

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
ENTRAPMENT, REPETITION AND TRANSFORMATION**



Carmen Martínez Alemán

Violence Against Women: Entrapment, Repetition and Transformation

A report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Fine Art.

Carmen Martínez Alemán

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ABSTRACT

Violence Against Women: Entrapment, Repetition and Transformation is a reflection on my creative practice as a visual artist. The project is the culmination of five years of research into this subject, inspired by artists and theorists to examine it from a feminist point of view. It is an ongoing body of work that explores themes of power, domination, gender inequality, entrapment, repetition and transformation. These issues are still relevant today and my personal interest and experience have motivated me to use my art practice to raise awareness.

Researching feminist theorists such as Amelia Valcárcel, Ana de Miguel Marcela Lagarde y Laura Segato has given me insight into the subject and allowed me to develop my artistic practice further, adding substance to my work and making my work more engaging. Philosophers Rosi Braidotti and Daisaku Ikeda have shown optimism is still possible and that we are all interconnected. They reinforce the importance of building better communities and fighting injustice against women.

Key artists such as Regina José Galindo, Jenny Holzer, Susan Hiller and Lorena Wolfer have been a source of inspiration, encouraging me to explore using different media, including photography, video, installation and performance. They have also shown me ways to use specific tools in my art practice, in order to convey the message of highlighting violence against women and bring about social awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The following report is a reflection on my creative and professional practice carried out during the doctorate, theoretically contextualised. It shows how it has progressed and the questions that were raised, evaluating the weaknesses and strengths of my artistic practice.

I have been influenced by my Spanish cultural background. My early personal experiences, growing up in Spain, which was ruled by the Francoist dictatorship and heavily imbued with conservative values, have influenced my practice and informed my interest in feminism. Although my work does not refer to specific events in my life, it has a biographical element. My practice is an exploration of violence against women (VAW), through an ongoing body of work that explores themes of power, domination, gender inequality, entrapment, repetition and transformation. I argue that these issues are still relevant today, across the globe, and as an artist, I feel impelled to explore them and raise awareness.

In the section entitled Personal and Creative Context, I discuss the process of gradually expanding my practice as a visual artist, from initially using photography to using other media. I also discuss how my interest in feminism has gradually evolved my practice, through discovering other feminist artists, as well as exploring issues on gender, sexuality and spirituality.

In the Creative Practice and Theory section, I discuss how my project has developed and how a combination of theory, artistic practice and the use of different media has allowed me to explore, understand and examine the subject, in order to develop and contextualise my practice. I have divided the report into the themes of entrapment, repetition and transformation. These themes co-exist with each other throughout the work, with certain themes becoming more prominent in certain pieces than in others.

Ideas of entrapment are explored in relation to the inequalities and oppression that women still experience and are displayed, visually, in the form of enclosed installations. Repetition does not only refer to the unceasing cycle of violence but to the art-making process and how it manifests visually in my practice. Finally, transformation acts as a methodology that enables the work to evolve into the different pieces as well as a message of hope for social change.

Predominantly, I have researched feminist artists and theorists, looking largely at Hispanic philosophers, including Amelia Valcárcel, Ana de Miguel, Marcela Lagarde, Lidia Falcón and Laura Segato, as I can relate to them more easily due to my cultural background and whose theories and practice resonate with me. They all look at the position and conditions of women in the patriarchal system in relation to inequality and violence. They are also at the forefront of research on the topic of VAW.

My Buddhist practice has encouraged me to pursue a route to peace and non-violence informing my practice. I have therefore explored philosophers who propose hope and transformation, unity and social change such as Daisaku Ikeda and Rosi Braidotti.

I have researched many female artists who have explored the subject of violence and inequality, power and domination, including Jenny Holzer, Regina Jose Galindo and Lorena Wolfer among others. These artists' work has encouraged me to look at the topic of violence from different perspectives, using different materials and approaches such as installation, video, performance and activism.

I reflect on my professional practice and how it has developed and benefitted from participating in exhibitions, residencies, presenting work in seminars and collaborating with collectives. In conclusion, placing my art in a contemporary context, I can see my practice continuing to address feminist issues, exploring this with a diversity of media, both in galleries and in the wider community.

PERSONAL AND CREATIVE CONTEXT

I became a feminist out of a pure sense of injustice and it was only much later that I learnt how to articulate conceptually what was happening, not only to me but also to the female sex in general, and how, throughout the historical process, that truth of exclusion in which we were forced to live. (Valcárcel, 1998).

My early childhood was lived during the final years of General Franco's dictatorship of Spain, and I reached adolescence during the Spanish transition to democracy. It was the beginning of a much more open liberal society, characterised by free expression, sexual freedom and cultural awakening when many women began to question the status quo.

However, Spanish society was scarred by Franco's legacy, including the patriarchal system and, in it, the position of women and their invisibility. The famous motto of the boy will look at the world, the girl will look at the home¹ was still prevalent. Women were relegated to the domestic and historical role of 'woman-wife-mother', a role greatly exacerbated by the oppression of the Catholic Church.

Seeing women denigrated through inequality and discrimination during Franco's dictatorship left a lasting impression on me. Growing up with a violent father, I became interested in women's rights, developing a strong sense of outrage about misogyny and violence. This has subsequently influenced my creative output. I became a feminist.

¹ 'El niño mirará al mundo, la niña mirará al hogar' phrase was published in *Consigna Magazine*. It is a propagandist motto of the *Feminine Section* controlled by Pilar Primo de Rivera, the sister of the founder of the Fascist movement *La Falange Española*, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. <https://desmemoria.eldiario.es/represion-mujeres/> (Accessed: 17 Jan 2019).

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Coming from a working-class family, an art career was not an option. Then, at seventeen, I became fascinated with photography. Women involved in photography usually had the role of being photographed, so taking control of the camera, for me, stood for taking control of my world. As Susan Sontag observes, 'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge - and, therefore, like power' (Sontag, 1979).

Photography was not my only interest. I had always been attracted to spirituality and in 1999, I started practicing the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin¹. I became an active member of Soka Gakkai², an NGO lay organization which promotes peace, culture and education, based on Buddhist values. This philosophy has awakened a yearning to create value in my community and contribute to a more peaceful society. It has also influenced my creative practice, addressing important global issues, such as VAW, consciously becoming more active within the community and creating value with my art.

B.A. Creative Practice and Theory

During my B.A. in photography, I turned my attention towards the clash between female sexuality and spirituality; themes that have continued to inform my art practice. Both can be seen as antagonistic, even in contemporary culture. Sexuality is often seen, in organized religions, to diminish spirituality. That tension is reflected in my work.

The B.A. gave me an opportunity to discover the work of female artists and their creative practices. Artists such as Judy Chicago, Ana Mendieta, Marina Abramovic and Frida Kahlo were influential because they had also explored similar issues on gender, sexuality, spirituality and the body. I was curious to see how they positioned themselves as feminists and how they used their

¹ Nichiren Daishonin was a Buddhist monk who lived in XIII Century Japan. Nichiren stated that anyone, regardless of gender, race or social status could achieve happiness, develop a life of value, influence their environment and, therefore, society.

² <http://www.sgi.org/> Soka Gakkai is the largest Buddhist lay organization in the world, extending to 192 countries and territories. Founded by Daisaku Ikeda, a Buddhist philosopher, educator, author and advocate for nuclear disarmament.

bodies as a tool of exploration. I was drawn to their use of visual symbolism. Mendieta's silhouettes, Abramovic's ritualistic performances, Judy Chicago's sexual and religious iconography and Frida Kahlo's visceral painting and use of retablos³, were all relevant to what I was investigating at the time.

My B.A. final year project, *Blessed* (1994), was a body of work critiquing the damage that Catholicism has done to women, using religious symbolism and Christian iconography. The work was displayed as a photographic installation in the form of a 'trptych' or altarpiece, divided into three panels, containing a series of photographs on related topics. (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Carmen Alemán, *Blessed*, 1994. Photography Installation.

³ Paintings of the Virgin Mary, Christ or saints. Before 1900 they were large gilded, painted and carved screens which adorned churches. After 1900 they became smaller.

The work of filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar was also inspirational, and not just because he portrayed what was happening socially and politically at the time, through the years of transition in Spain. More importantly, Almodóvar gave women a presence and a voice by bringing their lives and their issues to the forefront. Women were the protagonists. The feminine and the feminist universe were fundamental to his work. His themes of religion, sexuality and some visual aesthetics, such as the use of vivid colours, were also relevant to my work. One example of his seminal films is *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1989), a black comedy about women responding to upsetting or dramatic events (Figure 2).

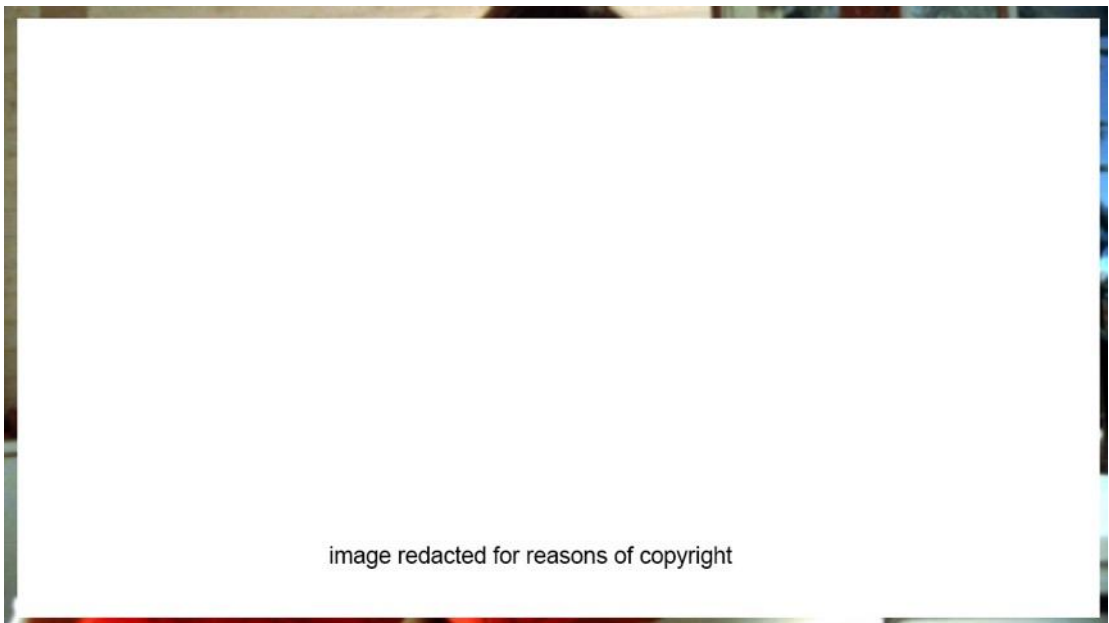


Figure 2. Pedro Almodóvar. *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1989. Film still.

M.A. Creative Practice and Theory

During my M.A. in Photography, a few things became important to my future practice. I began working with food as an art material and as a visual metaphor to explore themes of gender and sexuality, the body, power and ageing. Coincidentally, I discovered that the majority of artists using food in their art are women, working in an experimental and hybrid way, crossing the boundaries of media, including performance, video, sculpture, installation, theatre, tableaux vivant and photography. This also gradually became important in my practice.

I started experimenting with moving image to construct female narratives and the results were two pieces, using food, that were linked with each other:



Figure 3. Carmen Alemán, *Meating*, 2001, Video Still.

Meating (2001) is a short film about power, sex, violence and death, using meat as an art material and bullfighting as a metaphor, but with a female torero (Figure 3).

Eggsistence (2002) is a short film and photographic series about the passing of time, loss and the ageing of the body (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Carmen Alemán, *Eggsistence*, 2002. Photography and Video Still.

Photography and moving images became tools to preserve the imagery of the ephemeral organic materials I was using, as well as a way of documenting the piece. These works were the genesis of my interest in visual repetition, installation and performance; elements that would reappear in my work during the doctorate.

Relevant Practice Since M.A.

After finishing my MA, I wanted to connect with and contribute to the community, as well as finding artists I could relate to. I participated in a project running photography workshops with survivors of domestic violence for the charity 'Hate Crimes' in London. It was crucial to meet survivors to conduct research and thus gain knowledge to inform my practice. I began to consider the idea of developing a project on violence against women.

In 2007, I created, co-ordinated and curated a community street-art project called 'Create Peace⁴' (Figure 5) in South London, with the aim of empowering the community to create art for peace, as well as organising a final event with videos, performances, music, poetry etc. The experience was incredibly challenging and taught me a great deal about organisation and communication.

My practice was growing as I felt more open to ideas of collaboration. It was not only about my own personal art but about participation, creating experiences for others and expanding my network. Being involved in the local community helped me to consider how I connected with the audience, which proved relevant later on in my practice.



Figure 5. Raquel Chinchetru, *Hug Me*, 'Create Peace', 2007, Street Art Project. Organized and Documented by Carmen Alemán.

⁴ <http://www.flickr.com/groups/createpeace/pool/>

Around 2005, I started making a photographic documentary about my father, who was suffering from a terminal illness. The approach was very different from previous works. Doing the project was very emotional but somehow it helped improve my relationship with my father during the final years before his death. Something very special and extraordinary happened between us during this period. The camera became a tool for me to get closer to my dad. It was as if the camera dissolved the emotional barrier between us. I had never known how to talk to my dad, and now, due to throat cancer, he had lost his voice. However, the camera gave us another language to communicate with and the opportunity to feel more comfortable in each other's space. By choosing my father as a subject, I made him feel important (Figure 6).

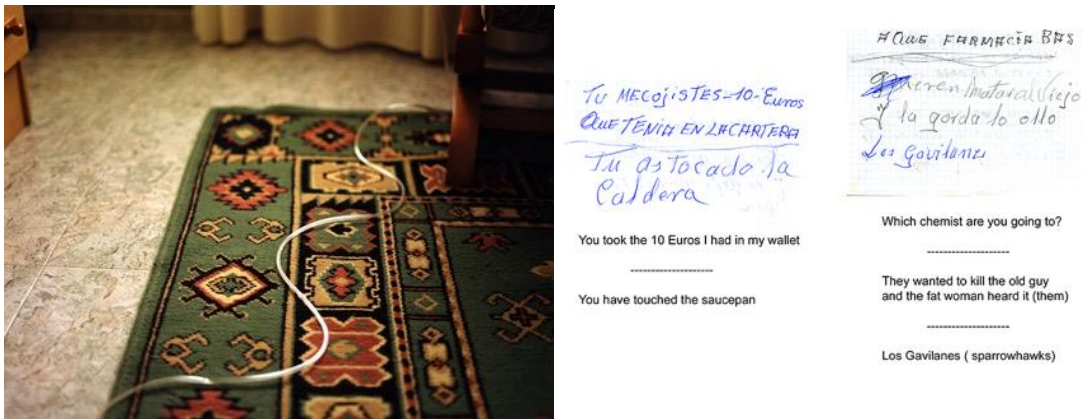


Figure 6. Carmen Alemán, *Lifeline*, 2009. Photography.

The experience of making this work altered my relationship with the camera. It was not just about taking photos compulsively but about learning to listen and perceiving the right moment to take the picture. The experience stopped being a personal exercise and became a collaboration.

At that point, I was looking for other avenues that could complement my practice. As well as developing my own projects, I was offered an art residency in Morocco, facilitating photography workshops with young Muslim women in a secondary school (Figure 7). Being women, working in a public space in a Muslim country, was an extraordinary experience, both for the girls and myself. We explored the invisibility of women in public spaces and the question of who 'owns' that space.



Figure 7. Art Residency, Morocco, Documentation, 2009.

In evaluating my professional practice during my M.A., I realised that, at the time, my practical methodology was the result of an amalgamation of influences that, as an artist, I would piece together, like a 'bricoleur', or a 'handy woman'; someone who accumulates whatever materials are at hand and pieces them together to complete the job.

My desire to understand and contextualise my practice further, through combined research and studio practice, has led me to undertake the Professional Doctorate.

CREATIVE PRACTICE AND THEORY

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women's rights and gender equality have been of great interest to me for many years. Now, with a focus on the female perspective, I have turned my attention towards the issue of violence against women (VAW).

The intention of my work is to expose the invisibility and inequality that women suffer, revealing the private and making it public. The concept of 'the personal is political', which became a slogan in the feminist movement during the '60s and '70s, still influences and inspires my practice. It is an important aspect of feminism because it takes the problem of women's inequalities and oppression into the public space. It is common to reduce women's rights to the private space and see it as a 'woman's problem' when the reality is that it is a social and political problem, a product of social structures. Similarly, while exploring the subject, this concept has affected my current practice. I cannot keep this work private. I must make it visible and widespread.

The impetus for my decision to focus on this subject in my practice was a series of events that propelled my personal and creative work. Appalling news stories of homicides frequently appeared in the Spanish media, which triggered and revived memories of my own past experiences and motivated me to respond. The most recent was the incident of 'La Manada', a case of sexual abuse that happened in Pamplona (Navarra, Spain), on July 7, 2016, during the San Fermín festivities. The case had strong media coverage and mobilized many people across Spain, who went out on the streets to demonstrate their outrage at the verdict. None of the accused was convicted of rape but of the lesser charge of sexual abuse.

I am interested in how violence seems to be hidden and silenced and why it keeps repeating despite advances in gender equality. Feminists see the

problem of gender-based⁵ violence as social, cultural and political in construction. Many other perspectives and theories have been presented to understanding this violence, such as the biological, scientific or anthropological, omitting gender, in other words, forgetting the discourse of inequality. Luisa Posada Kubissa argues convincingly that VAW can only be understood from a context of domination, of men over women. It is a problem that affects social and political life, but, at the same time, it feeds the system. Thus, patriarchal structures condemn women to inferiority and perpetuate violence. (Posada Kubissa, 2008).

Feminist philosopher Ana de Miguel believes that the idea of male superiority is still deeply rooted in society. This ontological learning is in our being, values and principles. It has become normalised in society that women are considered worthless or inferior, which serves as an excuse to justify inequality, violence and women's lack of a voice in society. When women have raised their voices, throughout history, they have been punished for their rebelliousness. It is important to raise our voices and speak out.

Despite the UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women in 1993⁶, which states that human rights for all women are basic principles, it continues to be a hidden crime. It is accepted in many countries as 'the way things are' and women and girls continue to be killed worldwide. It has many forms and can be exerted in many different ways, from those everyday attitudes that are socially tolerated and naturalised and become invisible, to the violence of control, sexual violence, labour discrimination, forced abortion and so on, right through to femicide. Feminist philosopher Amelia Valcárcel theorised that we are still living in a mirage of equality (Valcárcel, 2016). According to Valcárcel, there is a naive belief that, because society has changed and the

⁵Although it may seem controversial, the term 'gender-based/gender violence' is another name for VAW. It refers to violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender. The United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines it as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'.

⁶ Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women:
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

VAW is considered "a violation of women's fundamental human rights". This includes the right to privacy and family life, the right not to be discriminated against, tortured or treated in an inhuman way and ultimately the right to life

situation of women has improved, both women and men have the same opportunities and rights, and we don't need feminism anymore. However, women's visibility and freedom are still limited. Women have achieved more civil, sexual and reproductive rights, but the patriarchal system continues to accept VAW. This means that although women are the equal of men, they do not have the same rights. Valcárcel states that violence is not going to be just that things happen to women. Violence is something that the system continually exerts against your possibilities, your desires, your talent, your freedom and your security in yourself, hence the illusion of freedom. (Valcárcel, 2014).

I have gradually expanded my research from looking at feminist philosophers, artists and cultural symbols from Spain to those from Latin America. Both cultures had a shared history, that lasted more than 400 years, as well as sharing the same language. Similarly, both Spanish and Latin American feminists are very open and committed in their fight to make this violence visible. This is not because VAW is a consequence of Latin passion, but because it is taken very seriously (de Miguel, 2018). Furthermore, Spain approved a pioneering and comprehensive law on gender-based violence⁷ in 2004, setting a new global benchmark, helping to expose the problem of violence. As part of my research, I joined several online courses to learn more about art and feminism in Spain and Latin America. This was a turning point for my inspiration and understanding of the topic of gender violence, a subject that is often discussed and explored through art.

⁷ Ley integral, (2004) is a law that refers to gender violence as a problem, (manifesting both in the private and the public). It affects women because they are women. It is the result of historically unequal power relations between men and women. The law covers preventative, educational, social, welfare, health and criminal areas and involves seven ministries (Education, Justice, Interior, Labour and Social Affairs, Health, Public Administration and Economy).

ENTRAPMENT

The concept of entrapment in my work relates directly to violence and its function as an analogy for women's discrimination and the systemic inequality women still suffer in the 21st century. bell hooks reflects that love and abuse can coexist and, in extreme cases, abuse can also be a form of love. This definition of love, although dysfunctional, seems to be very familiar, due to women's fear of the absence of love with their family or partners (hooks, 2000). In my work, I refer to the idea that women are still oppressed through a mirage of equality and so, captivated by romantic love, they become imprisoned, as well as being trapped in cycles of violence and oppression.

Ideas of entrapment have manifested visually in several ways in my work. My piece *Love me Knot (2014)* is a claustrophobic installation about love and hate, with each being part of the other in a destructive relationship, both jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The installation was set in a small, claustrophobic room, to create a repetitive yet overwhelming experience, similar to a relationship marked with violence, where feelings of love and hate are blurred and tied together in a very difficult knot, which cannot easily be undone. I wanted to visually recreate the reality of violence as well as the false 'bombardment of love' in a relationship dominated by fear and control. The piece is made of many pages of poems written about love and violence, on sheets of paper randomly arranged. They line the walls of a small room of 6m², which has a very narrow entrance, covering the entire surface, reflecting what is unseen, the hidden reality (Figure 8). Violence could go almost unnoticed, softened and accepted, by such an excess of beauty and poetic words.

I would argue that the myth of romantic or courtly love still pervades in our society. Katherine Gravdal notes that this type of love is a masculine game of power, property and violence (Gravdal, 1991 cited in Weisl, 1998:111). This fairy tale is still popular, where violence is

normalised. For example, with domestic violence, the victim is gradually trapped through courtship and flirtation and the mantle of love. Kate Millet reflects on the idea of romantic love, saying love has elements of emotional manipulation, often exploited by men, because 'love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity'. (Millet, 1970: 37).



Figure 8. Carmen Alemán, *Love me Knot*, 2014, Installation Detail.

I wanted the experience to be one of excess, of being saturated by letters and poems of love and violence. I wanted to encourage the viewer to read and touch the pages, while being overwhelmed by the scale and repetitive nature of the poems, thus, giving a sense of the size and immediacy of this social problem. To do that the viewer sometimes had to bend down or squat or stand on a chair to see the pages.

I collected fragments of texts from poems of love and violence from throughout history and arranged them as if they were pages of books or letters. The poems were extracted from the works of poets from different cultures and times, from classics like Lord Byron, Jean de la Fontaine and Emily Dickinson to

contemporary poets like Eavan Boland and Brian Patten, among others. They were all in English so that the audience in England could easily read them. The point I wanted to make was that love, hate and violence can happen in any culture, time or place. In the case of VAW, women's stories are being kept hidden. These stories have not been shouted about enough. My intention was to metaphorically open these books, rip off the pages, and expose these stories. Thus, the power of memory is revived, not diminished.

