

MIRAGE - The social function of artistic practice as a tool for empowerment. Creative net art projects with women in shelters.

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ABSTRACT

In this article we present and discuss the ongoing net art project entitled "MIRAGE - The social function of artistic practice as a tool for empowerment. Creative net art projects with Women in Shelters". The main objective of this research project is to analyse if the artistic practice of net art can have the function of awareness and expression of a certain human and social condition by an individual or group, to become a tool for empowerment and self-determination, namely in the specific situation of women victims of domestic violence. This research will be done through a case study, with an empirical base, which is the Shelter Houses for Women victims of domestic violence.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → Media arts; computing; Sociology.

KEYWORDS

Net art, participatory art, social museology, domestic violence, herstories, empowerment

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1 INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence on women is an installed reality in Portugal and according to the Observatory of Murdered Women of the UMAR - União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta, in 2020, a total of 16 feminicides in intimate and family relationships were registered in Portugal [1]. Between 19 March 2020 and 14 June of 2021, during the period of the state of emergency and state of calamity of the Covid-19 pandemic, 329 women and 220 of their children, minors or adults with disabilities, were received in Shelters of the National

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Network of Support for Victims of Domestic Violence (Casas de Abrigo da RNAVVD-Rede Nacional de Apoio às Vítimas de Violência Doméstica), and 370 women were considered autonomous [2].

Considering that we live in a historical era dominated by audiovisual media and the Internet, we believe that there must be room for a multimedia and transmedia art committed to social and citizenship issues, in articulation with the community, and used as a tool for awareness, maturation and individual and social change. This should be an art that fosters new ideas, raises critical thinking and promotes new approaches and actions, always inciting self-awareness and self-reflection.

There are numerous and varied projects in contemporary art that use art as a central tool in social development programmes among disadvantaged and excluded populations, in environmental, educational and vocational training plans, in undertakings that aim to train people in need and provide them with access to full and participatory citizenship, while promoting social inclusion and equity, as well as art in the context of activism that deals with issues of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, HIV-AIDS, among others. According to Suzanne Lacy: "Most important to me are the numerous invisible communities whose courage, presence and persistence have inspired my work over the years, those who suffer forms of discrimination, violence and injustice" [3].

Remedios Zafra [4] points out that a constant exercise of political alertness is essential, but also the visibilizing acuity of creative minds to bring into play the more subtle and hidden effects of forms of domination that are installed in the social order, effects materialized through strategies of invisibilization (normalization of symbolic violence) as well as strategies of blindness (seeing with the eyes of another). Politics and creativity are essential because violence does not rest, it constantly reviews its pillars and collects the gains of its efficacy in the inscription of power on sexualised bodies and, now also, in the reiteration of its codes in the new agents that represent us (what we are) in a networked world. These creative and political exercises warn that, in a post-corporeal context, forms of sexual domination continue to be hidden and that strategies of blindness continue to be normalised in relation to the very act of symbolic and real violence against women. The repetition, and consequently the normalisation of this violence against women on the Internet, means that the effort of net artists and feminist activists should not only be to adopt a reflexive and analytical look at these encrypted and invisible discourses present online, but also to overcome their own blindness, since we all incorporate patriarchal structures and ways of seeing into our perceptual structure, in an unconscious way. This is a blindness caused by the systematic

looking through the eyes of the other, that is, of the patriarchal discourse that is preponderant on the web [4].

The MIRAGE project aims to analyse the following central question:

– Can the artistic practice of net art assume a social function and work as a tool to contribute to the empowerment, self-esteem and identity of Women in Shelter Houses?

Around this central question arise the following secondary questions:

– Throughout the training period will the behaviour of women from the Shelter Houses become evident, and progressively reflect the assimilation and understanding of technological and artistic content that empowers them?

– Will it be possible through net art to contribute to fight domestic violence against women, towards a society which is more egalitarian, and therefore more sustainable, promoting the change of paradigms of Women in Shelters in relation to gender?

– In what ways has net art been evidencing, from the last decade of the 20th century to the present day, social concerns, particularly in relation to gender equality?

