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From Rio de la Plata to the Extreme West: Feminist Historiographies of Art and Artistic Activism in Argentina and Chile

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to employ a comparative approach that allows us to understand the approaches towards art historiography articulated in two countries of South America. Although women artists had organised themselves early on in societies, in women's exhibitions, and were one of the driving forces in art, when we look at how the art canon has been configured in these countries, we must move to the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st to find consistent work that dissociates itself from dominant patriarchal perspectives.

In this article, I propose to approach this process comparatively, looking at two periods: first, the eighties-nineties and the introduction of gender studies; and second, the exhibitions, research and books produced, above all, since 2000. In both periods, I shall also consider the artistic activism that generated historiography. In the two cases studied, Argentina and Chile, the tension between democracy and dictatorship will also be considered as a relevant factor that has interrupted a process that had begun in the 1970s and would be resumed with the return of democracy.¹

Keywords: Latin America, Argentina, Chile, dictatorship, post-dictatorship, art feminist historiography, comparativism

1 A partial and preliminary version of this text, focused on Argentine historiography of art, was published as "Historiography of Feminist Art in Argentina from the 1970 through Today", by AWARE: Archives of Women Artists. Archives and Exhibitions, 3 March 2024, https://awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/historiographies-de-lart-feministe-en-argentine-des-annees-1960-a-nos-jours/?from=search&fbclid=IwAR3dkoVjt3EdLAoKZOcRaEZ9Rdh9nevMT7PQ38oxYukNtEBuk_S0d_LOYDc [accessed 15 March 2024].

Introduction

The history of feminist art has been written from a predominantly Anglo-Saxon perspective. Such is the literature that dominates its history. However, outside the centres that have the power to disseminate their narratives in English, the lingua franca of contemporaneity, there have been many histories of feminist art in Latin America. Their history has been written in the last twenty years, giving rise to a historiography that accounts for the iconography that Latin American artists have produced since the second wave of feminism. Comparative histories make it possible to establish concepts, contexts, simultaneities, and differences. What is shared by the two national cases we will deal with in this article is the intersection between feminism as activism, as an intellectual movement, and a political context that conditioned its development based on the political history of the countries caused by dictatorship in Chile between 1973 and 1990 and in Argentina between 1976 and 1983.

What are the criteria from which we construct this comparative perspective? Comparativism has been developed in cultural studies and cultural history² and in art studies.³ The extent to which they erode the specific in pursuit of the generalisations that can arise from comparison has been intensely discussed. The flip side is the focus on national history that erases simultaneous processes, between which there may even be points of contact. Our perspective argues that any comparison that considers regional and even global processes is enriched when the conceptual framework considers contact zones,⁴ and simultaneities based on shared cultural perspectives.⁵ In our case, the contact zones were articulated by Nelly Richard's lectures and books, while the shared cultural perspective that allows us to understand simultaneous processes is to be found in the experiences of the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, in the international moment of theories on feminism and gender studies in the 1990s, and in the new emergence of feminist activism in the 21st century. Comparative studies of the art of Argentina and Chile have been carried out extensively in recent years⁶ a development to which this article aims to contribute.

2 A. Gorelik et al., "Dossier. El comparativismo como problema", *Prismas. Revista de historia intelectual* 2004 ok, No. 8, pp. 121–243.

3 M.A. García, "Toward a Reappraisal of Comparative Studies: The Case of South American Modernism", *Grey Room*, Fall 2020, 81, pp. 72–101.

4 M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London–New York, 1992.

5 A. Giunta, *Contra el canon. El arte contemporáneo en un mundo sin centro*, Buenos Aires, 2020; A. Giunta, "Simultaneous Avant-Gardes and Horizontal Art Histories", in: *Horizontal Art Histories and Beyond. Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, eds. A. Jakubowska, M. Radomska, New York, 2023, p. 7.

6 S. Dolinko, A.M. Risko, S. Vidal Valenzuela (eds.), *Intercambios transandinos. Historias del arte entre Argentina y Chile*, Santiago de Chile, 2022.

Argentina

Introduction

When the feminist art movements in Latin America are analysed comparatively, the chronologies show that Argentinian artists got involved from the late 1960s onwards. They joined a climate of political activism with which, in some cases, they took part in what was called “double militancy” – in politics and in feminism – while they differed in others. In the Latin American context, left-wing activism understood that the feminist revolution took place within the framework of a generalised revolution.⁷

In the feminist group UFA (Unión Feminista Argentina), created in 1969 and active until 1973, we find artists such as the photographer Alicia D’Amico. The feminist and activist work of filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg also belongs to this period.⁸ Her documentary films (*El mundo de la mujer*, 1972, and *Juguetes*, 1976) deconstructed the mandates of patriarchal society articulated by industry and education.⁹ In this sense, artistic feminism expressed itself in Argentina with a clear program from the beginning of the second wave at the end of the 1960s. However, since the nineteenth century, it is women’s exhibitions, organised by women, that have been a way of making their work visible.¹⁰ Contrary to what it may seem, women artists were very active during the first half of the twentieth century. They painted, wrote, exhibited, and organised exhibitions. However, they were not included in the various books in which history was written. In this sense, the history of these exhibitions is central to a feminist historiography of art.¹¹

7 A. Giunta, “Mujeres entre activismos. Una aproximación comparativa al feminismo artístico en Argentina y Colombia”, *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)*, 2014, No. 4, pp. 1–12.