Love me Knot (2014) suggests that collective memory, both the large memory (how history is recorded in books and archives) and the small memory (personal histories), need to be awakened. Stories need to be told. Personal and collective stories are important for social transformation. The silence needs to be broken. Cathy Caruth paraphrased holocaust survivor Schreiber Weitz in relation to the dilemma and the trauma of speaking out when she stated:

People have said that only survivors themselves understand what happened... I'll go one step further... We don't... I don't know... So, there is a dilemma. What do we do? Do we not talk about it? What do we do? Elie Wiesel has said many times that silence is the only proper response, but for most of us, including him, not to speak is impossible... To speak is impossible and not to speak is impossible (Weitz, 1990:154).

I consider this piece crucial because it marked the direction and focus of my research. I got the idea of using text and poems from *Cárcel de amor* (*Prison of Love*, 2006), an exhibition I visited at Caixa Forum in Barcelona (Figure 9). The title is taken from an epistolary medieval novel with the same name *Cárcel de amor* (1492) by Diego de San Pedro, where physical love is connected to violence. The novel also presents a debate between misogyny and pro-feminism through a series of intimate letters. The exhibition questioned the patriarchal system, offering an opportunity to discuss the concept of equality, exploring themes and attitudes in relation to gender violence. I was dismayed at how it is normalised and silenced. How what is not named does not exist (Atenció, G. 2015: 17). The absence and/or invisibility of women throughout history, in many different spheres of society,



Figure 9. *Cárcel de Amor*, Exhibition at Caixa Forum, 2006, Barcelona.

and their confinement to the domestic space has provoked the need to reveal the invisible.

In the work of Spanish artist Elena del Rivero, I identified similarities to my piece *Love me Knot* (2014) in materials, themes and approach, such as the use of paper in the form of book pages and the references to medieval times, written fragments, letters and poems. Rivero's *La perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*, 2001), is a 19-meter-long installation, made out of more than 700 pages from the book of the same name *The Perfect Wife*, by Fray Luis de León, sewn by hand to a gigantic piece of tulle (Figures 10, 11). The book published in 1583, is a collection of teachings on the duties of married women in sixteenth-century Spain. Elena del Rivero used its pages to vindicate and subvert the roles traditionally associated with women.

The work of artist Regina José Galindo has influenced me in her use of claustrophobic or small spaces (cells, boxes, coffins, prisons, shells) suggesting entrapment, vulnerability and a lack of freedom. For instance, in her installation *279 golpes* (*279 Blows*, 2005), Galindo locked herself in a small room, where the audience could not see her, and, once inside, she hit herself 279 times, referencing the number of women who had been murdered in Guatemala that year (Figure 12). The sound was amplified so that it was heard from outside the cubicle. The audience could only hear the artist. This piece



Figures 10, 11. Elena del Rivero, *La Perfecta Casada*, 2002, Installation.

resonates with ideas of entrapment as well as the invisibility of violence, in the sense that we all know violence happens around us, but, although we hear it, we don't necessarily see it. We have become used to it and we don't do anything about it. We become bystanders. The piece also takes me back to my own childhood experience when my mother would ask me and my siblings to close the windows at home so the neighbours could not hear my violent father inside.

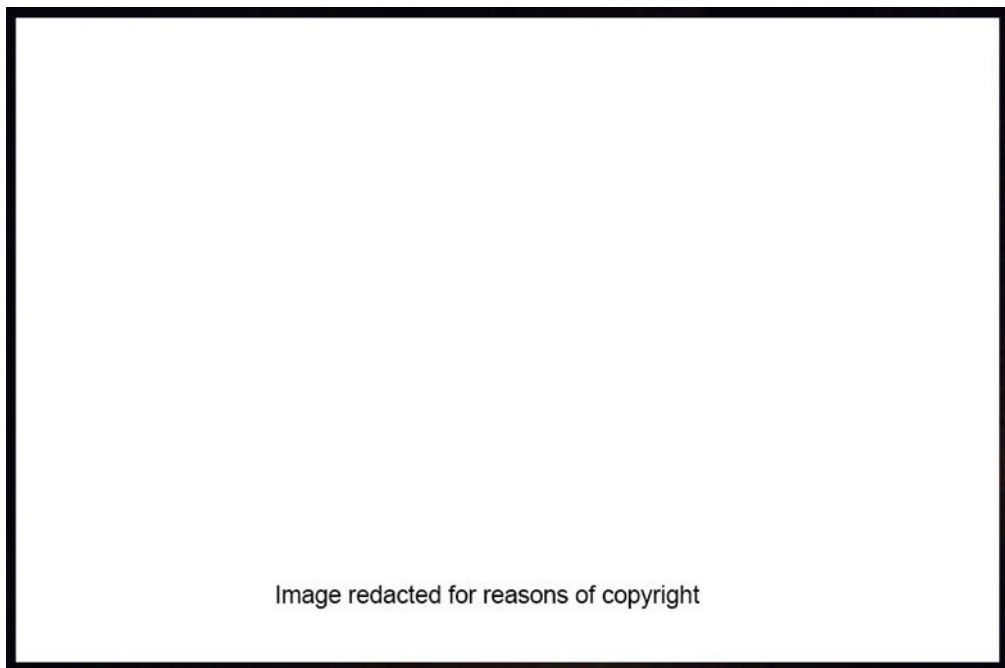


Figure 12. Regina José Galindo, *279 golpes*, 2005, Performance & Sound Installation.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, reflects that women are mutilated as human beings and that they are not fully considered a 'subject'. In fact, it was only in 1993, that women won the 'great' right to be considered human, at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna⁸, where it was declared that the rights of women were equal to men. It can be said that it was at that moment that women had their rights recognised in International Law.

Feminist anthropologist Marcela Lagarde in *Los cautiverios de las mujeres (The Captives of Women, 2005)* speaks of the oppression suffered by women in different fields. Lagarde analyzes the idea and the 'symbolic world' of what it means to be a captive; the myths, the beliefs, the patriarchal ideologies that make many women not only captive, but also captivated. Lagarde states that women are captivated by the ideas that sweeten the patriarchal world and make us think that the canons, the rules that they impose on us, are what will lead to happiness. (Lagarde, 2014).

The idea of captivity implies suffering, obligation, punishment, fear, guilt, confinement, even the captivity of living for others, and not appreciating themselves. There is a lack of (symbolic, physical, psychological and emotional) liberties that women suffer both in private and in public.

Ideas of entrapment continue manifesting visually in the next piece, *LightWomb* (2015), a mixed media installation about the hidden reality of violence and the difficulty of speaking out. The installation was a giant circular light box, a metaphor for a 'prison of love', suspended from the ceiling, and constructed to be an immersive space, with images, text and sound. It allowed the audience to become isolated and wrapped in the experience, surrounded by the sounds of whispers and vision of fragments of poems. The recorded voices are an integral part of the piece. I wanted the voices to penetrate the viewer's skin and give them 'goose bumps'.

⁸ <http://at20.ohchr.org/conference.html>

Using voices seemed a natural progression in my work. Some were voices of hope, some were haunting whispers, to simulate the hidden reality of this social problem and the difficulty of speaking out. Trauma and fear are a fundamental reason for this, as well as a tremendous sense of shame for many women. Women, in some cultures, cannot shout, especially if they have been educated not to be heard. (Lagarde, 2014). The intention of using these voices was to evoke memories of our life experiences related to love, hate and violence. Sound can stimulate other senses and bring more emotion to the work, by allowing the audience to be present and immersed in the moment. Susan Hiller says that ‘when we look at something, we dominate with our eyes; when we listen, we enter a more intimate world. Hearing penetrates the body’ (Hiller, 2005).

The soundscape also aimed to bring the female voices to life, showing their anger and pain. The whispers represented the voices of people (e.g. neighbours perhaps) gossiping behind the scenes, rather than defending the victim or denouncing the violence. Whispers increase a sense of trying to reveal a secret, the tone creating tension between speaking out and keeping quiet. Whispers could also be seen as rumours, perhaps challenging or doubting the truth. The voices were now telling their stories, evoking a time when stories were memorised and recited, to reveal and preserve the truth, at a time when women were seen as keepers of these oral traditions.

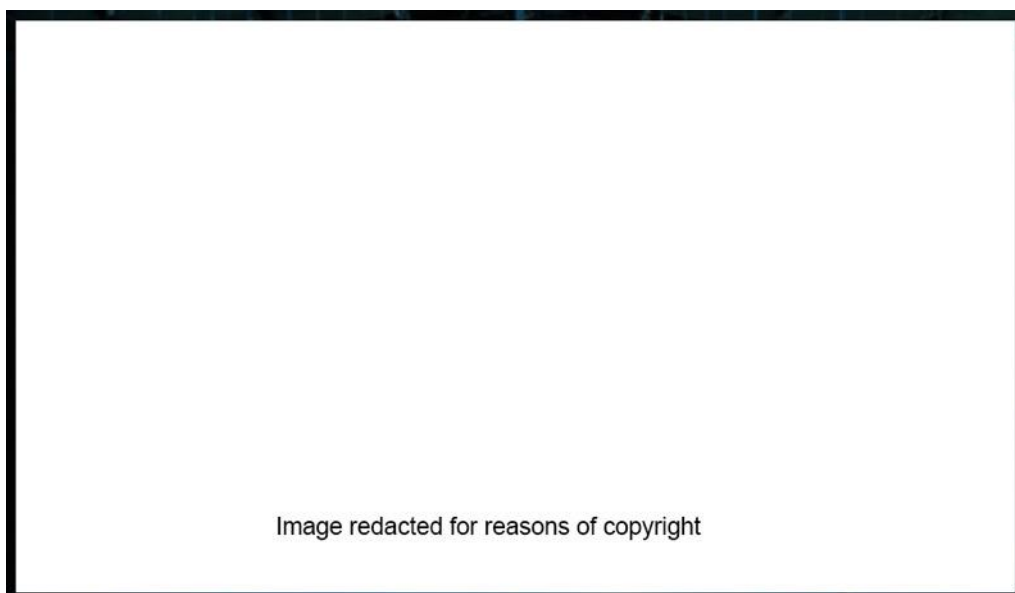


Figure 13. Susan Hiller. Witness, 2000, Audio Sculpture.

The sound installation *Witness* (2000) by Susan Hiller and its alternative approach to narrative was a particularly important influence on my own practice; she recorded voices in many different languages, telling stories about the experiences of encountering UFOs. She used audio and visual technology as a means of investigating these phenomena, suspending hundreds of tiny speakers from the ceiling, like little earpieces (Figure 13). The installation was technically quite complex. Each earpiece represented one voice and one story. The number of earpieces also made it an immersive experience, being surrounded by the murmur of whispers. Hiller stated that the installation didn't fully exist until viewers participated and listened to the voices and that listening heightened their imagination and the ability to visualize these stories in a very personal way (Hiller, 2000). This makes it more powerful because each viewer has a different experience and freely uses their imagination, according to the story they listen to. Similarly, in *LightWomb* (2015) I was dependent on viewers entering the installation, engaging with it, listening to the voices and allowing themselves to respond (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Carmen Alemán. *LightWomb*, 2015. Mixed Media Installation.

LightWomb (2015) moved my practice, metaphorically speaking, to the privacy of the female body, to the physical, with the hope of empowering women and giving them a chance to raise their hidden voices.

At first sight, the visitor might feel overwhelmed. The aesthetics and beauty of the installation, the scale, colours and lighting were meant to be striking. In audience feedback, one comment stated, “the brutality was missing” and another highlighted the controversy of the idea of creating something beautiful from tragedy or violence. I was therefore challenged to reflect on the aestheticisation of violence. I acknowledged that the comments were fair, and I needed to reconsider my intentions. I realised that the aesthetics, although very important in my practice, may have unconsciously taken priority over the concept (Figure 15). The extraordinary thing was that I felt guilty for creating beauty out of violence. Philosopher Herbet Marcuse states that ‘art could not represent human suffering without subjecting it to aesthetic form and thereby to mitigating catharsis, to enjoyment, and that art is inexorably infected with this guilt’. (Walker & Chaplin: 1997: 161).



Figure 15. Carmen Alemán. *LightWomb*, 2015, Mixed Media Installation, Detail.

It was not my intention to glamorise violence. Instead, I wanted to create a multi-sensorial experience, where the viewer may feel trapped or overwhelmed by the realisation of acts of violence. There is certainly a conflict of emotions, however, and the depiction of violence is not explicit. My intention was to point out how VAW is hidden and silenced, emphasising such silence through sound. Did I unconsciously use beauty as a strategy to seduce viewers? Was beauty softening viewers' reflections on violence? Were the viewers attracted by the beauty, then feeling trapped? These are some of the questions that the piece raises for me.

Researching the aestheticisation of violence, I encountered *Contraviolencias. Prácticas artísticas contra la agresión a la mujer* (2010)⁹, an exhibition of artists who confront VAW. The curator, Piedad Solans, declared that she did not want to relate the subject of gender violence to the re-vindications of the 60's and 70's (with artists such as Abramovic, Yoko Ono, Valie Export), adding more violence to violence and more blood to the already bloody subject. She wanted to show another way of seeing violence. According to Solans, the subject (woman) gets destroyed by using more violence to show violence. Instead, Solans reflected on the tools and power that women have, both as individuals and as a collective, to take action and she discovered that silence and beauty are tools that seem to be used by many artists to show and oppose violence. For example, artist Alicia Framis in *Anti-dog* (2002), where women from different backgrounds demonstrate in the street using fashion, uses beauty and silence as an instrument to oppose and reflect on sexual violence. Thus, breaking the silence can draw on different strategies (i.e., emphasising silence through sound, revealing and exposing how violence is still very relevant, encouraging viewers to interact with the work, performing in silence, etc).

In *LightWomb* (2015), what appears to be a beautiful space from afar, gradually changes once the visitor enters the space and takes the time to explore the installation. When listening to the whispering, the sounds start to penetrate the skin and through the active process of reading the broken poems, mixed with the images of what may seem like traces of bloody fluids, the visitor starts forming a narrative of violence. The poems were specifically chosen to make

⁹ <http://www.rtve.es/television/20101115/contraviolencias/371159.shtml>

the viewer feel uncomfortable. They were both erotic and violent (Figures 16, 17).



Figures 16,17. Carmen Alemán, *LightWomb*, 2015, Mixed Media Installation, Detail.

For *LightWomb* (2015), there was only one entrance for the viewers to enter and exit the inner circle of the installation (Figure 18). My intention was to invite viewers to physically enter the space and become trapped in the experience, feeling overwhelmed by the narrative of pain and violence. The inner circle metaphorically represented a womb, a place in which life can be formed or produced (in both a positive or negative way, both willingly and unwillingly).

The act of 'invading' the space or the womb (as a feminine space) could feel like a violation, like witnessing a rape, an act of aggression or assault. Once inside, the narrative of violence becomes obvious; the walls appear to talk, whispering the pain, the stories of love turned to hate. The feelings of fear, shame or even scandal become possible. Ultimately the silence is broken.



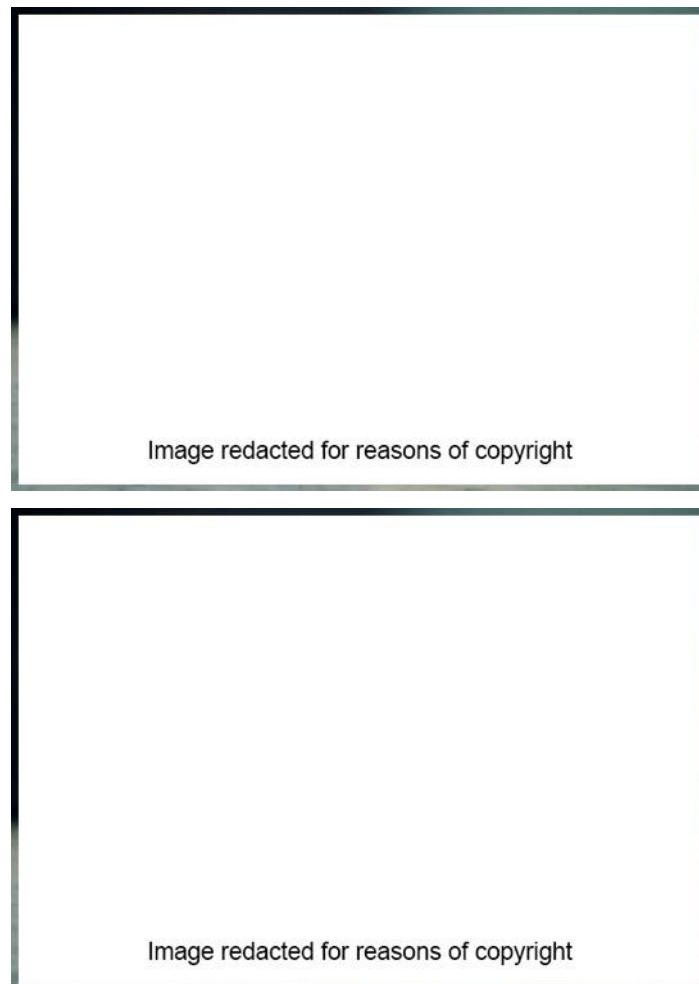
Figure 18. Carmen Alemán, *LightWomb*, 2015, Mixed Media Installation.

This gives rise to ideas of corporeality, with *LightWomb* (2015) becoming a metaphor for a space that has been trespassed physically, emotionally or symbolically. Does the piece represent the body as a space? Does it follow that the private body is also a political body and that VAW is not a private matter but part of a wider social problem? Women have fought to bring the private out into the public and become the owners of their own bodies. Could the metaphorical invasion of the body in this piece reveal a historical reality that women are not, in fact, owners of their own bodies? De Miguel considers that some men still have the belief that a woman's body belongs to them and that they have free access to them, as, for example, in the case of rape or prostitution (de Miguel, 2018)

Furthermore, with reference to the body as a territory and the idea of who owns and controls the space, anthropologist Rita Laura Segato in *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres (Writing on the Body of Women)* notes that the female

body is also referred to as a 'territory' because they already belong to the space that man controls, either because he can do so or because he must show that he can, to prove his virility (Segato, 2016: 43).

Other artists have used the space of the womb. Tracy Emin's Tent piece *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-95* (1995), is a location of intimacy, reclaiming pride from shame (Figures 19, 20). In *LightWomb* (2015), the germinating seeds are, initially, green and hopeful but then turn black, trapped in the fibre, unable to reach soil and bear fruit. This lends darkness to the piece and represents all the women who were unable to retain or use their fertility, due to the violence afflicted on them by men.



Figures 19, 20. Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995), Installation.

In conceiving *LightWomb* (2015), I was inspired by *Lustmord*¹⁰ (1993-94), a piece by artist Jenny Holzer. Poetry and rage appear in *Lustmord* (1993-94),

¹⁰ *Lustmord*: title taken from a German word meaning murder with sexual pleasure

made in response to sex murders during the Bosnian war. The work was a series of statements from the perspective of the perpetrator, the victim or the observer, compiled in the form of short poems. The final works were photographs of these phrases, printed in capital letters on women's skin. e.g. "SHE ACTS LIKE AN ANIMAL LEFT FOR COOKING". Holzer's work managed to form a narrative of brutal violence (Figure 21).

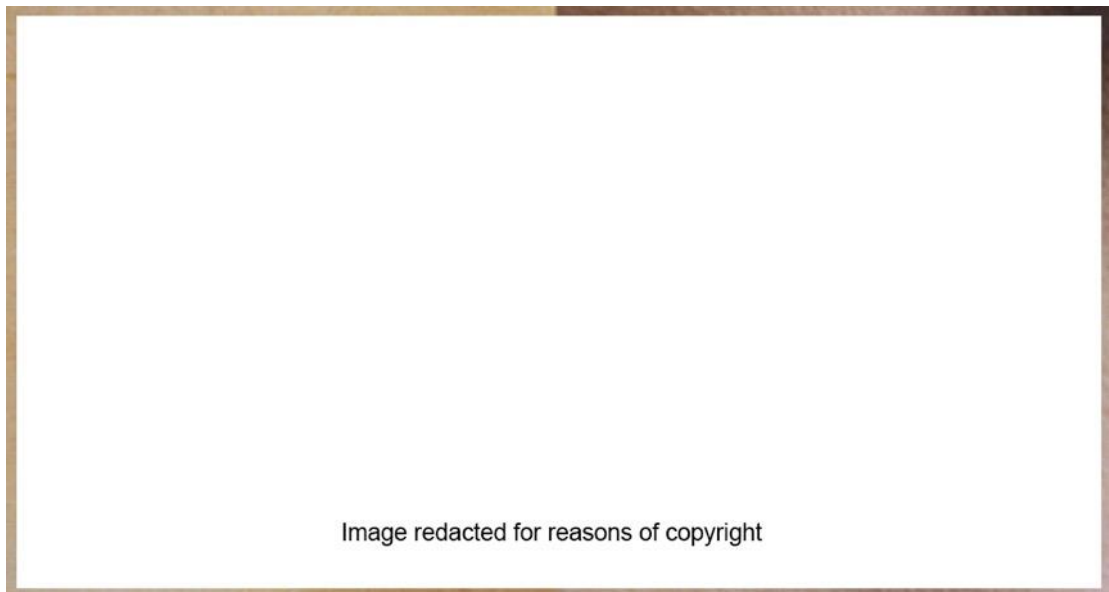


Figure 21. Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord*, 1993-1994, Photography.

Although the images in *Lustmord* (1993-94) are simple snapshots of the skin, their power relies on their emotional and visceral quality. It is precisely because they look like quickly taken snaps, that the images seem to be less aesthetically beautiful but more realistic and so more convincing, like home-made bodies of evidence.

In *Lustmord* (1993-94), it is because violence is not explicit but implied (through the use of traces, clues and stories of violence) that the spectator feels it. As Coulthard says of *Lustmord*:

The narrative of violence is one constructed by the viewer, through careful engagement with, and investigation of, its traces and effects. (...) The fact that only traces or partial narratives of violence are given, thus, offers a commentary on the pervasive after-effects of acts of brutal violence and gives a sense of the particularly problematic visibility of

forms of violence against women (battery, rape, domestic abuse) - forms that are often ignored, repressed, or disavowed as unverifiable, invisible or culturally and legally ambiguous. (Coulthard, 2006: 131).

It is only when carefully reading the brutal statements that the viewer becomes engaged. Similarly, in my work, I aim for the violence not to be explicit but implied through clues.

In *Lustmord* (1993-94), the use of skin is disturbing because the viewer can immediately connect to the physicality of the body (in the images, the pores and hairs are visible), the pain and the abuse. This was an inspiration when I was creating *LightWomb* (2015). Hence, the choice of material and the visual appearance of the walls are similar to various skin tones. They were made of colour photographs printed on tracing paper, which has a skin-like quality, but feels cold, sharp and dry when touched. *LightWomb* (2015) may be seen as a prison of love, beautiful on the outside and painful and destructive on the inside.

Machismo Kills

Researching the topic, I was faced with the aggressor and wanted to understand his brutality as well as his vulnerability. How and why did he become a monster?

