

## THE ROLE OF ART IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

**Ashish Baran Mishra,**

Faculty, Department of Visual Arts, Graphic Era Hill University,  
Dehradun Uttarakhand India

### ABSTRACT

Art satisfies the human sense of sight, moves the human heart, and is interpreted according to each individual's unique perspective. Since the primary purpose of most works of art is purely aesthetic, not everyone views them as agents of social transformation. Every member of society may see themselves reflected in art; everyone should have access to all forms of creative expression. Politics of Visual Arts examines how recent political trends are influencing the production, exhibition, consumption, and preservation of works of art across a wide range of cultural contexts in response to mounting political pressures from activist and special interest groups, on the one hand, and politically conservative governments, on the other.

**Keywords:** culture, memorialization, transitional justice, arts-based peacebuilding.

### INTRODUCTION

The arts have always played a significant role in human society. It is found in all shapes and sizes, digital and analog, organic and inorganic, human and mechanical. Performance art and acting are under the category of audio-visual art, whereas visual art refers to things like paintings and sculptures. The way each person perceives a work of art is unique. Visual art, sculpture, music, dance, theater, and literature are all examples of this kind of creative output.

A resolution declaring 2021 the "International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development" was approved by the United Nations General Assembly during its 74th session. The creative economy, which includes the production of audio-visual products, design, new media, performing arts, and visual arts, has a significant impact on the world's GDP, labor market, and export earnings.

Art is greater than life, yet what a miserable existence without it, stated abstract expressionist painter Robert Motherwell. Art is crucial to society because it may serve as a potent catalyst for constructive social change as well as a source of joy, excitement, and wonder. One of the numerous advantages of participating in the arts is the development of empathy. The ability to shift perspective is a hallmark of really immersive art.

People all across the world are using visual and performing arts to teach key life lessons like leadership, communication, awareness, and most importantly, empathy.

Global Business School Network suggests that industrial schools may play a crucial role in bringing together representatives from government, business, and civil society to tackle global challenges. It's an interesting topic of discussion whether or not business schools throughout the globe use any of these arts to help students become more aware of and motivated to do something about the world's most important issues.

It's general known that music has a powerful effect on people and is frequently seen as a universal healer, playing a significant role in the mobilization of social movements all over the globe. Messages of revolt and protest have been disseminated via music, lifting the spirits of the poor and oppressed. Music is often at the core of political upheavals and the subject of restrictions by authoritarian regimes due to its revolutionary potential.

Ten years ago, I developed an elective course at the Goa Institute of Business that connects music to business in order to introduce students to the subtle power of music in cultivating intuition, improvisation, and deeper impact. The premise of this elective is that an in-depth knowledge of society and its constantly shifting cultural norms is essential for every aspiring business manager. Music's impact on ads has been investigated in connection to a variety of aspects, such as musical congruency, lyrical substance, likeability, and participation levels.

The transformative potential of music and its application as a kind of "soft power" in areas outside of marketing and commerce are well knowledge. This course includes a module titled "Music and Social

Change," which challenges students to reflect on how music can be used to affect social change. We talk about the relevance of music festivals all across the globe. Artists like Bob Dylan, who used folk and rock to protest the Vietnam War and economic inequalities in the 1960s, are examined. This class introduces students to late-1980s rap's social commentary and uses current events to drive home the lesson.

In a chapter headed "Art, social action, and social change," Michael Murray argues that artists have always used their work to advocate for certain political and social causes. Bringing attention to issues and mobilizing individuals to work toward solutions is another useful outcome. Thus, the arts, in his view, are not the solution but rather a means to it, since they encourage introspection about one's own capabilities and the world around them.

The lens through which we see the world is the artistic medium, and it has the potential to shift our viewpoints. The arts have the potential to change people's minds and make the world a better place, which is an accurate statement. It has the capacity to encourage empathy, bring people together, and fight against all forms of prejudice. It may be argued that people, who in turn affect society, are influenced by the arts. To achieve this goal, however, they need to be exposed to a wide range of creative forms.

