

# Arte e ativismo cultural de mulheres na formação docente de Artes Visuais: educação crítica e enfrentamento às formas de opressão contemporâneas

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## Resumo

O artigo apresenta como as produções artísticas de mulheres e feministas anunciam enfrentamentos sociais e novos saberes para a formação docente de Artes Visuais. Tais manifestações podem ser percebidas como pedagogias culturais que produzem interpretações e visões sociais na luta por direitos e contra o cenário patriarcal/neoliberal. Vale ressaltar que, com advento da pandemia, artistas visuais ocuparam a internet com suas visualidades, a fim de promover uma espécie de *ciberativismo*. Assim, buscamos investigar como o ativismo artístico dessas mulheres são essenciais para a formação crítica de professoras/es. O método aplicado consiste na análise pedagógica e visual das produções artísticas dessas mulheres, por meio de estudos da cultura visual. Portanto, investigaremos como tais visualidades se convertem em saberes pedagógicos no enfrentamento as opressões contemporâneas. Consideramos que, no contexto brasileiro, onde o patriarcado e a opressão se mostram latente, seja preciso investir em metodologias feministas que possibilitem a formação crítica de professoras/es.

**Palavras-chave:** Arte de Mulheres; feminismo; formação de professores; ativismo cultural.

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# **Art and cultural activism of women in Visual Arts teacher training: critical education and confronting contemporary forms of oppression**

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## **Abstract**

The article presents how the artistic productions of women and feminists announce social confrontations and new knowledge for the training of Visual Arts teachers. Such manifestations can be perceived as cultural pedagogies that produce social interpretations and visions in the struggle for rights and against the patriarchal/neoliberal scenario. It is worth mentioning that, with the advent of the pandemic, visual artists occupied the internet with their visualities, in order to promote a kind of cyberactivism. Thus, we seek to investigate how the artistic activism of these women is essential for the critical training of teachers. The applied method consists of the pedagogical and visual analysis of the artistic productions of these women, through studies of visual culture. Therefore, we will investigate how such visualities are converted into pedagogical knowledge in facing contemporary oppressions. We believe that, in the Brazilian context, where patriarchy and oppression are latent, it is necessary to invest in feminist methodologies that enable the critical training of teachers.

**Keywords:** Women's Art; feminism; teacher training; cultural activism.

# **Arte y activismo cultural de las mujeres en la formación del profesorado de Artes Visuales: educación crítica y enfrentamiento a las formas contemporáneas de opresión**

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## **Resumen**

El artículo presenta cómo las producciones artísticas de mujeres y feministas anuncian confrontaciones sociales y nuevos saberes para la formación de docentes de Artes Visuales. Tales manifestaciones pueden ser percibidas como pedagogías culturales que producen interpretaciones y visiones sociales en la lucha por los derechos y contra el escenario patriarcal/neoliberal. Cabe mencionar que, con la llegada de la pandemia, los artistas visuales ocuparon internet con sus visualidades, con el fin de promover una suerte de ciberactivismo. Así, buscamos investigar cómo el activismo artístico de estas mujeres es fundamental para la formación crítica de los docentes. El método aplicado consiste en el análisis pedagógico y visual de las producciones artísticas de estas mujeres, a través de estudios de cultura visual. Por ello, investigaremos cómo dichas visualidades se convierten en saberes pedagógicos frente a las opresiones contemporáneas. Creemos que, en el contexto brasileño, donde el patriarcado y la opresión están latentes, es necesario invertir en metodologías feministas que posibiliten la formación crítica de docentes.

**Palabras clave:** Arte de la Mujer; feminismo; formación de profesores; activismo cultural.

## Introduction

In light of the current neoliberal, conservative, and patriarchal context affecting Brazil, we recognize the need to invest in teaching and learning methods that enable critical perception and analysis of social oppressions, starting from initial teacher training. Thus, this article aims to present how art and the visualities produced by women and feminists from the Global South (SANTOS, 2009) can become cultural pedagogies that provide critical training for visual arts teachers. We believe that the current post-pandemic moment in Brazil, characterized by extreme racial intolerance, gender-based violence, social inequality, political persecution, artistic censorship, and other forms of oppression, demands new directions for a more humane education that produces subjects free from "market-based subjectivities" (TVARDOVSKAS, 2015, p. 38) and patriarchal norms that are massified through conservative visualities, Fake News, and other everyday image forms utilized in this process.

In this sense, studying the artistic productions of women, whether created individually by artists or by feminist groups, can serve as formative and pedagogical instruments that educate critically and raise awareness (FREIRE, 1979) among teachers, students, and other minorities against the oppression of the patriarchal/neoliberal system.

This study is the result of our individual research and the investigative partnership (mentor and mentee), in which we seek to analyze the importance of visualities in the teacher training process in visual arts. Our interest lies in investigating how artistic productions created by women and/or feminist groups can become pedagogical mechanisms to confront the processes of subjectivation of hegemonic standards that are daily attributed to the social context. Thus, we will discuss the scope of patriarchy in social life and its control mechanisms aligned with the neoliberal context, but most importantly, we will point out pathways regarding the pedagogical potential of artistic productions by Latin American women in the critical formative process and in combating this scenario, as well as presenting their struggles and visual poetics.