The Greek myth of the 'Minotaur and the Labyrinth' came to my mind. It has echoes in contemporary Spanish culture because it refers to the 'beast inside' and the 'myth of the macho'. With it, other relevant ideas, such as power structures and gender relations, brutality, domination, masculinity and patriarchy, also come to the surface. Labyrinths intrigue me because they are symbolic of entrapment as well as places of refuge. Labyrinths are that 'which is monstrous and as a space of hope and transformation'. (Culleton, 2007: 40). One has the potential for both getting trapped and/or escaping and it is up to us to choose. I find it a good analogy for getting out of the entrapment of violence.

The mythical figure of the Minotaur has references to my Spanish roots, as the bull (or 'toro'). It has often been used as a stereotypical symbol in Spanish culture. In fact, the symbol of the bull has become synonymous with the Spanish landscape after an advertising campaign from Osborne brandy (Figure 22).¹¹

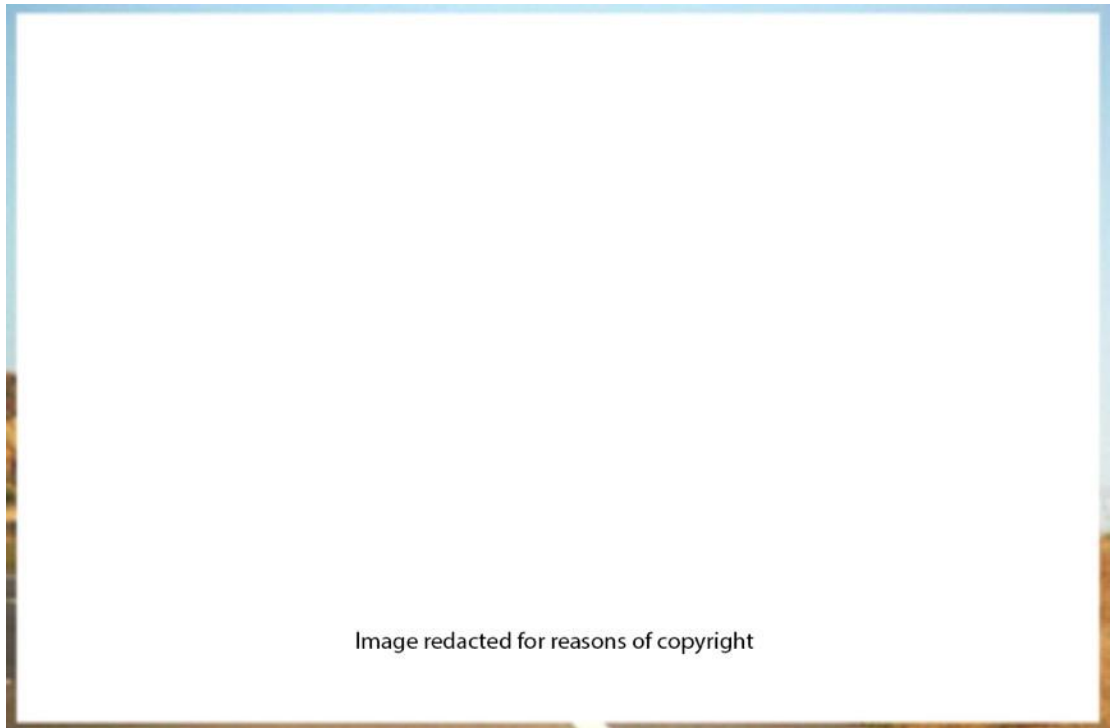


Figure 22. *The Osborne Bull* (Toro de Osborne). Spain.

To develop these ideas, I sculpted the head of a bull (the Minotaur) to use as a prop for my next piece (Figures 23, 24). Somehow, in my mind, the Minotaur was a symbol of this pattern of love and violence. Creating the Minotaur was a slow and painful process. It was as if I was confronting the legacy of virility in Spanish culture and the realization that, even now, the Minotaur is never very far away.

¹¹ The Osborne Bull (*Spanish: Toro de Osborne*) is a 46ft high metal silhouette sculpture of a bull. It was originally erected as part of an advertising campaign in 1956 to promote Osborne sherry and located near major roads throughout Spain. In 1994 the Spanish law prohibited any alcohol publicity on any road, but by then the signs had become nationally renowned. There was a public outcry against the demolition of the black sculptures and the court finally allowed these signs to remain in place, with the condition that any reference to the original advertising campaign would be removed or blacked out. The bulls have now become part of the landscape, achieving "cultural" significance. The bulls are now public artworks.



Figures 23, 24. Carmen Alemán. *Bull's Head*, 2016.

To me, the Minotaur represents the 'macho', and, although some may argue that macho may not necessarily mean someone who is violent to women, violence is still a symbol of power in a macho culture and the 'macho' believes that a woman has to be submissive. I would argue that this, in itself, is a sign of seeking supremacy and domination. It is psychological violence. Violence could also be symbolic, structural or physical. The term macho has a long history in the Spanish language. It comes from the Latin *masculus* meaning male. In Iberian descendent cultures, men 'are expected to' be macho, possess or display virility, have courage and strength, as well as show leadership.

Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso was obsessed with the figure of the Minotaur and used it both as a vulnerable figure, as well as a symbol of 'violence and brutality', (Culleton, 2017: 43) as seen in the scene below (Figure 25), showing a Minotaur about to rape a sleeping girl. It seems he did not question machismo, like many men of his time.

Segato, tells us that man has to demonstrate his virility, otherwise, he is not worthy of respect. That is to say, man has to have some type of power (sexual, bellicose, physical, economic, intellectual, etc) to be a man. Sadly, man has ended up being the victim of his own mandate, 'the mandate of masculinity', by inflicting violence (against women) precisely in order to prove his manhood and make himself respected. Unfortunately, Segato says, this monster of femicide stories ends up being a character to imitate, for certain macho men. The structures of masculinity, gender, patriarchy are analogous to the 'macho' structure. (Segato, 2017).

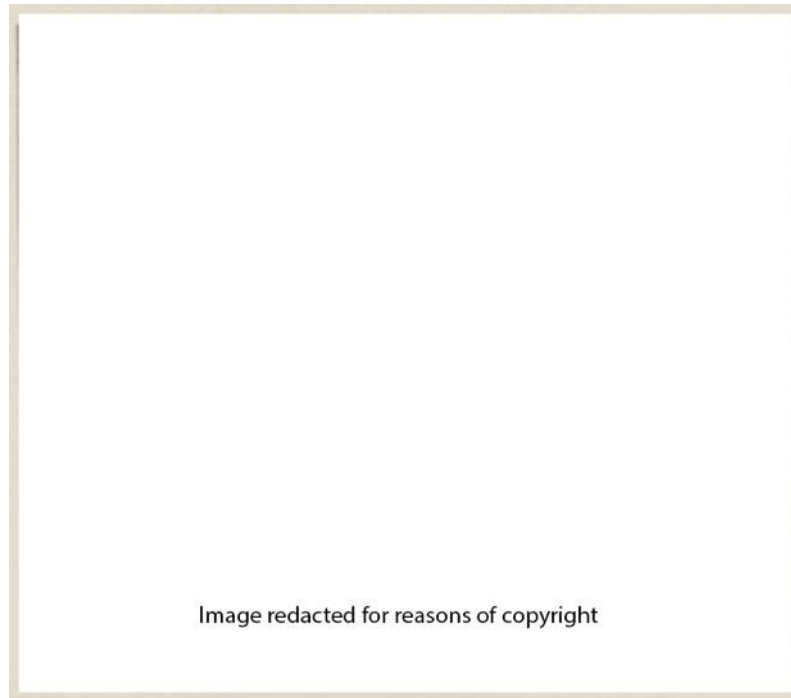


Figure 25. Pablo Picasso. *Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl*. 1956. Lithograph.

In my next piece *Missing Eve I* (2016), an installation about missing women, I introduced the figure of the Minotaur and created my own narrative (Figures 26, 27). The Minotaur was attached via a cord of clothing, in the form of an umbilical cord, to a ball of clothes. This acted as a symbol of punishment, for the hidden crimes against women that he, the Minotaur (macho), had committed. I then decided that the 'weight' the Minotaur would carry should be made out of clothes, symbolising the bodies of the missing women.

I am not sure my Minotaur represents the aggressive essence of masculinity, the macho culture, or the patriarchal system. Strikingly, I represented the Minotaur amputated, without arms, sexual organs or legs, with only a torso and a head. Was this piece my act of revenge/rage against the system? He does seem vulnerable and perhaps he becomes what Segato mentioned earlier, the victim of his own mandate. There are ambiguities in how the spectator could interpret this figure which adds to the complexities of meaning.



Figures 26 27. Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve I*, 2016, Installation.

Missing Eve I (2016), is also about endurance, evoking the idea that VAW is tolerated and endured, sometimes with resignation, by women themselves and by the system. Furthermore, my body became an important part of the piece. I used my body to reveal a historical reality that women are not always possessors of their bodies and that violence and femicide exist. My

performance became an act of resistance against the female body becoming an object. This took me back to Simone de Beauvoir and her discourse in the *Second Sex* about women being denied the possibility of being a 'subject' and being reduced to an object for the pleasure of others. (Beauvoir, 2018: 60).

Violent Threads

In 2016, I took part in an art residency, in Psarades, North Western Greece, where the borders of Greece, Albania and North Macedonia meet. This area has witnessed waves of migration, civil war and violence, leaving deep scars on the landscape and memory. This resulted in *A Mother Border* (2016), an installation about migration, inspired by the Greek myth of the Three Fates; the incarnations of destiny, representing the eternal bonds of past, present and future. The three pieces in the installation are connected by red threads, representing blood ties or umbilical cords, which link us to our mother (Figure 28).

The dress on the tapestry refers to the mother figure, the biological female who gives us life, and the first person we feel connected to. The dress is also split, torn and pulled in different directions, perhaps symbolising violence. This is a reminder that migrants experience immense vulnerability and entrapment, particularly women, as they are at greater risk of ill health, exploitation or abuse, such as forced prostitution, trafficking or sexual slavery. It also relates to the figure of the migrant mother, quite relevant nowadays and constantly criticized for claiming 'birth-right citizenship status' by prolonging her stay in Europe. Virginia Woolf once said, 'As a woman I have no country... As a woman I want no country... As a woman my country is the whole world.' (Three Guineas, 1938).



Figure 28. Carmen Alemán, *A Mother Border*, 2016. Site specific installation Psarades, Greece.

The piece resulted in a site-specific installation, which responded to the location. Christian Boltanski came to mind; he said that he prefers unconventional spaces as opposed to galleries and museums in order to touch people because they mustn't know it is art and they could believe it is life. (Boltanski, 2010)

During the making of *A Mother Border*, I was drawn to a piece of work by Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota, called *Dialogue with Absence*, (2009). Although she used different materials, I felt my piece connected with hers through the colour red, symbolic elements such as the threads, the dress, the ideas of excess, entrapment and repetition, the interconnectedness, the female lineage, past, present and future, and again the absence of their bodies (Figure 29).

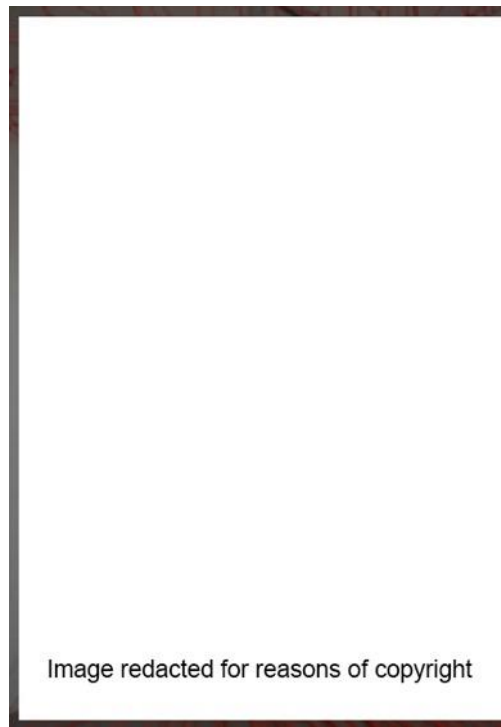


Figure 29. Chiharu Shiota, *Dialogue with Absence*, 2009. Installation.

Curator Menene Grass Balaguer says that 'threads, in the work of Shiota, are the central theme in the individual and universal narratives that are transmitted from parents to children, from generations to generations.' (Balaguer, 2013). In the same way, threads in *A Mother Border* are like the veins that connect us to life, to previous generations, as well as generations to come. Interestingly, knots, tangles and labyrinths, are also symbolic elements that are part of Shiota's elaborate installations, giving a sense of entrapment by enclosing objects and even herself.

Raptio

Further to the idea of entrapment, Lagarde talks about a term, used in anthropology, called 'bride kidnapping', which she defines as a mechanism to appropriate women, a deprivation of the freedom of women through manipulation (Lagarde, 2014). The abduction of the bride is a misogynist act and a social drama that still happens in some parts of the world, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus and Africa, where women are raped, and forced to marry against their will. Lagarde states that the abduction of the bride becomes another form of 'captivity' or entrapment. Many women still suffer this, giving up their own life to live for others (Lagarde, 2005).

With the idea of how girls, around the world, continue to be subjected to inequality, abuse, violence and violation of human rights, I made an installation called *Raptio*¹² (2017). The piece consisted of a 'hopscotch' game and a mountain of stones. I chose a game that would be played by children, usually girls, in the playground. Traces of clothing were left stuck to the stones to indicate a human presence, a second skin symbolizing the absence and the memory of the body (Figures 30, 31).



Figures 30, 31. Carmen Alemán. *Raptio*, 2017. Installation Detail, Before and After PV.

¹² *Raptio*: The name refers to the large-scale abduction of women; kidnapping for marriage or sexual slavery. Some scholars prefer to use the word 'abduction' instead of sexual violation and it seems to be controversial how the acts committed against women should be judged or named.

At that time, the kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram, an extremist terrorist group in Nigeria, was a global news story. It made me think of the Greek myth of ‘the abduction of Persephone’ and the Roman myth of ‘the abduction of the Sabine women’ (Figure 32)¹³.



Figure 32. Nicholas Poussin, *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*, 1637-1638.

Stones were the obvious material to use as they are associated with the game. However, there are also other connections between stones and gender. In honour killings in some countries, especially the Middle East, women are ‘stoned to death’.

Gender is attributed to certain aspects of nature, such as Mother Earth. With time, the belief in the supernatural powers of stones seems to have decreased. Stones lack sensations or feelings and the mineral is viewed as the lowest form of creation. Stones are available for anyone to pick up anywhere, in the field or in the street.

I was unsure how to coax the audience into playing hopscotch, especially the adults. Would drawing numbers in the squares have made a difference and encouraged the audience to play? How to engage the audience to participate

¹³ Also referred to as ‘the rape of the Sabine women’ in Roman mythology, it is an incident in which men from Rome, seeking wives, organised a mass abduction of young girls from Sabina, in central Italy.

has been a challenge throughout my doctorate. I could have written instructions on how to play the game, as sometimes this is the only way to get a response. It was, in itself, interesting to observe what happened. Somehow the lack of



Figure 33. Felix Gonzalez- Torres. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* 1991. Installation.



Figure 34. Carmen Alemán. *Raptio*, 2017. Installation.

numbers emphasised the sense of absence and the loss of innocence from a traumatic childhood. The stones remained as a pile of disposable bodies, echoing the simple cumulative power of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' pile of colourfully-wrapped sweets, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* -1991), which explored the mourning of people dying from AIDS. The piece specifically referred to Felix Gonzalez-Torres' partner Ross Laycock. The intention of the piece was that each visitor would take one sweet with them, representing Ross's loss of weight, while he was dying. Symbolically, by taking a sweet, as a society, we are contributing to his death. Similarly, *Raptio* (2017) could represent the abduction of girls or women. We could be seen to be consenting to the women's disappearance, by playing along, accepting its normalisation (Figures 33, 34).

Interestingly, some people did not notice the installation when it was displayed, partly because it was quite small and in a corner, and partly because it was not aesthetically pleasing or provocative enough. I found the comparison with real life fascinating and poignant, how VAW is not given the importance it deserves. Furthermore, the chalk marks on the floor, for the hopscotch, started to disappear gradually, like a metaphor for the issues of invisibility, like scars or bruises healing to remove the evidence.

REPETITION

In my work, the concept of repetition appears in several ways. I explore it to highlighting the problem of violence against women, responding to the idea of how it seems to manifest, echoing itself in an incessant circle of violence, an act which is often repeated over many years, especially in the domestic environment. Repetition is an important element as it also refers to the art-making process, which involves continuous actions such as wrapping, mummifying and knotting, manifesting visually in the forms of repetitive motifs and symbols. There is also repetition in acts of femicide¹⁴ and statistics show patterns of repeated behaviour. Furthermore, counting the numbers, a repetitive act, is an important part of gathering statistics.

We can see how violence against women can manifest, repeating itself in an endless cycle. Lydia Falcón (journalist and long-time committed activist on the topic of VAW) in her book *La violencia que no cesa (The Violence that Doesn't Stop, 2003)* argues that violence is, for some women, their daily life (Falcón, 2003: 15) and argues that all governments, in fact, consider that an adequate dose of violence against women achieves the objective of maintaining the discipline and social correction essential for the good progress of families and ultimately of society. (Falcón, 2003: 13).

An example of an influential artist using repetition is the work of Regina José Galindo. In her performance *El cielo llora tanto que debería ser mujer (The Sky Cries So Much that She Should Be a Woman, 1999)*, the artist repeatedly immersed herself in a bathtub full of water holding her breath and catching air, eventually reaching the point of drowning (Figure 35). It is interesting that this 'circular' behaviour may seem to have no meaning or be a sign of madness. However, this repetitive action could be seen as a sign of trauma. The artist is demonstrating the desperate situation many women face when suffering violence against them. Caruth explains that trauma is an experience that keeps repeating and haunting the survivor in the form of an involuntary cycle. People

¹⁴ Femicide is the most extreme and radical practice of violence, when the killing of females by males is done solely because they are female

who have suffered trauma are often unable to get over it and it keeps recurring or coming back. This is very common in victims of a tragedy and certainly in victims of violence. (Caruth, 1996).

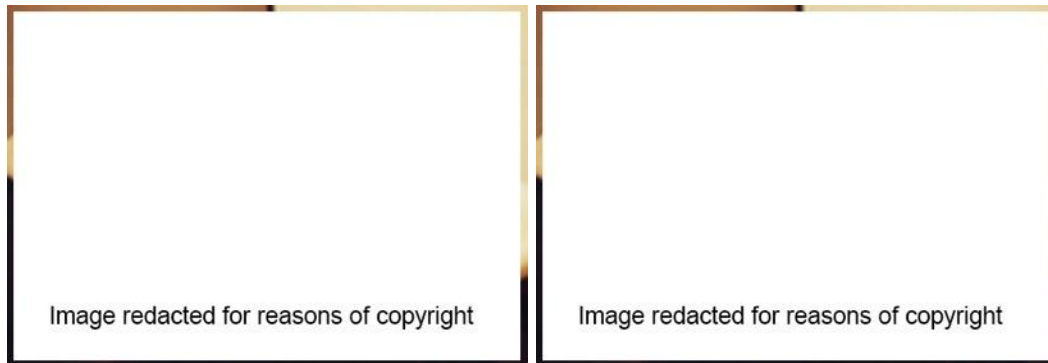


Figure 35. Regina José Galindo, *El cielo llora tanto que debería ser mujer*, 1999, Performance.

What Do We Do with the Numbers?

Men are afraid that women will laugh at them.

Women are afraid that men will kill them (Margaret Atwood)

Violence against women has many forms, from domestic violence in a 'private' environment to the most extreme practice of femicide. This term was first used by an American feminist writer and activist, Diana Russell. Radford said that femicide is a misogynist killing of women by men and pointed out that it is a type of sexual violence, linked to misogyny and sexism. (Radford & Russel, 1992: 23).

From the point of view of feminism, the question I ask is why most women who get killed are murdered by men but the number of women murdering men is almost non-existent. Of course, there are exceptions, however, the difference is huge. The relationship between genders is political because it is a relationship of power. The male culture of contempt for women is what makes it possible to kill women. Kate Millett explained it very well in *Sexual Politics* when she said that the patriarchal system is so perfectly designed that a relationship of dominance and subordination is normalised and accepted between male and female. So perfect is its subjugation of women that it seldom requires violence to achieve its aim (Millett, 1970). Although that was said in the 1970s, it remains relevant, with many cases of VAW still occurring in

Europe and across the world, such as the aforementioned case of *La Manada* in Spain.

I was struck by Patricia Cronin's reference, in her exhibition catalogue, to the 'More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing' article by Amartya Sen, economist and winner of the Nobel Prize, in 1990. In it he asked: 'What do you do with the statement "100 million women are missing?"' This statement disturbed me but also motivated me to investigate statistics on different websites, including UN Women, Refuge, Women's Aid, etc. I could see myself captivated by quantification but horrified by the fact that women are becoming merely numbers buried in the statistics.

Since then the idea of '*What do we do with the numbers?*' has remained on my mind and, in order to answer the question, I needed to find ways to translate it into a visual and creative work. Numbers haven't got a physical form but become an abstract and attractive concept for me because they are dynamic, they repeat but they are different. Visually, I could interpret them in an act of counting or repetition, transferring them, in the form of statistics, directly into my work. The answer is an ongoing dilemma.

Sally Engle Merry, also discusses the complexity and the politics of counting VAW globally, according to the different conceptions and understanding of violence. She concludes that the whole process of counting is highly political and not very transparent. What and how it is measured seems to be manipulated by powerful organizations. Although it may help to incorporate theories about social change, these are never put into action.

Numbers convey an aura of objective truth and scientific validity... Counting things requires making them comparable, which means that they are inevitably stripped of their context, history and meaning. Numerical knowledge is essential, yet, if it is not closely connected to more qualitative forms of knowledge, it leads to oversimplification, homogenization and the neglect of the surrounding social structure. (Merry, S.E., 2016).

My mother used to say that she had ‘won the lottery’ by marrying my father. This phrase stayed with me and influenced the making of my next piece, *The Ovarian Lottery* (2015), which was a game related to chance, playing a ‘lottery’, that would show the reality of VAW (Figure 36). I created an interactive ‘wheel of fortune’ to explore ideas of numbers and quantification, in response to the term ‘ovarian lottery’, first coined by millionaire Warren Buffet, to explain that it was only a matter of pure chance whether one was born with a particular gender, nationality, race or class. Like a cultural lottery, in the context of gender violence, it is merely by a stroke of luck that we are not one of the millions of women who are affected by violence, go missing or are killed. The wheel was a circular flat design, using the design and imagery from the previous piece *LightWomb* (2015). The idea was to engage the viewer to spin the ‘wheel of fortune’. The pointer would stop at a number, and that number would correspond to a fact or statistic, globally. This was a simple and poignant way of learning about the facts and reflecting on the reality of these atrocious crimes. The idea of using a roulette wheel, showing statistics, became a tool of empowerment. The act of spinning the wheel also emphasised repetition both aesthetically and in regard to the cycle of violence.

e.g. ‘2 women killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner.’



Figure 36. Carmen Alemán *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2015. Installation.

