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**"A New Landscape of the Possible":
400 Women, Politics of Representation and Human Rights**

Abstract

This paper engages with the broad question of the (im)possibility of art to represent a feasible and effective mechanism for changing values and raising global awareness with regards to gender-based violence and sexual violence against women. It focuses on 400 Women, an art installation by London artist Tamsyn Challenger which brings to light the feminicidal reality of the Mexican-American borderlands specifically, and gender-based violence globally. The installation, which consists of 175 portraits by different artists, sends a clear message in support of women's human rights to life, and their right to live a life free from violence. Likewise, it advocates for people's right to memory, rectification and reparations. In addition, the installation compels the individual, the public, the local authorities and the international community to take a stance against gender-based violence against women and impunity, and in favour of compliance to the human right to non-discrimination. This artistic project, which developed over five years and which was exhibited worldwide, represents a cry for gender and social justice in the face of personal, collective and state violence against women. My argument, therefore, revolves around the thesis that art is a powerful tool to mobilise people's consciousness and demand accountability for gross violations of women's human rights, but also an empowering mechanism for the families of the disappeared to claim justice and bring the missing family members into our collective memory.

Keywords: feminicide, politics of representation, human rights, visual arts, activism

Every woman has the right to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres.

—Convention Belém do Pará, Article 3

The images of art do not supply weapons for battles. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible.

—Jacques Rancière, "The Intolerable Image" 105

Introduction

This paper engages with the (im)possibility of art to represent a feasible and effective mechanism for changing values and raising glocal awareness about human rights issues, in particular about gender-based violence and sexual violence against women. Although this is a very broad question, to which the paper is unable to provide a final answer, my analysis aims to problematise a series of issues such as the role of art as mediator in the dissemination of human rights values and discourses, its power to raise awareness about violations of women's human rights, and its function as an important accountability mechanism for demanding action from duty-bearers in face of system(ic) violence against women. I will focus on *400 Women*, an art installation by London artist Tamsyn Challenger, which aims to make a statement and raise *glocal* awareness on the *feminicides* in the Mexican-American borderlands, and gender-based violence globally. The installation, which consists of 175 portraits by different artists and which developed over five years, makes visible the *feminicidal* reality of the region, sending a clear message in favour of women's human right to live a life free from violence and their right to life. It also advocates for the human right to memory, bringing to the fore issues of state accountability and rectification, among others. In addition, the installation invites the individual, the public, the local authorities and the international community to take a stance against gender-based violence and impunity.

Besides examining the content of the artistic message, it is also important to critically examine the way in which these messages are conveyed and codified by/through the politics of representation intrinsic to the art project, and the set of relations it establishes with existing human rights discourses. These are some of the questions with which both Jacques Rancière and Wendy Hesford engage in their respective works as they scrutinise the politics of representation that becomes activated whenever a work of art is produced, and whenever it is finally exposed to the public. Accordingly, Hesford stresses the importance of examining the particular visual economies and truth-telling mechanisms that are triggered by and intrinsic to the work of art. These visual rhetorics, more often than not, engage and reproduce cosmopolitan and neoliberal power relations through a "mass media production of the spectacle of suffering (...), [which ultimately] divest[s] it of

any structural understanding of the production of suffering itself" (Hesford 7). These visual rhetorics, which permeate the realm of literature, music, and the media as well as art, appeal to Western audiences precisely because such rhetorics constructs them as moral subjects and bearers/guarantors of human rights, mapping the world into clearly demarcated spectator zones and sufferer zones (ibid.). The humanitarian character of these specific visual rhetorics, which draws a strong line between subject/object, I/Other and powerful/powerless, reproduces and mirrors the unequal power relations that circulate economic and political globalisation processes without critically assessing their origins, outcomes, or their local impact. The problem is, as Hesford explains, that these visual economies circulate a "global market place that tends to recast structural inequalities, social injustices, and state violence as scenes of individual trauma and victimisation" (29). The complete removal of collective and systemic factors from the focus of analysis in favour of the "victimised" and "traumatised" individual decontextualises the latter from the material and power/knowledge structures and networks that make them socio-economically and politically more vulnerable (not powerless) than other social subjects. Therefore, this humanitarianism obscures power relations by embracing a "politics of pity" in which the audience/subject that looks (the saviour) constructs "what/who is being seen" within the logic of a specific cosmopolitan narrative in order to validate the "subject" who has the power of both seeing and constructing specific orders of things.

Bearing this in mind, it is crucial to interrogate what visual economies *400 Women* deploys and performs, and above all, where the victims of *femicides* stand in Tamsyn Challenger's work. If we problematise art in light of human rights practices and rhetorics, and put both into dialogue, then it becomes central to question the discursive and political relationship that is inevitably established between the two. This critical reflection is fundamental if we consider that art, as other cultural manifestations, does convey and disseminate social values that can influence individual and collective moralities, validate and subvert hegemonic principles, and also mobilise people towards certain actions. [1] The politics of representation that a specific art piece might endorse and evoke is what Hesford refers to as *spectacular rhetorics*, which "refers not [only] to individual images, iconic or otherwise, but to social and rhetorical processes of incorporation and recognition mediated by visual representation and the ocular epistemology that underwrites the discourse of human rights" (7).