We aim to explore what possibilities of knowledge emerge from the artistic manifestations exercised by women in both physical and regional spaces - through artistic activism situated in the context of social mobilizations - as well as in the virtual realm, such as social networks, through cyber-activism and digifeminism (ABREU, 2017). We understand that these epistemological articulations can be useful in the critical training of teachers and in the construction of consciousness-raising knowledge (FREIRE, 1979) to foster social engagement in their pedagogical practices in opposition to hegemonies. Thus, we will contextualize the social dimension of patriarchy and the

movements that oppose it, the legacy of women's struggles in formulating artistic activism, the pedagogical analyses of their productions, and their importance for the critical training of teachers. Finally, we will present the considerations we have made thus far, acknowledging that the research is still ongoing

### **The social context of patriarchy**

According to Lerner (2019), the organizational form of patriarchy did not exist in the primitive periods of gathering communities, in a social context of divided community activities, where women performed roles symmetrical to those of men for the survival of the community. In certain cultures, such as horticultural societies, women played significant roles in the survival structure, providing "on average, 60% or more of the food" (LERNER, 2019, p. 54), although this participation did not characterize the existence of a matriarchal society. For the author, the various pieces of evidence from primitive archaeological sites demonstrate that the role of women and their subordination to men was not universal among ancient societies. In this sense, patriarchal scenarios were also not the same in current societies. Vergès analyzes that multiculturalism has produced various forms of patriarchy, sometimes more blatant, and other times subtler, but always with the same interest of "serving racial capitalism, exploiting, extracting, dividing, dispossessing, deciding whose lives matter and whose do not" (VERGÈS, 2020, p. 18)

In this context, men organized themselves to reverse scenarios that were more favorable to women, creating symbols and mechanisms of control over their bodies and the children that constituted the community, such as the family and private property. That is, the initial proposal of patriarchy did not arise solely with the intention of family organization but with the primary interest of administrative and social control over communities.

Thus, men organized cultural ideals that shaped the patriarchal landscape, through concepts of heteronormative families (mother, father, children), private property, women's responsibility for motherhood and their husbands, and other ideological precepts that served to maintain control over women's bodies and the dynamics of the economic, political, and cultural system. This scenario also worked to prevent any form of female or feminist uprising, which would only occur later in more recent periods of history. These control mechanisms were gradually internalized and, in fact, accepted by some women (LERNER, 2019), who came to view these determinations as essential for social and family organization. Moreover, according to the author, men were only able to reverse the social organization of communities thanks to the help of privileged women who supported them, under the

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false promise of security and family stability, often because they felt vulnerable or deprived of any social role other than motherhood and domestic care.

In this context of submission and control, visualities were used as symbolic, cultural, and social artifacts that conveyed messages and patterns, which were constantly massified and served to shape the Western/patriarchal/capitalist society. According to Alves (2016), it is within the context of creating a supposed reality that the political, cultural, and social formation of individuals takes place. It is worth noting that when we speak of visualities, we refer to a construction that is not only visual but also social (MIRZOEFF, 2002). In other words, visual scenarios were created that represented standards of what should be considered “real” in a “civilized,” capitalist, and patriarchal society, according to the Western imagination. Mirzoeff (2016) develops the concept of “visuality complexes” - the production of a social organization through classification, separation, and aesthetics- which would generate imagistic scenarios<sup>3</sup>. Thus, in the postmodern periods that followed, visualities organized social life, strengthening the power of white men while subjugating women, Black people, and other non-Western civilizations.

It is important to highlight that this dominance also influenced artistic visual constructions over the centuries. In various periods of art, male artists represented the female sex through ideals of beauty, religious beliefs, and mysticism (C. COSTA, 2002), which contributed imagistically to the social control of their bodies. In this sense, these visualities became part of mechanisms of visual control that helped sustain patriarchy and other hegemonies during centuries of oppression. In the control of state power, men anchored in a sexist ideology categorized and classified women as inferior to maintain control and dominance over them. Moreover, patriarchal domination has always been allied with other forms of oppression, such as racism and slavery (LERNER, 2019), to keep the bodies of non-white individuals under the control of the power dynamic. Foucault analyzes that,

during the classical era, there was a discovery of the body as an object and target of power. We would easily find signs of this great attention devoted to the body — the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, that obeys, responds, becomes skilled, or whose forces are multiplied (FOUCAULT, 1987, p. 163).

Foucault's analysis helps us understand how the patriarchal system operated within this same perspective of control, training, and subjugation of women's bodies, involving them in gender domination and obedience that has sustained and still sustains men's power. Even after centuries, the

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<sup>3</sup> In tracing a decolonial genealogy of visibility, Mirzoeff (2016) identified three primary complexes of visibility and counter-visibility, characterized as: the Plantation Complex, the Imperial Complex, and the Military-Industrial Complex. The complex that derives from these conditions has volume and substance, forming an autonomous world that can be visualized, sustained, and inhabited, where subjects do not have the "right to look."

patriarchal ideal continues to be fed and ingrained in other dominant structures to impose "feminine" ideals and standards that keep women under regimes of control in the struggle for power. Today, with the expansion of digital media, other forms of psychic, bodily, sexist, conservative, and heteronormative controls are becoming widespread through images and visualities that maintain the patriarchal/neoliberal dynamic, as we saw in Brazil during the protests of 2013/14 and the impeachment process of President Dilma Rousseff.