### **LITERATURE AND REVIEW**

Teresa Sanz et al (2021) The growing environmental and climate justice movements in the United States (US) have common ground with the fight against coal extraction and transportation. These movements use artistic expression as a tactic. Academics and the general public alike agree that art has the power to inspire behavioral, perceptual, and emotional shifts. However, the theoretical subject of how art is related to activist techniques and to socio-spatial alterations in environmental disputes is still largely neglected. This research helps address that need by analyzing the prototypical fight against building a coal-export terminal in Oakland, California. We conducted in-depth interviews with 32 participants, including activists, artists, and lawyers involved in the fight over this coal-export facility. Interviews were put into perspective by observation of non-participants and secondary data collecting. The findings provide a historical context for environmental creative action, a visual representation of the many forms it has taken, and an examination of the related networks. We show that artistic activism is crucial for promoting participation, education, and dissemination within the anti-coal movement. The movement grew in scope and demographic reach thanks to the arts and the influence they had on physical space, especially for women and young people of color. The arts facilitated public understanding of political and environmental issues and increased citizens' input into policymaking. Environmental justice, environmental humanities, and human geography are all brought together in this article. We add to the little literature on the topic of how art may be used to affect social and ecological systems when they are at odds with environmental justice.

KAREN TARKULICH (2018) With a focus on what it implies for the administrators working in art institutions, this thesis investigates the connection between art institutions and activism from the perspective of artists producing socially conscious work. The artists I studied were actively engaged in their respective fields, which included the visual arts, theater, music, and education. My goal in doing these interviews is to identify any recurring concepts, thoughts, or vocabulary that these artists may share with administrators. My research highlighted the significance of an organization's leadership, its employees, and its goal in determining whether or not it is equipped to tackle activism in the arts. There was also no agreement among the respondents as to whether or not socially engaged employment could be created inside any institution at all, according to the study's findings. Many of those interviewed for the study also agreed that facilitators and administrators should be aware of their own privilege and know when to step aside.

Michael Murray (2012) Social injustice comes in many forms and requires constant work to combat and overcome. Social oppression takes many forms, and it tends to build up over time in disadvantaged areas. Internalizing this societal injustice makes one feel helpless and hopeless. Cooperative effort is essential if these communities are to be enlisted in a process of active resistance. The foundation of participatory action research is participants' active participation in a process of self- and community-improvement. Participants may reevaluate their lives and the systems that oppress them via communal and individual efforts. Understanding the social psychological nature of

communities and community transformation, as well as the function of art in encouraging local action and larger societal change, are topics explored in this chapter. Several cases are discussed to demonstrate the need for fostering critical awareness in underprivileged communities and the value of designing interventions that are grounded in the values, beliefs, and life experiences of the local population and bolstered by systemic social forces. Community characteristics To take social action that improves people's lives, we must first know how those people see the world and how others see them, as well as the larger sociopolitical setting in which they live. While collective social activity may help bring about positive change, lasting transformation needs.

Maya Weisinger (2020) There has been a surge in anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry in Germany over the last decade, leading many experts to conclude that the country's remembering culture is in decline. The continual reckoning with the horrors of the Holocaust makes *Erinnerungskultur*, or the way cultures cope with their historical pasts, especially essential in Germany. Transitional justice is one approach to coping with post-conflict communities; it aims to right historical wrongs and actively construct better social, cultural, and reconciliatory processes. War crimes prosecutions, compensation for victims, and memorialization are only a few examples of the kinds of undertakings that might fall under this umbrella. The effects of artistic memorialization efforts on German *erinnerungskultur* are the focus of this study. Four artistic memorialization initiatives in Germany were the focus of an exploratory case study in which primary and secondary data were gathered. The projects were evaluated based on their potential to achieve three predetermined goals for transformation via the arts using the Aesthetic Perspectives framework (2017). The most important findings demonstrated that initiatives with stakeholder and participant focused methods strategically introduced throughout the planning phase had greater impacts than those without. These findings imply that although many memorialization initiatives have transitional justice as an aim, the most effective ones are those that can be produced via open and transparent cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders.

