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FEATURING ARTWORK BY DIEGO BECAS, DIANA DAGADITA,
MOLLY MENDOZA, OLIVIA TWIST AND SADDO

INTRODUCTION

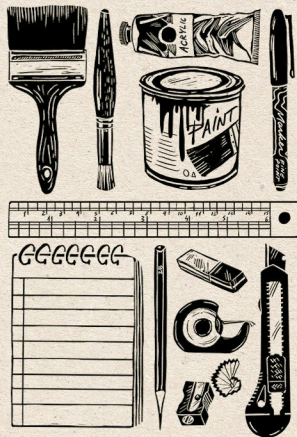
When I was a kid growing up in Mississippi and Tennessee in the United States, I learned early on about social injustices that exist in the world.

I remember defending myself against bullies who did not like me because of my dark skin. I recall watching my favourite TV shows and learning about South African apartheid, police brutality, the global AIDS crisis and historic movements for civil rights through episodes that dared to highlight these causes.

As I recognised the power of the media in expanding my knowledge, I began to create art in my teens that reflected the issues happening around me – 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the Jena Six trials. And by the time I found myself as an arts organiser on the ground in the 2014 Ferguson Uprising, I felt equipped with the experience to deploy art as a way of bringing people together to raise our collective voices.



Throughout this book, you will learn the art of protest through the many artworks, experiences and campaigns that have been created across the world to protest social injustices and advocate for the rights and liberties of diverse communities. You will learn a bit of my story as well as the stories of others – leaders, artists, youth and everyday people – who have used art as a tool for organizing communities and catalyzing change. However, I hope you will also learn the art of *protesting*. Tips and strategies are shared throughout this book to help you exercise creative ways to mindfully organise, create and protest with others. Suggested art activities range from writing simple protest signs to designing banners, building sculptures, organizing flash mobs and making cause-specific artworks.



With this, you might be more compelled to raise your voice about the issues, causes and global concerns that matter to you. Our society constantly experiences waves of social movements, campaigns for justice and fights against climate issues and disease on a global scale. And no matter where you live, or what language you speak or what cause you choose, it is my hope that this book will encourage and equip you to use art as a language and instrument that can help you champion your chosen cause.

01 WHY ART MATTERS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

MY STORY AS AN ARTIVIST IN FERGUSON

On August 9, 2014, my life – like those of many in my home city of St. Louis, Missouri – was forever changed when I learned that a teenager had been killed by a police officer while walking along the streets of his grandmother's neighbourhood. His name was Michael Brown Jr, and his body lay in the street for four and a half hours as news media captured photos and people crowded around in dismay. Over the days that followed, hundreds of people began to march in protest across the small municipality of Ferguson, Missouri, where he lived. I was one of them, and after daily – and soon nightly – protesting, I wanted to do something more.

At that time, I was an educator at our local contemporary art museum. I'd just finished graduate school in social work, and I'd been active as a community-based artist and designer in collaboration with schools, neighbourhoods and artists all across the region. In response to the Ferguson Uprising, I created a digital platform called Connected for Justice that helped allies donate and distribute resources to people on the ground. I also collaborated with a photographer to develop *Faces of the Movement*, a photographic series that

dignified and amplified the stories of people involved in the uprising. And my best friend, Sophie, and I even went door-to-door across Ferguson recording United Story, a video series of stories featuring neighbours and families whose streets and homes became central to the growing protests. Others in our 'artists' collective created works that amplified movement slogans like 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot', and performed flash mobs, and placed guerrilla installations in public spaces to help spread the messages of the protests.



THE MIRROR CASKET

THE MIRROR CASKET



Of all the projects that the activists and I created, we became most known for the *Mirror Casket*. This project emerged from a series of dreams I had after my first nights of protesting. Each dream included men walking into the night carrying a casket that was made of mirrors. I couldn't shake the image, so I reached out to as many artists as I knew to ask for help to bring it to life. Six artists responded, and in a matter of weeks, we worked together to gather materials, design the casket, build it and march it from the street where Michael Brown Jr was murdered to the police department where many had gathered nightly to protest.

After its first use, the *Mirror Casket* appeared in subsequent marches across the region and was exhibited throughout Missouri, including in the capitol. During the year that followed, it gained the attention of the Smithsonian Institution, which acquired it for its latest museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. Activist Angela Davis even wrote an article about it for *Smithsonian* magazine, titled 'The Art of Protest'.

Eventually, the public awareness gained from the *Mirror Casket* project and other protest artworks allowed me to meet, connect and work with dozens of artists to conceive and develop more creations, performances, videos and even apparel that address women's rights, LGBTQ+ issues, racial inequity, climate justice and education. Together we have used art to help grassroots groups and organisations lobby for policy changes and influence the ways in which our communities can thrive more equitably.

WHY ART MATTERS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Most art that is created in protest will not be acquired by museums, nor is this usually the goal of activists and artists working together. Most often, we aim to reflect and respond to the immediate causes that are grounded in our social movements. And whether used in a march, a social media campaign or as guerrilla art in a public space, protest art helps social movements inform the public of issues, challenge the status quo, convey collective goals and messaging, imagine a vision of change and persuade others to take action.

Informing the Public

When used in public spaces, protest art serves as a mighty tool to help people learn about social issues. As an example, *Chalked Unarmed* was a guerrilla art series by public performance artist and *Mirror Casket* collaborator Mallory Nezam. The project invited citizen collaborators to create chalk outlines, like police outlines of murder victims, on pavements across their communities. Each outline was filled with the name, date and location of a person who had been murdered by a police officer.

Making Messages Visible

In protests across the globe, people tend to write and illustrate their calls to action on cardboard, posters or banners.

At marches, where it can be hard for target audiences to hear each individual's voice, signage allows each person's message to be seen, and the results are often full of creativity and passion.

Imagining a Vision for Change

Protest art effectively helps people develop a language and create a vision for how outcomes in a community can be better. While projects like the *Mirror Casket* challenge viewers to look inward to see themselves differently and empathise with those whose lives have been lost, other works may propel people forward to imagine a new reality.

Influencing Action

Efforts like *Decolonise This Place* and *Theatre of the Oppressed* use performances, flash mobs and "spect-acting" (whereby a member of the audience also becomes part of the performance) to engage with people across the world and explore how justice and equality can become reality. Each experience that the artists facilitate is directly tied to demands for organizations and government leaders to change a policy, boycott unjust spaces, disinvest from harmful companies or stop violent or inequitable public actions. For example, *Theatre of the Oppressed* ran a performance in 2016 entitled *The Housing Circus*, based on the real life experiences of different individuals trying to receive housing benefits. Told from the perspective of LGBTQ+ individuals and war veterans living in New York City, *Theatre of the Oppressed* used this performance to suggest policy changes.

Challenging the Status Quo

One of the common impacts of protest art is to push against the norms and rules of society. Artists like Elizabeth Vega, Ai Weiwei, Banksy and others have mastered using art as dissent. Such works often take existing materials and cultural artefacts and re-purpose them, or they might remix messages from advertisements, buildings, monuments, news articles or political documents in ways that point to their hypocrisy, outdated messages or other flaws.