The problem with these hegemonic politics of representation is that they tend to appropriate human suffering through the use of images that respond to specific politics of alterity and become intelligible within particular humanitarian and cosmopolitan Western referential frameworks and socio-economic, political and cultural logics. As a result, "victim subjects [are incorporated] into social relations that support the logic of a global morality market that privileges Westerners as

world citizens" (Hesford 9), relations that also construct those objects/subjects of suffering as ultimately "othered". Jacques Rancière, in this respect, prompts us to interrogate "what kind of human beings the image shows us and what kind of human beings it is addressed to; what kind of gaze and consideration are created by this fiction" (Rancière 102). Consequently, it is fundamental to interrogate in what specific ways (and if) *400 Women*, from its own artistic space and character, engages in a gender/social justice political project. Likewise, it is important to assess the sort of dialectical relationships that are established between and among the public, the subjects of vision, the contextual and reference frameworks, the geopolitical spaces, the imaginary inventories, and the structures of feeling involved in such (re)presentations. [2] The following sections, therefore, will try to shed light on these questions

1. Feminicides in Ciudad Juárez

There are no survivors of femicide. All we have are the voices of witness survivors (families) who speak for them.

—Rosa Linda Fregoso & Cynthia Bejarano 11

Femicides are one of the most extreme forms of violence against women. It is a term used to refer to "the killing of women *qua* women, often condoned by, if not sponsored, by the state and/or religious institutions" (Russell and Radford 1). [3] Diana Russell and Jill Radford's definition highlights several recurrent issues in *femicides*: 1) That these women are systematically killed based on the fact that they are women; 2) that these killings are intimately linked to the level of gender discrimination in the region; 3) that this discrimination against women is systemic and permeates all levels of society and political institutions; and 4) the role of the state as a guarantor of human rights, in this case of women's.

There is a significant body of knowledge that is being produced around these issues, offering a differential and non-hegemonic knowledge that defies the "official" stories about these murders and that have forced regional and local governments to take responsibility and action for the (ab)use of women. The obstructive role of the local government and the state in dealing with the killings of women, as well as the abuse of power exerted against family members, friends and non-governmental organizations have been common practice over the years. This governmental stance has relied on a political and public discourse that holds the dead and disappeared women responsible for their own ill fate, thereby further appropriating their (non)existence through the

imposition of a “narrative” of blame. [4] In addition, the lack of thorough criminal investigations “showed that the authorities did not consider these pandemic feminicides sufficiently serious and patterned crimes; for this reason, the crimes remained in impunity and continued to be committed” (Carmona et al. 166-7). This disregard on behalf of the state—through its multiple representatives—which nurtures the “sense of impunity” of the murderers, plays an important role in the advancement of a women’s human rights framework for tackling *feminicidal* violence. This approach highlights the state’s obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, conceptualises feminicides as individual and systemic violence, and situates these murders as part of a gender power structure characterised by political, economic, and social inequalities.

Precisely because of the inaction of the state as well as its victim-blaming rhetoric, the role of the families and friends of the victims has been crucial in exposing the killings of women to the public eye and in demanding social justice. The actions of these local actors have been fundamental to the process of raising public awareness with regard to the level of gender violence in the region and for demanding that authorities meet their obligations under international law. They play another important role for the community, that of giving visibility to the otherwise “invisible” women. In this context, families, support groups, and cultural production on the matter serve as active agents, subverting this attempt at erasing “existence” and “memory” from the collective (un)conscious by precisely bringing these murdered women from the “margins” to the centre of analysis, discourse, and to the public eye. Art plays a key role in these ‘decentring’ and ‘re-centring’ processes, since as mentioned above, it conveys (non)hegemonic values that can challenge the status quo, and denounce discriminatory and abusive social practices, including human rights violations. It is from this political space that my analysis of Tamsyn Challenger’s *400 Women* will develop.

2. *400 Women* and a "New Landscape of the Possible"

As a collaborative project between families of the victims, artist and NGOs, *400 Women* works at a *glocal* level by denouncing *feminicide* in Ciudad Juárez and raising awareness and socio-political action against gender violence worldwide. The conceptual installation came to fruition after Challenger contacted nearly two hundred artists from several nationalities and asked them to participate in the project. [5] Challenger’s inspiration to mount the show originated in 2006, during a trip to Mexico in which she met Consuelo Valenzuela, whose daughter Julieta Marlene González Valenzuela had disappeared without a trace. Challenger says she was moved in multiple and contradictory ways when Consuelo attempted to hand her a postcard with a blurred picture of her

daughter, which prompted an unexpected feeling of embarrassment and discomfort in her. As she explains:

