

The Art of Protest

By
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Protest art is the creative works produced by activists and social movements. It is a traditional means of communication, utilized by a cross section of collectives and the state to inform and persuade citizens.^[1] Protest art helps arouse base emotions in their audiences, and in return may increase the climate of tension and create new opportunities to dissent. Since art, unlike other forms of dissent, take few financial resources, less financially able groups and parties can rely more on performance art and street art as an affordable tactic.

Protest art acts as an important tool to form social consciousness, create networks, operate accessibly, and be cost-effective. Social movements produce such works as the signs, banners, posters, and other printed materials used to convey a particular cause or message. Often, such art is used as part of demonstrations or acts of civil disobedience. These works tend to be ephemeral, characterized by their portability and disposability, and are frequently not authored or owned by any one person. The various peace symbols, and the raised fist are two examples that highlight the democratic ownership of these signs.

Protest art also includes (but is not limited to) performance, site-specific installations, graffiti and street art, and crosses the boundaries of Visual arts genres, media, and disciplines. While some protest art is associated with trained and professional artists, an extensive knowledge of art is not required to take part in protest art. Protest artists frequently bypass the art-world institutions and commercial gallery system in an attempt to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, protest art is not limited to one region or country, but is rather a method that is used around the world.*

*From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Protest art has been around for as long as there has been authority, let's take a look at three pieces of art from the last 100 years--that is art dealing with protesting something.



Guernica is a large 1937 oil painting on canvas by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. One of Picasso's best known works, *Guernica* is regarded by many art critics as one of the most moving and powerful anti-war paintings in history. The gray, black, and white painting, which is 3.49 meters (11 ft 5 in) tall and 7.76 meters (25 ft 6 in) across, portrays the suffering of people and animals wrought by violence and chaos. Prominent in the composition are a gored horse, a bull, screaming women, dismemberment, and flames.

Picasso painted *Guernica* at his home in Paris in response to the bombing of Guernica, a Basque Country town in northern Spain, by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy at the request of the Spanish Nationalists. Upon completion, *Guernica* was exhibited at the Spanish display at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, and then at other venues around the world. The touring exhibition was used to raise funds for Spanish war relief. The painting soon became famous and widely acclaimed, and it helped bring worldwide attention to the Spanish Civil War.

Keith Haring's work screams fun. Or rather, it is fun but it is also screaming: an alarm call saying that life is good but terrible things conspire against it. Ignore the words and “Ignorance = Fear” looks fun: Haring’s trademark simple lines, the three primary colours with a dash of pink, three figures, jumping, perhaps dancing. Take in the words, and you hear the scream. By the late 1980s, AIDS felt like the most visible threat to life in America. When Haring created “Ignorance = Fear”, one American was being diagnosed with HIV every minute. Four people were dying of AIDS every hour. By 1991 the epidemic had claimed the lives of 100,000 Americans.

But as Haring (who had himself been diagnosed with AIDS) and his fellow activists knew, no one was actually talking about it, not meaningfully. The epidemic was exacerbated by shame, blame and ignorance.

Many people believed that HIV could be contracted from a kiss, a cough, or even a toilet seat: fears that stigmatised sufferers and contributed directly to the mishandling, by doctors and others, of the crisis. Religious organisations bawled that AIDS education amounted to promoting “immoral lifestyles” so governments and individuals stayed silent.

The solution was to make noise. ACT UP, a group of activists, coined the phrase “Silence = Death”, appropriating the pink triangle with which the Nazi regime marked homosexuals as a badge of pride. Their goal was to make as much noise as possible, and Haring joined the cause. Where his outline figures normally pulsate with life, marked out in cartoon vibrations of motion and emotion, here they seem to be shaking themselves to death in their quest to maintain their own and others’ ignorance. Like the three monkeys of myth, they see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. Precisely because of that, evil, in the shape of AIDS, is continuing its work. It is a bright poster, supremely alive, like all of Haring’s work. But it is also about facing death, something that Haring laconically described in an interview the same year as an “incredible education”. He died of AIDS-related complications less than a year later, but not before doing his best to share what he knew.



O Jogo Bonito—the Beautiful Game—has turned ugly. Each day during the World Cup in Rio brings fresh reports of protests breaking out on the streets of Brazil. “We need schools, not stadia,” read the placards, “FIFA go home,” “Who is the Cup for?”