It is important to stress that we do not argue that artistic practice is the solution to such a complex problem as domestic violence, but we advocate, like community artist and researcher François Matarasso, that participatory art constitutes a safe territory to address it [5]. The capacity of art to contribute to personal development and to empower vulnerable and marginalised people is today being widely directed towards supporting individual and community growth as well as promoting social inclusion.

The artistic practice of this project will be participatory focusing mainly on the creative processes and is heir to artists such as Joseph Beuys and Mierle Laderman Ukeles who in the 1970s connected art to new dimensions and meanings such as ecological, social, economic, political and pedagogical contexts. We argue, like the art thinker and essayist Bernardo Pinto de Almeida that: “The art that demands our time will have to be, and even for it to be remembered in the future as worthy of signifying it, capable not only of representing us – in case there is a future in which one wishes to understand how this time was represented, expressed and felt –, but also of responding to us collectively” [6].

Equally, we highlight the importance in nowadays societies of the internet for women as it is advocated by the United Nations Women’s Organisation: “Whether through websites, social media, instant messaging or email, it has opened avenues for online activism, community building, career and learning opportunities, greater awareness and engagement around women’s rights issues, and enabled women to create businesses, political campaigns and more” [7].

Likewise, Gender Equality is the Goal 5 of the 17 Global Goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for the United Nations Organisation Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDGF). Empowering women and promoting gender equality has repercussions in all areas of development such as health, economy, education, among others, and is therefore crucial for a more equitable and sustainable future for all [8].

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology will be that of participatory art, collaborative, inclusive, and of active and empathetic listening towards people, materialized through the organization of a co-creative laboratory, in which the Shelter House Women participants will develop artistic projects based on their life stories of self-determination and overcoming. The process will be accompanied by the creation and implementation of recording (video and photography) and monitoring (questionnaires and short interviews) instruments that will be used throughout the research project.

The laboratory process, developed over two years, will be organized as follows:

- i. Mapping of the participants in the project by their identification and selection, through empathic interviews and listening of the testimonies of their life stories (48 sessions), which will take place in the period before the beginning of the Laboratories and that will be documented in video and photography. In this period, the Guide “Participatory Net Art Practices” will be created to be used in the Laboratories;
- ii. Technical training in the Laboratories, in which they will work with computers and learn image editing and basic digital programming, certified by the university (216 sessions with a periodicity of 3 weekly sessions);
- iii. Guidance and follow-up of project development.

3 MAIN OBJECTIVES

This project aims:

- i. To produce knowledge and promote methodologies on the social function of art and artistic practices as empowerment tools, presented in e-book format, that can be used by different institutions working with vulnerable communities;
- ii. To contribute to the empowerment of Women in Shelter Houses by promoting their skills, related to their personal empowerment, self-esteem, identity and inclusion in the digital society;
- iii. To inform, sensitize and raise awareness in society about the social problem of violence against women, disseminating the results of the whole artistic process of participatory art carried out with Shelter Houses Women in the Labs, in the Virtual Women Art Museum, hosted in a public access server, which will be used as an Archive of this process, and in an Itinerant Exhibition.

4 RESULTS

From this research we expect to have as main results:

- i. An Educational Guide entitled “Co-creative Net Art Practices for Gender Equality”, which will be an important resource for institutions that promote gender equality, such as: Shelter Houses, educational institutions and civil society organisations. This script will determine the guidelines to be followed in an artistic project of social and intervention nature, in the specific context of violence against women;
- ii. A Virtual Art Museum, titled M.ARS – Virtual Women Art Museum, already implemented by the authors, consisting of an online digital platform for computer and mobile phone,

which integrates the creative net art projects carried out by Women, also as a way to make known the results of the project and a space for reflection on the phenomenon of domestic violence through net art (<http://www.mars.uevora.pt>);

- iii. An itinerant exhibition in national and international institutions with the Virtual Museum's collection constituted, initially, by the internet projects conceived and produced by the group of women and by the records of this production process.

5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology should offer people the opportunity to access and participate in society. Technology should facilitate access for all people. However, there is a paradox since technology is used to govern, control, and homogenise society and maintain stereotypes that persist stubbornly. Conscious responses to this phenomenon are needed to create a more egalitarian digital society.