8 M.L. Rosa, *Legados de libertad. El arte feminista en la efervescencia democrática*, Buenos Aires, 2014.

9 A. Giunta, *Feminismo y arte latinoamericano. Historias de artistas que emanciparon el cuerpo*, Buenos Aires, 2018. Extended English translation published as *The Political Body. Stories on Art, Feminism, and Emancipation in Latin America*, Berkeley, 2023.

10 L. Malosetti Costa, “Una historia de fantasmas. Artistas plásticas de la generación del ochenta en Buenos Aires”, in: *El canon accidental. Mujeres artistas en Argentina (1890–1950)*, ed. G. Gluzman, Buenos Aires, 2021. Originally presented at the VI Conference on Women’s History and I Ibero-American Congress of Women and Gender Studies, Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, University of Buenos Aires, 2–5 August 2000.

11 G. Gluzman, “Feminismos, educación, creatividad y libertad en la Buenos Aires posdictatorial. El caso de Lugar de mujer”, *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)*, 2021, No. 18, pp. 110–127, https://caiana.caiana.com.ar/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/caiana-18D_-Gluzman_pdf-CORREGIDOFinal.pdf [accessed 17 March 2024].

When art history took on the forms in which its normative narrative was constructed, a radical shift took place. This is when a feminist art history and historiography was proposed. What was left out? How were the matrices of taste constituted? To what extent do the themes of art history account for the patriarchal ways in which society is constructed?

In the history of Argentinean art, there was a clearly visible shift in 1990s. It was not on the fringes of the feminist movements that were reorganised with the return of democracy after 1983. Nor was it oblivious to the regional exchange in Latin America, from which an interdisciplinary area of gender studies was activated. The emergence of a history of art with a gender perspective was also linked to the agendas of the humanities (primarily history and literature), which established new topics that had an impact on art history studies. During these years, together with the women-only exhibitions curated by women, the established narratives of art history began to be dismantled, as did the perspectives from which the writing of art history, both in relation to the nineteenth century¹² and to the twentieth century,¹³ were approached. This historiographical change is linked to the third wave of feminism, centred on dismantling narratives and processes of identity construction, deconstructing them, and unravelling the plots of colonial biological essentialism.

A second period can be distinguished in the 21st century. Since 2008, a series of articles,¹⁴ books¹⁵ and exhibitions with research and catalogues¹⁶ have been published that document, analyse and reinterpret chapters of Argentine art. Exhibitions dedicated to the revision of women artists' work are increasing considerably. This historiographic period coincided with what is considered the fourth wave of feminism, characterised by the mass mobilisation that has occurred with the *niunamenos* movement since 2015 in Argentina – a movement in dialogue with Mexican activism against femicides in Ciudad Juárez, and also in Polish activism against the prohibition of legal abortion and calls for a women's strike. This period has seen extreme activism that paralleled the revisions of art history. Since the 2001 crisis in Argentina and in the context

12 L. Malosetti Costa, "El rapto de cautivas blancas: un aspecto erótico de la barbarie en la plástica rioplatense del siglo XIX", *Arte, historia e identidad en América: Visiones Comparativas*, eds. G. Curiel, R. González Mello, Zacatecas, 1994, pp. 297–314.

13 A. Giunta, "La mirada femenina y el discurso de la diferencia", *1er. Coloquio Latinoamericano de Estética y Crítica*, Buenos Aires, 3–5 November 1993, published in: R. M. Ravera, ed., *Los signos del arte*, Buenos Aires, 1999, pp. 11–15.

14 A. Giunta, "Género y feminismo. Perspectivas desde América Latina", *ExitBook*, 2009, No. 9, pp. 90–95.

15 Rosa, op. cit.; G. Gluzman, *Trazos invisibles. Mujeres artistas en Buenos Aires (1890–1923)*, Buenos Aires, 2016; Giunta, *Feminismo...*

16 C. Fajardo-Hill, A. Giunta, *Radical Women. Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, Munich, 2017 (Portuguese edition by Pinacoteca de São Paulo, Brazil, 2018); L. Francisco, ed., *Tácticas luminosas: artistas mujeres en torno a la Galería del Rojas*, Buenos Aires, 2019; G. Gluzman, *El canon accidental. Mujeres artistas en Argentina (1890–1950)*, Buenos Aires, 2021.

of feminist activism, artistic collectives have also emerged and multiplied. In what follows, we shall focus on these last two periods.

Historiography of the 1990s Reorganisation of feminist activism during the post-dictatorship period

The return to democracy brought new visibility to an activism that had been hidden or displaced during the dictatorship, along with the return of many cultural actors who had gone into exile. These included artists and writers like Ana Amado, Elsa Flores Ballesteros, Elda Cerrato or Marcia Schvartz, to name just a few.