Linda Dittmar (2014) Art that actively challenges the social order continues to create controversy and face opposition as we reach the second decade of the 21st century. Ricardo Dominguez, a professor of visual art at the University of California, San Diego, recently faced a threat to his tenure after creating what he calls "transborder immigrant tools"; these are repurposed cell phones loaded with GPS software that point border-crossers to caches of fresh water in the desert. Featuring an audio program that plays motivational poems to migrants, the phones have been dubbed "mobile Statue of Liberty" by Dominquez.

### **ART AS A TOOL FOR INSPIRING SOCIAL ACTION**

Art, like the sciences, may effect change even on a micro level. It allows the voiceless to be heard. Art that tackles serious social and political concerns in a compelling way may be a potent force for change. If channeled properly, socially engaged art has the potential to cause indignation and spur societal change. By sparking meaningful debate and discussion, the message it transmits has the potential to alter the course of events.

#### **Art and society**

Art is a way for us to share our innermost feelings, ideas, and impressions with the world. Art, in all its manifestations, is a window into a society, preserving its ideals and traditions even as they shift and evolve. Art evolves and transforms in response to societal changes. Artistic development is propelled by cultural and social evolution. Art is also significant since it serves as a global emblem of many cultures. Traditional communal and cultural practices inform folk art, which in turn communicates a sense of shared community identity and values.

#### **Changes in the past through art**

The two are inseparable: art and history. Art has been a powerful tool for social and political change agents for generations. Artistic movements have historically been significant drivers of social and political shifts. After World War I, several artistic movements were created to express outrage at the millions of lives lost. Equally significant in the struggle for equal rights was the role played by the feminist art movement.

#### **Role of artists in present times**

Most of today's famous artists and writers utilize their work to spread awareness and promote positive social change. Artists' skills to articulate themselves enable them to challenge accepted beliefs, alter perceptions, and arouse emotions in ways that conventional political strategies seldom can.

Malika Favre, a French illustrator and graphic designer now working in Barcelona, is a fantastic illustration of this trend. Empowerment of women is a common topic in Malika's artwork. Their femininity is celebrated for being assertive, powerful, sensuous, and self-reliant. She thinks a good image needs a powerful story to back it up. Not only are the images in her art spectacular, but she also uses them to make strong statements about societal concerns. Open forums on social and political topics are emerging in artist groups.

### **Motiva as a new medium of expression and a vehicle for social change**

Motiva helps bring about subtle dramatic changes, create new views, and aid in shifting the way people think about the world via art by giving a new medium to deliver inspirational and thought-provoking statements that are represented by attractive artwork. It's a great way to share and preserve thoughts and opinions while also propelling them forward.

Motiva's mission is to encourage creators all around the globe to utilize this innovative platform to not only share their work, but also to initiate meaningful dialogue about pressing issues. For the purpose of generating money for non-profits doing good in the world, "Motiva for A Cause" was created.

### **THE IMPACT OF ART ON SOCIETY**

The cultural heritage of future generations is safeguarded via the arts. When compared to documented historical documents, works of art by contemporary artists more accurately reflect the world as we know it. Art accurately portrays the spirit of a bygone age. Ancient art such as the Bhimbhetka and the Venus of Berekhat Ram as well as petroglyphs show scenes from daily life. These imaginative routes originally depicted life many hundred million years ago.

People of diverse cultural origins are able to communicate with one another via creative forms such as music, visual art, and written word. In this way, art serves as a bridge between different communities and peoples. Examples include the Taj Mahal and Indian architecture, as well as barns and windmills. Art is often used as a tool for social transformation. Governments employ all forms of art, including murals, paintings, sculptures, theater, films, and music, to communicate information and affect the public. Open defecation, female genital mutilation, tree cutting, and other social ills have all been targets of mural and painting campaigns in India, where they have been employed by the government. Many posters used the image of "Uncle Sam" and the slogan "I want you for U.S. Army" to enlist new soldiers.