The Internet emerged in the mid-1990s as a mass medium presenting an enormous creative potential that has since been explored by artists. Using the language of multimedia technologies as a main tool, we aim with this research to study net art, its genesis, modes of operation and artistic and historical contextualization, in order to create digital platforms of net art with Shelter Houses Women, so that these platforms can be experienced as true spaces of citizenship. In this sense, we will study how net art has been evidencing, since the last decade of the 20th century until nowadays, social concerns, particularly in relation to gender equality.

We propose to review and update art history sources, through post-medium critical theories, in order to understand how net art has been evidencing and being the stage of artistic projects, focused on the field of communities, minorities and "herstories", since the last decade of the 20th century until today. Net art and its main representatives have contributed to interactive online experiences associated with projects with social community empowerment and political activism purposes.

Regarding the specific field of net art and women gender violence we highlight the publications of Remedios Zafra, [9] and Martínez Collado [10], in which projects by artists such as Annie Abrahams, Auriea Harvey and Michael Samyn, Cristina Buendía, Francesca da Rimini, Margot Lovejoy, Marie-Jose Sat, Natalie Bookchin, Prema Murthy and Sonya Rapoport are highlighted. Likewise, since the 1970s, artists and collectives in the visual arts have sought, through their artistic projects, to make visible the mechanisms of violence against women: [11], [12] and [13]. In addition, this subject has been studied in previous thesis, articles and exhibitions by the authors since 2014.

However, despite these bibliographical references and artistic works, there is a gap in research regarding the relationship between net art and participatory art that requires a consistent and in-depth study.

Regarding Education Art Guides focusing on the relationship between artistic practices and gender issues, there are no publications dedicated in a systematic and conclusive way to this theme, and some development of the theme can be found in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, online Learning [14], and the "Gender

and Citizenship Education Guides" by the Portuguese Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality [15].

So far, research on how social museology, which understands the museum as a dynamic cultural art institution committed to art and society can contribute to gender equality, has been tested and analysed by previous work by the authors. In this project, the relationship between art, culture, social museology and gender will be extended to the specific field of the net art, namely, in the context of the creation of a Virtual Art Museum, an interactive platform for online and real-time co-creative artistic practices dissemination by the Women in Shelter Houses.

It should be noted that since 2015 members of the team have regularly conducted research and events on the theme of art, gender and violence against women, in an interdisciplinary manner, such as exhibitions, websites, conferences, debates, publications and articles. These works, which often involved students, researchers, and national and international artists, constitute a first corpus of reflections, methodologies and good practices concerning the relationship between Art and Gender and a first interdisciplinary approach to the subject in Portugal. This proposal is innovative as it will give continuity to the work carried out by the team, filling a gap in the field of knowledge, systematising models, and methodologies centred on participatory net art as a tool to contribute for the empowerment of segregated or marginalized minorities.

6 OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

For the development of this project, we positioned ourselves in net art, which we crossed with Participatory Art and Neta Art, in a clear and intentional methodology with recourse to inter and transdisciplinarity.

We will have as main reference the study and artistic creation in the scope of aesthetics and transmedia arts which, according to Patrícia Gouveia, are fundamental for the understanding of contemporary culture. According to the author, the transmedia arts are:

"Arts that are no longer "post", "new" or mere "digital folklore", but transmedia, proper of a certain kind of transmodernism. If, for modernism the new, the cut with tradition, the end of history and of the great narratives were part of the creative poetics in transmedia aesthetics, the remixing of languages, media platforms and systems of play and game reign in a recurrent parody of the capitalist system. Contemporary artists use marketing tools, digital networks and critical retro-engineering technologies to mix analogue and digital arts in a transinternet art filled with situations that remind us of the of the 1990s net.art aesthetics" [16].

In the search for answers to the central question we will draw on the analysis and research tools employed by Angela Washko, Anne-Marie Schleiner, Ceci Moss, Claire Bishop, Christiane Paul, Dale Spender, Josephine Bosma, Judy Malloy, Margot Lovejoy, Mary Flanagan, Rachel Greene, Remedios Zafra, Sadie Plant, Sharon Daniel, Suzanne Lacy, Suzie Gablik, among other media arts thinkers and artists fundamental to our research.