It should also be noted that, in what is called *insilio* (the experience of those who stayed in the country during the dictatorship), feminist activity did not disappear. The word feminism was erased from the names of the groups and was replaced with the word woman or with the name of a prominent woman. These groups or associations included the Centro de Estudios Sociales de la Mujer (linked to the Frente de Izquierda Popular), the Asociación de Mujeres Argentinas (AMA), which later became the Asociación de Mujeres Alfonsina Storni (AMAS), and the Asociación Juana Manso in the city of Córdoba. During these years, the dynamics of study groups was also important. While militancy was prevented by the repressive system, they sought channels for keeping up with the trends and training.

With the defeat in the Falklands War and the end of dictatorship, new groups were founded, such as the Organización Feminista Argentina (OFA), Libera, Derechos Iguales para la Mujer Argentina (DIMA), Asociación de Trabajo y Estudio de la Mujer-25 de noviembre (ATEM) and Reunión de Mujeres. 1980 saw the first public demand for shared parental authority, which was legalised in 1985 – until then it had only belonged to the father. The central point of the feminist agenda in the post-dictatorship period was the struggle for the legalisation of abortion. This was already present in UFA in 1973, but democracy helped expand it.¹⁷ On the march of 8 March 1984, flyers were distributed for the legalisation of abortion and four years later, the commission for the right to abortion was formed. In 1986, National Women's Meetings began, which allowed the incorporation of popular sectors.¹⁸ In 1999, the Coordinating Committee for the Right to Abortion was formed. Starting with the white scarves of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the

17 M. Tarducci, "Escenas claves de la lucha por el derecho al aborto en Argentina", *Salud Colectiva*, 2018, 14, No. 3, http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1851-82652018000300425 [accessed 15 March 2024].

18 G. Di Marco, "Los movimientos de mujeres en la Argentina y la emergencia del pueblo feminista", *Aljaba*, 2010, 14, http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1669-57042010000100003 [accessed 17 March 2024].

campaign for the legalisation of abortion adopted the green scarf (symbolically connected with nature and life), which became a powerful visual sign from 2015 onwards.

Reorganisation of the feminist culture

The first group linking women with culture was *Lugar de Mujer*, created in 1983 on the foundation of a previous conference on women's creativity.¹⁹ In addition to the photographer Alicia D'Amico (who delivered a workshop on how to work on one's own image in relation to the construction of an identity), women painters, tapestry artists and experimental filmmakers (such as Narcisca Hirsch) exhibited or delivered workshops at *Lugar de Mujer*. In 1984, 8 March was celebrated with exhibitions by women artists organised by the Museo de Arte Moderno and the Museo Sívori in Buenos Aires. The historic march in which women celebrated the return of democracy was photographed by Alicia D'Amico, who also produced the book *Podría ser yo*, which offers a portrait of women's work.²⁰

In the artistic field, exhibitions of women artists intensified from the 1980s onwards. In 1984, the Museum of Modern Art organised the exhibition *La mujer en el arte*. In 1986 and 1988, Monique Altschul organised the exhibitions *Mitominas I* and *II* held at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, and in 1986 and 1988 she delivered two more with contemporary artists reviewing the myths that condition female representations.²¹ *La mujer en la plástica Argentina I*, an exhibition organised by the critic Rosa Faccaro (linked to *Lugar de mujer*), at the Centro Cultural Las Malvinas in 1988, was probably the first exhibition with historiographical research and practices in Argentina.²² These exhibitions show that in the 1980s, feminism was expressed in art with exhibitions that sought to give visibility to artists erased from the dominant narratives. Unfortunately, none of these exhibitions had catalogues.

Gender Perspectives and Art History

The return of democracy opened up a new field of academic research. Newly graduated female art historians entered the research grant system of the University of Buenos Aires and CONICET (National Research Council). This opened the door for research that developed a focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the 1990s, gender studies entered the academic field. Gender, rather than feminism, was the key word. Studies on the women captives of the indigenous

19 Gluzman, "Feminismos, educación y creatividad...".

20 Ibid.

21 Rosa, op. cit.

22 Gluzman, "Feminismos, educación y creatividad...".

malones in the 19th century²³ and on the literature that narrated them (the poem *La cautiva* by Esteban Echeverría, 1837, Tabaré, by Zorrilla de San Martín, 1888) were central. The study of representations of captive women implied a deconstructive perspective of art history.²⁴ This was not about revising the history of women artists. It was about understanding to what extent the place of women had been constructed from representations of culture made predominantly by men, concerning to what extent the history of civilization against barbarism had been shaped by literature and representations of white women abducted by Indians.

In addition to studies of history and literature, Griselda Pollock's work in art history was also important.²⁵ For Pollock, it is not just a matter of constructing a counter-narrative that rescues the place of women artists, but of considering to what extent the matrixes of patriarchy, as an ideology of representation, have shaped the histories of art and the construction of the notion of gender as difference. It is not just a matter of making a history of women's art, but of understanding the foundations of the narratives of art history.