During the protests against the president, numerous images were disseminated and circulated on social media and mainstream media, aiming to discredit her physical image and moral integrity. We witnessed the construction of a political, social, and cultural scenario, orchestrated by conservative, reactionary, and misogynistic entities interested in reclaiming the country's power through a strong visual construction that degraded and humiliated the president, turning her into an enraged, uncontrolled, and irrational figure. After this episode, sexism, homophobia, and racism were revealed as part of a fascist project of power that aligns with the neoliberal/patriarchal/colonialist context to serve the economic interests of the dominant groups. In this way, visualities were used by these groups to produce a collective subjectivity, altering social relations and manipulating daily life through virtual devices such as social networks. This process intensified "with the introduction of intentionally created computer algorithms for controlling the 'psyche' of subjects" (ABREU, 2020, p. 97).

According to the same author, the internet and social networks have also opened spaces for other visualities, such as feminist and artistic expressions by women who seek to oppose and dismantle patriarchal/neoliberal/colonialist hegemonies through their artistic productions. We can observe that the resurgence of sexist and misogynistic ideals has produced and intensified the engagement and activism of women who, through art, aim to challenge the imposed standards and hegemonic social organization. Thus, we will next highlight how women, individually or through collectives, have equipped themselves to produce feminist artistic narratives that seek to raise awareness and educate other women and oppressed groups about the various forms of oppression.

## **The contemporary art of women and the legacy of struggles**

In the last 60 years, women have been producing a significant amount of artistic and visual work, whether through traditional arts and their languages, such as painting, printmaking, and sculpture, or through dance, photography, performance, video performance, and urban installations. Both in Brazil and other Latin American countries, we have observed a transformation in contemporary art, driven primarily by women who began to create art in parallel with social struggles

Arte e ativismo cultural de mulheres na formação docente de Artes Visuais: educação crítica e enfrentamento às formas de opressão contemporâneas and various feminist movements. In this way, their artistic productions can be interpreted as part of a contemporary visual culture that enhances the relationship between art and life, with the feminist struggle and the more oppressed social layers.

We see several examples of women artists who, during the 1970s and 1980s, were committed to producing visualities that denounced the lack of freedom of expression, torture, and violence perpetrated by authoritarian regimes against the bodies of those who opposed this authority. Among them, we can recall Maria Maiolino, who in the 1970s produced video performances, using her own body to denounce the oppression and acts of violence that affected women and other groups trying to resist the dictatorships. Although the artist never declared herself a feminist, her works are part of the activist artistic legacy that translates the tortures and impositions on women's bodies and minorities during that period, as we can observe in the *Fotopoemação* series and the photographic reproduction of the video performance *De: Para* (From: To) (Fig. 1). In the work, the artist appears bound in a sort of restraints that we interpret as a symbol of the repression and silencing experienced by people during the dictatorship period in Brazil.

Figure 1: *De: Para*. Anna Maria Maiolino, 1974



Source: Photographic reproduction by Sérgio Guerini/Itaú Cultural

In the same way that the artist left her legacy of struggle, other Brazilian artists also created artworks aligned with women's fight for the freedom of their bodies, even though they did not declare themselves feminists. In addition to the Brazilians, other Latin artists were also concerned with

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translating their demands for the right to control their own bodies and overturn the hegemonic sexist order through art. A group that left an important legacy of artistic, political, and feminist activism for women's civil rights was the collective of Mexican artists involved in the movement known as Artivism, which, according to Mexican researcher and artist Mayer, “combines art and activism” (MAYER, 2018, p. 37). The artist, who is also part of the collective, analyzes that the group's visual productions are engaged in spreading an art that is activist and committed to promoting a feminist vision of the rights of Indigenous and marginalized women. The work of these artists was fundamental to the transformations that took place in Mexico regarding Visual Arts Education and the interdisciplinary possibilities with Cultural Studies and feminisms.

In Brazil, these interdisciplinary constructions of Art with other studies are more recent. However, we cannot overlook the fact that, since the beginning of the dictatorship, we have seen the rise of feminist, artistic, and social movements determined to restore Brazilian democratization, which would only occur at the end of the 1980s. Alongside this, we witnessed the growth of a mass of female artists committed to denouncing and combating oppression to ensure civil rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of the body. These struggles also brought about changes in the Brazilian educational context and prompted significant reforms in curricular organizations in schools and universities. Brabo explains that, “as a result of the feminist movement, on a national level, in the 1990s, gender was included in the National Curriculum Parameters for Elementary Education” (2008, p. 161). With the theme of gender incorporated into school curricula, the debates and issues surrounding this topic expanded through various disciplines, with Art playing a significant role in this process. According to the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) for Visual Arts education:

The theme of cultural plurality has special relevance in art education, as it allows students to engage with diversity in a positive way, both in art and in life. In the classroom, individuals from different cultures interact, and these cultures can be identified by ethnicity, gender, age, geographical location, social class, occupation, education, and religion (BRASIL, 1998, p. 41).