These thinkers and creators provide us with the framework for the research through the operative concepts, namely: net art (Rachel Greene [17] and Josephine Bosma [18]); net art expanded (Ceci Moss [19]); collaborative art systems (Sharon Daniel [20]); transmedia (Patrícia Gouveia [21]); Social Museology ([author], 2013, 2018); community art (Suzanne Lacy [22]); connective aesthetics (Suzi Gablik [23]), as well as; net art as a social tool (Judy Malloy [24]), (Christiane Paul [25]), (Mary Flanagan [26]), (Margot Lovejoy, Christiane Paul and Victoria Vesna [27]), (Dale Spender [28]), (Michael J. Connor, Aria Dean and Dragan Espenschied [29]), and (Marina Gržinić and Adele Eisenstein [30]).

Likewise, the concept of gender is central to our project (Judith Butler [31]), being understood as the sociocultural construction of the diverse and possible ways of being a person, which in turn takes multiple expressions and is not merely reduced to sexual characters. Its various manifestations, among which gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, gender roles, personality characteristics, as well as personal competences and interests, are permanently constructed throughout life.

Another of the concepts that is extremely dear to us is that of herstory (Macedo and Amaral [32]). This English term was coined by feminism to designate the theorisation and documentation of women's experience, life and language. The ironic use of the term in English arises from an awareness of the mismatch between language and the reality to which it refers, namely with regard to the omission of the role played by women as social agents in history. The term also intends to draw attention to the censorship existing in the patriarchal language itself by highlighting the use of the masculine as generic – His-story. This process of renaming implies the recognition of the conditionings to which both women and men are subjected in terms of the language they use and the very images they construct about reality. The objective of feminist historians is twofold: on the one hand, they wish to give women a place in History and, on the other, to return History to women [32].

7 PLAN AND METHODS

The art project "MIRAGE – The social function of artistic practice as a tool for empowerment. Creative net art projects with women in shelters" has as central question to analyse if artistic practice can have the objective of awareness and expression of a certain human and social condition by an individual or group, in order to become a tool for empowerment and self-determination, namely in the specific situation of women victims of domestic violence. This research will be done through a case study, with an empirical base, which is the women victims of domestic violence in Shelter Houses.

We argue that the individual empowerment of women surviving domestic violence is a dynamic and continuous process in which the skills, personal characteristics of resilience and proactive behaviours are associated with real, permanently changing social conditions, including rights, law and cultural and social policies, involving the possibilities or impediments they create for a truly transformative change in their lives.

In this sense, knowing that for women suffering from domestic violence the process of rebuilding their lives free of violence is often long and complex, we think that participatory art is not a

solution for the complex problematic of domestic violence but can be a contribution for the empowerment of Women.

We also consider that participatory art is a valid research method that can contribute for the advancement of Art's scientific domain. As François Matarasso argues:

"Mental health, drug addiction, domestic violence and loneliness are complex social issues and participatory art has proven to be a safe territory to address them. The potential of art in human development is being channelled to support the growth of individuals and community groups and to promote social inclusion. Its capacity to empower vulnerable and marginalised people also provides political visibility to complex and sensitive issues. (...) It would be foolish to think that participatory art projects can solve the multi-dimensional challenges facing European society today. But it would be equally foolish to ignore their potential in supporting people's ability to work together to find better ideas for the future" [4].

This study that will be conducted over three years by an interdisciplinary team that includes specialists in the field of multimedia art, art history, museology, and sociology, is based on a long path of research, since 2015, by the team members.

In order to answer to the above-mentioned research central question, the investigation plan will be divided into three main stages.