I'd first met Consuelo in a private room in a hotel but it was when we left the room and were in the foyer, a much more public place, that she decided to press the postcards of her daughter into my hands. In an instant I was very nervous at being scrutinized by her and then immediately ashamed of feeling like I wanted to get away from this person that was suffering so much. The shame of my reaction made everything immediately vivid; her proximity, her smell, her grip, the translator nearly shouting, as I remember it "she wants you to take them, to give them to anyone, anyone you know" but the most arresting memory for me is the face of Julieta zinging out from this 3 colour-way postcard. The face looking up at me was such a poverty of an image. It had been reproduced from a snapshot and the face was blurred. She had no eyes really, everything was faded, a bleached out nose. And I think I just wanted to bring her face back. (www.tamsynchallenger.com)

This quote highlights a few questions: the division between the private/public, the collapse of the presence/absence dynamics through the image of Julieta, and its power to trigger a series of acts and emotions that troubled Challenger, displacing her from her comfort zone. All these feelings are captured by *400 Women*, which establishes a dialogue between artists, the public, urban spaces, structures of feeling, collective imaginaries and power relations, through the presence/absence of the murdered women and their representation. [6]

In this respect, Challenger's haptic encounter with the faded photograph of the feminicidal victim triggers a powerful reaction when she is forced to confront the reality of the disappeared, or rather, her presence and her image. As a result, Challenger experienced the uneasiness of having to put a name and a face to one of the many girls abducted, therefore giving a concrete dimension to her absence, infusing it with "physicality" and "tangibility" by means of a picture that stands for existence and life. Above all, Challenger was compelled to be participant of the pain and suffering of "another", who in turn channels the pain of the missing and the abused. The connection between the presence/absence of the victim and the one who recognizes and acknowledges her is precisely what haunts and seizes the public when they undergo this immersive experience, and face each of the portraits. The face-to-face encounter with each woman in each of the portraits breaks the objectifying gaze and moves beyond narcissistic recognition, as each face compels the seer, the so-called "subject" to act, to engage, and not merely to project onto them his/her own beliefs and expectations. All of the women claim their own subjectivity and position themselves as subjects by commanding that act of engagement, that participation by figuratively defying that objectification and claiming their spatial existence in their own right.

Indeed, *400 Women* plays with a presence/absence dynamic to bring to the fore each and every woman that is part of the exhibition, as well as the collective they represent. The former problematises the latter by means of the installation's aesthetics, i.e. the physical characteristics of

the portraits and their arrangement. For example, the portraits were produced in a size reminiscent of a Mexican *retablo*, which symbolizes an act of remembrance and the tribute paid to the victims. In this respect, Challenger provided photographs of the murdered and disappeared women to each artist and commissioned them to do a portrait. However, not all the artists received an image to work with, either because these were unavailable or because it was not part of their practice, in which case, the name of the woman had to be visible in the portrait. As Challenger explains, "If I had made all the works myself this individuality in memoriam would be lost; it would have only expressed my character. So I knew I needed individuals, with all their unique qualities, to express the individuality of the woman or girl I gave them to represent" (*Edinburgh Art*).

In line with Hesford's analysis, this act of representation can be inherently problematic; an act of "ventriloquism" that involves the appropriation of these women's subjectivities by another actor. Inevitably, a certain level of "appropriation" takes place in this act of representation, since these women are dead and/or disappeared, and therefore, unable to communicate that subjectivity. However, the process surrounding the "birth" of this installation, the fact that Challenger worked closely with families, NGOs and relatives at these embryonic stages, and the fact that she sets no claims of truth neither to the victims, nor to the work of art itself, represents already a significant effort to counteract as much as possible the potential re-victimisation of these women, their further dehumanisation, and a utilitarian use of their existence and disappearances. In effect, by publicly acknowledging that *400 Women* is in itself a fiction, Challenger articulates a powerful critique of the hypocritical dynamics of artistic representation and the art industry (and by extension society in general). She points out that "these women's lives have been disregarded in a way that this work hasn't been, and each portrait in the 400 installation hasn't been, so it's a sad irony of our times that these objects have more significance than each of those young women's lives had" (*Line Magazine*). That critique highlights the commodification of women in society and their perception as disposable objects in a neoliberal economy and system of governance, in which their lives have less value than a work of art. [7]

