenon. For the author, violence often occurs in private or away from the observation of third parties, which may contribute to its underreporting, as victims may be reluctant to report incidents to the relevant authorities. Similarly, Gomes et al. (2014) highlight the persistent invisibility of violence against women within public health systems.

Pereira and Almeida (2010), in his historical analysis of the issue dating back to the colonial period, described it as the 'visibility of violence and the violence of invisibility', observed in bodies scarred by the punishments of slavery. In this same context, Palma and Francis (2013) emphasise that "silence perpetuates racial and gender inequalities, as well as discrimination related to sexual orientation, which are deeply rooted in society."

REPRESENTING VIOLENCE THROUGH THE VISUAL ARTS

The visual arts are an important means of representing and addressing violence against women, enabling silenced experiences to be brought to light and challenging the social structures that underpin gender inequality. Through painting, photography, performance, installation, and other forms of artistic expression, artists from different periods and cultural contexts have addressed violence, contributing to public awareness and encouraging critical reflection on this phenomenon. Violence is also deeply rooted in gender inequalities and asymmetrical power relations (World Health Organization World Health Organisation [WHO], 2026, UN Women. (2025).

Historically, the depiction of violence against women has often been associated with mythological, religious or historical narratives, in which women might appear as objects of representation rather than necessarily as subjects of their own experience. Many of these images were produced within an art world dominated by men and aimed at a male audience. However, it is important to recognise that interpretations of these works are complex and vary according to the historical and cultural context.

From the 20th century onwards, and particularly with the development of feminist art in the 1960s and 1970s, a transformation took place: many women artists began to use their own bodies, personal experiences and issues relating to gender, sexuality and power as a vehicle for creativity and social critique Lippard (1980), McLellan (2020). Feminist art has sought to challenge traditional forms of representation that were previously marginalised. In contemporary visual arts, violence against women is frequently addressed as a social, political and cultural phenomenon. The works seek to highlight the consequences of abuse, denounce discrimination and challenge the mechanisms that perpetuate gender-based violence. To this end, artists draw on images of the body, everyday objects, photographic archives and symbolic elements that evoke suffering, resistance, memory and survival. Princenthal (2019), in her analysis of artistic works relating to sexual violence during the 1970s, demonstrates how various artists transformed experiences of violence into forms of protest and political intervention. Among the artists who addressed issues relating to violence and power, Artemisia Gentileschi stands out for her work *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (*Judith Beheading Holofernes*), created in the early 17th century.

Gentileschi's experience as a female artist in a male-dominated society, as well as the legal proceedings relating to the rape she suffered, help us to understand the context in which she developed her career, although the painting constitutes a direct representation of personal vengeance National Gallery. (2020). Another example is Frida Kahlo, whose artistic output intensely explores the body, pain and personal experience. Her self-portraits present the female body as a space of identity, vulnerability and resistance, with personal struggles incorporated into her artistic output, making the body a central element of her visual language Chedgzoy (1998), Osorio (2022). Although Kahlo's work cannot be reduced solely to the theme of violence against women, her depiction of pain and vulnerability has helped to challenge traditional representations of the female body, through images that invite reflection on suffering, identity, gender and autonomy.

In contemporary art, Ana Mendieta provides another particularly relevant example: in her performance *Rape Scene* (1973), the artist confronted the audience with a disturbing depiction of the consequences of sexual violence. Mendieta used her own body

to reconstruct the scene and provoke a direct reaction in the viewer, transforming the art space into a place of testimony and denunciation Hammer Museum. (2019). Subsequent studies highlight that *Rape Scene* allows us to reflect not only on sexual violence, but also on the dimensions of gender and race, and on the way in which legal and social systems can contribute to the normalisation or erasure of such violence White (2023). Photography can fulfil both a documentary and a political function, although the depiction of victims and survivors raises ethical issues relating to privacy. At the same time, urban art and art installations have taken over public spaces as forms of protest against gender-based violence. These practices bring art closer to the community and enable issues traditionally confined to the private sphere to be discussed publicly. Feminist art of the 1970s and 1980s particularly demonstrated this relationship between artistic production, activism and social intervention, using public spaces and performative practices to challenge existing inequalities Lippard (1980), Princenthal (2019).

