

Many Maids Make Much Noise

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The documented artistic research project (doctoral thesis), <i>Many Maids Make Much Noise</i>, comprises a series of artistic projects focused on the social history of the early twentieth-century British militant campaign for votes for women (known as the suffragette movement). The aim is to try out artistic and educational strategies used within that movement, as a means of ‘reading’ these practices and questioning their usefulness to feminist struggles today. How can contemporary female-led activist groups utilise history, memory, and cultural forms to create new political imaginaries? The historical examples referred to are the work of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, as well as Urania, a suffragist journal. By exploring that history together with groups of contemporary women, engaged in community organising, self-help and activism, the doctoral study makes visible the ways in which female-led activist groups can be spaces of mutual education. Many of their practices fall outside of traditional definitions of education and art; including consciousness-raising, tools for managing group dynamics, community building and emotional care, as well as memory practices, all of which are being enacted within the group and passed on. Questions that arise include: whether these subtle methods for teaching and learning can be considered as forms of feminist pedagogy? In the absence of written documents, how can artistic means be used to represent the practices of these groups so that they can be learnt by others?</p> <p>The artistic projects included in the PhD also address historiographic questions, such as how to narrate a feminist history in ways that reflect the politics of the subject matter? The first project that is submitted as part of the PhD, is a curated museum display of Sylvia Pankhurst’s artworks at Tate Britain, London, 2013-14. Subsequent projects attempt to refocus the gaze away from ‘heroic’ individuals, such as Pankhurst, and instead reflect the practices of the communities and private networks of care and friendship that surrounded them. By trying out collective, polyvocal and subjective modes of storytelling which leave space for diverse women’s voices, the projects allow for subjective readings of history. The conclusion is that these artistic methods reveal as much about the experiences of the contemporary women who participated in the research – their lived reality and memory practices – as they do about the historical events themselves.</p> <p>The PhD submission consists of: <i>Sylvia Pankhurst</i>, A Display at Tate Britain, London, 2013-14; <i>Many Maids Make Much Noise</i>, An Exhibition at Ar/Ge Kunst, Bolzano, 2015-16; <i>Neither Strivers Nor Skivers, They Will Not Define Us</i>, An Exhibition at The Bower, London, 2021; <i>Hold Hold Fire</i>, Video Installation, 2019-21. The projects are represented in two PDFs: a book titled <i>Many Maids Make Much Noise</i> which includes links to the artworks, <i>Learning to Speak Sense</i>, sound installation, 2016; <i>Neither Strivers Nor Skivers, They Will Not Define Us</i>, sound installation, 2021; <i>Hold Hold Fire</i>, 2-channel video installation, 2019; and <i>Appendix</i>, text, 2024.</p>	
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