Simultaneously, another line of thought was articulated from the trans-cordilleran exchange between Chile and Argentina. The Chilean theorist Nelly Richard is fundamental here. We shall analyse the exhibitions she curated and her books in the next section. Now we want to highlight that the effect that her lectures and publications had in Argentina was central. This includes her book *Femenino/Masculino*, whose impact is visible in the study of contemporary Argentinean art from a gender perspective.²⁶ The study of the work of Alicia Herrero and Graciela Sacco did not seek to rescue them as female artists, from a biological perspective, but to analyse the construction of female subjectivities in their work.²⁷ It sought to identify and analyse the effects of gender and the construction of a gaze. The reading of Craig Owens,²⁸ translated into Spanish in 1985,²⁹ was important for the understanding of these perspectives, as well as the translations of Jean Scott.³⁰

23 C. Iglesia, J. Schwartzman, *Cautivas y Misioneros. Mitos blancos de la conquista*, Buenos Aires, 1987; C. Iglesia, "La mujer cautiva: cuerpo, mito y frontera", in: *Historia de las mujeres en Occidente*. Tomo 3. *Del Renacimiento a la Edad Moderna*, eds. G. Duby, M. Perrot, Madrid, 1992.

24 Malosetti Costa, "El rapto ...", pp. 297–314.

25 G. Pollock, *Vision & Difference. Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London, 1988.

26 N. Richard, *Masculino / Femenino: prácticas de la diferencia y cultura democrática*, Santiago de Chile, 1993 (translated by Duke University Press, 2004)

27 Giunta, "La mirada femenina..."; A. Giunta, "Graciela Sacco: intervenciones del cuerpo/ impresiones luminosas", in: *Escrituras solares. La heliografía en el campo artístico*, ed. G. Sacco, Rosario, 1994, pp. 58–89.

28 C. Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", in: *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. H. Foster, Seattle, 1983, pp. 57–83.

29 H. Foster, ed., *La posmodernidad*, Barcelona, 1985.

30 J. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, 1988, 5, No. 91, pp. 1053–1075, doi:10.2307/1864376. JSTOR 1864376.

It is important to highlight that social sciences and gender studies were echoed in the formation of the Gender Studies Research Institute of the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. The nucleus was formed in 1992 as the Interdisciplinary Area of Women's Studies (AIEM), with the participation of the Arts, Anthropology, Education, Philosophy, History, Classical Languages and Literature departments.

When it comes to exhibitions, they also showed a conceptual shift that involved gender perspectives. In 1994, three artists (Cristina Schiavi, Alicia Herrero and Ana López) produced a radical exhibition *Violaciones domésticas* (Domestic Violations) at the Espacio Giesso. In their work, they deconstructed gender in the domestic environment. Furthermore, in 1995 and 1996, curator Adriana Lauría organised two editions of the exhibition *Juego de Damas* (Game of Ladies, Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes Juan B. Castagnino, the Espacio Nave of the Teatro Auditorium in Mar del Plata and the CCR) and in 1997, Elena Oliveras curated *Tajos bajos* (Low Tacos, Centro Cultural Borges). The aim was to exhibit works by women artists while at the same time questioning heteronormative sexuality.

Art, Feminism, and Postcrisis

The economic crisis that led to the resignation of the nation's president Fernando de la Rúa in 2001, the timing of which was dominated by the role of the IMF, provoked one of the most intense social upheavals in Argentina's history. The streets were flooded with demonstrations expressing distrust of politics. Its impact on art was expressed by the intensification of activism. This was a moment in which the artist's individual work was diluted in the collective.³¹

Feminist groups linked to social protest, activism, and feminism emerged. These groups serve as evidence to growing activism: *Mujeres Públicas* (Public Women), 2003; *Belleza y Felicidad Fiorito* (Beauty and Happiness Fiorito), 2003; *Serigrafistas Queer* (Queer Serigraphists), 2007; *Desesperadas por el ritmo* (Desperate for rhythm), 2014. These collectives took up the struggle for the legalisation of abortion, for the right to creativity for poor and excluded women, for forms of representation of queer aesthetics, for the equal right to representation of women in the art world.

The feminist movement has had a radical orientation in Latin America since 2015. On 3 June 2015, a massive demonstration against femicides in Argentina was organised under the name of *Ni una menos* (Not One Less), words taken from a poem by Susana Chávez in protest against the femicides of Guanajuato, Mexico. The author of the poem was assassinated in 2011. Demonstrations are repeated each year on that date and on 8 March. Since 2015, the word feminism has acquired a new legitimacy. It has coexisted with gender and even displaced it.

31 A. Giunta, *Poscrisis. Arte argentino después del 2001*, Buenos Aires, 2009.

Along with this intensification of feminist demonstrations, artistic collectives also multiplied: *Cromoactivismo* (Chromo-activism), 2016; *Nosotras Proponemos* (We Propose), 2017; or *La Lola Mora*, 2018. These collectives emphasise the political meaning of colour, the struggle for the rights of artists understood as workers, for the federalization of art feminism and for the recognition of women artists throughout the country and not only in its capital city, Buenos Aires.