In this way, the visual arts play a fundamental role in representing and challenging violence against women. As well as documenting experiences of suffering, these artistic expressions can foster processes of resistance, empowerment, remembrance and social transformation. By bringing silenced experiences to light and challenging cultural norms and power relations that contribute to gender inequality, art can help foster a critical awareness of violence against women. Thus, the visual arts are not merely a reflection of social reality, but can also serve as tools for exposing injustice and bringing about change.

LANGUAGES AND STRATEGIES IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

Throughout history, violence against women has been analysed as a manifestation of power relations embedded in patriarchal structures, in which gender inequality contributes to the normalisation of women's subordinate position. In this context, Federici (2018) links violence against women to historical processes of capitalist accumulation, highlighting the interconnection between patriarchy, exploitation and the control of women's bodies and labour. For her part, Segato (2016) analyses gender-based violence as a structural and political phenomenon, highlighting the relationship between patriarchal hierarchies, the exercise of power and the transformations brought about by contemporary capitalism. The author also considers that certain forms of violence against women take on an expressive and communicative dimension, functioning as mechanisms for asserting power and reproducing gender hierarchies.

In this context, art can serve as a tool for social intervention, employing strategies that shift the focus of denouncing violence to everyday spaces.

Figure 4



Figure 4 Milk Carton - Peggy Diggs
Source: http://www.peggydiggs.net/milk-carton

The project involved using milk cartons as a medium for messages relating to domestic violence, with the aim of reaching women in vulnerable situations in an everyday setting such as the supermarket. The initiative was developed on the basis of research carried out by the artist into domestic violence and through contact with professionals and organisations working with women who are victims of violence.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND ACTIVISM

Artistic activism stems from provocation, generally spearheaded by dissatisfied artists concerned with political changes and social problems within the broader context of contemporary art. Furthermore, activist art represents not only social criticism, but

also a conflict of interests amongst artists, linked to state control over management, the consequences of which are reflected in cultural production. According to Magalhães (2005), feminism gives visibility to the narratives of women subjugated to a logic of male individualism. In this context, 'dependence' is often associated with the female gender, in contrast to the valuing of autonomy and independence, traditionally attributed to the male subject Pateman (2003), Pinto et al. (2002). The male subject is unable to cope with the frustrations of everyday life and with personal experiences relating to the loss of self-control, which are absent from artistic representations. However, 'art has the power to change consciousness and, ultimately, to bring about social change' Haynes, (1997). One might cite **Eles levaram na**, a work addressing social criticism with reference to the French Revolution and 'possible fantasies', alluding to the situation of violence that men inflicted upon women, perpetuating scenarios of war Hagen and Hagen (2004). *The Disasters of War*, which denounces the horrors of war and depicts women as victims of violence, provides a historical context for understanding the relationship between art and social criticism. During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist movements gained prominence in art criticism, debates surrounding 'high culture' and 'popular culture' Frow (1995), questions of status and authorship Cruz (2002), and critiques of commodification. These developments contributed to the emergence of artistic practices that challenged gender discrimination and questioned the marginalisation of women within the art world and society at large. Feminist artistic practices increasingly employed visual art, photography, performance and collective interventions to denounce discrimination, gender inequality and violence against women.

These practices transformed art into a means of social and political engagement, raising public awareness and challenging established cultural norms. In particular, performance-based interventions addressed sexual violence, including rape and strangulation, through public acts of protest and collective resistance. The use of black clothing and commemorative ribbons bearing the inscription 'In Memory of Our Sisters' sought to honour victims of violence and call for greater public awareness and social responsibility Haynes (1997). Such interventions demonstrate how artistic practice can challenge the normalisation of violence against women and promote demands for justice and social change.

Figure 5



Figure 5 Three Weeks in May (1977)
Source: **https://www.suzannelacy.com/three-weeks-in-may**

Figure 6



Figure 6 The Un-Heroic Act (2018)
Source: https://www.suzannelacy.com/publications#/un-heroic-act/

The work of Suzanne Lacy, a socially engaged artist, is also noteworthy. Her use of humour, irony and statistical data serves to highlight structural inequalities, transforming artistic practice into a form of political activism. Her performances and community projects address issues relating to violence against women, promoting the direct involvement of communities and public institutions in developing awareness-raising and prevention strategies

Nan Goldin, an artist and human rights activist, used photography to raise political and social awareness; she portrayed herself as yet another victim of 'domestic' violence.