7.1 First Stage

Prior to the Laboratories, a first preparatory stage will take place:

- i. Mapping of the Women participants of Shelter Houses in the project by their identification and selection, through empathic interviews and testimonies of life stories, that will be registered in video and photography. These questionnaires and short interviews will focus on the participants distressed lives and overcoming experiences. The whole process will be accompanied by the creation and implementation of recording instruments (video and photography) and monitoring;
- ii. As we are working with vulnerable and potentially traumatized individuals, the secrecy and confidentiality of the information obtained and their image will be protected through technical video, audio and photographic strategies so as not to bring stigma to the group of Women studied, and an exit strategy, a mitigation plan was devised to prevent adverse impact to the vulnerable Women if they no longer wish to participate. All this will be provided by the Shelter House psychologists and social workers team. To the extent that this project involves ethical issues related to working with people as a case study, namely Women of Shelter Houses, it will be subject to procedures based on the Declaration of Helsinki [33]. These procedures, in general terms, seek to maintain the secrecy and confidentiality of the information obtained, and unnecessary actions that may cause damage such as not protecting their image, invading their privacy and violating their confidentiality. We want to make sure that processes such as the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy, as well as demonstrating respect for the subjects of the research, do not affect in any way the development of the project that aims, above all, that the research brings models and methodologies that can be replicated. Likewise,



Figure 1: Co-creative Laboratory “Pixel Art Against Domestic Violence” video created by the research team, Women from a Shelter House and master course art students. ©Teresa Veiga Furtado e Aida Rechena.

- we defend that interests concerning individual people, who are case studies of our research, should always and under all circumstances prevail over the profits of science and society;
- iii. The creation of a Guide entitled “Participatory Net Art Practices”, in digital and paper formats, which has as its direct purpose the guidance of the Co-creative Net Art Laboratories that will start at the next stage;
 - iv. The Guide consists of a set of Worksheets, in which contents in image editing and basic programming (html and css language) are specified in order to carry out net art projects throughout the sessions. Each Worksheet will be developed with the Women over one month. The learning experiences such as those of the internet educational community service institution Girls Who Code or Museum of Modern Art Learning Guides [Mo], are a source of inspiration. The exercises will also be inspired by artists’ works like Sharon Daniel net art project “Exposed” [34], or the hypertextual net art of Olia Lialina, Nathalie Bookchin, and Angela Washko, centred in *herstories*;
 - v. The implementation of a Virtual Net Art Museum, hosted in the server of the university, and of public access, which will be used as an Archive of all the participatory art process with the Shelter House Women. The Archive of the Virtual Museum will contribute to inform, sensitize and raise awareness in society about the social problem of violence against women. We consider to be very important for the process of

women’s empowerment to see their artistic practices available for others to see. The website also comprises a page that works as a space for visitors’ comments, trying to evaluate the public’s reactions and the effects of the net art works on them.

7.2 Second Stage

In a 2nd stage, Co-creative net art Laboratories will be held. The trainers of the research team will support their classes with the Guide “Net Art Participatory Art Practices”, and the participatory art methodologies proposed therein.

The laboratory process, developed over one year and a half, will be organized as follows:

- i. Shelter House Women will be offered technical training, in which they will work with computers and learn image editing and basic digital programming, certified by the university – total of 216 sessions, with the duration of one hour and a half, with a periodicity of 3 weekly sessions. They will answer to the exercises in the Guide’s 18 Worksheets that will result in 18 net art projects (one net art project per month);
- ii. Guidance and follow-up of project development, and extra classes support when needed;
- iii. Documentation on video and photography of all processes.

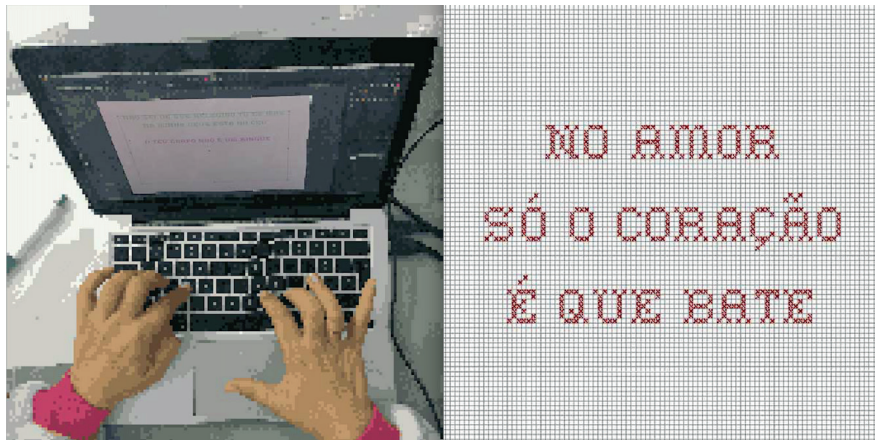


Figure 2: Co-creative Laboratory “From Cross-Stitch to Pixel” with the research team and Women from a Shelter House. This is a phrase from a participant Woman reading, “In Love only the Heart Beats”. ©Teresa Veiga Furtado e Aida Rechena.