This implementation allows us to think that there is a possibility of aligning educational practices in Art with the visualities produced by visual culture to discuss issues inherent to gender, sexuality, race, and class in an intersectional and reflective manner. In this way, it would be a means to surpass the boundaries of feminism itself, producing a transgressive education that could also be implemented for the education of illiterate people. According to bell hooks (2019), feminist texts often do not reach oppressed masses and remain in closed cycles of intellectuals and feminist scholars. For her, “the focus on written material prevents many women from learning about feminism” (HOOKS, 2019, p. 164). Artistic visualities, on the other hand, can represent an educational form that

Arte e ativismo cultural de mulheres na formação docente de Artes Visuais: educação crítica e enfrentamento às formas de opressão contemporâneas generates meaning and “draws” the social struggles that are part of the daily lives of many in Brazil, including LGBTQIA+ groups, Indigenous ethnicities, women, and marginalized Black populations. In this sense, women’s art productions can become pedagogical tools in the formulation of a contemporary visual literacy that is plural and aligned with social struggle.

Despite being considered materials with educational potential, and despite the advances in women’s and feminist productions, their representations are still scarcely studied in higher education Visual Arts programs. This is precisely because they emerge outside a colonial and Eurocentric context of education, which continues to be followed as a model of scientific knowledge by many educational institutions, even though it is inconsistent with the reality in Brazil and the rest of Latin America. Moreover, many of these productions take place on the margins of artistic circuits, which often prevents the recognition of the women who create them in pedagogical and educational projects. This view is supported by researchers such as Luciana Loponte (2005, 2013, 2015), who investigates the invisibility of these productions in academic content and the lack of appreciation for feminist productions in the interface of Visual Arts Education. Her studies point out that “there is a discursive framework established that distinctly affects the way historians, curators, and critics see the inclusion of women in the field of arts” (LOPONTE, 2015, p. 147).

In this context of confrontation, absence, and struggle, women have sought other ways to showcase their productions and assert their political, cultural, and social positions in new cyber spaces since the 1990s. We can cite, for example, the case of the VNS Matrix collective<sup>4</sup> which was part of a movement called cyberfeminism to showcase their artistic and literary productions. This movement, conceptualized by Donna Haraway (1985) in the essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century*, explained the relationship between feminism, technology, and social movements, making a feminist critique of science. This movement still exists and invests in digital technologies to spread counter-opinions against the oppressive hegemonies that permeate network environments, as reflections of everyday life. From this movement, others emerged, such as digifeminism, “to reflect on the political actions and artistic productions of young women who, similarly to the cyberfeminists of the past, use digital tools to express opinions” (ABREU, 2017, p. 134), subjectivities, issues of sexuality and non-traditional femininities, as well as their activism for the rights of women, whether Cis or trans.

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the artistic collective can be found on the official page: <https://vnsmatrix.net/>  
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In this way, these women's productions are embedded in a non-hegemonic visual culture context, emerging to counter other visualities produced by mass media and advertising, which are used to maintain social domination and control over bodies. According to Mirzoeff (2016), visual control categories have been disseminated since the colonial period as a way to regulate the freedom of bodies and people's subjectivities. For him, visualities need to be analyzed in conjunction with information, imagination, and critical and subjective understanding. However, the author's proposal can only be practiced if there is an investment in preparing the gaze, through the study of counter-visualities that allow individuals to critically understand the visual context and its counterpoints.

Mirzoeff (2016) suggests understanding counter-visualities as political manifestations that challenge the orders and limitations imposed by power structures, creating disruptions and tensions that question systems of value judgment. In this way, we can see in women's art forms of counter-visualities that emerge to oppose the norms imposed on their bodies and other subjugated groups, ensuring that people can truly perceive the discourses linked to mass visualities. After all, many of these women's contemporary productions come from the legacy of struggle by other artists who began creating in opposition to political, social, and Eurocentric hegemonic arts, which traditionally constituted the art circuits.

The legacy left by contemporary women artists has influenced digital artists, performers, and women in feminist collectives to produce visual content with the intention of opposing patriarchy. According to Abreu (2017, p. 137), "when a woman creates a meme to mock machismo, that is digifeminism. When other women use their social media profiles to express opinions or denounce sexist behaviors, that is digifeminism." In other words, these women's productions form a movement of virtual activism, amplifying the social struggles of feminist groups and artists committed to disseminating their counter-visualities. Some of these productions can be found on Instagram on institutional pages such as the *Museu do Isolamento*, which is dedicated to disseminating and referencing the work of various Brazilian artists who began producing artistic visualities during the pandemic. Through this, we find the personal page of the Amazonian artist Fernanda Delffino, @adelffino or @fios.de.igapo, who uses her page to display artistic narratives through embroidery that transcribe issues of identity and territory, pointing to critiques of xenophobia, as we can observe in her work *Ser nortista é viver no ativismo* (fig. 2).

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Figure 2: Ser nortista é viver no ativismo, Fernanda Delfino, 2022



Source: [instagram/fios.de.igapo](https://www.instagram.com/fios.de.igapo)

We can see that the artist produces a visual narrative on social networks, in search of territorial belonging, and denounces how the northern region of Brazil is rendered invisible by the rest of the country. Like her, other artists create images and visualities that are exclusively exhibited on social networks and virtual spaces. Many of them use their own bodies to create alternative narratives and break with dominant guidelines, generating a shift in the gender constructs established by hegemonic discourses. According to Abreu, the body “configures itself as a container of symbolic codes that help to understand the new relations of knowledge and power” (ABREU, 2017, p. 136).