Figure 7



Figure 7 Nan Goldin One Month after Being Battered (1984)
Source: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/102197

Through a variety of artistic media, including painting, photography, installation, performance, video, urban art and digital media, feminist artists bring visibility to historically marginalised experiences, encouraging critical reflection on gender inequalities. Among the most influential figures is Judy Chicago, whose work *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979) represents a milestone in the history of feminist art.

Figure 8



Figure 8 The Dinner Party (1974–1979)
Source: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/pt-PT/stories/brooklyn-museum-feminist-guide

The installation pays tribute to women who have played significant roles in history, challenging their invisibility in traditional narratives of art and culture. The work has become a symbol of the recognition of the female experience and the struggle for gender equality. Another notable example is the Guerrilla Girls collective, founded in 1985, which uses posters, public campaigns and urban interventions to denounce gender discrimination and inequality in the representation of women in museums, galleries and cultural institutions.

Figure 9



Figure 9 Guerrilla Girls, (George Lange/ Press release))
Source: https://www.guerrillagirls.com/

VIOLENCE EXPOSED THROUGH ART

Exposing violence against women was one of the key policies of second-wave feminism (1960s and 1970s). "Women from all social classe were calling for help from anyone who would listen," says Erin Pizzey, a feminist and pioneer in this field through her book *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* and her work with *Chiswick Women's Aid* for victims of violence. She adds, "Violence on the street is a serious crime." "However, the same behaviour when it takes place inside the home is ignored. Society takes no interest in these issues relating to domestic brutality; for a man, the home is a castle surrounded by walls, which cannot be scaled to protect the women and children held captive within." For centuries, violence has been regarded as a historical, cultural and masculinised ideology, right up to the present day. The way to tackle this problem is through reporting, as a means of putting a stop to abusive assaults in the 'physical and private sphere of every woman who has suffered the trauma of rape'Agnati (2000); women had no rights, and sought to 'construct and reclaim the' "of a heroine who does not conform to feminine norms" Agnati (2000) – the "physical and emotional suffering experienced by any woman who has faced rape" – yet the perpetrator lived with the victim Agnati (2000). In this sense, the motivation behind the works of the artist Artemisia Gentileschi began to be understood; her self-portrait evoked modern feminism in Europe: Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653) was the victim of sexual violence. The memory of this event influenced her works, the most famous of which is 'Judith Beheading Holofernes', which depicts the biblical passage in which Judith, with the help of a maid, beheads the general who had harassed her; this is considered by many scholars to be a representation of the artist's desire for revenge and justice.

Figure 10



Figure 10 Judith beheading Holofernes (revenge through art).
Source: https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/judith-beheading-holofernes

With this in mind, we consider that art has played a key role in empowering victims, in that 'personal creativity constitutes a continuous process of forming images of ourselves in relation to the world' Muller (1991).

Over the decades, there have always been artists whose voices have been transformed into images that tell their stories in different ways, yet with the same aim of conveying a message about violence, as in the case of Panmela Castro, Paula Rego and Banksy, amongst many others.

In the work of Panmela Castro, an artist shaped by a lifetime of domestic violence, she has consistently conveyed this message through installations, paintings and urban art depicting women who have suffered violence.

Figure11

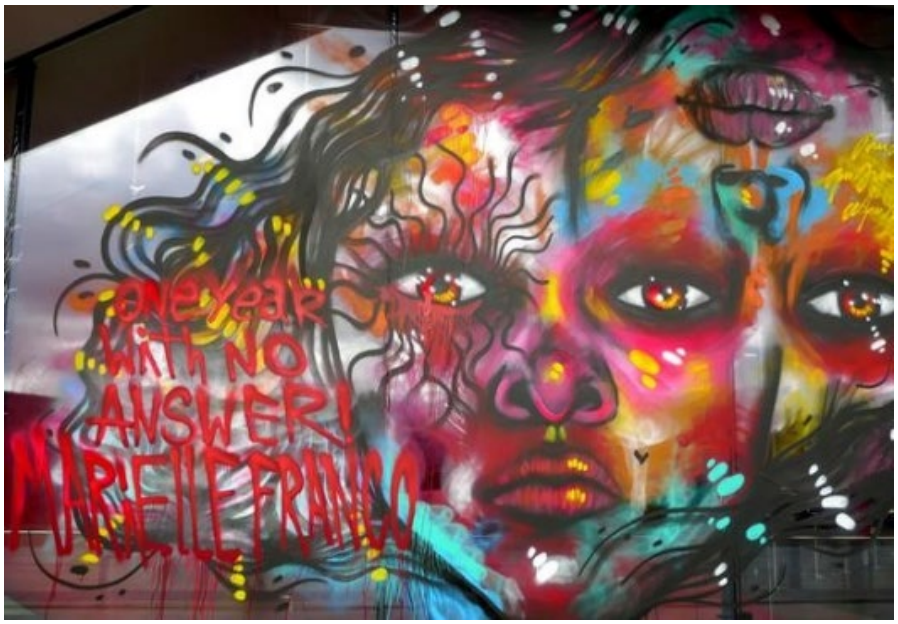


Figure 11 "Together we are stronger", 2019.
Source: https://www.premiopipa.com/2021/03/arte-urbana