The arts are used in numerous historical dramas, including Schindler's List, The Pianist, Border, Lagaan, and many more. The public's perception of an issue may be significantly changed by works of this kind. These individual advantages also assist society as a whole by producing citizens who can function well in a more multicultural setting. By this, I mean "the expression of common values and community identity through artworks commemorating events significant to a nation's (or people's) experience, and the social bonds created among individuals when they share their arts experiences through reflection and discourse."

### **ART AS BUILDER OF POLITICAL COMMUNITY**

There is a growing consensus in the art world in recent months that the communities formed around exhibitions, talks, and other art-related activities have political potential, and that artists and curators should work to foster the development of such communities.

In the wake of Trump's victory, art magazines and galleries have welcomed new audiences, and publishing firms (like Verso Books) have shown increased vigor and urgency in organizing events. While there are many worthy cases to choose from, I'd like to highlight the explicit talks about the usefulness of creative community for political initiatives that have taken place at e-flux events in New York, such as the double launch of books on machines and intersubjectivity in December. University art departments have also mobilized, and their members may be more willing to talk in explicitly ideological terms. One such example is Andrew Weiner's December one-day symposium at New York University titled "Sense of Emergency: Politics, Aesthetics, and Trumpism," which brought together activists, art theorists, and artists.

There should be certain caveats to this drive for communal creation. When people are in a hurry to form groups, they may not take the time to think critically about who should be considered a part of "the community" and who should be left out. After Trump's win, Elvia Wilk wrote a fantastic piece for thetowner.com in which she urged members of the "notorious international culture class," which includes many modern artists, to examine themselves these important issues.

"We need to build and sustain our networks of support," Wilk writes. But she continues, "If we are holding meetings about what we can do, we should first and foremost be utilizing them to examine who we are. Where have all the voices gone? Later in the essay, she discusses how many artists lack a strong sense of belonging: "We exist in pockets of mostly urban areas, and those pockets connect directly to other pockets via travel and wifi, with an often-uniform set of cultural principles and hierarchies extending across them." In the section on art's role in oppression, I will return to some of these seeming conflicts within the art community.

### **ARTIVISM AS A PRACTICE**

John Jordan claims that Artivism is not a movement but rather a technique that bridges the gap between the two fields. It occurs when a person's political outlook becomes wild and pleasingly open, and as powerful as a finely crafted instrument, striking a balance between creativity and resistance. In late 2003, activist John Jordan and his associates established a group known as the Clown Army, sometimes known as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA). The members of CIRCA sought to develop a novel form of civil disobedience by combining the traditional art of clowning with modern nonviolent direct-action techniques. A Clown Army is a professional army in disguise, made up of genuine kooks.

Simply said, Artivism is a type of resistance that defies traditional definitions of art. It challenges not only the problematic art discipline, but also the separate identities of 'artist' and 'activist,' labels that suggest artists have a monopoly on creativity and activists have a monopoly on social change, implying that other people are neither creative nor involved in changing the world. It treats social movements as a kind of substance. Their methods of operation and available alternatives are structures that may be altered and reimagined via group thought. Non-protest demonstrations are discussed as a crucial tactic for those living and working under oppressive regimes or situations of emergency when public criticism is forbidden. The Orange Alternatives were a Polish protest group active in the 1980s. Through public events and absurdist provocations, it poked fun at the Communist regime and promoted independent thought. Protests against gnome and martial rule included graffiti, sympathy marches, the distribution of toilet paper, the singing of hymns while holding hands around an orangutan cage at a zoo, and the distribution of toilet paper. The opening up of artists, guerillas, theaters, and musicians for Artivism started with the march of 10,000 people in orange dwarf hats.