We can understand that social struggles and feminisms are intrinsic to the artistic legacy left by various women at the end of the last century, as well as contemporary artists who are engaged in the same narrative. Their works have influenced social change and a movement challenging binary gender norms, as well as the development of other perspectives that question hegemonic standards. The artistic legacy of these women is extremely powerful in encouraging new forms of critical teaching and learning on various topics embedded in Visual Arts. It is important that we value their work both in academic and school contexts, without fear of them being deemed inappropriate productions, as this is also a stigma that must be broken through a commitment to education that transforms into social struggle.

## **Pedagogies in the Artistic Production of Women**

As we pointed out at the beginning of this text, we will now present the pedagogical possibilities that emerge from the contemporary artistic expressions of women and how they are capable of

producing knowledge and social reflections to confront patriarchy and other forms of oppression. This approach seeks to present the productions of women artists as formative potentialities for Visual Arts teachers and as pedagogical possibilities in the construction of a critical perception of reality. Thus, we will highlight some artists and feminist collectives that use both the streets and social media spaces, such as Instagram, to display and comment on their works and social concerns. According to Abreu (2020, p. 101), “digital technologies have contributed to the invention of new counter-conducts that break with the hegemony of dominant narratives.” In this way, the internet and social networks become spaces for artistic cyber-activism, placing feminist agendas in the spotlight and widely disseminating them.

We observe that social networks have created space for the visibility and belonging of women artists who were previously absent from exhibition spaces and academic debates in Visual Arts. In addition to digital platforms, the streets have also become a space for artistic expressions by women and feminist collectives that develop visual productions. Many of these artists are young women, connected to social movements or activist collectives that produce visual languages such as graffiti, dance, performances, installations, paste-ups, murals, and other visual creations that are still considered marginal in more conservative Visual Arts studies. Among these women, we can mention graffiti artist Mag Magrela, who uses her Instagram page to showcase and display her work in urban spaces. It is important to note that when we refer to women artists, we understand them as social subjects who identify with the female gender, whether they are cis, trans, or LGBTQIA+. In any case, many of them grew up familiar with the internet or found in these platforms the opportunity to showcase their projects and visual productions as a response to the invisibility in hegemonic artistic circuits, which are still organized under a sexist and conservative lens.

During the pandemic, many of these artists participated in protests that intensified in Brazil and other Latin American countries in defense of democracy, in response to the oppression and negligence of governments regarding the purchase of vaccines and the fight against COVID-19 through public health measures. In this context, many artists and feminists produced their narratives and artistic visualities against the oppressions that compounded the daily lives of the poorest segments of society. In this way, numerous artists became involved in street protests with works that aimed to confront and counter the various forms of oppression linked to anti-democratic and/or fascist governments. Similarly, this movement spread through virtual platforms and social networks, which served as spaces for exhibitions, political and social activism, and as a means of disseminating a visual culture

Arte e ativismo cultural de mulheres na formação docente de Artes Visuais: educação crítica e enfrentamento às formas de opressão contemporâneas of resistance by artists and feminist movements. Among these groups, we can cite the Chilean feminist collective of artists *Las Tesis*.

O grupo atuou durante a pandemia com produção de diversos manifestos artísticos nas redes sociais, encontros virtuais, produção de cartazes, fotografias, *performances* e seminários, com objetivo de debater sobre a violência e formas de contrapor o patriarcado. No entanto, O coletivo ficou conhecido em 2019, principalmente pela criação da *performance* (Fig. 3) ‘Um Violador em seu caminho’ (tradução nossa), reproduzida em diversos países, como México, Brasil e França, por outras mulheres que encontram nessa forma de expressão uma maneira de denunciar, alertar outras mulheres e cobrar da sociedade um amparo significativo às vítimas de violência. A *performance* que foi tão difundida, articula expressão artística com ativismo social, por meio do encontro da arte com as manifestações feministas que ocorrem pela América Latina.

Figure 3: Performance "A Rapist in Your Path," Las Tesis, 2019



Source: Periscope Newspaper

The performance by the artists can be understood as a form of social epistemology, which can also be analyzed as a form of cultural pedagogy. It articulates artistic languages and, through performance, presents a social critique regarding violence against women, the blindness of justice, and society's disregard for such oppression. With phrases like "it wasn't my fault, not where I was nor what I wore," the artists counter macho and dominant discourses that attempt to criminalize women and their bodies, even during the investigation of violence and violations committed against them. We can observe that, pedagogically, the artists use dance and stage performance to enact a critique that exposes, through music, the state, men, and institutions as their oppressors and violators. In the same way, by blaming patriarchy, they critically mobilize other women to understand the macho culture that constantly promotes the violation of their bodies in all instances.

The artists' work can be used in the training of Visual Arts teachers and in their educational practices in school environments to build critical knowledge about hegemonic social organization, create new perspectives on women's struggles for civil rights, and about feminism itself, which is intertwined with Visual Arts. We recognize that the use of these images “[...] in pedagogical processes offers opportunities to learn to see the world with less innocent and more questioning eyes regarding the discourses disseminated through the disciplining visualities of the gaze” (ABREU; ÁLVARES; MONTELES, 2019, p. 844-845). Thus, through Visual Arts education, we can regain individuals' ability to identify and “claim the right to look” (MIRZOEFF, 2016). Therefore, valuing these productions in the context of education also means investing in other epistemologies that arise through images, culture, and everyday life. These artists' works are part of a broader composition, presented in virtual spaces, to create new cultural pedagogies that help us understand the struggle of women and other oppressed groups.