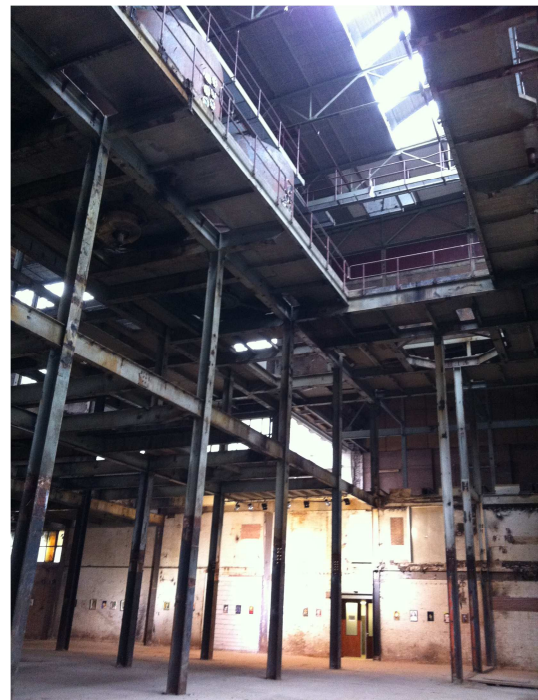
Indeed, the social disposability of women is further highlighted by the way in which the portraits are displayed. The visual effect of the lined-up portraits, all sharing the same size and monotonously placed one after another, also denounces the dehumanization of women by being treated as mere statistical figures in criminal records, and the erasure of their autonomous subjectivity. This idea is highlighted by the fact that there is no information accompanying each portrait, just a number written at ground level. The arrangement of the portraits themselves evokes the alignment of workers in the *maquila*, their alienation, their loss of a sense of uniqueness and the erasure of their identities, being reduced to a number with a set market value in a neoliberal economy. It also

denounces the authorities' negligence to the murders, the exploitation of women in the workplace and the connection between *feminicides* and the *maquila* system.

The visual politics of *400 Women* brings to the surface its intercontextuality, exposing further the specific structures of feeling that are activated through simultaneous interactions among the public, the art installation, its visual aesthetics and the urban spaces in which it was exhibited. For example, as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the exhibition was shown in an old rundown schoolhouse, the Canongate Venture, with the ceiling coming off, and the floor covered in dirt and dust. The Amsterdam venue (see pictures 1-4) was an old and abandoned factory in the outskirts of the city (Sugar City), right by a highway and almost deserted. The state and feeling of neglect and isolation permeating these spaces mirrored the dire conditions in which these women lived, vanished and died, again exposing their marginality in society. In effect, the exhibition simultaneously confronts the public with the reality of these women, who live under “high levels of insecurity, vulnerability, and absence of social and political protection, and in zones of social devastation, where insecurity and crime prevail, along with coexistence marked by illegality [...] the disintegration of institutions, and the rupture of the State of Law” (Fregoso & Bejarano 12). This reality is powerfully cut across by gender, racial, ethnic, class and sexual factors and dynamics.



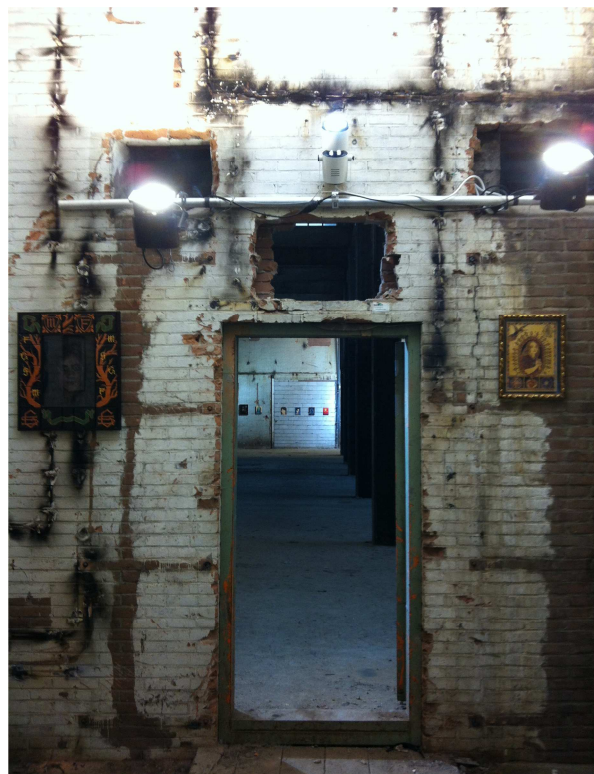
Picture 1 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women



Picture 2 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women



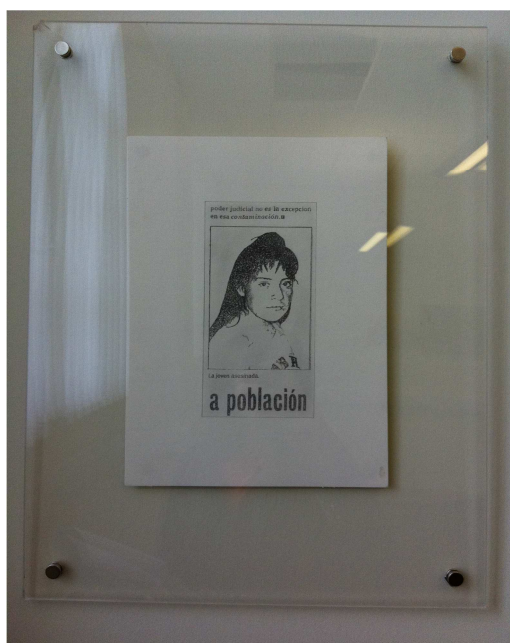
Picture 3 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women