Exposing violence was one of the key actions of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s Walby (1990). In this context, one of the founders of the first shelter for women who were victims of domestic violence—Chiswick Women's Aid—deserves special mention. The author highlights that women from all social classe sought support for situations of abuse that were systematically silenced, stating that 'violence is a serious crime' Pizzey (1974). However, violent behaviour within the home was ignored, reflecting society's indifference to domestic brutality.

Pizzey also denounces the notion of the home as an inviolable space of male authority — 'a fortified castle' — which hinders the protection of abused women and children Pizzey (1974). One of the key strategies for combating gender-based violence lies in reporting assaults, as a means of breaking the cycle of physical and private abuse suffered by women. However, Agnati (2000) emphasises the "physical and private dimension of every woman who has suffered the trauma of rape" (p. 25), highlighting the suffering involved. Historically, women had no rights and sought to 'construct and reclaim the identity of a heroine who does not conform to feminine norms' Agnati (2000), whilst enduring physical and emotional suffering, often in the presence of the perpetrator Agnati (2000). Based on this premise, it is considered that art plays a key role in empowering victims, since "personal creativity constitutes a continuous process in relation to the world" Muller (1991). Over the decades, various artists have transformed individual and collective experiences into images that denounce violence, as in the case of Panmela Castro, Paula Rego and Banksy, amongst others. Panmela Castro, whose work is shaped by her experience of domestic violence, expresses this reality through installations, paintings and urban art, raising awareness of the plight of women who have suffered violence. Similarly, Banksy, regarded as a revolutionary in the defence of human rights, unveiled the work **Valentine Mask**, in which he denounces domestic violence against women on the very day that Valentine's Day is celebrated, highlighting it as a symbol of pretence and social hypocrisy.

Figure 12



Figure 12 Bansky, (valentine mask)
Source: https://www.dn.pt/cultura/banksy-presents-a-work-on-domestic-violence-on-Valentine's-Day-15840461.html

These artistic practices illustrate the role of contemporary art as a tool for denouncing violence and raising awareness of it. In this vein, the artist Paula Rego, in her work *Engole a Maçã Venenosa* revisits the tale of Snow White – dressed in Disney costumes – to construct a critical narrative on gender-based violence and the stereotypes imposed on women.

Figure13



Figure 13 Paula Rego, 1994 "Snow White Swallow
Source: https://www.casadashistoriaspaularego

The painting illustrates the conflict between childhood fantasy and social reality, highlighting how prejudice and violence permeate women's experiences. Furthermore, Rego interprets female ageing as a form of physical and psychological violation, exposing the cultural pressures that restrict women's bodies and autonomy, and transforming the figure of Snow White into a symbol of resistance against patriarchal norms and expectations of female submission.

THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE

Violence has historically been perpetrated by men and is often legitimised by blaming the victim.

With the aim of raising public awareness of this issue, the artist Derya Kilic has created performances based on paintings by historical artists, incorporating bruises and wounds that highlight the physical and psychological impact of violence.

Figure14



Figure 14 Deria Kilic, To Know, to see. Photography.
Source: https://www.maçkasanatgalerisi.com/2021oncesiturkce/Exhibitions/Derya-Kilic-2012—2013

Through these works, Kilic demonstrates that domestic violence has persisted throughout history, although it has only recently begun to be recognised as a psychosocial issue, highlighting the role of art as a tool for speaking out and raising awareness.

Artistic and advertising works were used as a form of appeal, serving as a visibly powerful exposé to reveal what remains hidden. Cindy Sherman created images of abused female figures, which she later re-enacted using her own body, creating photographic scenes and films of the victims in which these same battered faces are displayed.