- iv. Integration of the video and photography documentation and the Women co-creative net art projects in the Virtual Museum.

The method will be based on the participatory art methodologies characterised by being cooperative, collaborative, inclusive, integrative, and of active and empathetic listening to people.

As Suzi Gablik says:

“Empathic listening gives way to the Other and decentralises the ego-self. Giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the means of expression, an empathic way of seeing through another’s eyes. (...) Art that is rooted in a “listening” self, that cultivates the intertwining of self and Other, suggests a flow-through experience which is not delimited by the self but extends into the community through modes of reciprocal empathy” [23].

Likewise, according to Matarasso:

“Shared creative work enables people to learn from and about one another because they bring different histories, identities, imaginations and desires to the act. Together, they face obstacles and share talents, make demands, become friends, develop skill, knowledge and confidence, explore their place in the group and discover new stories about themselves. Such things occur spontaneously in the process of co-creation” [35].

7.3 Third Stage

In the third stage of the project, during the third year, the results achieved in the previous stages will be publicized and disseminated.

The dissemination will be carried out by:

- i. Virtual Net Art Museum and in the social media surrounding it, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram;
- ii. Itinerant national and international Exhibition and its catalogue, which integrate the different materials of the project;
- iii. International conference in which Advisors and Keynote speakers will participate, and which will also have the participation of several international experts in the field of net art;
- iv. Data analysis of the questionnaires and interviews carried out with Women from Shelter Houses throughout the research, in order to evaluate the effectiveness and failures of the participatory art practices;
- v. Also, in order to ensure the sustainability of the project after its conclusion, and for a period of two years, there will be a number of training actions offered by the research team of this project, to Shelter Technicians and teachers of all levels of education, as a way to ensure the use of the digital educational script and the maintenance of the Virtual Museum as a platform for gathering information on the continuity projects in the Shelter Houses.

8 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

We consider this project relevant as it is related to the following international development goals:

- United Nations Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Throughout this art research project, Women of the Shelter Houses, will be offered technical training, in which they will work with computers and learn image editing and basic digital programming, certified by the university – total of 216 sessions, that will improve

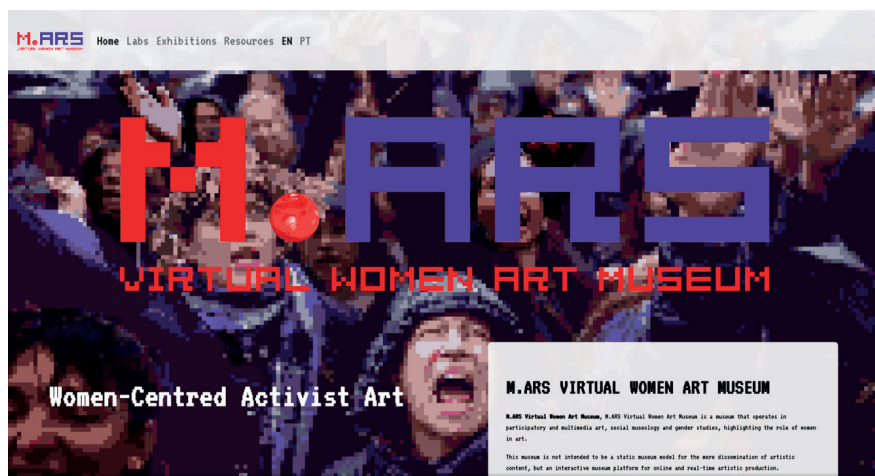


Figure 3: Virtual Women Art Museum, archive of all the participatory art process with the Shelter House Women. ©Teresa Veiga Furtado e Aida Rechena.

their digital literacy and increase their opportunities for integration in the nowadays digital societies. Similarly, the artistic participatory practices at the Creative Net Art Laboratories will contribute for their empowerment in a process of self-realization and emancipation, gaining skills, confidence and knowledge.