In addition to the collective, other feminist artists and activists have used social networks, such as Instagram, to present their artistic productions, comment on them, and discuss political, social, racial, identity, and gender issues. Among the Brazilian artists, we can mention Sallisa Rosa, an Indigenous visual artist who creates installations, performances, videos, ceramics, and photographs with environmental and feminist themes. Due to her environmental engagement and powerful work, the artist was featured at the Sesc Triennial in Sorocaba and in the exhibition *Feminist Histories: Artists After 2000* at MASP in 2019. In addition to participating in recent exhibitions with other women, Sallisa maintains an Instagram page, @sallisarosa, where she publishes her works and writes about them, analyzing their relationship with territory, roots, and her own body as a place of journeys and paths. One of her most recent works is the *Abya Yala* series (Fig. 4), in which the artist symbolizes the female body through ceramic pots.

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Figure 4: Pot, Abya Yala series, Sallisa Rosa, 2021



Source: Instagram/sallisarosa

Like her, Gê Viana is another Brazilian artist who is concerned with reclaiming her Indigenous and Black ancestry through decolonial productions that (re)signify artistic works created by European male artists during Brazil's colonial period. The artist's works seek to break with stereotypes, racial standards, and gender legitimations of what it means to be a woman by reclaiming the ancestries of African ethnicities and tribes that did not use categories like man and woman in their social and familial organizations. The research of author Oyewùmí (2020) helps us understand this deconstruction by the artist when she analyzes that the category of woman is a social construct of the traditional Western and Eurocentric family. The author explains that "the traditional Yorùbá family can be described as a genderless family. Significantly, the centers of power within the family are diffuse and not specified by gender" (OYEWÙMÍ, 2020, p. 177). In this way, we can see that Gê Viana proposes a reclamation of culture and ancestral traditions prior to colonization, in an attempt to break with the binary gender standards imposed by colonizers on Black and Indigenous populations. Thus, her artistic productions can be understood as cultural pedagogies that constitute essential decolonial knowledge in the learning process of Visual Arts and in the training of teachers in this field, particularly concerning African and Afro-Brazilian culture and art.

In the same line of social engagement is the artist, storyteller, performer, educator, and researcher in Popular Education, the Cearense Juliana Costa, or CostadeJu. The artist defines herself as an "activist" and often creates visual languages advocating for human and women's rights. Engaged in the feminist struggle, she has frequently participated in protests in favor of democracy, producing performances (Fig. 5) against the Bolsonaro government during the pandemic. On her personal



Instagram page, she discusses her productions and artistic expressions, informing readers about her points of view, her political position, and how art can play a powerful role in the fight against body oppression and for the lives of women.

Figure 5: *Performance O corpo fêmea na rua*, Juliana Costa, 2021



Source: [instagram/costadeju](https://www.instagram.com/costadeju)

By showcasing this work (photographed by @DudaDusi) on her personal Instagram account, the artist explains that the performance embodies the struggle of a woman through a body in art, in the street, and in the fight. According to the artist, the *Women for Democracy* united for a more just and equal society and to denounce the failures and negligence of denialist governments, which allowed the death of hundreds of people during the pandemic. As we can see, various artists came together during the protests in 2021, forming an alliance with other social groups in an attempt to combat the oppressive reality and the Bolsonaro government's neglect of life and health.

Both Juliana Costa and photographer Duda Dusi produced artistic visualities during the protests, which can be understood as cultural pedagogies, as they are concerned with forcefully denouncing the problems that affect daily life and can, in turn, educate others through these visualities. In a way, their productions, like those of other women, emerge from marginalized, invisible, and oppressed layers, under oppressive control, as an attempt to merge art and culture to highlight individual and collective resistance. Thus, we can see that the narratives constructed during the protests, and through the collaboration between art and feminism, become social epistemes that highlight a visual culture that is, at its core, constituted through counter-visualities (MIRZOEFF, 2002).

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The dissemination and spread of such visualities through social networks, on individual artist pages or social group pages, can reach and raise awareness among others, even if they did not actively participate in the street protests. In other words, these visual productions become non-formal and pedagogical knowledge, potentially formative for both the general public and Visual Arts teachers and even their students. Larrosa (2000) understands that the concept of the pedagogical transcends the relationships established between students and teachers in school contexts, and includes various environments, spaces, and contexts where learning relationships are realized—between the individual and themselves, others and the individual, and the individual and the world. For the author, pedagogical practices are those in which “the experience people have of themselves is produced or transformed” (LARROSA, 2000, p. 36) and in which the human being, who maintains a reflective relationship with themselves, is constituted and produced in this relationship. Thus, we can think that these practices, not previously considered pedagogical, may create spaces where modifications in the individual’s relationship with themselves occur, potentially originating pedagogical experiences, in this case, through visual productions on social networks (ZAMPERETTI, 2017).

In addition to the artists presented, many other women have been using Instagram to showcase their visual productions, created in the streets, in specific places, or projects made specifically for social media platforms. We assess that the internet has become a space for exchanging experiences and narratives of certain women and artistic collectives who have found in this space ways to strengthen social activism and feminist agency to counter patriarchy. Likewise, it has become a place for sharing and visually demonstrating the works of many women who do not find a place in traditional art spaces.