Figure15



Figure 15 Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #30, 1979
Source: https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/92.119/

Similarly, the artist Fátima Pecci, who has a particular interest in art history and political and feminist activism, depicts female figures who have experienced the nightmare of violence; amongst these is the work entitled 'One day I'll get out of here', which addresses the theme of violence alongside works by other artists.

Figure 16



Figure 16 Fátima Pecci, algún dia saldré de aquí - (2014 - 2021)
Source: https://fatimapeccicarou.com/Algun-dia-saldre-de-aqui

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' PROJECTS

The feminist art movement, which developed primarily from the 1970s onwards, introduced new ways of representing the female body, challenging traditional models of beauty, submission and objectification. Authors such as Judith Butler (1990) and Bell Hooks (2000) argue that cultural representations profoundly influence the construction of gender identities and can contribute both to reproducing and to challenging power relations. In this context, various artists have used their artistic practice to denounce different forms of physical, sexual and symbolic violence. Ana Mendieta explored the relationship between the body, memory, identity and violence through performances and interventions in nature, notably in the work *Rape Scene* (1973), inspired by a real-life case of sexual violence. Her work is regarded as a benchmark in feminist art for its condemnation of gender-based violence, and the 'Silhouette' series, which simultaneously symbolises absence, vulnerability and resistance.

Figure17



Figure 17 Mendieta "Rape scene" (1973)
Source: https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art/art/rape-scene

Barbara Kruger uses appropriated images from advertising combined with visually striking phrases to challenge the control exerted over the female body. The work *Your Body Is a Battleground* (1989) has become one of the key symbols of the struggle for reproductive rights and of the critique of patriarchal structures that restrict women's autonomy. Works such as *Your Body Is a Battleground* (1989) have become international symbols of the struggle for women's rights. The artist uses short phrases and striking images to provoke reflection on the way in which the female body is controlled and represented in society.

Figure18



Figure 18 (Your body is a battleground)

Source: https://www.nga.gov/artworks/230973-untitled-your-body-battleground

Although she belongs to the Baroque period, Artemisia Gentileschi remains an essential figure in studies on gender-based violence. Having survived a rape and a widely publicised trial, she produced works such as **Judith Slaying Holofernes** and **Susanna and the Elders*,* in which the female protagonists take on roles of resistance against male violence, transforming her personal experience of trauma into a visual narrative of resistance, symbolising not only the quest for individual justice, but also a critique of the patriarchal power structures that perpetuate violence against women. Las Tesis – creators of the performance *'Un violador en tu camino'*, presented in dozens of countries as a condemnation of violence against women and institutional violence.

Figure 19



Figure 19 Las Tesis, "A Rapist on Your Path."

Source: https://voices.uchicago.edu/202402span24524/perfiles-biograficos/las-tesis/

Mariana Morais – creator of the Headless Women in Public Art project – examines the invisibility and representation of women in public spaces through a feminist and migrant perspective.

These examples enable us to link the historical perspective (Artemisia Gentileschi), 20th-century feminist art (Ana Mendieta and Barbara Kruger) and contemporary artistic practices (Digitálias, Las Tesis and Mariana Morais), illustrating the evolution of art as a tool for denunciation, resistance and social transformation in the face of gender-based violence.

Over the years, various participatory art projects have emerged to promote the empowerment of women who are victims of violence. A notable example is the portuguese collective Digitálias, studied by Teresa V. Furtado (2023). Developed in collaboration with women staying in women's refuges, the project uses digital art, collaborative creation and transmedia narratives as tools for rebuilding identity, strengthening self-esteem and fostering social inclusion. The results demonstrate that artistic participation can contribute to processes of emotional recovery and the development of autonomy. The Las Tesis collective, too, through its performance **Un violador en tu camino** (2019), gained international recognition by denouncing violence against women and the role of institutions in perpetuating it. The piece has been staged in dozens of countries, highlighting the potential of performance art as a form of social mobilisation and feminist activism. More recently, studies by Held (2022) highlight the role of feminist textile art in denouncing femicide and sexual violence, whilst Hill and d'Arcangeli (2023) demonstrate that the visual and performing arts constitute important spaces for resistance, remembrance and the assertion of women's rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review provided an understanding of the origins and persistence of gender-based violence against women, as well as identifying opportunities for intervention through artistic practices. The studies analysed show that artistic creation can provide a space for the symbolic expression of experiences of violence and for coming to terms with traumatic experiences, contributing to processes of identity reconstruction and the strengthening of self-esteem Furtado (2023). Artistic production can also act as a mediator of emotional expression and foster dialogue between women who are victims of violence and professionals or support services. However, it is important to note that the use of art should not be seen as a substitute for specialised psychological, social or clinical interventions, but rather as a complementary means of expression and intervention.