The discovery of global statistics, through my research, made me realise the incredible ignorance and denial of women’s oppression. All the facts and

figures I used in the piece *The Ovarian Lottery* (2015) are current, devastating and difficult to believe. This only emphasises Valcárcel's theory of 'the *mirage of equality*' mentioned earlier, and the fact that we (women) are only halfway there because we have not achieved equality. Violence against women is not a new reality, violence has always existed since it is part of any system of power. However, according to Valcárcel, we are now living in a very difficult and unstable time across the world. The influence of globalisation is definitely affecting everyone, especially women. Their freedoms, their bodies, their respect, their life, their dignity, their quality of life, disappear because they are weaker (Valcárcel, 2012). Statistics show that violence between genders has increased and women's rights, that have previously been gained, could easily be lost. A good indicator of the magnitude of hidden sexual violence is shown in the '#metoo' campaign, where millions of women have shared their stories about sexual violence and harassment.

Segato's theory, 'the pedagogy of cruelty' suggests that there is a tendency to relate to objects (producing individualism) as opposed to subjects (producing communities). Segato states that objects are becoming more important than people. We treat people as objects because we are losing our compassion and empathy towards them. According to Segato, the first expression of 'the pedagogy of cruelty' is sexist violence. Women's bodies are, in this context, considered disposable objects. Could the roulette wheel, as an 'object', trick viewers into engagement, so they can learn the reality and cruelty of VAW?

I exhibited this piece in the *Espacio Gallery* in East London. The piece was effective as long as the visitor had the initiative to interact with it, which does not always happen in a gallery; visitors don't always read instructions or statements. It was interesting how, after spinning the wheel, the player could then realise the true significance of the numbers. However, I realised that the accompanying text of facts often went unnoticed, as it was too small and easily overlooked by the visitor. The text could have been displayed in a different way, written in big letters across the wall, in order to attract attention and encourage the visitor to play or, at least, notice it and read some of it. This was also about giving permission to interact with an artwork, as most pieces are accompanied by a "Do Not Touch" sign.



Figure 37. Carmen Alemán. *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2017, Interactive Installation.

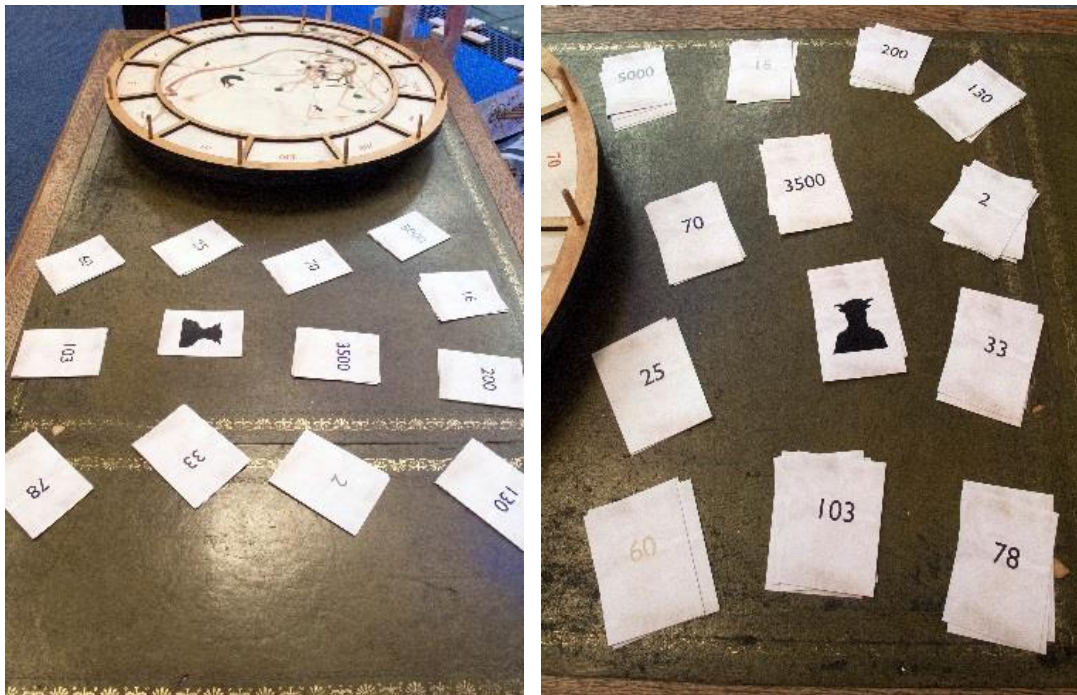


Figure 38. Carmen Alemán. *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2017, Interactive Installation.

I exhibited the piece again in Oct 2017, however, I changed the nature of its display, adding elements of a game of chance. I used a table that simulated a casino setting and I designed a deck of cards, on which the facts and figures were integrated (Figures 37, 38). This allowed for more interaction with the

piece. It changed how the audience responded. They engaged with it in a more playful way. It was a way to engage with the audience and deliver a message without being didactic.

Some artists, such as Yoko Ono, have already explored the idea of 'giving instructions'. In *Play it by Trust* (1966-2011), an anti-war piece, using the Buddhist idea that conflict resolution is based on the understanding that everything is connected and that we are all one, Ono gives the audience the following instructions: 'Play it for as long as you can remember who is your opponent and/or who is your own self'.

My work started evolving and developing, after *The Ovarian Lottery* (2015). Statistics, facts and figures offered new insights for exploring and making new work. The idea of the missing, counting and numbers became more important in my work.

As a result, based on statistics gathered from The United Nations which recognised that some 200 million women and girls are 'demographically missing' worldwide, I developed the piece *Missing Eve I* (2016), a large ball completely made from second-hand clothes, which had originally been part of the Minotaur's piece (Figures 39, 40). As much as possible, it was my preference that the clothes were originally worn by women (if we consider that clothing is more often than not gender specific). Independent curator Nina Felshin in *Clothing as Subject* (1995) referred to how feminist theorists in the 70's argued that sexual identity was 'constructed' and 'fabricated' according to the rules or standards of society. By using clothes that had been previously worn, I could argue, it added a layer of corporeality, because those clothes had become a second skin and it was as if they have absorbed a 'memory'.

My intention was that the ball of clothes would represent the lives of millions of women who have gone missing. Layers upon layers of clothes were knotted together and wrapped around each other to form a large sphere that represented the world. The clothes were weaved together to show that this is a recurring social problem that is difficult to untangle. Although their bodies are gone, their presence remains. The clothing was used as a poignant reminder

and poetic metaphor to symbolise the presence of their 'missing bodies'. When people disappear the first things that people find are their personal belongings, including items of clothing, which serve as clues to identify the bodies



Figure 39. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve I*, 2016, Installation. Work in Progress.



Figure 40. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve I*, 2016, Installation.

The work of Patricia Cronin further inspired me to experiment with clothes as materials. Her installation *Shrine for Girls* (2015) at the *Venice Biennale* (Figure 41), was a poignant memorial based on three horrific events concerning the killing, abduction and enslavement of women and girls: The Boko Haram kidnapping in Nigeria, gang-rapes in India and the Magdalene laundries in

Ireland. The most striking aspect was Cronin's use of clothes as materials and the simplicity of the display, using altars to create memorials or shrines. The artist placed different garments on three altars, representing the lives and the absence of the young women. Silence was used in a subversive way, as words were not needed to explain the tragedy. The clothes worked as a substitute for the body and were the instrument that broke the silence.

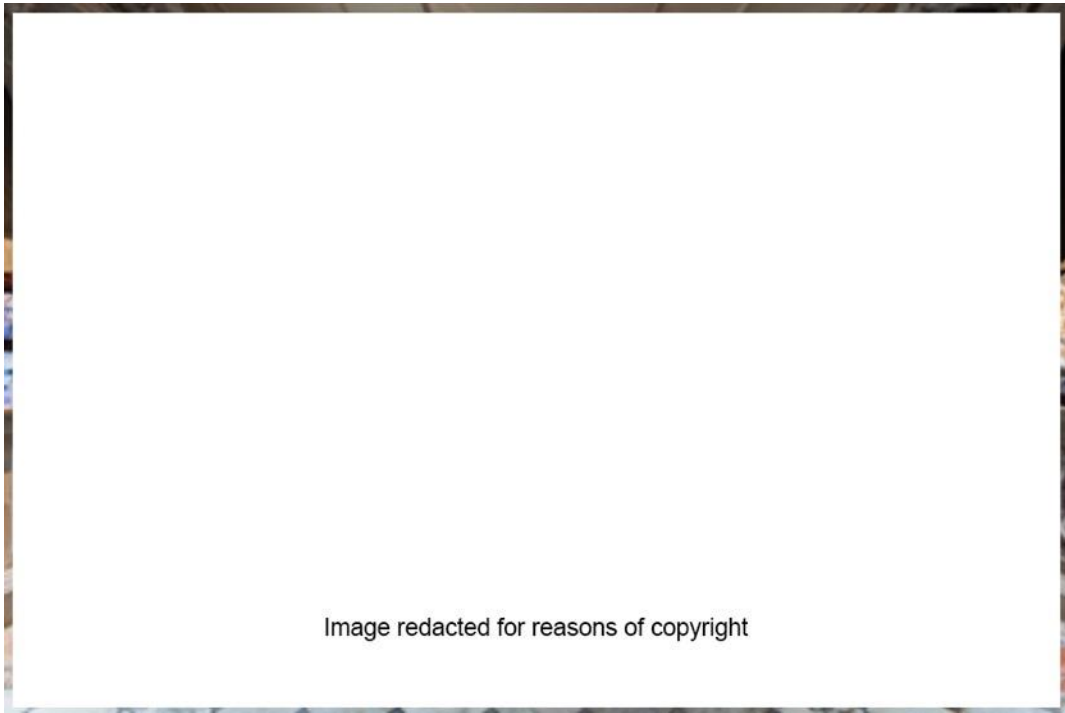


Figure 41. Patricia Cronin. *Shrine for Girls*, 2015, Installation in La Biennale di Venezia.

Making the piece was emotionally overwhelming and physically demanding. As the ball was growing, the weight became considerable. I could also sense the energy from the clothes, the smell, the body fluids, the stains, the sweat, opening the imagination to what happened to the lives of all these women as if the clothes held memories. Even the temperature of the ball, once finished, was 'warm', similar to body temperature, having taken heat from my body. Someone from the audience said, "it is as warm as a pregnant belly".

The physicality of the production process, touching and feeling the materials, was important, even crucial. My whole body became part of it. It was performative and sensorial, not only to my eyes but my whole body. All my senses were aware of it.

I recorded a few time-lapse sequences of the process of making the ball (Figure 42). Poignantly, the performative aspects of making the piece felt even more powerful than the final presentation. Layer by layer, knot by knot; the repetition, the weight, the physicality of the making process. All these experiential facets were important. As the killing goes on, the piece could remain a work in progress, never finished, an ongoing memorial.



Figure 42. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve I*, 2016, Installation. Work in Progress.

During the process, the repetitive action of turning the ball evokes the Greek myth of 'Sisyphus', who was condemned to eternally repeating the same futile action of pushing a rock up a mountain only to see it roll down again (Figure 43).

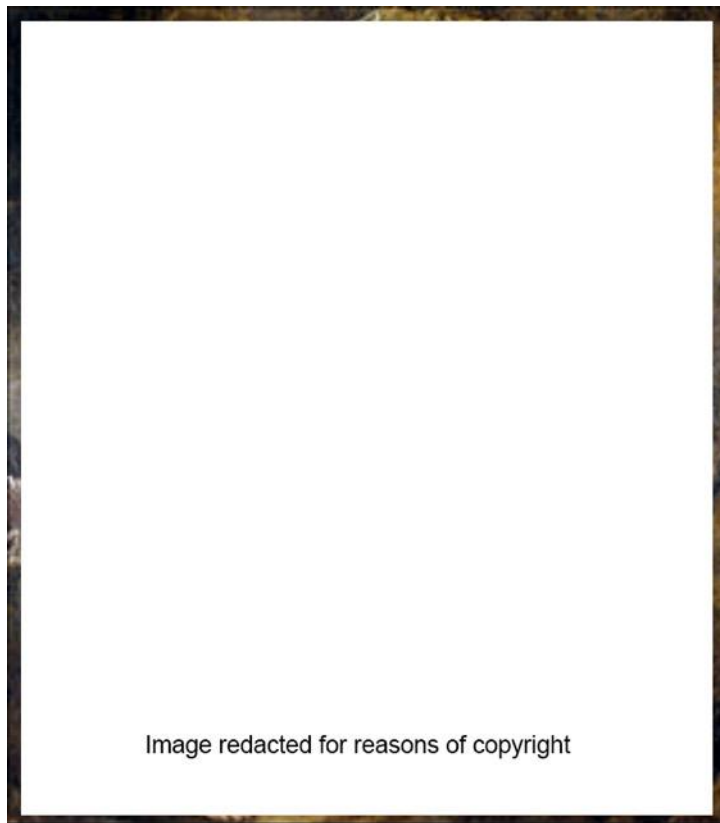


Figure 43. *Sisyphus*. Titian, 1548-49. Painting.

On 8th March 2018, I did an actual performance (*Missing Eve II*, 2018) using the ball, which reflected on *Missing Eve I* (2016). The performance was part of an exhibition on the theme of women's invisibility, called 'Sheroes', at Ugly Duck's Gallery in London (Figure 44). The process of making the 'ongoing memorial' was now more important than the final piece. Performance has a powerful force that other means do not have, perhaps because it is ephemeral, and happens in the present. According to Diana Taylor, performance, like a memory or trauma, is experienced in the present. It transmits traumatic memory through its re-staging. (Taylor, 2014).

Performance was used by many feminist artists during the 70's, as a space for struggle and as a construction of identity, giving visibility to many women in art. Ana Navarrete in her essay *Este funeral es por muchos muertos (This Funeral is for Many Dead, 2005)* declared that 'Trauma prevails because it is the body of women on which all kinds of violence and domination are exercised, past, present and future. Memory is necessary to rescue the drama of forgetfulness and the performative act with the body is the most effective strategy to resist and transform reality. (Navarrete, 2005: 255).

I performed the piece during the entire private view. For three hours I continued rolling, knotting and wrapping clothes, making the ball in silence. During the performance, I was thinking why aren't any memorials dedicated to the victims of femicide? There are memorials about war or terrorism and the statistics demonstrate that domestic violence kills far more people than wars or terrorism. Making an ongoing memorial was quite appropriate and made sense to me. The performance piece was inspired by Galindo, using silence as a subversive tool. The concept of silence has been used as a tool for investigating trauma through a feminist perspective. Silence could either be a tool to make violence more invisible or as a subversive weapon, as in the case of Galindo's performance.

Through Galindo's work, I understood how an artist could manifest silence through performance, as a tool for collective healing. Galindo chooses not to speak in her performances, remaining silent as if she is dead. Her work makes me feel insecure, but it also has the capacity to awaken empathy. Her work functions as a double-edged sword, it makes the audience feel vulnerable, exposing the pain and suffering, but it also functions as a form of collective catharsis. In relation to trauma, Giulia Casalini in *Feminist Embodiments of Silence* states that 'the artist also needs the public's action in order to cure it: the trauma is indeed not only personal but also collective' (Casalini, 2013).

Through silence, Galindo can reach and communicate with anyone and everyone. She makes her body speak in a 'lingua franca' that anyone can understand. Casalini quotes Mladen Dolar who says that 'silence is both human and animal, it speaks for all the countries. And it can be louder than words: only the voice which is completely silent can 'overcry' all other voices. The voice or reason, silent as it may be, is the power of the powerless.' (Dolar, 2006:90 in Casalini, 2013).

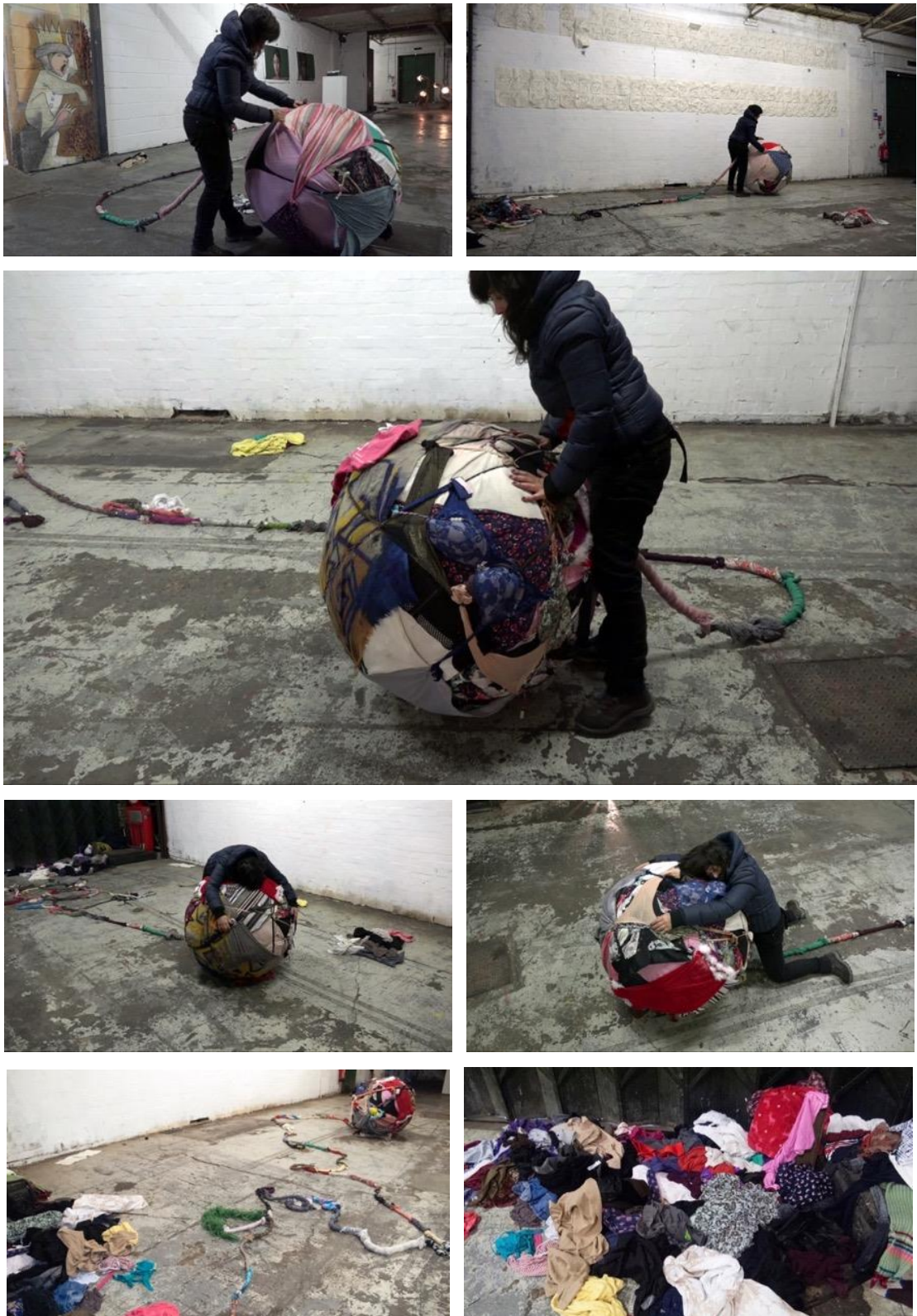


Figure 44. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve II* 2018- ongoing. Performance and Living Sculpture.



Figure 45. Yoko Ono. *Cut*, 1965. Performance.

Another important piece in relation to the subordination of women and use of clothes as materials is *Cut* (1965) by Yoko Ono (Figure 45). In this performance, Ono, seated on a stage, invites the audience to cut away her clothes unveiling the female body, showing its vulnerability. Clothing is an important element in my work because I relate it to the protection and the dignity of the body. The remaining traces of Ono's clothing evoke similarities with my performance *Missing Eve II* (2018-ongoing).

Continuing with the idea of femicide, I undertook a residency in Toronto, Canada, where I discovered that Canada has a long history of VAW and femicide, particularly among First Nations (indigenous) women.¹⁵ There, I created *Trespassing* (2017), an installation related to the ongoing number of missing indigenous women in Canada (Figure 46). My intention was both to create a memorial as well as a crime scene, where stones were piled on top of a bench. Stones were attached to threads, which were formed like 'roots',

¹⁵ In 2004 Amnesty international published "Stolen Sisters' a human rights response to discrimination and violence against indigenous women.

weaving and tangled in the rocks. At the same time, a warning sign was telling us that a crime had happened here again.



Figure 46. Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing*, 2017. Installation.

The materials were inspired not only by the location of the residency, on Toronto Island, but also by the enormous importance that land and nature have in Canada, and the issues around land rights and First Nations people. The land is fundamental to indigenous people, as their means of survival. It has economic, spiritual and symbolic importance. Many First Nations tribes were matrilineal. Wealth, power and inheritance were passed down through the mother's line. Therefore, the decisions to use stones, fragments of the land, could symbolise the bodies of indigenous women. Stones are fragments which have been broken and separated from the land. I was further inspired by a group of activists who built 1,181 female inukshuks¹⁶ as a way of drawing attention to the issue of the missing women (Figure 47).

¹⁶ Inukshuk: a landmark made of stone in the form of a human shape, used by indigenous tribes from the arctic region of North America for different purposes such as for navigation, showing hunting grounds, and burial monuments.

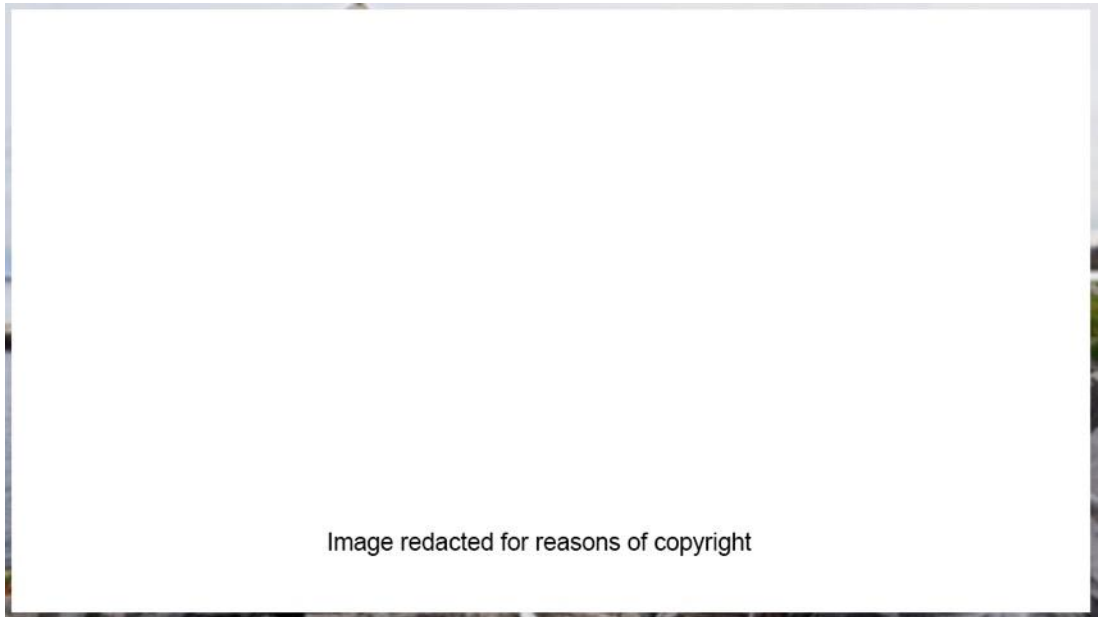


Figure 47. Kristen Villebrun, *Female Inukshuk*, Oct-Nov 2015. Activist Intervention.