From the historiographical point of view, a generation of art historians who took up feminist approaches in their theses emerged. A generation that became visible when their dissertations, focused on the analysis of the work of women artists in Argentina, were published.³² On top of that, the exhibition *Radical Women. Latin American Art, 1960-1985* enhanced the visibility of more than a hundred artists from Latin America, many of them little-known.³³ Research for the exhibition began in 2010 and was initially objected to by both male and female curators for focusing only on female artists. The context of feminist activism, visible in the United States with the #the metoo movement, and the opposition to Donald Trump's misogyny, entirely changed the context of reception of this exhibition, from the expected negative reception into a highly positive one. This was visible in its impact on the Latin American and Argentinean scene, together with the effect of activism that directly affected the representation of women artists in awards, institutions, and galleries in Argentina.

Since 2018, the National Salon has introduced a clause of equal representation between women and men, both in the admission process and in the composition of the jury and the awarding of prizes. This change in the regulations was requested and activated by the feminist artistic group *Nosotras Proponemos*.³⁴ In 2021, under the directorship of Feda Baeza (transfeminist curator and director of Salas Nacionales de Exhibición), the Salon's regulations introduced percentages for trans and non-heteronormative identities. In the same year, an acquisition prize was created for female, binary and trans artists, to incorporate their works into the collections of national museums. Although women do not represent more than 20% at best in these museums, at least public policies have been developed to ensure that inequality is not reproduced.

The prominence of feminism, its presence in the streets, in public discourse, and in cultural life (artistic, editorial) has made it a visible target for the growth of the extreme right. The attack on feminism is a central point of their discursive strategies in the run-up to the elections held in Argentina in November 2023. Legal, free and safe abortion, legalised in December 2020,

32 Rosa, op. cit., and Gluzman, *Trazos invisibles*....

33 Fajardo-Hill, Giunta, op. cit.

34 S. Rottenberg, "Women Art Workers in Argentina Demand Gender Equality, and Museums Start to Listen", *Hyperallergic*, 3 September 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/431714/nosotras-proponemos-buenos-aires-international-womens-day/> [accessed 17 March 2024].

is one of the aims of these groups. Groups that arose from digital networks and from discourses of hate in which feminism is a focal point, have also centered on feminist artists and their works of art. The power of images has not lost its relevance in the new order being debated in the country.

Chile

Introduction

The popular mobilisation that led to the democratic socialist government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973) had an effect of “overflowing joy” in cultural production.³⁵ We can highlight, reflecting on those years, the testimony of the artist Cecilia Vicuña, when she declared that “There was a kind of erotic relationship of feeling the revolution and the passion for justice as something powerful, not a duty but a delight”.³⁶

In 1971 she travelled to London and there she realised to what extent, for the intelligentsia, Chile was the hope of the planet, proposing a revolution without violence and without persecution of the opposition. The time of activity of Popular Unity was a period of multiple cultural forms, of experimentation, risk and institutional audacity. The legacy of those years can be seen in the urban mural movement of the Ramona Parra Brigades, or in the Solidarity Museum, conceived as world artists’ support for the government of Salvador Allende. The inauguration of the UNCTAD building (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, created in 1964) promoted interaction between the visual arts. The democratisation of books and culture was also sought through the massive and inexpensive editions of the Editorial Nacional Quimantú (1971–1973).

This scenario came to an end with the coup d’état that included the death of Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973. During these years, the struggle of women was inserted in the complete transformation of society and also in the specific women’s agenda. Let us remember that in 1972 the National Women’s Secretariat was created. But women’s organisations opposed to the Popular Unity government (such as Poder Femenino / Feminine Power) were also actively demonstrating with “cacerolazos” and were later praised by the Pinochet dictatorship. During the years of the dictatorship (and even after, until 2016), Pinochet’s wife Lucía Hiriart presided

35 See A. Dorfmann, interviewed by M. Vicuña, Center for the Humanities, Santiago de Chile, Diego Portales University, 2020, <https://www.centroparalashumanidadesudp.cl/ariel-dorfman-50-anos-cultura-en-la-unidad/> [accessed 17 March 2024].

36 See C. Vicuña, interviewed by C. Yáñez, Center for the Humanities, Santiago de Chile, Diego Portales University, 2020, <https://www.centroparalashumanidadesudp.cl/cecilia-vicun%cc%83a-50-anos-cultura-en-la-unidad-popular/> [accessed 17 March 2024].

over CEMA Chile (CEntro de MAdres/Center of Mothers), dedicated to the welfare of poor women.