Picture 4 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

The portraits highlight the fact that the women (and girls) who are victims of *feminicides* “were poor and young; that many of them worked in the maquilas; that they were dark-skinned and had long

hair” (Lagarde xv). The installation, therefore, opens up the space for exposing the levels of sexism, racism, and labour exploitation in which these women and girls work and live, which turns them into one of the most vulnerable sectors of society. All these factors intersect in ways that define these women's social realities, their life choices, the level of discrimination they experience, their desires and motivations, as well as the scarce protection they receive from the state. Therefore, the installation denounces the violation of women’s human rights and the (ab)use of women in socio-economic arenas. A number of portraits, for example, articulate a specific critique of these violations by resembling newspaper cut-outs about the disappearance of the women/girls (picture 5).



Picture 5 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

Another one (picture 6) holds the state of Mexico accountable not only for leaving the crimes unresolved, but for promoting impunity through its inaction. This particular portrait, with the image of one middle-aged woman, smiling and distilling life, conflicts with the reality of her death, which more powerfully conveys the denunciation of institutionalised gender discrimination and systemic violence against women, sanctioned by both, the Catholic doctrine and its traditional gender values, and the Mexican government. Consequently, the installation points to critical questions regarding the nature of these *intercontextualities* and structures of feeling, their foundations, and their adherence to a particular "shared morality", which seems to permeate human rights discourses with a humanitarian take.



Picture 6 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

The installation additionally problematises the relationship established between those privileged subjects who attend such an installation and those who are the subject/object of such piece of art. In effect, the hierarchical relationship between self and other, which reproduces unidirectional and top-down power relations, is not uncommon in mass media human rights campaigns, film and art pieces with a political edge. [8] Therefore, going back to the original question posed at the beginning of the paper, it is fundamental to ask whether *400 Women* succeeds in questioning and problematising such power dynamics, and whether it avoids their reification through the endorsement of a hegemonic discourse of the female "victim". As Hesford explains,

victim identifications may make distant human rights violations visible and, in some cases, provide an opportunity for the disenfranchised to represent themselves, but the limitations of victim-based politics [...] are profound. Victimization rhetoric invites interventions and protectionist remedies that can obscure structural inequalities and economic injustices, and that therefore ultimately undermine the promotion of human rights. (47)

In addition, beyond exposing the systemic violence and social structure of abuse and discrimination, victim identification and victimization politics may nurture the Western subject's moral worth and superiority by activating and reproducing a cosmopolitan politics of pity and piety rooted in cultural and ethical colonial rationalities that utilise the so-called "victims" to validate the neoliberal subject in its own righteousness instead of dismantling and shedding critical light on their privileged positions. To what extent does *400 Women* break the chain of identifications based on sameness and universalist reciprocity that obscure those power dynamics? As Hesford asserts,

"human rights representations of suffering subjects do not appeal to particularity or difference but to universality and sameness, although the appeal is initiated by difference" (Hesford 51). This fact is highly problematic as it erases power inequalities and structural differences that condone the perpetuation of such dynamics of discrimination and abuse. It also assumes that emotions and perception are prediscursive, therefore universally felt and experienced, which again further ostracises the "victim" in the aforementioned "otherness" and nurtures a sort of "narcissism of pity" implicit in the western "gaze", which by looking, seems to grant recognition and humanity onto the other. [9]

400 Women, however, presents a number of elements that attempt to dismantle this referential framework. As discussed above, the buildings and spaces in which the installation is exhibited engage with specific structures of feeling to produce certain effects: To challenge the public in their comfort zone through the production of asymmetric identifications. This term refers to the ways in which similarities and identifications between the public and these women can be drawn without erasing the differences among them or overlooking the relations of power that constitute all of them as subjects. As a result, "the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139; qtd. in Hesford 49). This asymmetrical relationship engages the public in a "dynamic of acknowledgment", not only of these women as subjects (i.e. who they were, how they are remembered and how they experienced death, violence and trauma) but also of the individual's *situationality* and *positionality* on a global scale. [10] It activates and encourages, according to Kelly Oliver, a "dialogic understanding of subjectivity as "response-ability" and "address-ability" (6), in which subjectivity is constructed in relational terms, in which the "other" turns him/herself into an agent that commands us to engage with him/her as significant to us, not as alien but intimate, not in opposition but in relation. [11] By confronting the nearly two hundred portraits, the public is called to engage in a process of recognition of the "other" across the power structures that have placed both subjects at the time/spaces junctures that converge at the moment of looking. This dynamic shift reveals the spectators' socio-economic positions in relation to these women, which undermines the unproblematic chain of identifications inherent in humanitarian rhetorics, and produced in/by cosmopolitan power relations.