However, when we (the participants in the residency) were displaced from the island, due to storms and the risk of flooding, into Toronto city, finding the material (stones) became a new challenge. I used the same experience of being 'displaced' to my advantage and finally found the stones I was looking for. The stones seemed to be miniature copies of the ones on the island and perfect for the new piece I had in mind. For the piece, I gathered many stones together which I displayed as a repetitive motif.

The work of Galindo again became inspirational, for my piece *Trespassing* (2017). In her performance called *Piedra (Stone, 2013)*, a striking piece that refers to the women who work in the coal mines of Sao Paulo, Brazil, Galindo used her body as a carrier of anger, hatred and injustice, for the violence and humiliation that many women are subjected to (Figures 48, 49). In the performance, she was motionless, curled up and covered with coal. Galindo explained her performance:

Stone, I am rock, I do not feel the blows, the humiliation, the lascivious looks, the bodies on mine, the hatred. I am rock. In myself is the history of the world. My body remains immobile, covered with coal, like stone. Two volunteers and someone from the audience urinate on the stone body (Galindo, 2013).



Figure 48. Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing*, 2017. Detail.



Figure 49. Regina J. Galindo, *Piedra*, 2013. Performance.

Piedra (2013) has connections to both *Raptio* (2016) and *Trespassing* (2017). The immediate connection is through the materials used. However, the reference to the body and the land, its vulnerability, its endurance and the idea of the female body as a disposable object, are common to all of these works.

Another reference to the body is the bench, with its human-like size. The fact that the stones are piled on top of the bench and raised from the floor, gives it the form of a memorial, like a burial mound (Figure 50).

My experience in Canada led me to reflect even further on how the world normalises the indifference towards VAW. In Segato's words: How high do the figures need to go in order for them to be important enough for the majority? (Segato, 2006).



Figure 50. Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing*, 2017. Installation.

Repetition is in itself a paradox. The meaning of repetition is the act of something that reappears and replicates. However, repetition is slightly different every time it happens. Although it is a repeated action, it relates to previous actions. Giorgio Agamben observes that ‘repetition is not the return of the identical; it is not the same as such that returns. The force and the grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was.’ (Agamben, 2004: 315). According to Agamben, memory can transform the real into the possible and vice-versa.

An example of repetition and difference in my work is in the piece *Watermarks* (2017), a short film about the hidden crime of VAW in its many forms, where the numbers of women killed are part of the piece (Figure 51).

The film is located in a kitchen; a tap drips water into a sink, which slowly fills up (using a time-lapse effect) until it overflows, representing the idea that time is running out. In the background, a radio plays music which is interrupted by news bulletins about crimes against women.



Figure 51. Carmen Alemán. *Watermarks*, 2017, Short film.¹⁷

Aesthetically, I wanted it to have a repetitive yet mesmerising audio-visual effect, to emphasise the normalisation of VAW, reminding the audience of the severity of the problem by the metronomic ‘drip-drip’ of the tap, along with the

¹⁷ See video on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/214539547>
Password: Watermarks

other sound effects throughout the film. The unsettling sound of dripping that never ends. Even when the sink could no longer contain the water, it continued. The dripping tap is a common cinematic effect used to create suspense and tension. The experimental short film *Dripping Water* (1969), by Michael Snow and Joyce Wieland, uses a similar approach with a long shot of water dripping repetitively into a pail, while at the same time environmental sounds interrupt the meditative effect of the drops. In this film, my aim was to explore the themes of power, misogyny and femicide. Dripping water is an analogy for a counter adding the numbers of missing women, each second.

Although the film is a fictional piece, it uses real and up-to-date news reports taken from verified news sources such as UN, Amnesty International, Huffington Post, etc. spoken by actors. Originally, I wanted to use it as a platform to list facts, figures and news reports. However, the feedback from supervisors and colleagues confirmed that the film was strong and clear enough by itself, without having to overload its message and make it didactic. *Watermarks* (2017) explores the intersection between the political and the personal, where elements of both the public and private interweave. The kitchen sink appears as a symbol of domesticity, which is often associated with the private space, and the radio news reports evoke the outside world, the public space. Via the radio, the private becomes public and the personal political, a medium for private stories to be shared giving rise to social change.

Technically, I had to overcome other obstacles such as timing, continuity, sound effects and editing. I intentionally used the grey palette, with its minimalistic and cold aesthetic, to give an impersonal or institutionalised look.

La mujer es cosa de hombres (*Woman is Men's Business*, 2009), a documentary film by Spanish filmmaker Isabel Coixet, was influential, as it covers a similar topic and uses a similar innovative editing style (Figure 52). Coixet's film juxtaposes women in their traditional roles, through advertising and historical media, with news reports of murders of women at the hands of their partners, whereas I use radio news reports alongside songs, with original video.



Figure 52. Isabel Coixet, *La mujer es cosa de hombres*, 2009. Documentary Film Still.

In *Watermarks* (2017), lyrics from heartbreaking love songs form a narrative of violence throughout the film, emphasizing the idea that twisted romance can perpetuate or hide violence. I used famous songs which might be more easily recognised by a wider audience. However, this may limit the distribution of the film in the commercial industry, until the copyright is cleared.

Due to the uncomfortable nature of the topic, in relation to ideas of entrapment in my earlier work, I initially considered displaying the film as part of an installation, with the intention of making it an uncomfortable experience, in, for example, a long corridor or a corner. I instantly thought of the *Corridor Series* (1969-70) by Bruce Nauman, where the viewer immediately would feel a sense of alienation and claustrophobia (Figures 53, 54). However, I abandoned the idea, as the content of *Watermarks* (2017) is more important than it being in a transitory space. I wanted to keep it intimate and enclosed, with seating provided to reinforce my intention to engage and create awareness. I felt, as a walk-through, it would lose its power and intention.



Figures 53, 54. Bruce Nauman, *Corridor Series: Performance Corridor*, 1969 & *Corridor Installation* (Nick Wilder Installation), 1970.

Another work related to counting and numbers is Sejla Kamberić's, *Ab Uno Disce Omnes* (*From One, Learn All*, 2015). It is a piece about crime and forensics, missing figures, history, memory, loss and absence (Figure 55). When Kamberić found out that the records of atrocities in the Balkan war were being erased, she assembled a body of work to collect and create a monument of data, as opposed to stone, in order to keep the collective memory alive. Her collected data consisted of a huge lab of information, with more than 30,000 images and video clips. The work is a never-ending process that exists as a living memorial.



Figure 55. Sejla Kamberić. *Ab Uno Disce Omne*, 2015. Film still.

Kameric reflects on the symbolic meaning of facts and figures, the act of counting dead bodies and how our lives are so interconnected that, in the event of a war, we are all likely to be affected by it. Numbers represent lives and each life can affect another ten more lives and so on. This really resonates with my work and the challenge of how to convey, through my art, the fact that huge numbers of people are suffering.

Symbolically my work has been conceived in relation to cycles. In this sense, the chronological aspect of the work is important. From the beginning, as the pieces evolve and transform, from one piece to the next, they use repetition in terms of concept, process and aesthetics. Ideas of circularity appear constantly in my work, in the form of symbolic elements such as circles, labyrinths and spirals (Figures 56, 57, 58). The labyrinth combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering path. The Labyrinth represents a journey and it is related to healing and wholeness. It has long been used as a symbol for meditation and prayer, in the forms of 'mandalas'. Mandala is, in fact, another word for circle, in Sanskrit. The path of a labyrinth often occurs within a circle; and circles are symbols of wholeness and centring, as they have no beginning or end, containing time and space.



Fig. 56. Circle Frame with Greek Meander Pattern.



Fig. 57. Structure from LightWomb (2015)



Fig. 58. The Labyrinth of the Minotaur Lambert of Saint-Omer

There is a particular roundness in the materials and shapes I use. For instance, the paper from *Love me Knot* (2014) has a certain curl. Similarly, the *LightWomb* (2015) installation is round and transforms into a ball which leads to the labyrinth and the sounds are waves by nature. Again, roundness appears in certain materials, such as the roundness of the stones in *Raptio* (2017) and

Trespassing (2017). The round water droplets falling into the sink form circular shapes in *Watermarks* (2017). The symbol of the circle seems to transform itself into different forms of roundness. Even the act of wrapping with the thread in *A Mother Border* (2016) implies a repetitive circular movement, repeatedly changing from two dimensions into three dimensions.

In addition, repetitive motifs are common throughout my work. In *Love me Knot* (2014), hundreds of book pages are replicated on the wall. In *Raptio* (2017) and *Trespassing* (2017), I displayed a mountain of stones piled up in the form of a repetitive pattern and in *Watermarks* (2017) repeated drops of water fill a sink.

Repetition appears during the production process in several pieces, such as in *Missing Eve I & Missing Eve II* (2016/8); by continuously rolling and wrapping clothes until a giant ball of many layers is formed, or in *A Mother Border* (2016), with the act of mummifying an object.

Alice Anderson is an artist who uses memory and obsessive repetition. She mummifies objects with copper thread as a strategy to remember. The final result is aesthetically beautiful and poetic. I am fascinated by how she affirms the making of her work using repetition. *188 Km* (2015) is a 2 metre wide sphere, made entirely out of red copper wire (Figure 59). The artist walked in a circle for a total of 188 km over several weeks in order to make it. 'Like in traditional societies where periodical ceremonial activities punctuate the cycles of life, she emphasises reiteration, repetition, rhythmic cadence and cyclical movements in her artistic practice. Repetition indeed is what gives gravitas and momentum to her artefacts' (Carocci, 2019).

Similarly, the round sphere, a shape that I explore in my work, is never ending and a universal symbol for wholeness and healing. I enjoy her approach to the production process and how she plays with materials in an instinctive way, letting go and feeling. 'I experience my body through movement and the wire is an extension of my body. I repeat the action, but it's never the same. I push this repetition to the limit, as if it were an absolute' (Anderson, 2015)

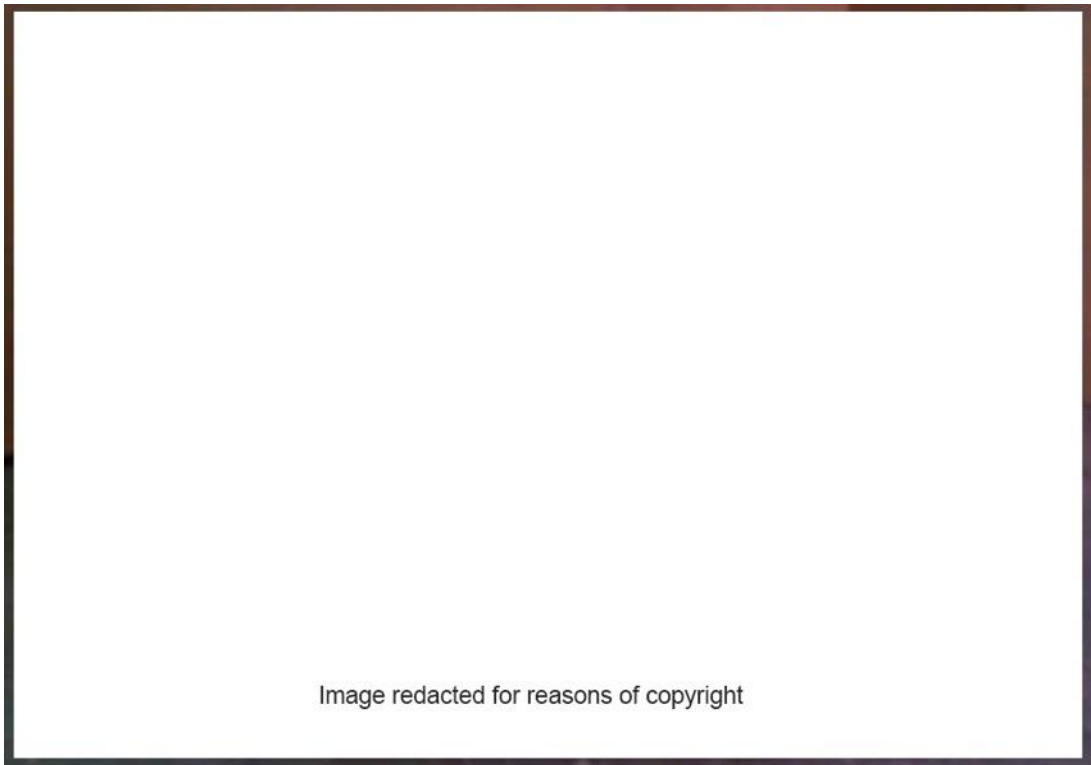


Figure 59. Alice Anderson, *188 Kilometres*, 2015, Film Still, Performance and Sculpture.

Finally, I want to use repetition as a strategy and as an act of insistence that violence against women is still around us, and as an act of desire to change it. This leads to the next theme of transformation.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation, according to the dictionary definition, means change, evolution, alteration, redoing, rebuilding, reworking or renewal. Within these parameters, the concept of transformation in my art practice appears as a strategic approach that allows me to explore and revisit the subject of VAW, as well as allowing the pieces to evolve from one form of work to the next.

Following the themes of entrapment and repetition, transformation serves as a beacon of hope and shows what art can do to visualise, raise awareness and reflect violence and its normalisation. In analysing my processes, the idea of transformation was crucial in deciding on a plan to guide me through the doctorate. I decided that my work could evolve through different stages, recycling and repeating its content and materials, using different media in order to link the pieces with each other, thus making the idea of transformation tangible. I think this approach has allowed me to explore the subject in a more creative and open way. The existence and nature of VAW in our society is complex and keeps reinventing itself. I could use the same strategy of transformation to raise awareness and emphasise my desire for change.

Furthermore, the idea of transformation becomes a metaphor for expiation, or purging (turning the negative aspect of violence into something constructive) so we can understand and reflect on what we can do about it. As an artist exploring the subject, I feel I have the responsibility to question my own ideas about the subject so that my art can contribute to change.

In my practice, I aim to explore violence and its mediation as an experience (physical, emotional and psychological). I felt it would help to target different senses, moving away from historic traditions of painting and sculpture. I found installation, photography, video and performance to be more immediate and interactive. For example, I used immersive installation to explore ideas of entrapment and oppression; sound as a strategy to emphasize silence; video to transport the viewers and performance to enact repetition.

I employ a wide range of media, a wide range of spaces and a wide range of materials from ephemeral (paper, sounds, chalk) to found objects (metal, wood, stones) to ordinary material related to women such as clothing. Practically, this is a demonstration of how the work has evolved in all its phases (Fig. 62): *Love me Knot* (2014) and *LightWomb* (2015) were crucial, as pointers to guide me in exploring the idea of transformation throughout the whole project. To test the idea of how the piece could evolve, the same poems used in the previous installation, *Love Me Knot* (2014), were now read, recited and recorded by women becoming part of the installation about how love imprisons women. Furthermore, the poems were also moistened and used as material for germination producing the so-called 'seeds of hope', to show that it is possible to break the circle of violence and, instead, allow growth and transformation. Seeds also function as a symbolic feminine element, as seeds give birth to new life. Thus, every time a woman is killed, the possibility of new life is also destroyed. However, it also showed the possibility of breaking this vicious circle of violence and bringing hope.



Figures 60, 61. Carmen Alemán. *LightWomb* (Germination in Progress), 2015, Documentation.

With nurture in mind, I experimented by germinating seeds directly onto the printed poems (Figures 60, 61). If the seeds could germinate and become flowers, it symbolised that hope and new life might be created in the place where so many lives were lost. From a position of empowerment, women also have the power to change society by educating ourselves and taking responsibility. De Miguel states that women are key to stopping unfair treatment through empowering themselves. (De Miguel, 2014).

The same poems were then transformed into a soundscape of female voices, as part of the next piece, an immersive installation, *LightWomb* (2015). The viewer was immersed in a narrative of violence within a prison of romantic love, and where the use of the 'soundscape' became a tool to denounce violence.

Further research pushed me into the world of counting and statistics, and the horror of '*what to do with the numbers*'. I created an installation, in the form of a game, in order to reveal the worldwide statistics of VAW, *The Ovarian Lottery* (2016), a circular flat board using the design and imagery from *LightWomb* (2015). The flat 2D board evolved into a 3D object in *Missing Eve I* (2016-ongoing), a large ball made out of female clothing, where the body and its physicality became essential to the revelation and horror of the fact that 200 million women are currently missing globally. From there, the clothing used in the previous installation had now been transformed into thread; the round shape of the ball had become a wheel; from clothing to cord and thread, from feminine identity to fate, it seemed to evolve naturally into *A Mother Border* (2016), a site-specific installation that revealed the violence of displacement and the vulnerability of migrant women and their role in a new land. Materials were then perhaps becoming more basic, raw and primitive.

A Mother Border (2016) was followed by *Raptio* (2016) an installation in the form of a children's game, a 'hopscotch' that exposed the truth about the continuing abduction of girls. Stones and traces of clothing were the primary materials used. This evolved into *Trespassing* (2017), an installation about the violence that indigenous women suffer in Canada, where previous materials such as threads and stones re-appeared, and the element of water emerged as a hidden material. This reappeared in *Watermarks* (2017) a short video revealing the repetitive nature of VAW.



Fig. 62. Carmen Alemán. Stages of Transformation.

The concept of transformation has made me more aware of the process through which work comes about, as well as of the final piece. In the performance *Missing Eve II* (2018), the emphasis is on the process of making rather than on the final piece.

The idea of transformation is influenced by my Buddhist practice which refers to self-improvement and how personal transformation can trigger a change in society and in the world. Buddhism reminds us that everything changes, that nothing dies but merely transforms itself. It also teaches us that we have the potential for inner transformation, to improve as humans. With that in mind, this principle has given me the chance to reflect on how I can use my art practice more effectively to visualise a topic that has been normalised, how I can represent violence, what media and materials I can use and how I can engage with the audience. I think my Buddhist practice has enabled me to consider how I could create value with my art.

This approach was initially inspired by Daisaku Ikeda's¹⁸ philosophy of peace. Violence is a product of conflict and inequality and following a philosophy of peace can help to fight human unhappiness and contribute to social change. Peace researcher Olivier Urbain, in his book *Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace, Dialogue, Transformation and Global Citizenship* (2010) discusses how transformation, together with dialogue and global citizenship, are themes or threads consistently running through Ikeda's philosophy. They are interconnected with each other and are essential elements for peace and non-violence. According to Ikeda, there will be less violence when people practice inner transformation and dialogue and enhance global citizenship (Urbain, 2010: 207). They have also inspired me to shape the project and throw a positive light on it.

Buddhism and feminism may seem in conflict with each other, in that no religion has openly supported the equality of women. However, this Buddhism is not a dogma, but a philosophy, which views all people as equal and espouses

¹⁸ Daisaku Ikeda is a Buddhist philosopher, educator, author and advocate for nuclear disarmament. Ikeda is the founder of the Soga Gakkai International <http://www.sgi.org/>

respect for others and the dignity of life. Feminism also advocates equal rights and they both fight for human rights, and, ultimately, peace. Buddhist philosophy, like feminism, is a philosophy that requires us to act. In *Having it Good* (2000), feminist artist and activist Suzanne Lacy uses the term 'Engaged Buddhism' within a socially engaged art practice, and how both advocate a sense of responsibility to take action to alleviate suffering and bring awareness. This is something that relates to my practice.



Figure 63. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve I*, (2016). Installation Detail (Umbilical Cord).

There are other Buddhist concepts relevant to my work, such as interconnectedness¹⁹, that leads to a sense of responsibility, the concept of 'both/and'²⁰ and impermanence. These manifest visually in the form of threads and cords and the use of ephemeral materials (Figure 63).

¹⁹ Also called dependent origination. A Buddhist teaching expressing the interdependence of all things. It teaches that everything in the world exists in response to causes and conditions. Nothing can exist independently from other things but exists because of their relationships with other beings or phenomena. (The Soka Gakkai dictionary of Buddhism)

²⁰ Both/and: a key Buddhist concept which means a focus on mind training for seeing things broadly and connectedly, as opposed to the ordinary dualistic ideas of either/or categories which tends to be narrow, static and closed. Both/and thinking is open and dynamic. Either/or is closed and static). Baas, J. (2004) *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. University of California Press. Glossary

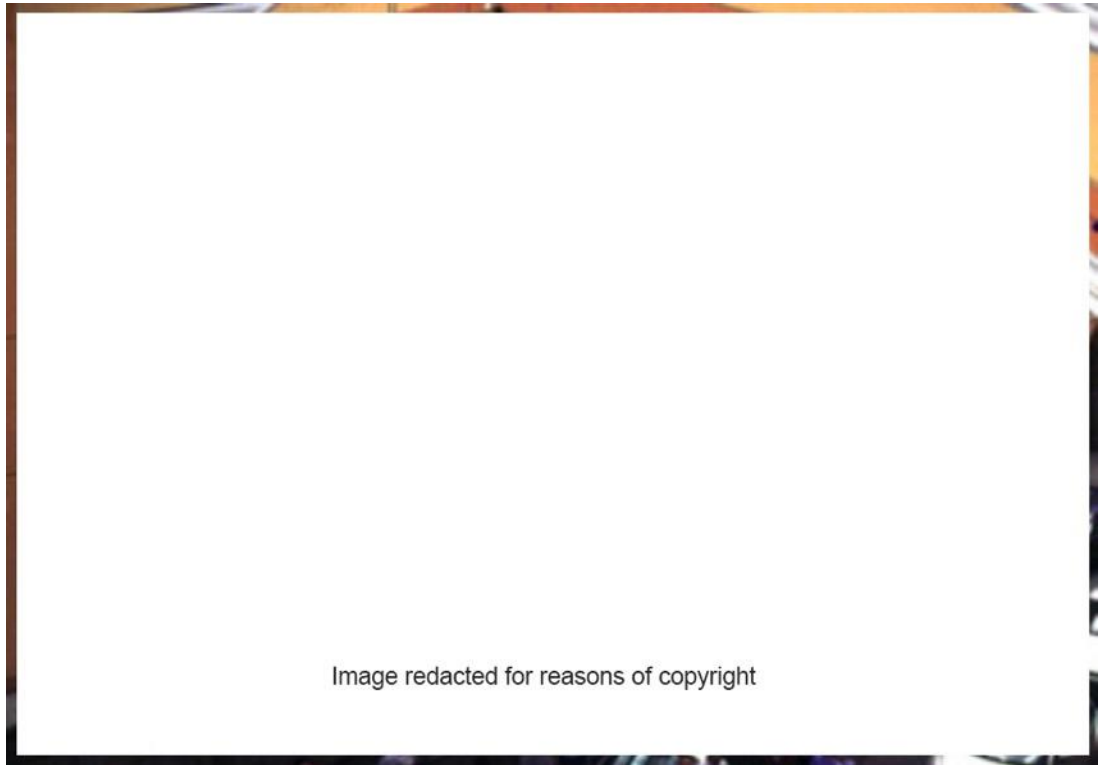


Figure 64. Regina José Galindo. *Lo voy a gritar al viento*, 1999, Guatemala. Performance

Regina José Galindo's work was also influential, with reference to the 'umbilical cord', which suggests ideas of connection, between life and death, between victim and survivor, metaphorically speaking. In Galindo's work, the 'umbilical cord', appeared in the form of cables and leads, blood and oxygen tubes, or threads and cords. In my work, the idea of the 'umbilical cord' was an important element that has reappeared, physically as well as metaphorically, not only in my recent works; *Missing Eve I* (2016- ongoing), *A Mother Border* (2016) and *Trespassing* (2017), but in earlier work, before my doctorate (Figure 6).