### **ARTISTIC ACTIVISM IN INDIA (HISTORY, PRACTICE, PARADIGM AND CIRCULATION)**

How can we measure the potential of art (visual arts, performing arts, literature, theater, dance, video art, film, etc.) to serve as social and political protest? is a major issue raised by artistic activism.

It is challenging to provide a clear measurement of the very role of art in politics due to the diversity of its participants and the variety of their intents, aims, and ways of expression. There is a wide range of artistic forms, from the more conventional (painting, drawing, sculpture, theater, etc.) to the more ephemeral (urban spaces, neighborhoods, specific sites, warehouse, etc.) to the increasingly digital (net art, hacktivism, etc.). Because their writers come from such a wide variety of ideological backgrounds, they all use rhetoric and diversionary tactics to communicate their various perspectives, degrees of radicalism, etc. Therefore, it is vital to participate in a shared reflection allowing the drawing of lines of analysis in order to construct a solid analytical framework in order to overcome the singularities of art activism.

Within every of these routines, two fundamentally different stances may be defined:

- If the purpose of the creative activity is to make the message and political action more "appealing," then it fits the first category. Artists that engage in political activism often have strong feelings about or agreement with the cause or issue they are addressing. Even if the artist is motivated by a desire to see positive social and political change as a result of the intervention, there is still the

danger of ideological servitude, of straying into the realm of propagandist art, and of stagnating artistic creativity.

- When creative work contributes to the distraction and dysfunction of political work and its discourse, nullifying the useful and effective aspect of these activities. This latter stance seems to have been taken by a sizable number of activist artists on a global scale in order to expose the risks, excesses, weaknesses, and hypocrisies of certain political acts and ideological ideas. It appears to avoid subjecting creative work to any one political discourse and guarantees more artistic liberty. However, it minimizes the influence that creative activity has in the public sphere (by objectifying the existing political and social order).

What we term modern creative activism receives nourishment from the collision of these two seemingly incompatible traditions. When examining its output, you may find that it has goals that are at odds with one another.

Artists such as Vivan Sundaram, Navjot Altaf, Tejal Shah, Shilpa Gupta, Pushpamala N., Anita Dube, Open Circle, Raqs Media Collective, Sahmat, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Habib Tanvir, Namdeo Dhasal, and many more all call themselves activists in the Indian art scene. Thus, they add to the international and national scope of the arts activism phenomena.

Since the New Economic Policy was introduced in 1991, the Indian Union has seen dramatic shifts in every sphere of life. The principles of the Indian way enacted by the fathers of independence in 1947 (secularist democracy, growth model self-centered organized around a large public sector, and non-alignment) have been called into serious question as a result of the opening of the economy and the rise to power of the Hindu nationalist right.

The current political climate in India (religious nationalism, stigmatization of minorities, questioning of secularism, ethnic conception of the Indian nation, bone of contention around Kashmir, violence of intercommunity conflicts, etc.) as well as its cultural and artistic climate (advent of India on the international art scene, development of the art market and cultural economy, shift of the middle class into mass consumption, questioning of freedom of expression etc.) all contribute to this.

The organizers of this Conference Day hope to bring together scholars from all fields to discuss the many definitions and manifestations of artistic activism in India since the 1990s, with a focus on the crossings, transfers, and intersections of art and politics at play within Indian artistic activism.

## CONCLUSION

Art and activism are potent means of bringing attention to causes and voicing opposition to injustice. Art as activism is more effective than other forms of protest. Street art, mural painting, spoken word poetry, performance, and activism are all forms of art that an Artist may engage in. Activism's mission is to mobilize the creative community around pressing social challenges. When demonstrations are done using Artivism, violence and attacks are reduced. It's a great approach to get young people interested in learning about the world and being involved. Everyone has the potential to be an activist artist, either alone or in a group. You may find artwork wherever. Meanings, personal interpretations, and artistic justifications are inherent in all works of art. And it's important for artists to address political concerns in their work. Art, not simply demonstrating, helps get the word out about political issues and gets people talking. The arts are a social and political force.

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