Picture 7 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women



Picture 8 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

Like Challenger's experience with Julieta's picture, *400 Women* unsettles the public in its position of privilege through these women's presence-in-absence (their deaths). It also exposes the public to an intercontextual web that is organised around specific themes. Thus, one can identify certain thematic areas that engage with issues of remembering/forgetting/the right to memory (pictures 7 and 8), the presence/absence of these women and their right to life (picture 9), the sexual violence and severe torture they experience, women's right to humane treatment, dignity, and a life free of violence (picture 10). In addition, there are other recurrent leitmotifs such as women and flowers



Picture 9 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

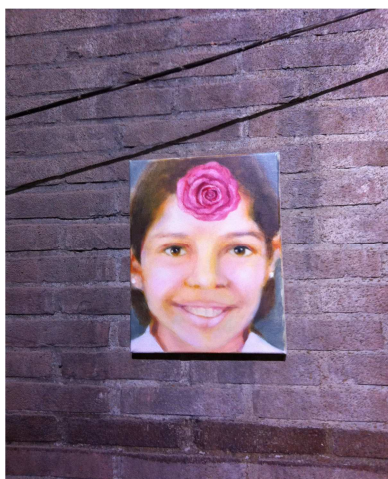


Picture 10 - Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and 400 Women

(pictures 11 and 12), women as martyrs and saints through an array of religious iconography: altars (picture 13), references to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Agueda de Catania [12], and the commodification of women as objects. [13]



Picture 11
Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and *400 Women*



Picture 12
Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and *400 Women*



Picture 13
Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and *400 Women*

The installation also highlights how gender-based violence against women, and sexual violence against them crosscuts the whole spectrum of the female population in Ciudad Juárez, as it is a systemic practice inflicted upon girls as little as three years old, which brings to the fore issues of children's rights, to women as mature as sixty-five. Interestingly, these thematic elements were neither predetermined nor formally agreed upon. Each portrait was produced independently from one another as each artist worked with one woman/girl and her respective particular reality. However, the fact that these thematic lines emerged in the exhibition also points out to the existence of a shared collective imaginary according to which artists, public and individuals envision and imagine women, violence against them, abuse, memory, loss, injustice, rights, innocence, and childhood. [14]

In this respect, *400 Women* exemplifies Jacques Rancière's analysis of "the image" as another element within any given fiction that contributes to the creation of a common knowledge or sense that refers to the collective symbolic, material, and discursive practices. These constitute a collective frame of reference that is uncritically accepted as fact. According to Rancière, however, the problem is not whether an image should or should not be represented, but "what kind of common sense is woven by some particular fiction, by the construction of some particular image" (102). [15] The image in *400 Women*, though evocative and functional within specific common systems of knowledge and imaginaries, transcends these representational parameters by precisely fragmenting the totality of the image (and the hegemonic Western discourse) of "the victim" with each portrait, which stands for every individual woman in her uniqueness. The multiplicity of artistic

practices, visual aesthetics, themes, and women/girls represented subverts any attempt to homogenise all these experiences under a mass of "nameless bodies [...] incapable of returning the gaze that we direct at them [and] that are an object of speech without themselves having a chance to speak" (Rancière 96). The exhibition resists the spectator's neoliberal disciplinarian gaze that turns the women/girls into a faceless mass of victims and "others", devoid of any autonomy and subjectivity. [16] In fact, the portraits engage with a range of emotions (happiness, rage, vitality, calmness, etc.) that have nothing to do with traditional representations of the "suffering subject". In so doing, the installation avoids engaging in what Hesford calls a "victimization rhetoric" (47). This kind of rhetoric, according to Hesford, tends to blind the spectator to structural and economic inequalities, encouraging protectionist interventions and solutions, and annihilating the victims as individuals in their own right. [17]

In this respect, *400 Women* performs a differential visual economy that defies a linear narrative of gender violence and human rights abuses [18], while at the same time claiming accountability and justiciability, and constituting itself as a mechanism to demand both. In so doing, *400 Women* turns into itself to expose the very inner workings of the spectacle, the intolerable image, and its own fiction. Like Rancière's intolerable image, *400 Women* "construct[s] different realities, different forms of common sense—that is to say, different spatiotemporal systems, different communities of words and things, forms and meanings [as well as] new relations between words and visible forms, speech and writing, a here and an elsewhere, a then and a now" (Rancière 102). This is what Hesford refers to as *posthumanist* politics of representation (and I would add, posthumanitarian), which questions how the normative "suffering" body is embedded and made legible within specific structures of feeling, human rights discourses and visual rhetorics, and therefore legitimated. What is more, these posthumanist politics also make explicit the multiplicity of factors, structures of visibility/invisibility that display the truth-telling conventions upheld by universalism in all its manifestations (191). [19]