Galindo used the symbol of the umbilical cord in *Lo Voy a Gritar al Viento* (*I'm Going to Shout to the Wind*, 1999) in Guatemala. Using a cable as a fundamental tool of survival, she hung herself from a bridge and read her poems, alluding to the fact that no one listens to the women's voices and they get blown away by the wind (Figure 64). This piece resonates with *Love me Knot* (2014), as it uses poems of love and violence to shout out the stories of women who die at the hands of their lovers and asserts the need to break the silence.

Looking at the work of other artists, in relation to the cord, I was introduced to the piece *Rope* (1983-84), a performance by Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh which lasted one year, where both artists were attached together with an 8-foot rope (Figure 65). The most interesting aspect of this piece was the connections and attachments that we have with others (people, things, the environment and life itself) and how whatever we do has an effect on our environment. We are responsible for each other in this world and we have to respond. Buddhism teaches that nothing can exist independently from other things, but, because that connection is not always physical, and may be invisible, we don't always believe it is possible or true. In my case, my intention was to make visible the fact we are all affected by VAW.

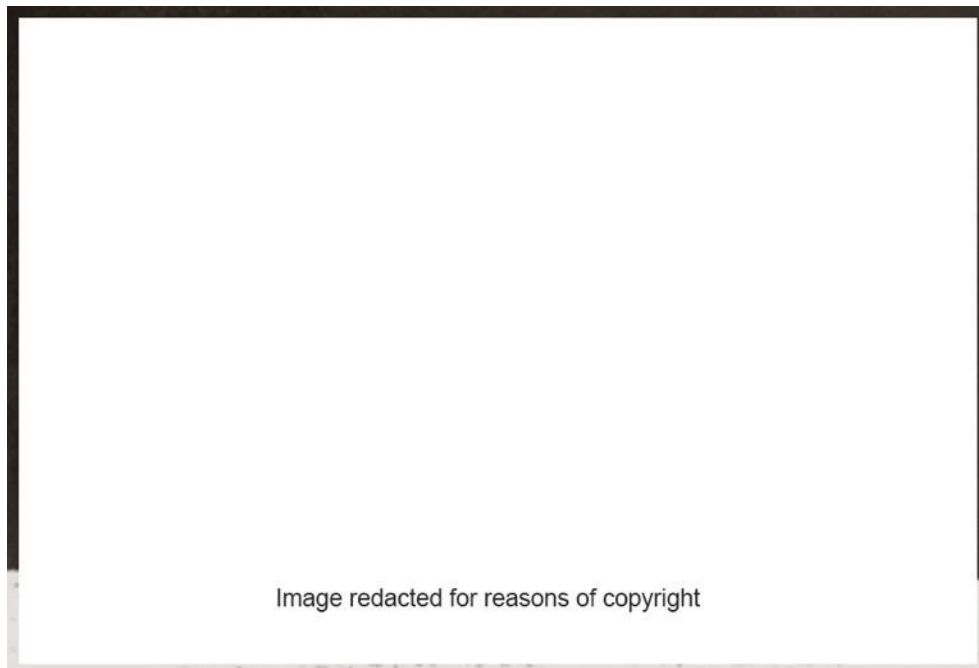


Figure 65. Linda Montano & Tehching Hsieh, *Rope*, (from July 4, 1983 at 6pm until July 4, 1984 at 6 pm), Performance.

Community, Collective and Activism

Feminism has gradually permeated my life and informed my practice. Through extensive research and reading, attending conferences and undertaking online courses on feminism, I can now look at the world from a critical perspective and question androcentric values and identify inequalities between men and women. I am interested in grassroots feminist movements from and for

(extra)ordinary women. VAW is an everyday problem that can only be solved by taking the private into the public space. As feminist journalist Falcón states, in order to make the revolution, we must take the streets (Falcón, 2018). With that in mind, I reflected on what my practice needed and how I could expand it, in terms of materials, approach, methods of working, methods of display and use of alternative spaces.

I have realised that the work I am currently doing is something that I cannot and should not do alone. I want to find strategies to collaborate and bring my work to a wider audience and closer to the public space. Showing the piece, *The Ovarian Lottery* (2015) and doing the performance *Missing Eve II* (2018-ongoing) demonstrated that my art practice sits between the gallery and other alternative spaces. It is seeking to engage the audience and raise awareness and I intend to strengthen those elements of my work.

I am increasingly interested in the community and social change and the idea that art can become a collective experience, a constructive social exchange, where people can be involved, as spectators, activists or artists at different stages of the process. Some examples are when in *Love me Knot* (2014) viewers are invited to experience the installation by being immersed in reading the poems. In *LightWomb* (2015) I worked with many volunteers recording their voices. Many of them had experiences with violence themselves. Later, the audience played an important role, sharing the emotional experience. In *The Ovarian Lottery* (2016), I invited people to play roulette to be informed about VAW and in *Raptio* (2017), a social sculpture/installation, I encouraged participants to play the game of Hopscotch.

As an artist, I advocate using dialogue as a means of calling attention to silence and its normalisation. I want to engage and collaborate with the community and have the freedom to use different mediums using art to 'pause, think, learn and act'. Doing issue-based work is gradually expanding my practice beyond my studio. This approach will sometimes create practical problems when presenting the work in galleries or outside its normal context. It creates personal challenges as I push myself towards public spaces and contexts which are not always comfortable.

Working on this project throughout the Doctorate has made me realise the importance of the community and the collective because this is where I believe I can contribute to social change, raising questions, creating conversations and offering optimism. Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti proposes 'affirmative ethics' as a form of political activism, in order to construct sustainable futures. Braidotti refers to the feminist strategies of the 1960s and 1970s, (such as the micro-politics of everyday life: 'the personal is political') as good examples of the equal importance of creation and critique.

Furthermore, Braidotti states that feminism, as well as 'affirmative ethics', rejects the dualistic oppositional thinking of either/or and embraces the monism of and/and instead. This takes me to the idea of interconnectedness between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others and the environment. In other words, it emphasises the idea of community building and collectivity. Braidotti emphasises the idea that we are all interconnected. It is a pledge for community and belonging. Braidotti states:

Ethical relations create possible worlds by mobilising resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination. These driving forces concretise in actual, material relations and can thus constitute a network, web or rhizome of interconnections with others. (Braidotti, 2011: 267).

A good example of *affirmative ethics* is the work of Lorena Wolffer, a Mexican artist who fuses art, feminism and activism. She gives a voice and power to women who experience violence. Her art consists of multiple micro political practices of daily actions and interventions in alternative spaces, in order to transform VAW into a visible and public phenomenon. Wolffer's art is a hybrid mix of photography, performance, public interventions with various communities, debates, courses, participations and pedagogical collaborations, etc. She uses whatever she needs to convey her message. Repetition reinforces the chilling message of her work, which is also my intention.

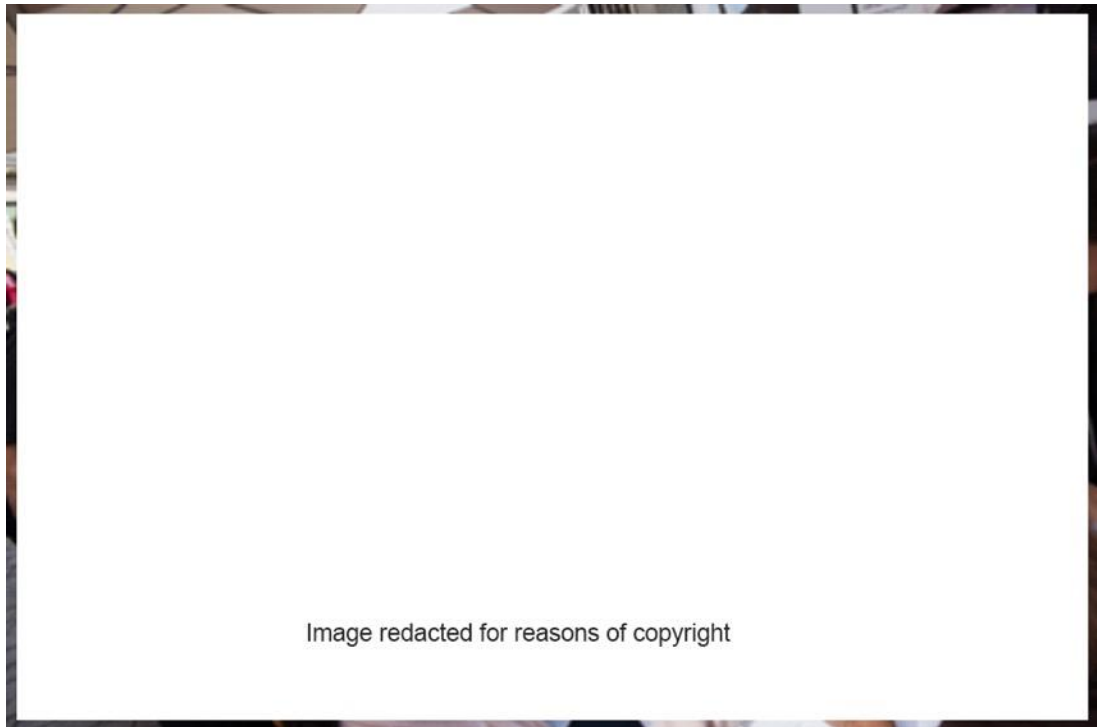


Figure 66. Lorena Wolffer, *Estados de excepción*, 2014. Participatory Project.

Her work has expanded my interest in activism in the community and using different ways to offer information and connect with people. She gives women survivors the hope and opportunity to create new situations, moments and space to have dialogues and exchange experiences. For instance, she has contributed to and created many participatory interventions with various communities of women, e.g. in *Estados de excepción (States of Exception, 2014)* where she invited passers-by to a four-course meal in public streets and plazas (Figure 66). In that way, she allows women to freely exercise their human rights in public and secure environments. Another example of this is her website, an ongoing platform for resistance, where she posts essential legal and emergency information, participatory links and questionnaires, as well as giving 'recipes' related to violence against women. This works like a noticeboard in a women's centre, many of which have now been defunded. It is a political and practical site that extends our notion of what art is and should be.

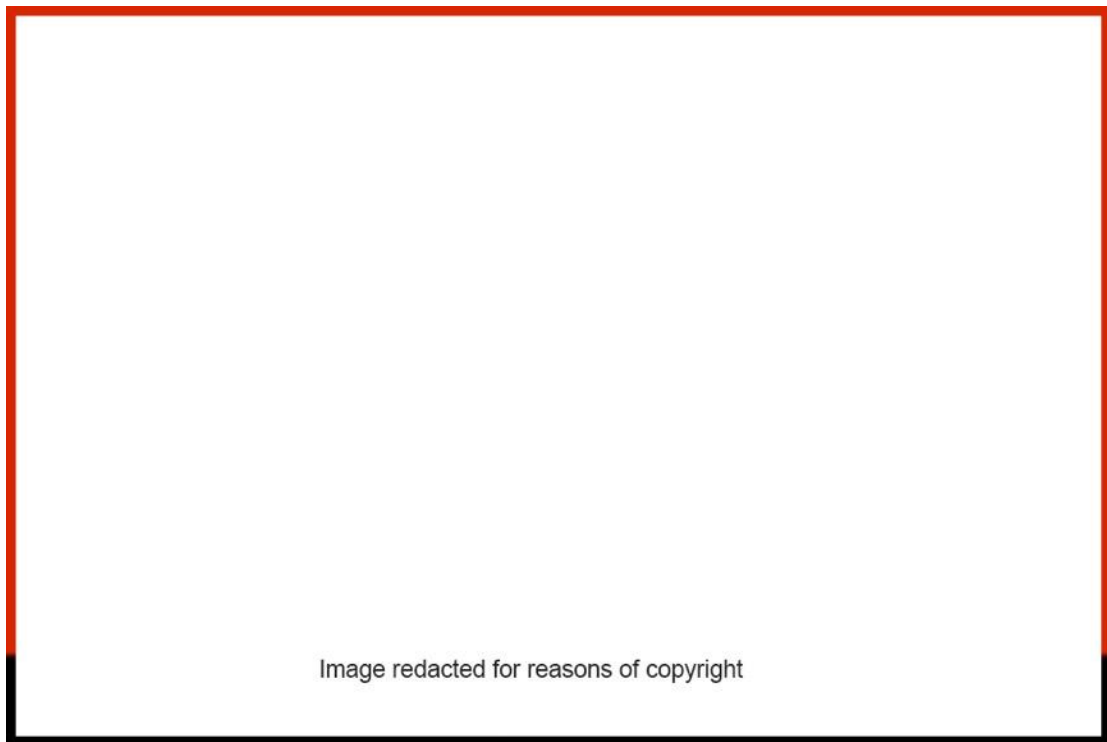


Figure 67. Lorena Wolffer, *Inventario*, 2003. Photo Poster.

Another example from Lorena Wolffer is *Inventario* (2003) which consists of several women's silhouettes juxtaposed with figures and numbers taken from the national statistics about gender violence, gathered by the National Public Health Institute in Mexico (Figure 67). The poster identified the exact location of the most frequently recorded assaults and showed the results in percentages on the silhouettes. The series exposed precise data on the violence that Mexican women suffer in a powerful and direct way.

Wolffer makes VAW visible, both in the public space and in the museum, demonstrating her commitment to the cause, as well as the hope and the compassion to make a difference. She empowers women by giving them a voice and provides the tools to fight against violence. This is Braidotti's affirmative ethics in action, 'the desire to become', to make a difference.

Interestingly, Braidotti's ideas deeply resonate with Buddhist concepts, though each use different terms and explanations. Firstly, Buddhism discusses the interconnectedness of things and the concepts of both/and or non-duality. Secondly, unity and community building are basic Buddhist concepts. Thirdly, Braidotti's idea that negative effects, including pain, horror or mourning, can be transformed, chimes with the Buddhist view of transformation. Braidotti states

that 'every event contains within it the potential for being overcome and overtaken. Its negative charge can be transposed.' (Braidotti, 2011: 269).

This philosophy also connects with the philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda on transformation, dialogue and global citizenship, mentioned earlier, which has also been important in my approach to art and life. Braidotti's positive vision and the ethical empowering option that give us the *potentia* (or the ability to create alternative outcomes) inspires my practice to counter violence. Braidotti argues that affirmation is not only wishful thinking or naive optimism, 'it is about endurance and transformation' (Braidotti, 2006). Her philosophy is about taking responsibility for our freedom and having the confidence that we can make a difference with our actions.

Discovering Braidotti is a revelation. She has a practical feminist philosophy that can create alternatives for a sustainable world. Her philosophy encompasses many ideas that I have tried to articulate and visualise through my art: life, motion, change, transformation, *potentia*, inter-connections between self and others, collectivity and continuous becoming. (Braidotti, 2006). This translates, in my practice, to raising awareness about VAW, breaking the cycle of violence, creating dialogue, building communities and persevering.

What is positive in the ethics of affirmation is the belief that negative effects can be transformed. This implies a dynamic view of all effects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror or mourning. Affirmative nomadic ethics put the motion back into e-motion and the active back into activism, introducing movement, process and becoming. This shift makes all the difference to the patterns of repetition of negative emotions. (Braidotti, 2006: 247).

To commemorate the International Women's Day march this year, I decided to re-enact my performance for *Missing Eve III (2019)* in the form of a collective experience (Figure 68). It was an experiment to see how the public would respond and interact with the piece. Interestingly, members of the public did engage with the making of the ball by bringing items of clothing themselves and helping me roll and push the ball through the streets of London.

The experience was incredible and the feedback very positive. Many people responded well to the piece and wanted to know more about the meaning of it. The march ended in Trafalgar Square with a rally and the ball ended up mounted in the paws of one of the Lion statues at the foot of Nelson's Column (Figure 69). Joining the march with this performance was an example of what Braidotti calls a 'micro political practice', where art and activism can interact and where community building can bring about social change.

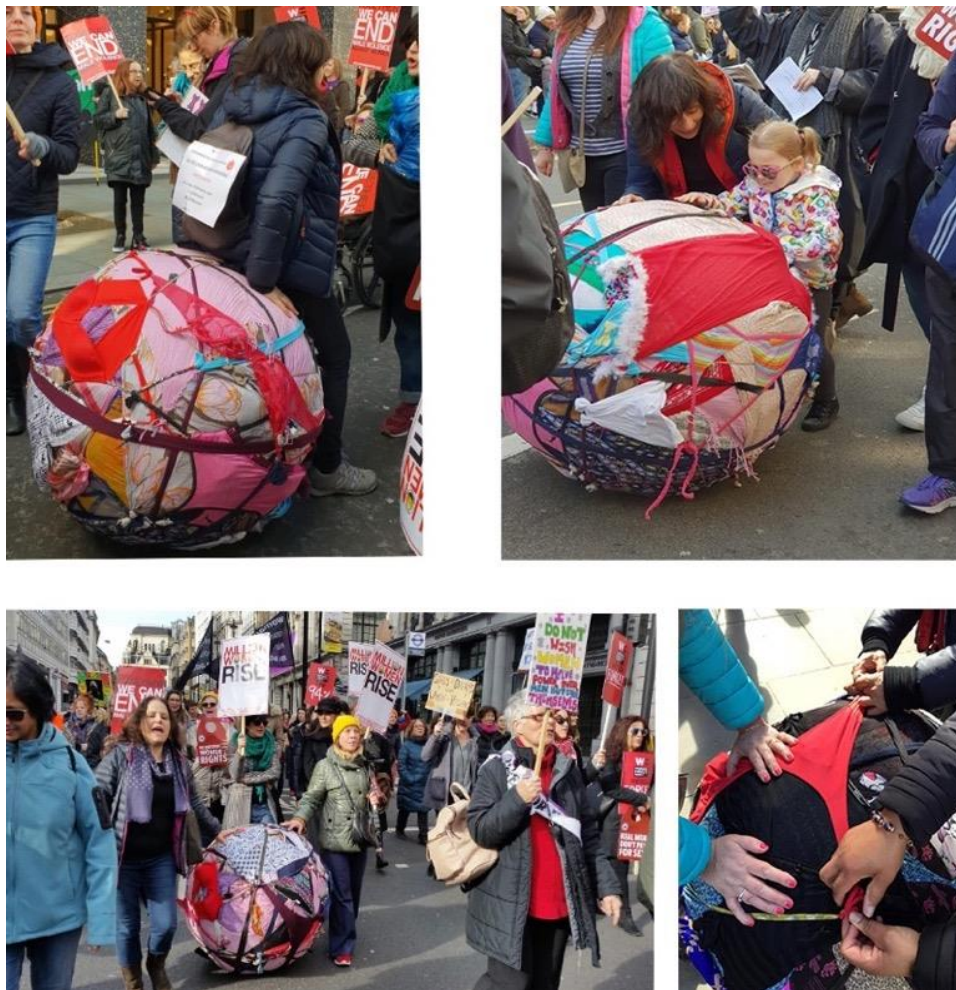


Figure 68. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve III* (2019). Collective Performance during International Women's Day March, 2019.



Figure 69. Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve III* (2019). Collective Performance during International Women's Day, March, 2019

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Exhibitions

- 2019 *Professional Doctorate Showcase*. UEL, London
- Viva Exhibition
- 2019 *Missing Eve III*. International Women's Day March, Central
London - Collective Performance
- 2018 *International Contemporary Art Fair*. Thessaloniki, Greece
- Installation
- 2018 *Sheroes*. Ugly Duck Gallery, London
- Performance
- 2017 *Feminist Art. FiliArt*. Institute of Education, UCL, London
- Installation
- 2017 *Professional Doctorate Showcase*. UEL, London
- Video
- 2017 *FAC (Feminist Art Collective) Residency. Open Studios Show*.
Daniel's Spectrum Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- Installation
<http://www.blogto.com/events/fac-residency-open-studio-and-social/>
<https://twitter.com/TorontoFAC/status/866650886608748544>
<https://factoronto.org/events-2/>
- 2017 *Tempest (Staff Group Show)*. UEL, London
- Installation

- 2017 *Echoes from the Cave: Dialogues with a Time and a Place.*
Crypt Gallery, London
- Site-specific Installation
- 2016 *Kokkalis Project.* Psarades, Greece
- Site-specific Installation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J92YJMjumOo>
- 2016 *Professional Doctorate Showcase.* UEL, London
- Installation
- 2016 *Eves and Liliths - Exploration of Women's Identity*
(Group Exhibition). Espacio Gallery, London
- Photography
<http://www.espaciogallery.com/past-exhibitions-2016.html>
- 2016 *No Monkey Business* (Group exhibition). Q-Park, London
- Photography
<https://www.storyindesign.co.uk/single-post/2016/02/20/Art-Show-Chinese-Open-2016No-Monkey-Business>
- 2015 *Educating Picasso* (Group exhibition). Espacio Gallery, London
- Installation
<http://www.nobarkingart.com/educating-picasso-2015.html>
- 2015 *To My Greek Sisters.* Open Museum, Psarades, Prespa, Greece
- Site specific exhibition
<https://floroieikastikoi.blogspot.com.es/2015/08/carmen-aleman-to-my-greek-sisters.html>
- 2015 *Professional Doctorate Showcase.* UEL, London
- Installation
- 2014 *Professional Doctorate Showcase.* UEL, London
- Installation

2014 *Professional Doctorate Showcase*. UEL, London
- Photography

Curation

2017 Co-curator with artist Ali Darke at *Echoes from the Cave*.
Dialogues with a Time and a Place. Crypt Gallery, London

Residencies

2017 *Laboratory of Neo-Feminism*. Centre Pompadour, Normandy,
France

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3QpKUKG8Fk>

2017 *Feminist Art Conference (FAC)*.
Artscape, Gibraltar Point, Toronto, Canada

<https://factoronto.org/fac-residency-2017/>

2016 *The Kokkalis Project: Directional Forces* (in Collaboration with
West Macedonia University, Florina). Psarades, Greece

<https://floroieikastikoi.blogspot.com.es/2016/07/2016.html>

2015 *The Canning Factory Museum: Directional Forces* (in
Collaboration with West Macedonia University, Florina)
Psarades, Greece

https://floroieikastikoi.blogspot.com.es/2015/08/iv_99.html

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3GLUm1qGCE>

<http://floroieikastikoi.blogspot.co.uk/2015/08/carmen-aleman-to-my-greek-sisters.html>

Conferences

2018 *No hay agresión pequeña. La rebelión de las mujeres contra la
violencia (There Are no Small Aggressions. The Rebellion of
Women Against Violence)*. Attendee.