The state violence of the dictatorship (1973-1989), the disappeared, the dead and the imprisoned, provoked the organisation of women who resisted the dictatorship. Slowly, a cultural scene was organised that activated opposition strategies. The second wave of feminism in Chile was represented by organisations opposed to violence against women, which were linked to human rights organisations. One of the visual productions that expressed visual forms of resistance was articulated through the making of arpilleras, within the framework of the support of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad sponsored by the Catholic Church. These were sewn tapestries that visually narrated the social conditions during the dictatorship. The workshops that organised this activity sought to offer economic aid and emotional support for women with family members who were imprisoned, disappeared or were in exile.³⁷

In 1975, the exhibition *La mujer en el arte* (Women in Art) promoted by the International Women's Year, whose international conference was held in Mexico City, was held at the Matta Hall of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile. The exhibition was co-organized by the National Women's Secretariat and the MNBA. Contemporary reviews reveal the censorship implicit in the exclusion of artists active in those years.³⁸

Feminism and gender perspectives since the 1980s and 1990s

In 1983, with the formation of MEMCH'83 (Movimiento Pro Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena),³⁹ and with the historical, political and discursive intervention represented by the activism of Julieta Kirkwood and the publication

37 M. Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope, Tears of Love; the Arpillera Movement in Chile 1974-1994*, University of New Mexico Press, 1996; J. Bryan-Wilson, *Fray. Art + Textile Politics*, Chicago, 2017.

38 On 29 June 2023, the exhibition *Women in Art 1975* opened at the MNBA in Santiago, Chile, curated by Gloria Cortés Aliaga (MNBA) and art historians Nicole González Herrera and Mariairis Flores Leiva, who critically reviewed the exhibition. It compared the previous research and the selection made by the museum's research team with the exhibition that finally took place. The differences were interpreted from the perspective of censorship that selected and excluded artists. This exhibition was curated by sculptor Lily Garafulic, together with Rosa Abarca (museum researcher), who worked hard on the show, along with a team consisting of Mercedes Gaju (coordinator of the National Women's Secretariat), Ángela Riesco (research assistant), Paz Romero (assistant coordinator) and Ernesto Muñoz (secretary coordinator). The exhibition included the works that were excluded in 1975 and the image of the young Mónica Briones, a painter and sculptor murdered during the dictatorship, the first documented case of a lesbophobic hate crime.

39 MEMCH'83 has its origin in the historical MEMCH that was born in 1935 and that won the right for women to vote, and also the right to abortion for therapeutic purposes and as a public health measure for women workers. This right was repealed in 1989, when the dictatorship, before stepping down, penalised it again.

of her book *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos* (1985),⁴⁰ a feminist history of Chile was introduced by the academy and in dialogue with Latin American networks. Kirkwood belonged to the *Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer* (1979-1983), an association made up of 14 professional women. This group later gave rise to *Casa de la Mujer La Morada* and, later, to *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* (CEM).

Nelly Richard, a French-educated critic who settled in Chile in the early 1970s, is linked to these intellectual groups and acknowledges the influence of Kirkwood's book. She recognizes the tension in them between those who, like her, focused action on poetics and aesthetics that explored art or writing, and the struggle of feminism understood as a social movement.⁴¹ Richard was central to the articulation of culture and gender perspectives. She participated in the organisation of two important events: Congress of Latin American Women's Literature held in Santiago in 1987 and the exhibition *Women, Art and Periphery* at The Floating Curatorial Gallery at Women in Focus, in Vancouver, of which she was co-curator with artist Lotty Rosenberg and writer Diamela Eltit. Richard's text in the catalogue analysed the work of women painters and photographers as perceptions of tunnel vision, as off-centred and hollowed of meaning. With her curatorial intervention, she reinforced the political place of symbolic practices. Early on, she dismantled essentializing perspectives to focus on discursive power articulations that analyse the relationship between the feminine and the masculine.

Richard introduced the gender perspective in the analysis of works of art. Her book *Feminine/Masculine. Prácticas de la diferencia y cultura democrática* (1993) had, as I have already pointed out, an immediate echo in the writing on contemporary art from a gender perspective in Argentina. In this book, Richard addressed the need for a tactical feminism, capable of activating the critical potential of both the feminism of equality (which proposes that we advance in the political and social struggle to suppress inequalities) and that of difference. She proposed that separation that isolates women's culture as a separate culture which re-essentializes the absolute feminine by confirming polar identities be avoided. Richard called for an intervention that would employ strategic tactics that avoid unilateral positions to activate a complex perspective. In her writing on art, culture and feminism, she does not hesitate to use the term post-feminism, associated with the 1990s feminism.

Nelly Richard's writing and her lectures have made it possible to establish a transcordilleran contact zone. Since the end of the 1980s, she has been participating in art criticism conferences organised by the Argentine Association and the International Association of Art Criticism in Buenos Aires – conferences held at the CAyC, Center for Art and Communication created and