Conclusion

I have tried to show the ways in which *400 Women* approaches women's human rights issues and the trauma of *feminicides* within the space of art. The installation engages with how the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez can be put into "images and fiction" (Rancière 102), without reproducing traditional Manichean binaries and hierarchical power relations that ultimately privilege the Western I/eye who sees. *400 Women* destabilises traditional politics of representation by constituting itself as an *assemblage* of individual portraits, women, memories, structures of feeling, artistic visions and visual-discursive possibilities. Such an amalgamation of elements unsettles the

dogmatic/domesticated spectator's vision, challenging it in its comfort zone by exposing it not only to multiple stimuli but also to strong political messages in which women's human rights violations are addressed. In this way, the installation moves away from anticipatory patterns of seeing, thus generating a feeling of estrangement, allowing for public and art, the "seer" and the "visible" to engage in a more balanced *tête-à-tête*

In addition, Challenger's work unsettles visual power hierarchies and defies the re-victimisation of the disappeared women, whose images and presence command the engagement and participation of the public with their reality through an asymmetric process of identifications. This rapport is established in a relational fashion, bringing on more ethical acts of vision in which power relations are horizontally constructed, and handled among individual subjects. Subjectivity, therefore, is questioned and reformulated in such a manner that it is not necessarily tied to a corporeal reality, but to a presence, a stance, a command, a reminder to everyone that these women lived, and still live at multiple levels of existence in people's memories, in portraits, in us as a public. In this way, it could be argued that *400 Women* becomes "a new landscape of the possible", opening up (and constituting itself) as a new space for political mobilisation, articulations of human rights principles and practices, and the construction of visual, sensorial and discursive architectures that resist the politics of subalterity.

Endnotes

[1] In this respect, Raewyn Connell explains that governmental bodies and institutions are agents for the dissemination of hegemonic (gendered) values. Likewise, literature, mass culture and other artistic manifestations are vehicles for their circulation. All of them have an impact on wider sectors of society, and contribute to the maintenance of a specific social order. Likewise, these tools can also be used to undermine the same hegemonic order they may eventually uphold, which turns cultural production and mass media into powerful (anti)hegemonic agents. For a detailed discussion, see Connell (1995, 2002).

[2] This web of elements is what Hesford refers to as "intercontextuality", which encapsulates a collective framework of reference (of material, symbolic and discursive practices) in which images are embedded and made intelligible.

[3] The complexity of elements that collide in this egregious form of violence against women, as well as the multiple aspects that are in need of consideration when approaching this issue are also reflected in the terminology used. As observed by Rosa Linda Fregoso, Cynthia Bejarano, and Marcela Lagarde, not only does the evolution of the term from *femicide* to *feminicide* reflect the changes and development in the field of research, it also encapsulates different approaches to the same reality, which in turn points to the lack of terminological consensus when referring to the murders. The concept of *feminicide* incorporates the misogynist murder of women and contextualises it within a broader structure of systemic violence and discrimination against them from an intersectional perspective. However, *femicide* is a preferable option for some scholars in Central America since it underlines the "misogynist murder of women, independent of the element of impunity or the participation of the state." (Fregoso and Bejarano 8) In my opinion, although the two concepts do not necessarily cancel each other out, it seems to me that the concept of *feminicide* is much more holistic and comprehensive, and problematises and challenges fundamental heteronormative structures and their impact on the individual lives of women. The use of *feminicide* also refers to a "transborder perspective" that incorporates "the relevance of theories originating in the global South for the formation of an alternative paradigm (knowledge, logics, subjectivities, traditions ...) that reverses the hierarchies of knowledge and challenge claims about unidirectional (North-to-South) flows of traveling theory" (Fregoso and Bejarano 4-5).

[4] In effect, a common explanation for the disappearance/murders was that the women/girls were provocatively dressed and therefore incited sexual attacks on them, that they ran away with their boyfriends (hence categorising the case as a "domestic" issue) or that they were "having a good time" away from the parents/family supervision.

[5] Some of the artists that were part of the project are Tracey Emin, Paula Rego, Maggi Hambling, Gordon Cheung and Humphrey Ocean.

[6] This relational network can also be found at the heart of other artistic pieces on *feminicides*, such as Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* (2001). Carefully examined by Laura Gillman in her contribution to this issue, Portillo's documentary film draws the audience into political mobilisation and empathy through its powerful *haptic visuality*. As Gillman argues, the audience is inescapably compelled by the film images, and then immersed into a responsiveness process at the sensorial level, in which subject/object relations are symbiotically established.

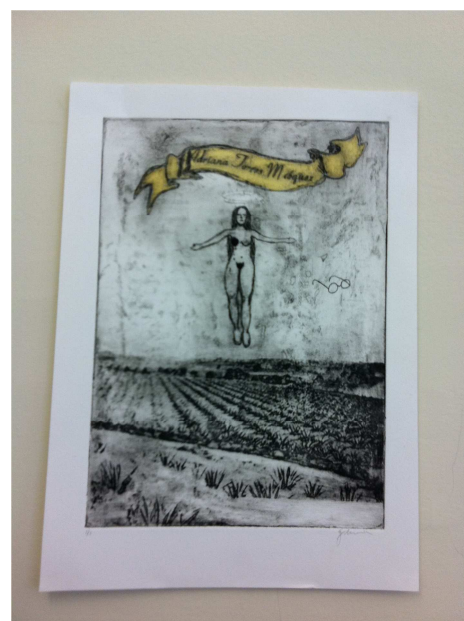
[7] Gillman's discussion of haptic visuality in *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) relates to the need of developing new systems of representation that will reproduce neither hegemonic visual politics nor normative discourses on gender, race and class, entrenched in the systemic and symbolic violence exposed by the film. *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) illustrates this point, and captures Portillo's strong concern with the risk of "exoticising", and "commodifying" *feminicides* if hegemonic systems of representation were used.