– United Nations Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender-based violence is considered a pandemic by UN Women, the UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment, noting that 1 in 3 women experience violence throughout their lives (UN Women, 2019). In a scientific research art process that we consider innovative and experimental, we use participatory art methodologies as a tool for the positive promotion of gender equality, through capacity building, empowerment and promotion of a liberating gender awareness among women victims of domestic violence, giving voice and visibility to their life stories. In the same way, we seek to raise awareness in society about the problem of gender violence by making it known through art made by people who have suffered it, in order to change behaviours and attitudes and to overcome prejudices and traditional gender stereotypes.

– United Nations Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries to the extent that this project involves the empowerment of Women, through their digital literacy and art and cultural skills and knowledge, will therefore be a contribution to reduce the inequalities within Portuguese society, and among countries. Likewise, this research aims to produce knowledge and promote methodologies on the social function of art and artistic practices as empowerment tools, presented in e-book format, that can be used by different institutions working with vulnerable communities, contributing for their empowerment.

– UNESCO Strategy for gender equality in and through education for 2019-2025.

We also consider the project relevant as it is related to national Portuguese government objectives defined in:

- The Action Plan for the Prevention and Fight against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (PAVMVD) which integrates the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030, Portugal + Igual, (ENIND);
- The National Skills Strategy, and the Action Plan for the Digital Transition (2020).

9 EXPECTED STATE OF THE ART ADVANCES

With this project the following advances are expected for the state of the art:

- i. To study how net art and its main representatives have contributed to interactive online experiences associated to projects with social, community empowerment and political activism purposes. Their projects will serve as inspiration for the elaboration of an Education Net Art Guide that integrates proposals for creative exercises in the field of net art, focused on gender equality;
- ii. To promote the inclusion of the digital literacy of Women in Shelters by giving them credited training and basic skills in the field of digital technologies, within the realisation of net art projects placed in a Virtual Museum, elaborated on the basis of the Participatory Net Art Guide;
- iii. To create research models and methodologies that can be used by other academic institutions, of social solidarity, among others, in the scope of the fight against gender inequality;

- iv. To raise awareness in society, through the net art projects of the Virtual Museum and the Itinerant Exhibition, of stereotypical and prejudicial conceptions of gender as a fundamental basis in the origin of structural inequalities between women and men, as well as a source of gender violence.

10 CONCLUSION

Throughout this ongoing net art co-creative project, we stress that the behaviour of the Shelter House Women has been brought to light, reflecting their assimilation and understanding of the contextualization of domestic and gender violence which they are victims of, as well as gender inequalities and women's rights.

We want to research in what measure the application of the digital technologies and the use of artistic expression itself can contribute to resolve the problem of Shelter House Women at the level of their mentality, that is, from the point of view of helping them to reflect and think critically about their own life histories and to find new ways of interpreting them. Often, Women that experienced domestic violence have a more reactive emotional dimension of fear lived through shame and guilt, but they experience difficulty in understanding this from a rational point of view. Through artistic creation, which can be very liberating, and which can have corporal expressions, the person begins to unwind, and this is also a form of problem solving. This research focus on the profound relationship between the arts, culture, social dimensions, cultural dimensions and psychological dimensions: the social function of art as a tool for empowerment and when in association with daily life.

We believe that the co-creative net art Laboratories will provide experiences, sharing and skills, for the empowerment of Shelter House Women. The learning and application of digital technologies and the use of artistic expression itself can help Women to reflect and think critically, to find new ways to interpret their own life histories and the global social forces of gender inequality. The net art Labs create a space for dialogue and community co-creation where fundamental contents regarding gender equality are debated. It is also a place for human relationships, for building models, empathic listening, for reflection and for sharing herstories, lives and experiences through a connective aesthetic. The art practices are, in this sense, a centre for the exercise of citizenship and art is understood as a people's right, where democratic coexistence is exercised, and a culture of peace and solidarity is disseminated when it comes to gender equality.

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