40 J. Kirkwood, *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos*, Santiago de Chile, 1982.

41 N. Richard, *Crítica y política* (interviews made by A. Castillo and M. Valderrama), Santiago de Chile, 2013, p. 100.

directed by Jorge Glusberg, a central figure also in the articulation of contact zones between Latin America and Eastern Europe. Her action was also key in the organisation of the 1987 congress of women writers (promoted by Carmen Berenguer and with the collaboration of writer Diamela Eltit and poet Ida Vitale, to name a few). The Argentine intellectuals Josefina Ludmer and Beatriz Sarlo, who had experienced the dictatorship in Argentina and the democratic transition that began with the government of Raúl Alfonsín in 1983, participated in the congress. They were active parallel to Chilean women writers who developed their activity in the repressive context. The *Revista de Crítica Cultural* (Cultural Critic Journal) that Richard founded and directed between 1990 and 2008 created an intellectual network that addressed issues of visual arts, literary criticism, cultural criticism, feminism, gender studies, philosophy, aesthetics, Marxism, post-Marxism, postmodernism, democratic transition, post-dictatorship, and memory.⁴²

Histories of feminist art in the 21st century and artistic activism

Studies on female artists in Chile have a specific bibliography, which has also developed in the curatorial field, from the biography of sculptor Rebeca Matte⁴³, to the histories of women artists in Chile in the first half of the 20th century⁴⁴, to the review of the work of Catalina Parra⁴⁵ and Luz Donoso,⁴⁶ to the exhibitions at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, Chile, curated by Gloria Cortés Aliaga (*(en)clave masculino*, 2016; *Desacatos. Feminine artistic practices. 1835-1938. MNBA Collection*, 2017; *Women in Art 1975*, 2023), to the author of the book *Modernas. Stories of women in Chilean art, 1900-1950* (2013). The exhibitions also include *Handle With Care* at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo-Quinta Normal that gathers contemporary expressions such as video, performance, and photography in 2007. This task of revision and rescue has a recent expression in the book *Women in the Visual Arts in Chile 2010-2020*, a 2021 initiative of the Ministry of Culture.

In Chile, the development of a feminist historiography and curatorship developed together with activism expressed in works that challenged the patriarchal power of the State, such as the series that Lotty Rosenfeld began

42 This journal is crucial for the analysis of Latin American post-dictatorship culture. It can be consulted at <https://americalee.cedinci.org/portfolio-items/revista-de-critica-cultural/> [accessed 17 March 2024].

43 I. Cruz de Amenábar, *Manos de mujer. Rebeca Matte y su época (1875-1929)*, Santiago, 2008.

44 G. Cortés Aliaga, *Modernas. Historias de mujeres en el arte chileno, 1900-1950*, Santiago, 2013.

45 P. Varas, *Catalina Parra. El fantasma político del arte*, Santiago de Chile, 2011.

46 P. Varas, *Luz Donoso. El Arte y la Acción en el Presente*, Santiago de Chile, 2019.

in 1979 with her urban intervention *A mile of crosses on the pavement* on Santiago de Chile's Manquehue Avenue, in which she crossed the lines of the pavement with a ribbon of the same width that configured crosses or + signs. These signs played a leading role in the final process of the dictatorship and were part of the No+ campaign (No more dictatorship, No more censorship, etc.). Chile also had gender activism developed from the late 1980s onwards, even during the dictatorship, by *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* (The Mares of the Apocalypse), a collective integrated by Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas. The performance in which they entered naked, on a horse, to re-found the University of Chile (1988) during the years of the Pinochet dictatorship is emblematic. They checked the masculinity of heroes on horseback. A topic that we will find again in contemporary feminist activism in Chile.

In a simultaneous process comparable to what is happening in Argentina, activist artistic feminism has been intense in Chile in the 21st century. In the historiographic field, it is also represented by the successive *Editaton* conferences held at the National Museum of Fine Arts, to incorporate biographies of women artists to Wikipedia. In the artistic field, there are numerous collectives that have achieved international impact: for example, *La Yeguada* collective, created by the artist Cheril Linett in 2017, in connection with the legacy of the Yeguas del Apocalipsis. In their urban performances, in which they invite both women and sexual dissidents to participate, they use nudity and a prosthetic ponytail as a symbolic disguise to confront the police forces and thus raise awareness of the relationship between femicides and punishment. In 2019, with the urban rebellion in Chile (Social Outbreak), they performed to denounce the police rapes during urban repression.⁴⁷

In 2019, in the context of the Social Outbreak of October, the group *LAS-TESIS* was formed in Valparaíso (Martin and Shaw, 2021).⁴⁸ Their best-known performance is "A rapist on your way" which has been performed in 52 countries to date. (IMAGE 4) They confront the organisation of justice, the State, and the President of Chile. The lyrics (direct, powerful, and adaptable beyond Chile) have been understood and shared in various cities around the world.⁴⁹

47 J.C. Vazquez, L. Vidal Yevenes, "Arte, Cuerpo y Denuncia, el uso del cuerpo como soporte crítico en el espacio público, una mirada desde las performances de la colectiva *La Yeguada Latinoamericana*," *Index, revista de arte contemporáneo*, 2019, No. 8, Dossier dedicated to Art and Activisms in Latin America, pp 152–159.

48 D. Martin, D. Shaw, "Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience: LAS-TESIS and the Phenomenon of *Un violador en tu camino*," *Bulletin of Latin American Research. Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies*, November 2021, 40, No. 5, pp. 712–729, <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13215> [accessed 10 May 2024].