[8] New York City's 2014 campaign "Let's End Human Trafficking" is a good example of this idea (see: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/endht/html/home/home.shtml>). The Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) "Imagine" campaign in 2002 is also illustrative of this point.

[9] In effect, as Challenger summarised in her interview on Line Magazine, giving these women "visibility" both as "human subjects" under international human rights law and as a works of art involves an act of acknowledgment that rests on the idea that "humanity is a matter of endowment, declaration, or recognition" (Esmeir 1549), which can be given and taken away, further reinforcing their victimhood and their subjectless status. In addition, these dynamics classify people as human, dehumanised, or non-human depending on their position within the legitimating discourse of international human rights law. Therefore, as interrogated by *400 Women*, "if the human is a meaningful subject position and if humanity is taken away from the other, what possibilities [then] remain for the other to exist as a formed subject [...]?" Furthermore, when persons are declared dehumanized, what political possibilities exist for them, aside from being victims awaiting humanitarian interventions?" (Esmeir 1549) By dismantling and destabilising colonial and neoliberal referential frameworks, and subverting hegemonic humanitarian politics of representation, challenging our own preconceptions of victimhood, humanity, "dehumanised" and "other", *400 Women* invites us to work toward "the forging of concrete alliances with human beings who await not our recognition but our participation in their struggles" (Esmeir 1545).

[10] This is what I understand as a two-way referential process of interpellation, which takes place at this particular encounter.

[11] In this respect, "we create an impossible problem for ourselves for presuming to be separated in the first place. By presuming that we are separated from the world and other people by the void of empty space, we at once eliminate the possibility of connection and relationships even while we make a desperate attempt to bridge that abyss" (Oliver 12). Oliver suggests that the divide between "subject" and "other" is a devastating construct, resulting from violent power relations. This relational approach, however, does not involve "sameness" but acceptance of our "connectivity" in a wider discursive and material structure, our response-ability and address-ability in it and towards it, and our vulnerability to it. This is one of the ways, according to Oliver, in which the notion of "subjectivity" is reworked, in which "otherness is always internal to subjectivity and encounters with others" (10).



Picture 14
Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and *400 Women*

[12] An example of this is the portrait of Adriana Torres Márquez (picture 14, right), disappeared in 1995 at the age of 15 and found dead with a nipple mutilated and a breast cut off. The portrait presents Adriana suspended in the air, her body mutilated, her hands extended as if crucified, floating over a vast field of land resembling the place where her body was found. This image is evocative of Saint Agueda of Catania, a martyr, virgin and saint who was tortured and whose breasts were both cut off as a punishment for her remaining a virgin.



Picture 15
Courtesy of Tamsyn Challenger and *400 Women*

[13] Several portraits are composed of objects (picture 15, left)—items either belonging to each of the victims, or belonging to someone else but found near the place where the particular victim disappeared, and subsequently offered to the families and friends in substitution for their remains. Considering that their bodies were never found, the only thing that the families and friends keep as symbols of their lives, existence and memory are the objects that belong to them. These objects therefore

metaphorically capture the essence and lives of these women. Each of these portraits makes a harsh critique of the state's recklessness in the investigation of these women's disappearance and murders, their subsequent involvement in the violation of their human rights through their inaction, and their responsibility in promoting gender-based violence against women and the impunity relating to it.

[14] These "visions" are intersectionally defined.

[15] Rancière elaborates: "A 'common sense' is, in the first instance, a community of sensible data: things whose visibility is supposed to be shareable by all modes of perception of these things, and the equally shareable meanings that are conferred on them." (102)

[16] As Rancière affirms, "the issue is not whether it is necessary to show the horrors suffered by the victims of some particular violence. It revolves around the construction of the victim as an element in a certain distribution of the visible" (103). Therefore, problematising "the construction of the victim" as part and parcel of specific bodies of knowledge is at stake here.

[17] From its inception (as Challenger's words reveal) *400 Women* developed a sense of "meta-awareness," that is, a strong concern as to how the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez and the murders of these women can be put into "images and fiction." (Rancière 102)

[18] This linear narrative presupposes a correlation between "perception, affection, comprehension and action" (Rancière 103).

[19] As Hesford underscores, it is fundamental to acknowledge the "contaminated normativity of human rights" (Cheah 172) and how "the human rights spectacle both haunts and consolidates hegemonic power" (194).

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