XV Escuela Feminista Rosario de Acuña. Gijón, Spain
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83dRDN7LJbE>

- 2017 FiliArt. *Women and Art*. 14-15 Oct. - Presentation
& Panel: *Feminist Art: Access, Activism and Representation*.
Institute of Education, London.
<https://filia.org.uk/filia-conference-2017/>
- 2016 *Women's Peace Conference* - Attendee
SGI-UK, SLNC, London
- 2015 *Women's Peace Conference* - Attendee
SGI-UK, Taplow Court, Maidenhead
- 2015 *Aesthetics and the Feminine* - Attendee. Society for Women
Philosophy (SWIP), Ireland. University College, Cork, Ireland

Presentations and Talks

- 2018 *(In) Memoriam: Provocative Talks on Violence Against Women*.
Women's Library @LSE: British Library of Political and
Economic Science, London
- 2018 *'I am a witch because'*
Studio 73 Art Gallery, Brixton, London
- 2017 Personal work in progress. Centre Pompadour, Normandy,
France
- 2017 *Trespassing*. Feminist Art Conference. Toronto, Canada

Online Courses

- 2018 *Violencias contra las mujeres: realidades, mitos y propuestas para la acción (Violence(s) Against Women: Realities, myths and proposals for action)*. 10-week course.
<https://feminicidio.net/articulo/curso-online-violencias-contra-las-mujeres-realidades-mitos-y-propuestas-la-acci%C3%B3n>
- 2016 *Combatividad y resistencia: arte y feminismo en América Latina (Fighting and Resistance: Art and Feminism in Latin America)*. 10 week course.
<https://feminicidio.net/articulo/curso-online-combatividad-y-resistencia-arte-y-feminismo-en-am%C3%A9rica-latina-1>
- 2017 *Subvirtiendo invisibilidades. Mujeres artistas en España (Subverting Invisibilities. Female Artists in Spain)*. 10-week course.
<https://feminicidio.net/articulo/curso-online-subvirtiendo-%20invisibilidades-mujeres-artistas-espa%C3%B1a>

Teaching

- Present P/T Lecturer in Photography. B.A. Programme.
University of East London
<https://uelbaphotography.wordpress.com/>

Other

- 2019 Personal website: <https://www.carmenaleman.com/>

Reflections on Professional Practice

My art practice involves exhibiting work, attending conferences, visiting exhibitions, curating, participating in art residencies, writing proposals for research projects, collaborating with other artists and participating in feminist talks.

Since undertaking the doctorate, my practice has become more active and prolific, making new work, exhibiting and participating in art residencies. This has impacted on my teaching, making it more reflective and dynamic. I am more confident both creatively and professionally and consequently more open to sharing my practice with my students, especially when helping with their Degree show and other external exhibitions.

Residencies

Residencies have been the highlight of my Doctorate, giving me the opportunity to pause, focus and reflect on my art practice. They have been enriching culturally, creatively and personally. Additionally, I have found residencies an important and enhancing experience that further fuels my interest in the community, by engaging with other artists, as well as the local people. Specific residencies, where the community and the collective aspect were most relevant, were the two feminist residencies I undertook, in France and Canada:

The Neo-feminist Laboratory. Centre Pompadour in Picardie, France is a new project, organised by feminist artist Michaela Spiegel, offering space and opportunities to research art and feminism (Figure 70). The residency, in September 2017, gave me time to focus on my Professional Doctorate final report, reading and writing. As part of the residency, there were communal meals, where all the artists could engage and interact, getting to know fellow artists and each other's work and discuss feminist issues.

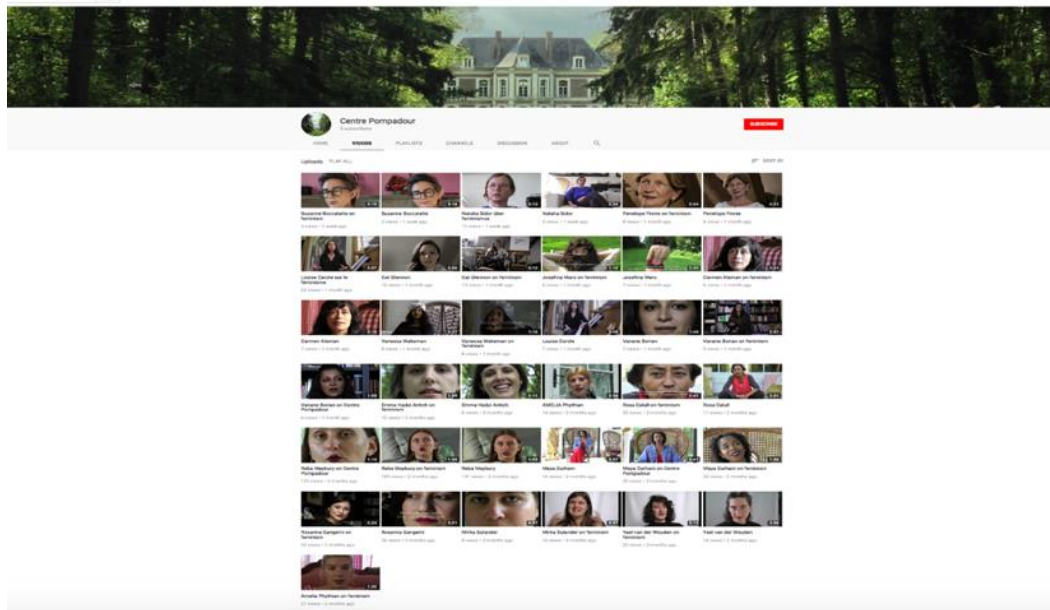


Figure 70. The Neo-feminist Laboratory, 2017. France. Artist in Residence.

In May 2017, I took part in the Feminist Art Collective (FAC), a multidisciplinary feminist artist in residence, in Toronto, Canada, gathering artists who focus on feminist art and social justice (Figures 71, 72). These included issues such as rape culture, racism, VAW, media representation, cultural appropriation, environmental degradation and impact on indigenous lands.

During the residency, I investigated issues surrounding women and violence, particularly femicide and the ongoing number of missing indigenous women in Canada, as I wanted my work to relate to the location where I was working.

There were plenty of opportunities to socialise and engage with fellow artists. We all participated in a variety of communal activities including studio time, discussions, films, presentations, guest speakers, group and individual critiques, communal dinners, gallery tours and mounted a group exhibition, at the end of the residency.



Figure 71. FAC Residency, 2017. Toronto, Canada. Work in Progress.

On the residency, I developed great bonds and camaraderie among the artists, as we helped each other complete the work for the exhibition. As a consequence, we have formed a 'Crit Forum' online, where we discuss each other's work and share information. I hope to exhibit with some of the participants in the future.

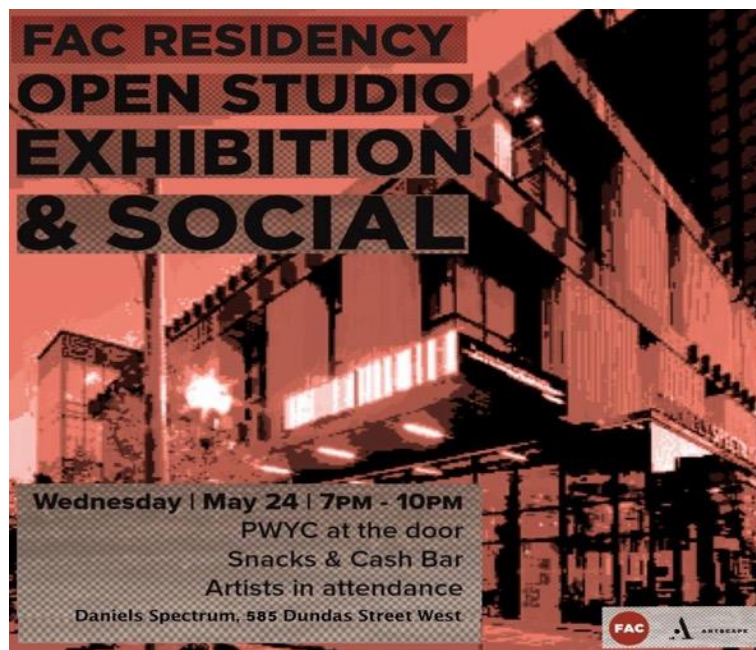


Figure 72. FAC Residency, 2017. Toronto, Canada. Exhibition at Daniel's Spectrum Gallery, Toronto

Over two consecutive years, in the summers of 2015 and 2016, I participated in two art residencies in Psarades, Northern Greece. The residencies were part of the Directional Forces project, in collaboration with artists from the University of West Macedonia. The residencies were an opportunity to respond to the local area of Presbes. In the first year, summer 2015, all the artists participated in a project at The Canning Factory Museum, an abandoned factory converted into a museum (Figures 73, 74). My response resulted in an installation related to women and violence during the Greek Civil War.



Figures 73, 74. Carmen Alemán. *To my Greek Sisters*, 2016. Artist in Residence, Psarades, Greece.
Installation.

In the second year, in summer 2016, all the artists worked on a joint undertaking entitled “*The Kokkalis Project*”, named after a cave used as a hospital during the Greek Civil War, next to the border with Albania (Figures 75, 76). I dedicated two weeks to producing work, resulting in a major installation, which was exhibited in Greece and, later, in London. The residency consisted of field research and collaborations with other artists and residents. This led to a major collective exhibition *Echoes from the Cave*, in London in March 2017.



Figure 75. The Kokkalis Project. 2017. Artist in Residence, Psarades, Greece.



Figure 76. The Kokkalis Project. 2017. Curating Exhibition, Abandoned School, Psarades, Greece.

Curation

Together with artist Ali Darke, I co-ordinated, curated and exhibited at the exhibition “Echoes from the Cave” at The Crypt Gallery, London. We showed the art that we and our Greek co-artists had exhibited in Greece, and invited them to also participate. Our tasks involved organising the entire show, looking after the artists, making work and curating the exhibition. Curating was challenging but I developed my ability, finding a balance between looking after other artists and successfully mounting the show.

The Crypt Gallery was an atmospheric and seductive space. I had to ensure each work had sufficient space for the viewer to experience the artists’ journey, whilst maintaining the symbiosis between the work and the unique setting.



Figure 77. Carmen Alemán, *A Mother Border*, 2017. The Crypt Gallery, London, Installation.

My installation, *A Mother Border* (2017) was site-specific to the location. It was first shown in an abandoned school in the village of Psarades, Greece. Installing it at The Crypt Gallery meant responding to an equally unique space (Figure 77).

Exhibitions and Talks

Visiting and participating in exhibitions is a fundamental part of my creative practice, including exhibitions and festivals in the United Kingdom, abroad and online.

The feeling of being immersed in art at the Venice Biennale was very inspiring. The whole city was transformed, with all available spaces displaying art. I was especially pleased that I found one exhibition dedicated to male violence inflicted on women and girls, *Shrined for Girls* (2015) by Patricia Cronin (Figure 78). This piece inspired me to continue exploring the subject. As my confidence grew, I became more open to where and how to display my art. After the Biennale, I created the piece, *The Ovarian Lottery* (2015).



Figure 78. Patricia Cronin, *Shrine for Girls*, 2015. La Biennale di Venezia.

It is important for me to engage a wider audience. Hence, I am seeking out alternative and public spaces. For instance, I took part in a conference event organised by *Filia*, a grassroots feminist organisation, at UCL. The exhibition area was in the entrance hall of the building. This caused certain constraints on space, position, lighting, display and overcrowding due to other artists' work being exhibited there. However, the nature and location of the event attracted many people. It was a great chance to reach other artists and the general public and engage in many interesting conversations (Figure 79).



Figure 79. Carmen Aleman, *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2017. FiliArt, Exhibition, UCL, London.

Online Courses

In part, the aim of my doctorate research was to increase my understanding of art and feminism. I enrolled in several online courses (Figure 80 81, 82). These courses had interactive forums which enabled me to discuss the lessons and also expand my network with other artists and art professionals. These included curators, art historians, gallery owners, etc. notably many Spanish and Latin Americans, where the work of feminist artists regarding VAW is quite widespread. The courses were organised by a feminist volunteer project called “Feminicidio.net” created, in 2016, with the objective of providing a forum and information about feminist art in Spain and Latin America. I discovered how they used art as a feminist tool to visualise and explore issues that are hidden, such as gender violence. I came across inspiring artists, such as Regina José Galindo and Lorena Wolfer and started considering the use of performance and art as activism.

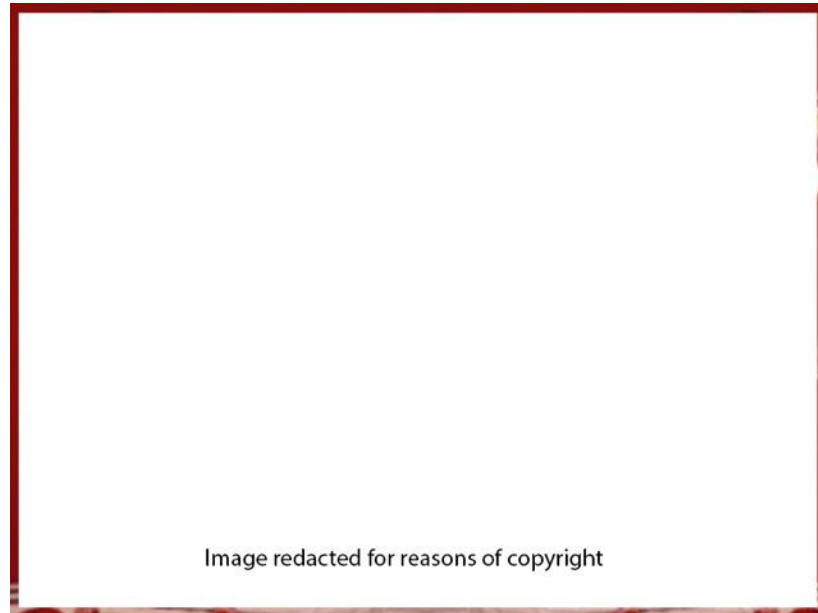


Figure 80. *Fighting and Resistance: Art and Feminism in Latin America*. Online Course.

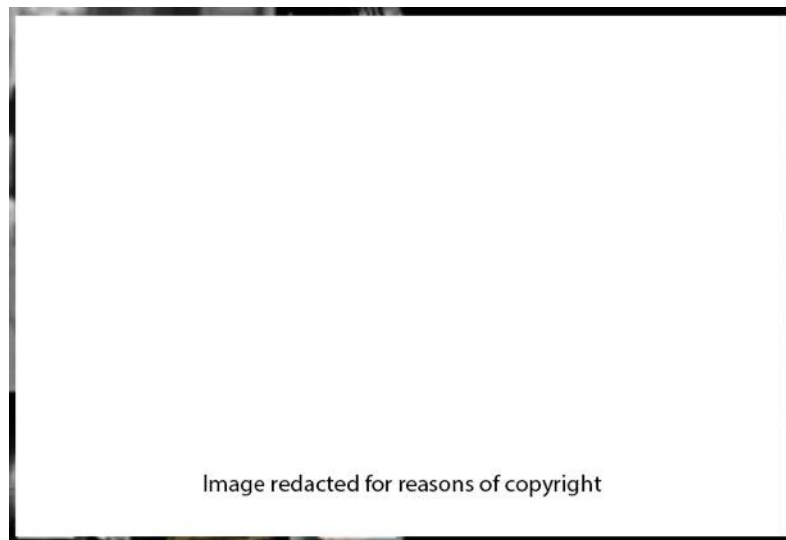


Figure 81. *Subverting Invisibilities. Women Artists in Spain*. Online Course.

Violencias Contra las Mujeres (Violence(s) Against Women - Realities, Myths and Proposals for Action) was an online course specifically designed to understand the causes, consequences, myths and tools for action from a feminist and legal perspective.

It provided information about statistics, campaigns, feminist demos, educational reading and more, for my research practice.

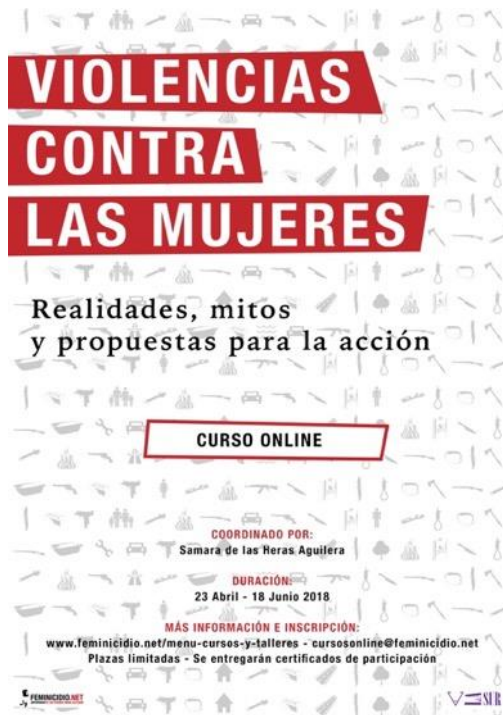


Figure 82. *Violence(s) Against Women*, Online Course.

Conferences and workshops

I have attended many diverse postgraduate workshops set up by the UEL Graduate School, including planning, speed reading, research tools, time management and academic writing in English as a second language.

Throughout the doctorate, I have attended conferences and talks about feminism, peace and women, photography, VAW, etc. I have presented my work a number of times, on several platforms, including at residencies, The University of East London and to a panel on feminist artists and human rights at Filia Art. Presenting my work has given me confidence in my creative practice and provided other opportunities and networking connections for future collaborations.



Figure 83. *No hay agresión pequeña*, 2018. Feminist Conference, Gijón, Spain

In July 2018, I attended a three-day conference, organized by the XV feminist school Rosario de Acuña in Gijón, Spain and run by philosopher Amelia Valcárcel (Figure 83). Following recent events, from the *#metoo* movement to the case of ‘La Manada’ in Spain, VAW was the chosen topic at the conference. This allowed us to reflect on the multiple forms of domination, control and abuse over women. New forms of violence, including daily micro-machismos, prostitution and trafficking, etc. were discussed. It was a great opportunity to understand more about the feminist movement in Spain. I am incredibly grateful to Spanish feminist philosophers, such as Amalia Valcárcel, Ana de Miguel and Alicia Puleo. The subject wasn’t discussed from an artistic point of view but I was able to better understand how feminism can be used as a tool of empowerment.

In October 2017, I participated in a feminist conference organised by a London grass-roots charity organization, *Filia* (Figure 84). The conference attracted speakers from many different backgrounds, from activists, lawyers, social workers, academics, artists, campaigners, researchers, etc. This made it more interesting, relevant and informal than only seeing academics.



Figure 84. *Feminist Art: Access, Activism and Representation*, 2017. Feminist Conference. London,

I took part in a panel session on art and activism, together with three other artists. The session addressed the importance of feminist art as a tool for social change.

Teaching

I am a part-time lecturer in the B.A. Photography programme at The University of East London (UeL). I teach on a practice-based model, focused on practice, contact and studio-based techniques, helping students to develop photography projects and events, as well as organising and curating exhibitions throughout the year, both internally and externally.

In conclusion, the biggest challenges during the Professional Doctorate have been the intense learning curve, time management, balancing my teaching, professional and creative career, as well as preserving my social and personal life.

Undertaking the Doctorate has not only built my confidence and belief in my creative and professional practice, but has opened the door to other opportunities such as exhibiting, networking and undertaking residencies. These experiences have been invaluable and expanded my creative and professional career.

SUMMARY

Undertaking this doctorate has been an enriching experience. I have had the opportunity to consider issues that are important to me and find my artistic voice. The doctorate has also provided support for me to learn, theorise and contextualise my work. It has allowed me the space for reflection and the tools to develop my creative practice.

I have always supported women's rights. Through doing the doctorate and researching the topic of violence against women, I have been able to expand my knowledge of feminism, which has helped me more fully understand the position and status of women in society.

Through my extensive reading, I have realised the importance of research and more fully understand the theoretical context of feminism, which has given me a greater insight that will carry my practice further. By studying feminism, I have discovered the work of both theorists and artists, mainly in a Hispanic context. I have become absorbed with the subject and inspired by feminism. Furthermore, my desire to learn more has resulted in substantial research; attending conferences, undertaking online courses on art and feminism and discovering relevant artists. This has led me to produce new work, as well as experimenting with new media and materials.

Reflecting on the work of other artists has encouraged me to develop my own practice. I have learnt to converse with both theorists and artists. They have influenced me and given me the confidence to express my ideas through my art.

During the doctorate, I have had moments of great inspiration, as well as great challenges. Sometimes I have preferred to stop reading or remain ignorant about particular events or some gruesome statistics. I would have liked to be able to tackle the topic of violence against women in a more positive way. Amelia Valcárcel is a philosopher who has made me think how to deal with the

subject in a different way, using irony and humour. However, the main objective of this doctorate has been to understand and develop my practice more creatively and intellectually and become more prolific.

During my time on the Professional Doctorate, my creative practice has utilised different approaches to explore the subject. I have become technically proficient in such things as creating complex installations and video editing; moving from 2D to 3D, from the virtual to the physical. I have experimented with the physicality of materials and the emotional resonance. Undertaking the doctorate has empowered me to believe in the process, to fail and start again, believing in the journey not in the destination. The doctorate has given me the chance to explore other disciplines that I never thought I would, such as sculpture and performance art. I have extended my practice far more than I would have ever imagined.

I have elevated my art practice to a professional level, giving me the confidence to participate in festivals, exhibitions, residencies, curating and presenting my work. I am learning to understand and celebrate my work. Experiences such as the feminist residency in Canada or initiating a collective performance at the International Women's Day march, in Central London, show that my art practice is expanding and reaching new heights.

As an artist, I feel it is important to engage and contribute to change. Regina Jose Galindo states that art does not change the world, but it is a detonator of thought (Galindo, 2015). Conversely, I would argue that when the artist makes the viewer reflect, that is in itself a change.

The doctorate has forced me to challenge my thinking, question my work and expand my practice as a professional artist. I have become more analytical and reflective as a result of invaluable seminar sessions and tutorials, where I have been pushed to question and share my practice. I feel my practice is moving in a new direction; both art and feminism are giving me a new perspective and fostering an interest in activism. I hope to continue along this path, bring my art closer to the community, stimulate people's imagination and use my practice to create value.