The analysed results also highlight the potential of artistic practices to stimulate critical thinking about gender inequalities and power relations. Feminist art, in particular, has helped to challenge stereotypical representations of women, problematise the objectification of the female body and denounce historically unequal power structures Nochlin (1971), Pollock (1988). In this context, the works of artists such as Ana Mendieta, Barbara Kruger and Artemisia Gentileschi constitute significant examples of artistic practices through which the body, identity, violence and the female condition are the subject of critical examination and resistance. Furtado (2023), in analysing the portuguese collective Digitálias, identified how collaborative artistic creation contributes to boosting self-esteem, the expression of personal experiences, the reconstruction of identity, and the development of personal and digital skills amongst women. These findings suggest that participation in collective creative processes can foster not only individual expression but also the building of support networks and social participation. Similarly, Held (2022) highlights the role of feminist textile art as a strategy for social activism, particularly in preserving the memory of victims of femicide, denouncing sexual violence and mobilising communities in defence of women's rights.

Hill and d'Arcangeli (2023) also highlight the contribution of the visual and performing arts to raising awareness of violence against women, demonstrating how these practices can occupy the public sphere and contribute to the construction of alternative discourses on gender-based violence.

The literature reviewed thus enables us to identify different functions attributed to art in the context of gender-based violence: the expression of individual experiences, raising awareness of violence, social critique, the preservation of memory and collective mobilisation. Its impact affects women particularly acutely, as a result of structural gender inequalities and asymmetrical power relations Segato (2016), Federici (2018). Addressing this phenomenon requires a multidimensional approach that combines prevention, protection and support for victims, holding perpetrators to account, and public policies aimed at promoting gender equality. In this context, the review art can complementary intervention, awareness-raising and prevention strategies, helping to bring to light experiences that are often silenced and to foster a critical awareness of violence and gender inequalities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has provided a description of the origin and persistence of the problem of violence experienced by women, along with possibilities for intervention through artistic expression, viewing creativity as a factor that supports emotional stability. The analysed data showed that artistic narrative enables victims to externalise experiences of violence symbolically through the processing of trauma, thereby facilitating the reconstruction of identity. It is evident that art acts as a therapeutic mediator, promoting emotional regulation and facilitating dialogue between victims and support professionals; however, artistic production reveals implicit content related to the dynamics of violence, contributing to a deeper understanding of its manifestations and their social impacts.

Furthermore, it is observed that artistic practices stimulate critical thinking about gender inequalities and power relations, expanding the potential of art as an instrument of social critique and cultural transformation. It is evident that, at present, gender-based violence constitutes a social problem with high individual and collective costs, with women being the most affected due to their structural vulnerability; this makes it essential to implement punitive measures against perpetrators.

A review of the literature has shown that art plays a significant role in raising awareness, exposing and preventing gender-based violence. With regard to feminist art, the literature shows that it has helped to deconstruct gender stereotypes and denounce such violence. Works of Ana Mendieta,

Barbara Kruger and Artemisia Gentileschi are frequently cited as examples of artistic productions that challenge the objectification of the female body. The most recent studies emphasise the importance of participatory and community-based art. Research such as that by Furtado (2023) on the Digitálias collective concludes that artistic creation boosts self-esteem, facilitates the expression of traumatic experiences, promotes the reconstruction of identity and develops personal and digital skills. However, Held (2022) concluded that feminist textile art constitutes an important strategy for social activism, helping to preserve the memory of victims of femicide, denouncing sexual violence and mobilising communities to defend women's rights. Similarly, Hill and d'Arcangeli, (2023) found that the visual and performing arts help to raise awareness of violence against women.

Studies on Ana Mendieta, Barbara Kruger and Artemisia Gentileschi show that their works denounce violence against women, challenge the objectification of the female body and represent forms of resistance and autonomy. It can be concluded that art plays a significant role as a therapeutic resource, as does the implementation of intervention programmes for victims' wellbeing in the construction of fairer and more equitable societies – not only as a means of denunciation, but also as a preventive tool, capable of promoting critical awareness and contributing to the safety and wellbeing of victims. However, gaps remain in the research, with the literature indicating still needed long-term of artistic interventions.

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