We observe that, through their social engagement and political positions, these women’s artistic productions, shaped by social issues and feminist resistance, constitute essential pedagogical knowledge for the critical training of Visual Arts teachers. This knowledge enables them to promote interpretations of visuality that shape the landscape of visual culture. Furthermore, engagement with their studies and productions can represent an engaged and critical education, centered on social justice. After all, these works are widely shared on the internet, on specialized pages or social networks, reaching a large audience and thus promoting non-formal education.

As we have already pointed out, these works can be found on personal pages or others dedicated to women’s productions, such as the Instagram page “@artistaslatinas,” which is dedicated to disseminating the productions and actions of women (CIS, Trans, and LGBTQ) as a space for exhibition, gathering, belonging, and cyber-activism. On this page, we can find Brazilian and other

Latin American artists who make up the activism, art, and feminist scene, such as the aforementioned Brazilian photographer Duda Dusi, who is dedicated to using social networks as an exhibition space for images captured during street protests in Brazil, such as those featuring the artist Juliana Costa.

Although Duda is dedicated to traditional photographic work, she tends to position herself politically and critically by showcasing images that address current social issues. According to Abreu, “feminist artistic expressions have spread across the internet, and there is a bit of everything: videos, performances, poems, stories, illustrations, photos, and many social media pages and websites” (2017, p. 147). In other words, women find on the internet a field for exposure, presence, and educational resistance against patriarchy and neoliberal oppression, as is the case with the artists mentioned in this study. Their work can be understood as pedagogical action knowledge (GAUTHIER, 2013) that, when experienced by teachers (even if not in the classroom as suggested by the author), can make them more reflective and critical of social realities.

Although our focus is on Visual Arts teachers, we understand that teachers from any field can use women’s artistic productions in their training, educational practices, research, or projects that utilize visualities. For Coutinho and Loponte (2015), it is possible to invest in subversion and resistance strategies from within the school context, curricular planning, and especially Art teaching. Thus, the study of women’s artistic visualities can offer pedagogical opportunities to challenge the hegemonic patriarchal/neoliberal/colonialist and oppressive control that shapes the social context.

In this sense, women’s artistic material can be used to foster critical and social perspectives, in an intersectional way, in the training of teachers so that they become conscious (FREIRE, 1979) and aware of other social perspectives that are subordinate to the capitalist/patriarchal order. In this way, teacher training takes on the responsibility of preparing educators who are engaged in promoting educational practices that value women artists as producers of cultural pedagogies capable of providing an understanding of visual culture, whether hegemonic or not.

By observing the work of the women highlighted in this study, we can interpret that many of them create through dance, photography, performance, sculpture, and other mediums images and visualities that promote a multiplicity of knowledge and discussions, addressing themes of gender, race, ethnicity, ancestry, the environment, class, and violence against women. Thus, their productions can be analyzed as cultural pedagogies, as they articulate cultural artifacts, communication, and social knowledge that emerge from non-formal educational spaces. According to Andrade and Costa (2015), cultural pedagogies operate in various ways in the formation of identity and subjectivities, stemming from a form of education different from that found in formal spaces. In this sense, these women’s

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productions can represent the formulation of knowledge that multiplies understanding in the context of Visual Arts teaching, as they highlight everyday pedagogical and social situations.

It is evident that many women artists have produced in conjunction with various feminist and social movements since the 1960s. Some recent exhibitions, starting in 2018, highlight this legacy of struggle, art, and culture left by them, through the display of a vast body of artistic work produced in the context of social mobilizations and during military dictatorships. These exhibitions show that their works were created in dialogue with political and social movements that sought to combat censorship, control over bodies, promote freedom of expression, and guarantee civil rights.

It is worth noting that these recent exhibitions were only possible due to public policies for cultural and artistic promotion by progressive governments, which were interrupted in 2016, and through the initiative of artists, researchers, and curators who sought to exhibit and emphasize the importance of women in art, education, and the promotion of new directions for Contemporary Art. These achievements and initiatives ensured the presence of artists, who were previously little known, in exhibitions dedicated exclusively to them, such as the 2017 MASP exhibition *Histories of Sexuality*; the 2018 exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* at the Pinacoteca of São Paulo; and two other exhibitions held in 2019 at MASP: *Histories of Women: Artists until 1900* and *Feminist Histories: Artists after 2000*. According to Fajardo-Hill and Giunta, curators of the 2018 exhibition at the Pinacoteca,

the works produced by the artists represented in *Radical Women* propose a different body, a body that is researched and rediscovered, deeply connected to the political situation experienced by much of the continent at the time, especially in the various countries governed by authoritarian regimes that sought to control behavior, thought, and the body. The lives and works of these artists are intertwined with experiences of dictatorship, imprisonment, exile, torture, violence, censorship, and repression, but also with the emergence of a new sensibility (2018, p. 17).

In agreement with the authors, we understand that the artistic productions created by women and/or feminist collectives that are part of social movements carry various themes of struggle and resistance. From this perspective, we can assess that the art produced by politically engaged women is aligned with the class struggle, yet in a feminist and pluralistic way. After all, Tvardovskas analyzes that “the artistic field is one of the spaces of strong critique against misogyny” (p. 50, 2015). Therefore, we believe that these artistic visualities announce new epistemological and pedagogical possibilities in the fight against patriarchy and fascist oppression through a critical, feminist, and reflective education.