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APPENDIX

Creative Practice. Catalogue (2014 - 2019)

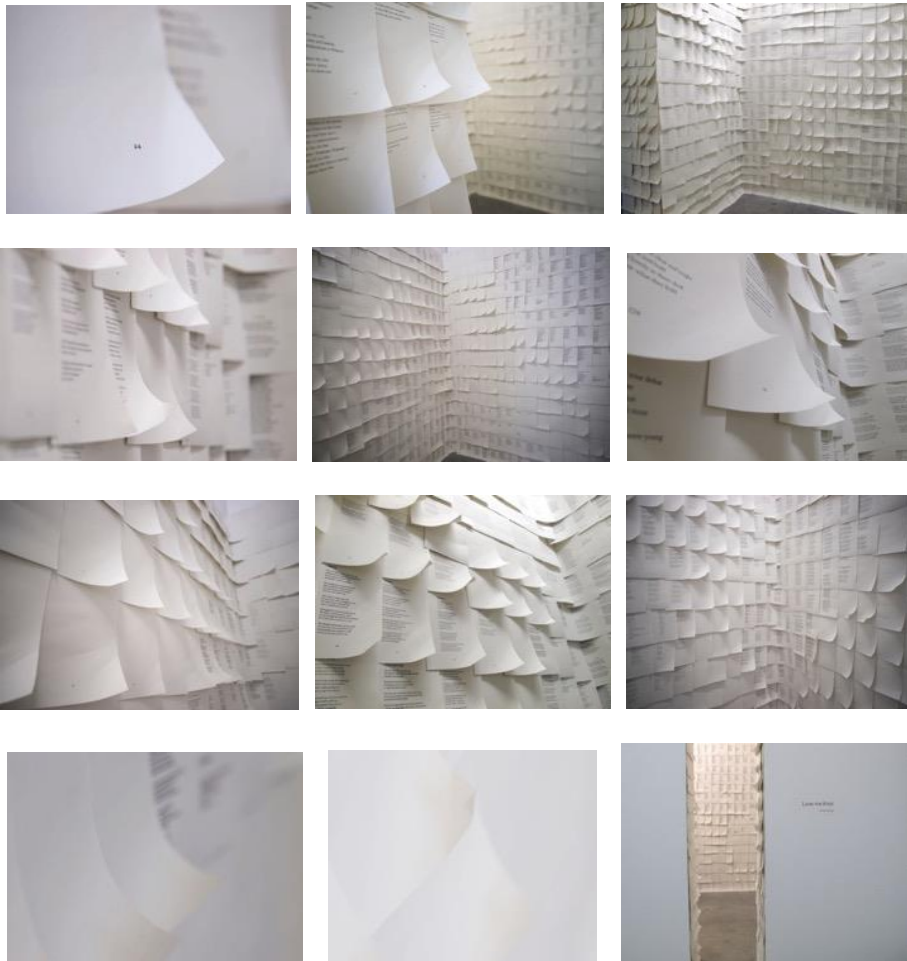
Love me Knot, 2014



Cárcel de amor. Exhibition
Caixa Forum, Barcelona

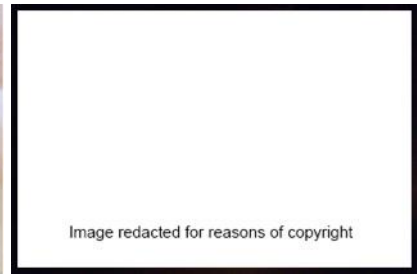
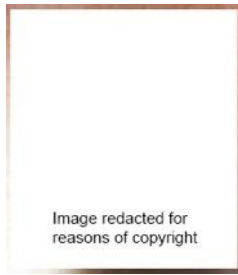


Elena del Ribero, *La perfecta casada*, 2002



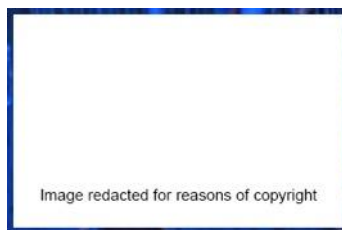
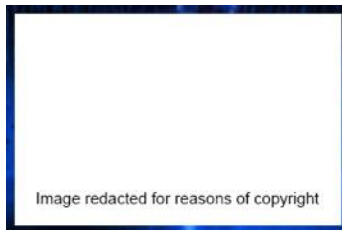
Carmen Alemán, *Love me Knot*, 2014. Installation.

LightWomb, 2015

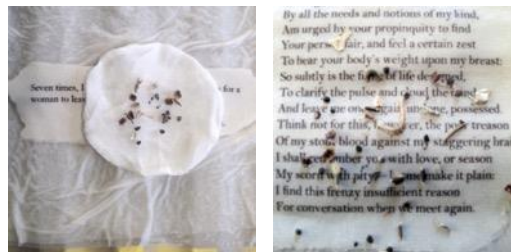


Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord*, 1993-94. Text: *Lustmord*, 1993-94. © 2008 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

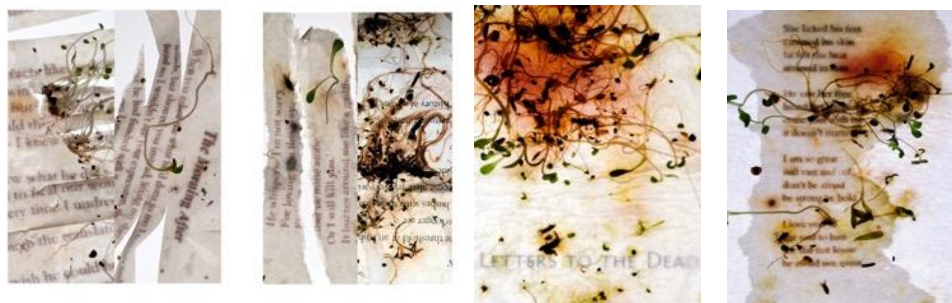
R.J. Galindo, *279 golpes*, 2005



Susan Hiller. *Witness*, 2000 Audio sculpture. Approx. 400 speakers, 10 audio tracks and multiple recordings



Carmen Alemán, *Germination on paper*. Work in progress, 2015.





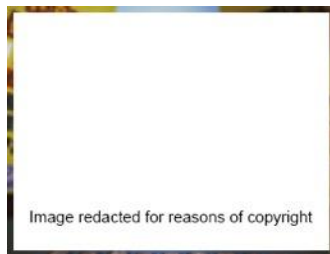
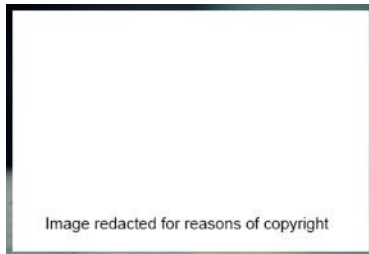
Round metal structure



Installation in progress



Carmen Alemán. *LightWomb*, 2015. Mixed Media Installation.



Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995)

The Ovarian Lottery, 2016



Patricia Cronin, *Shrine for Girls*, 2015, 56th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia



Carmen Alemán, *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2015 Interactive installation.



Carmen Alemán, *The Ovarian Lottery*, 2017 Interactive installation @ Filia Art

'The Ovarian Lottery'

FACT 1: 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner. (Office of National Statistics, 2015)

FACT 2: 25% (1 in 4) women in England and Wales will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes and 8% will suffer domestic violence each year (Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2013/14)

FACT 3: 33% (1 in 3) women, globally, will experience violence at the hands of a male partner (State of the World's Fathers Report, MenCare, 2015)

FACT 4: 60. Every 60 seconds police in UK receive a domestic assistance call – yet only 35% of domestic violence incidents are reported to the police (Stanko, 2000 & Home Office, 2002)

FACT 5: 103 UK women are suspected to have been killed by men between January and October this year. 103 women dead in 304 days is one woman dead every 2.9 days.

FACT 6: 78 Yazidi female bodies were found in a mass grave in Sinjar, Iraq, in November 2015.

FACT 7: 5000 murders committed in the name of 'honour' each year worldwide

FACT 8: 16. Worldwide, up to 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16.

FACT 9: 200. Now the United Nations is recognizing that some 200 million women and girls are "demographically missing" worldwide.

FACT 10: 130 million girls and women in the world, approximately, have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting, with more than 3 million girls in Africa annually at risk of the practice.

FACT 11: Up to **70** per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime, according to country data available.

FACT 12: 3,500 intimate partner violence related deaths occur every year in Europe. 77% of all victims of intimate partner or family related homicides are women.

The above are general facts and statistics on violence against women and Girls. The resources are collected from several sources: UN WOMEN (The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) and Refuge

The Minotaur and the Labyrinth, 2016



Image redacted for reasons of copyright

The Labyrinth of the Minotaur
Lambert of Saint-Omer.

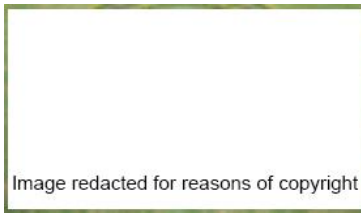


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7 Circuit/ring Classical (Cretan) Labyrinth.

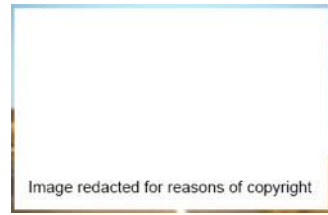


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The Road's Bull in Spain



image redacted for reasons of copyright

Picasso. *Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl*. 1956



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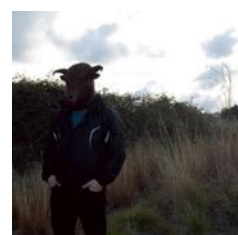
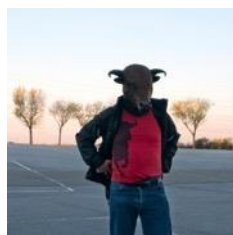
Guernica, Picasso



The Minotaur's Head, Work in Progress, 2016

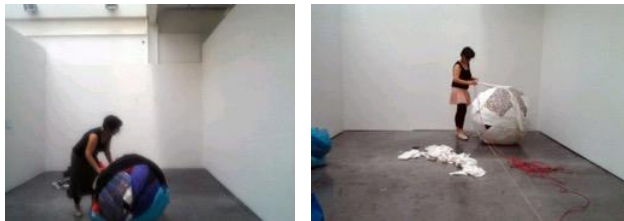


Minotaur in Spain- Tests shots. Work in progress. 2016



Carmen Alemán, *The Minotaur in Spain*, 2016, Test shots.

Missing Eve I, 2016



Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve I*, 2016, Installation.



Christian Boltanski, *No Man's Land*, 2010. Park Avenue Armory



Alice Anderson, *Ropes*, 2013-2014



Alice Anderson, *188 Km*, 2015



Missing Eve II, 2018

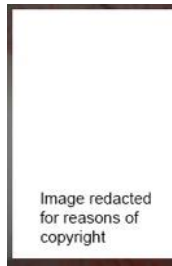


Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve II*, (2018-ongoing). Performance



Titian, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. 1548-49

A Mother Border, 2016



Ch. Shiota, *Dialogue with Absence*, 2009.



Carmen Alemán. *A Mother Border*, 2016 Psarades, Greece, Installation.



Carmen Alemán. *A Mother Border*, 2017, The Crypt Gallery, London, Installation.



The Kokkalis Project

The Crypt Gallery
 Roman Road, London, NW1 6JH | 0207 739 9110
 Ticket: £10 and Family Card: £20 (16, 18, 20, 25)
 Private View on Thurs 4th March (6-8pm)
 Exhibition open from 10th-12th March (12-7pm)

In the summer of 2016, a group of international contemporary artists worked alongside each other in the ancient village of Kokkalis in North Western Greece. They brought with them their individual sensibilities and cultural backgrounds and, responding to the history and geography, created an eclectic mix of painting, sculpture, installation, photography and film. Set in the beautiful mountains around the Lake of Prespa, where the borders of Greece, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia meet, this area has witnessed waves of migration, civil war and violence, leaving deep scars on the landscape and memory.

Carmen Alemán • Sofia Antonaki • Magda Chiriacopoulos • Ali Daska • Yari Douran • Martha Blahu
 Nikolaos Karapantazis • Hani • Katerina Katerina • Niki • Katerina
 Konstantinos Kostas • Rafi Lavan • Emphane Mazi • Lou Madras • Olga
 Mavrou • Vreni Nalvaki • Elisaveta Oikarinen • Maria Papadopoulou • Ioanna Pichardou
 Inese Prodan • Agnieszka Rados • Irena Rados • Vasilisa Stasinoukera • Nikolaos Tsanakis



Echoes from The Cave, 2017, The Crypt Gallery. London. Exhibition

Raptio, 2017



Poussin, *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*, (1637-1638).



Bernini, *The Abduction of Persephone*, 1621-1622



Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1460 oil on panel



Materials and processes. Work in progress



Carmen Alemán, *Raptio*, 2017, Tempest exhibition. Installation detail

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *'Untitled' (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* 1991

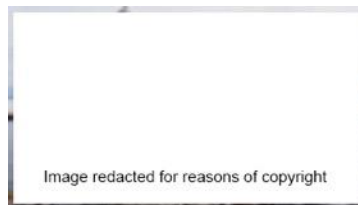


Carmen Alemán, *Raptio*. Installation, before and after PV

Trespassing, 2017



Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing*, 2017. Work in Progress



Kristen Villebrun, *Female inukshuk*, 2015



Carmen Alemán, *Stones*, 2017, Site Specific Installation

R.J. Galindo, *Piedra*, 2013



Artists Evacuated. Toronto Island, 2017



Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing*, 2017. Installation.



Carmen Alemán. *Trespassing II*, 2017, Memorial, site-specific. Canada



Ana Mendieta, *Burial Pyramid, Yogul*, 1974 Super-8 colour, silent film. 3:15 mins

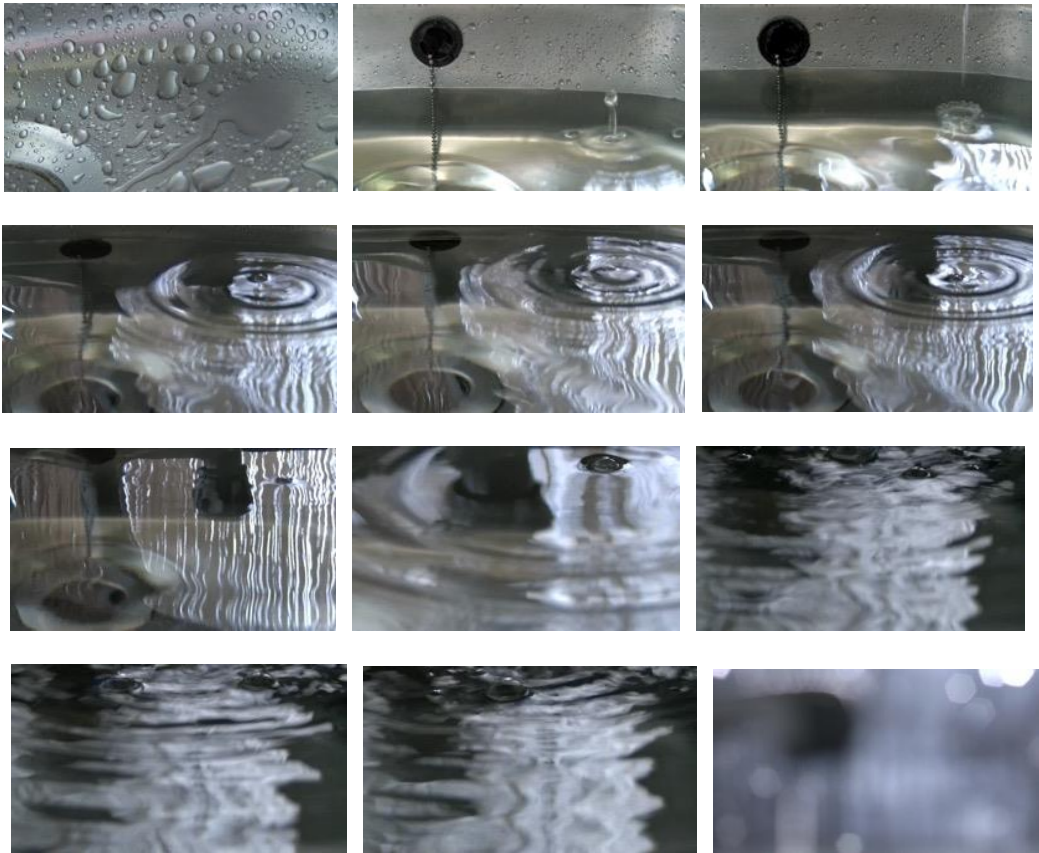


Ana Mendieta, *Rape*, 1973

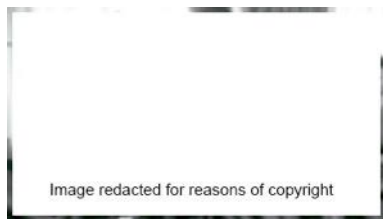


Carmen Alemán. *Clothing found in the bushes*. Toronto Island, Canada, 2017.

Watermarks, 2017



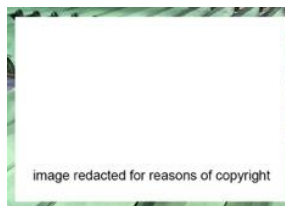
Watermarks, 2017, Film Stills.



Isabel Coixet, *La Mujer es Cosa de Hombres*, 2009. Documentary film still.

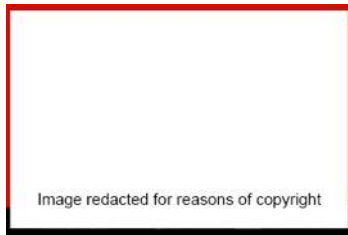


Bruce Nauman, *Corridor Series: Performance Corridor*, 1969 & *Corridor Installation* (Nick Wilder Installation). 1970.

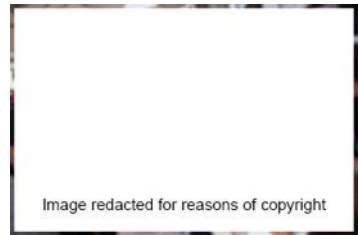


Sejla Kamerić. *Ab Uno Disce Omnes*, 2015. Film still

Missing Eve III, Collective Performance, 2019



Lorena Wolfer, *Inventario*, 2003.



Lorena Wolfer, *Estados de Excepción*, 2014.



Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve III* (2019).
Collective Performance during International
Women's Day March, 2019.



Carmen Alemán. *Missing Eve III* (2019).
Collective Performance during International
Women's Day March, 2019.

Feminists artists and Violence Against Women



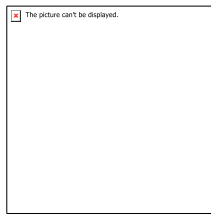
Combatividad y resistencia. Arte y feminismo en América Latina. Online Course



Subvertiendo invisibilities. Female Artists in Spain. Online Course



Violencias contra las mujeres. Online Course



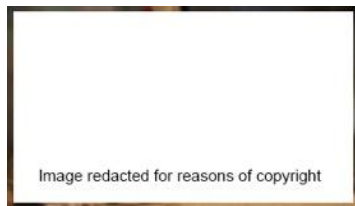
Loredana Longo. *Floor*, 2012. Tiles



Vanessa Beecroft, 2007. *Still Death*, Performance



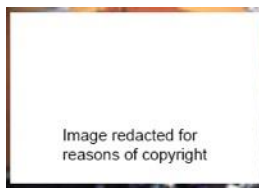
Iciar Bollain. *Te doy mis ojos*, 2003, Film



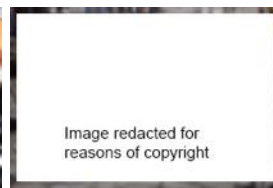
Cristina Lucas. *La Liberté Raisonné*, 2009, Video



Yoko Ono. (1965). *Cut*, Performance.



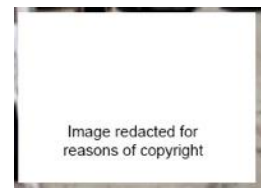
R. J. Galindo, 1999, *Lo voy a gritar al viento*. Performance



R.J. Galindo. *Hilo de tiempo*, 2012 Chiapas, México Performance



R. J. Galindo, *El cielo llora tanto que debería ser mujer*, 1999. Performance



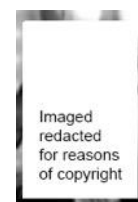
R. J. Galindo, *Quién puede borrar las huellas?* 2003. Performance



Doris Salcedo, *A flor de Piel*, 2014



Elina Chauvet. *Zapatos Rojos*, 2009



Mayra Martell. *Retrato Utópico de la identidad*, 2005

Artists in Residence and Exhibitions



© Carmen Alemán, *Feminist Laboratory*, Centre Pompadour, Picardie, France



©Carmen Alemán, *Untitled*, Psarades, Work in progress, 2016



The Kokkalis Project. 2017. Artists in Residence, Psarades, Greece.



Carmen Alemán 2015. *To My Greek Sisters*, The Canning Factory, Open Museum, Psarades, Greece



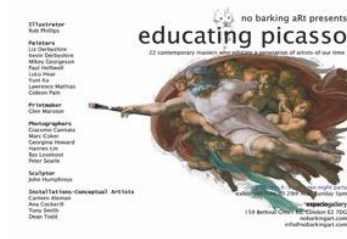
East London Artists. Doctorate Show,



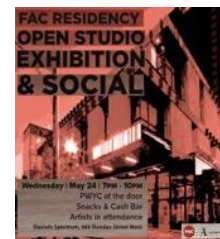
No Monkey Business, Q Park, Chinese Open,



Eves and Lilith. Espacio Gallery, 2016



Educating Picasso. Group Show. Espacio Gallery, 2015



FAC Residency, 2017, Exhibition at Daniel's Spectrum, Toronto, Canada



Feminist Art: Access, Activism and Representation. 2017. Feminist Conference. London,



There are no Small Aggressions. 2018. Feminist Conference, Gijón, Spain



Sheroes, A Social Exhibition. Ugly Duck, 2018

Viva Exhibition - June 2019

Missing Eve IV, 2019. Installation.

What Do We Do with The Numbers..? Installation

Watermarks. 2017. Short Film



Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve IV*, 2019. Installation.



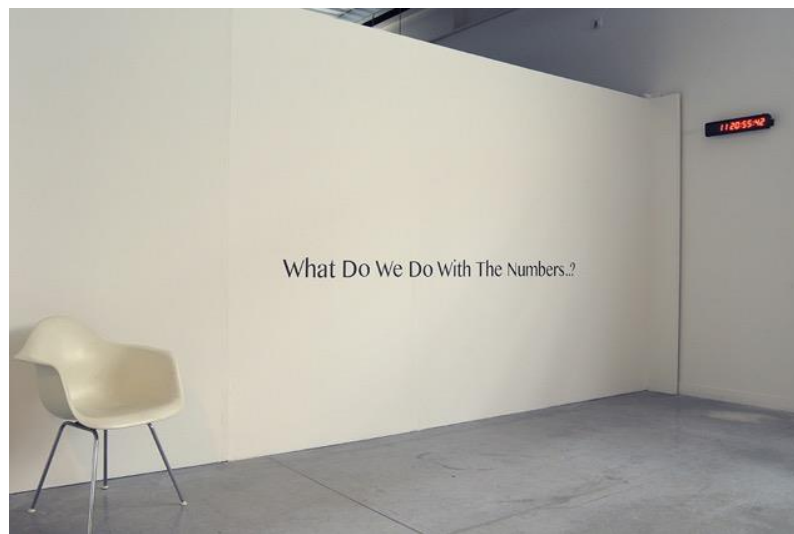
Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve IV*, 2019. Installation detail.



Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve IV*, 2019. Installation detail.



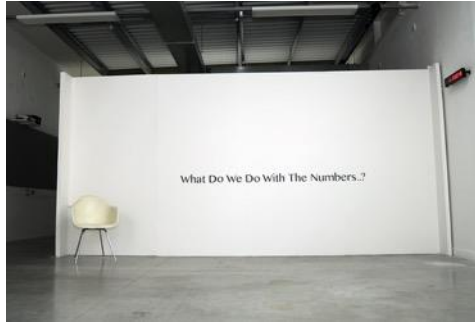
Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve IV*, 2019. Installation.



Carmen Alemán, *What Do We Do with The Numbers..?* Installation



Carmen Alemán. *What Do We Do with The Numbers..?* Installation



Carmen Alemán, *What Do We Do with The Numbers?*, 2019. Installation



Carmen Alemán, *Watermarks*. 2017. Short Film



Carmen Alemán, *Missing Eve IV*, 2019. Installation.