49 The text reads:

The patriarchy is a judge, who judges us to be born,
and our punishment is the violence that you don't see.
It is femicide. Immunity for my killer.
It is disappearance. It is a violation.

Conclusions

Artistic feminism has been articulated in Argentina since the 1970's through intellectual groups that have raised the agenda of second wave feminism. In Chile, the actions were represented by the formation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs during the government of Salvador Allende. Writing about women artists began in both countries in the 1980s. In Chile, it developed from Nelly Richard's critical writing. The exhibition held in Chile in 1975 on the occasion of the International Year of the Woman shows the framework of the discussion centred on the role of women as "spiritual rock of the Homeland", linked to the tasks of caring for the house and the family. The exhibition did not account for the agenda of the struggle for women's emancipation in second-wave feminism.

Theoretical instruments involving gender perspectives were introduced in the 1980s and 1990s in both these countries. In the context of the dictatorship, this is produced from opaque writing, which seeks to erode the discursive transparency identifiable by the censor. In Argentina, it is found in the framework of the return of democracy, linking intellectuals and artists returning from exile with those who had been inside the country during the dictatorship (insile). The reorganisation, now based on gender agendas, had an effect on academic discourse and on the formation of research centres at universities. Both in Chile and in Argentina singular and group histories on women artists and dissidence have multiplied in the 21st century. Books, exhibitions, and catalogues have enabled the emergence of documents, critical reviews, and rescues of works and bodies of works that had been marginalised in the histories of art written in each country. At the same time, exhibitions such as *Radical Women. Latin America, 1960-1885*, and the accompanying catalogue, have set the stage for comparative studies. Activism increased starting in 2015, from the shared cultural horizon that activated feminism in Latin America with the massive march held in Argentina in 2015 with the slogan *Ni una menos* (Not one less). Women artists have organised themselves in both countries into collectives and networks of collectives.

Was it the democracy-dictatorship relationship that regulated the debate on the social place of women, on their emancipation and on art made by women and dissidents? In principle, the comparison of these cases from the proposed moments has allowed us to believe that the debate has had comparable moments in both countries. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that these discourses were articulated as an additional form of resistance to the dictatorship in Chile, while in Argentina they were articulated as an additional strategy of democratic reorganisation. Another difference is quite crucial. While

And it wasn't her fault or where she was or how she dressed.

The rapist was you. The rapist is you.

The judges. The President.

Translated by A. Giunta

in Chile, as in much of Latin America, abortion is only legal under particular circumstances,⁵⁰ proof of its colonial legacy and the power of the Catholic religion in this continent, in Argentina it was legalised on 30 December 2020.⁵¹ Added to these differences is the early creation of the Secretary of Women in Chile during the government of Salvador Allende – under the auspices of the Civil Organizations Division of the General Secretariat of Government, while in Argentina the first Sub Secretary for Women was appointed in 1987, as a continuation of the National Direction for Women and the Family created in 1983, whose existence was symbolic, since its structure was never approved. In 2019 the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity was created and then abolished in December 2023 by the elected extreme right president Javier Milei.

Beyond the framework provided by dictatorships and democracies, we note the articulation of feminism and gender studies that have been organised in internal history, beyond the political circumstances. This allows us to affirm that feminism and gender studies have been, between the 1970s and now, key terms that have allowed us to trace a shared cultural perspective that serves as a basis for the proposed comparison. The study of other cases will allow us to discuss in greater depth the moments highlighted in this article.

We find ourselves in a complex situation. On the one hand, there is an intense process of rewriting art histories in both countries: Argentina and Chile. Research linked to exhibitions and books published in the last two decades has made it possible to make the work of women artists visible and to study it. On the other hand, feminism is the object of attacks expressed on the Internet, with harassment and hate campaigns against women and feminism. Gender and feminism are keywords in the discourses of the alternative right.⁵² For the moment, the solid historiographic and curatorial articulation allows us to think that this context will not affect the development of a complex art history that accounts for the art made by women artists since the 19th century in Latin America.

50 In Chile, Law No. 21030 (promulgated in September 2017) decriminalises voluntary interruption of pregnancy on three grounds: 1. Danger to the woman's life; 2. Lethal foetal inviability; 3. Pregnancy due to rape.

51 In Argentina, Law No. 27610 (promulgated in December 2020) establishes access to Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE), and the obligation to provide comprehensive and free coverage. The law establishes that women and people with other gender identities with the capacity to conceive have the right to: a) decide to terminate the pregnancy in accordance with the provisions of the law; b) seek and access care for the termination of pregnancy in the health system services, in accordance with the provisions of the law; c) seek and receive post-abortion care in the health system services, without prejudice to the fact that the decision to abort had been contrary to the legally enabled cases in accordance with the law; d) prevent unintentional pregnancies through access to information, comprehensive sexual education and effective contraceptive methods.

52 P. Stefanoni, *¿La rebeldía se volvió de derecha?: Cómo el antiprogresismo y la anticorrección política están construyendo un nuevo sentido común (y por qué la izquierda debería tomarlos en serio)*, Buenos Aires, 2021.

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