The works produced by women, especially those connected to socially marginalized groups (Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, etc.), can become formative and pedagogical tools of opposition to the oppression promoted by the neoliberal/patriarchal/colonialist system. Coutinho and Loponte (2015) point out that there are several arguments supporting the proposition of pedagogical work based on the artistic production of contemporary women, as it

a dialogue about social issues by highlighting the conflicts and dilemmas embedded in the works, without sugarcoating or minimizing them, as a means of confronting and seeking alternatives to overcome sexism, dichotomies, exclusions, and invisibilities. [...] to dialogue with the social context of the school (students, family, teachers, and community), as these artistic propositions address everyday issues, fostering identification with personal life stories and events that relate to the topics in question (COUTINHO; LOPONTE, 2015, p. 188).

Despite all the arguments supporting the importance of women's productions in the educational process, whether formal or non-formal, there are still barriers that need to be broken to ensure the recognition of women as essential in the critical formation of teachers in this field. This occurs because the social dimension of patriarchy impacts educational institutions, which organize their academic content under the influence of such hegemony. This assertion comes from previous research, in which we found, according to teachers' accounts, that the artistic material produced by women is rarely seen during academic training, especially in relation to contemporary art. Even when there is some type of demonstration, it tends to focus on aesthetic appreciation rather than a sensitive/critical perspective on the productions. Loponte (2005, 2014, 2015), for instance, investigates this issue by highlighting how women's productions have become invisible in academic content, which also fails to critically address feminist productions in the context of Visual Arts Education.

Her critique aligns with what researcher Carla de Abreu (2017) argues, as both agree that, in the Brazilian context, the problem of valuing women's artistic productions involves the lack of discussion about the relationship between art, Visual Culture, and feminisms in Visual Arts Education. Unlike Brazil, this relationship has existed in Mexico since the 1980s and is evident in the works and artistic movements of women who focus on social issues, as observed in the *Artivista* collective.

These points help us understand that it is necessary to invest in methodologies that value women's art as important for both teachers' and students' critical and social understanding during their training. Coutinho and Loponte (2015) argue that using works produced by women in Visual Arts classes can pave the way for overcoming paradigms. They analyze that, in the school context, the introduction of such works may,

Arte e ativismo cultural de mulheres na formação docente de Artes Visuais: educação crítica e enfrentamento às formas de opressão contemporâneas capable of provoking plural and still rarely seen dialogues, that are not solely interested in conveying conventional, purely manufactural information, but that, without denials or dissimulations, embrace a commitment to diversity, difference, the unspoken, the forbidden, the peripheral, and, for this very reason, are able to contribute to the dissolution of the perpetuation of a single point of view and to the rehabilitation of other forms of knowledge and power (COUTINHO; LOPONTE, 2015, p. 187).

We can understand that this is also relevant in the training of Visual Arts teachers, as it introduces new ways of learning and teaching through women's visual productions. However, such investment still requires addressing the models and ideals that shape teacher subjectivities, particularly regarding the use of women's artistic production in their pedagogical practices. We clarify that women's artistic production has been stigmatized due to the controversial approach it brings, precisely because it challenges dominant hegemonies and exposes social oppression. According to Fajardo-Hill and Giunta, "the vast body of work produced by Latin American and Latina artists has been marginalized and suppressed by a dominant, canonical, and patriarchal art history" (2018, p. 17). The reality is that works created by women artists may address themes aligned with feminist struggles against patriarchy and the system of oppression operated by neoliberalism, and for that reason, they are rejected and rendered invisible in training courses and schools.

While we emphasize the importance of women and their productions in the teacher training process, we recognize that the debate about the importance of these productions in the curricular constructs of educational institutions needs to be expanded. This should be done through the awareness of these themes as drivers of new social knowledge that combat current hegemonies and promote critical, feminist, and decolonial education. Thus, we believe that these productions can become fundamental in fostering discussions on the critical and social formation of Visual Arts teachers, as well as teachers in other fields of knowledge.

## **Final considerations**

This brief study, based on the focus of our research, aimed to highlight how the artistic productions of women or feminist collectives promote social discussions and critical reflections on various themes that are incorporated into Visual Arts and feminist activism. Furthermore, we sought to list the mechanisms and expansion of patriarchy in the neoliberal context and its interference in everyday life and educational institutions, which end up impacting the dissemination of women's artistic productions. However, we aimed to demonstrate how contemporary women artists have found

ways to resist institutional invisibility and oppressive regimes through artistic expressions that denounce and combat such regimes.

We believe that this brief study was able to show how women have found in social networks and the streets ways to display their productions, addressing themes of opposition to the dominance of patriarchy, fascism, and neoliberalism. Likewise, we aimed to demonstrate how these spaces have become places of belonging, artistic and social exchanges, and formative experiences.

We considered that it was possible to point out how women's artistic productions and the artistic manifestations arising from feminist collectives have become increasingly aligned with issues of gender, class, violence against women, femicide, and the right to life, establishing a unique kind of social episteme and pedagogical knowledge that breaks with Western standards imposed by groups that wish to maintain their positions of power. Finally, we sought to discuss the educational potential that the artistic articulations of these women promote in the critical formation of teachers. However, we understand that the discussions surrounding these proposals, as a significant part of educational institution content, are still in the process of construction and acceptance. For this reason, the study is ongoing through a doctoral research project and extension projects that investigate the importance of visualities in teacher education.

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