More than 10 percent of Brazil’s population still lives on less than US\$2 per day, struggling to access decent health care and education. Yet this World Cup is said to be the most expensive to date, costing an estimated US\$11 billion—money many feel should be spent on better things. This sentiment was captured by the São Paulo-based street artist Paulo Ito a month before the tournament began, his mural of a crying boy with nothing to eat on his plate but a football becoming an Internet sensation.



Modern Day Protest Artists

Ai Weiwei is a Chinese contemporary artist and activist. Ai grew up in the far north-west of China, where he lived under harsh conditions due to his father's exile. As an activist, he has been openly critical of the Chinese Government's stance on democracy and human rights. He investigated government corruption and cover-ups, in particular the Sichuan schools corruption scandal following the collapse of "tofu-dreg schools" in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. In 2011, Ai Weiwei was arrested at Beijing Capital International Airport on 3 April, for "economic crimes". He was detained for 81 days without charge. Ai Weiwei emerged as a vital instigator in Chinese cultural development, an architect of Chinese modernism, and one of the nations most vocal political commentators. Ai Weiwei encapsulates political conviction and his personal poetry in his many sculptures, photographs and public works. In doing this, he makes use of Chinese art forms to display the Chinese political and social issues





I highly recommend watching the PBS Art Assignment about Ai Weiwei.

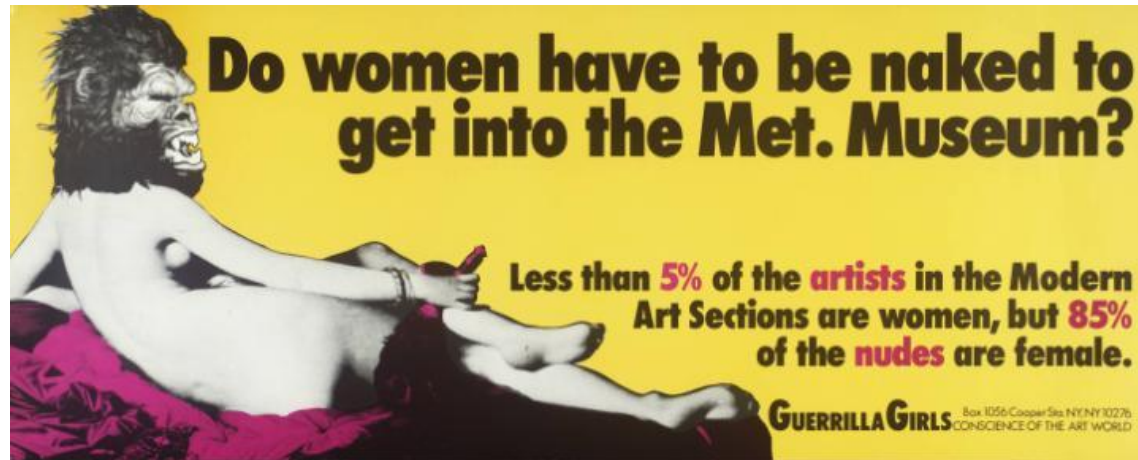
Here is the YouTube link:

<https://youtu.be/YMtsodcAsVU>



Guerrilla Girls is an anonymous group of feminist, female artists devoted to fighting sexism and racism within the art world. The group formed in New York City in 1985 with the mission of bringing gender and racial inequality into focus within the greater arts community. The group employs culture jamming in the form of posters, books, billboards, and public appearances to expose discrimination and corruption. To remain anonymous, members don gorilla masks and use pseudonyms that refer to deceased female artists. According to GG1, identities are concealed because issues matter more than individual identities, "[M]ainly, we wanted the focus to be on the issues, not on our personalities or our own work."

The Guerrilla Girls use real facts and figures in their posters to make their point, they say they are 'fighting discrimination with facts'. But as well as facts they use humour to change people's minds. One journalist described them as 'quippy as well as lippy'.



**WOMEN IN AMERICA EARN ONLY 2/3 OF WHAT MEN DO.
WOMEN ARTISTS EARN ONLY 1/3 OF WHAT MEN ARTISTS DO.**

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

Watch “Complain Creatively” about the Guerrilla Girls on The Art Assignment by PBS Digital

<https://youtu.be/5i5cEhd6Vt8>



**HOW MANY WOMEN HAD
ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AT
NYC MUSEUMS LAST YEAR?**

Guggenheim	0
Metropolitan	0
Modern	1
Whitney	0

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1985-86

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS**
LANGUAGE OF THE ART WORLD



Everyday People being Protest Artists.

