

# Digital Basket: Multimedia Labs for Gender Equality web art archive.

**Teresa Veiga Furtado**

CHAIA – Centre for Art History and Artistic Research  
University of Évora, Portugal  
tvf@uevora.pt

## Abstract

The Digital Basket: Multimedia Labs for Gender Equality website – [www.cabazdigital.uevora.pt](http://www.cabazdigital.uevora.pt) – is the result of an art-based research project, in the form of an interactive digital art archive, that emerged to host the work of *Digitalias*, a domestic violence Shelter Home women artistic collective, as well as the work carried out as part of a wider multimedia art project centred on gender equality multimedia workshops for high school and university students and the community of Évora, Portugal. The website is intended to be a participatory art research project, of CHAIA-Centre for Art History and Artistic Research, of the University of Évora, carried out to promote gender equality on the Internet, from an inclusive and intersectional perspective, in accordance with the directives of the Action Plan for the Digital Transition, the IN-CoDe.2030 Programme of the Government of Portugal, and the Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 of the European Parliament. The main objectives are: collective co-creation of multimedia art and net art with students and the community, using basic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools, centred on gender equality issues, disseminated on this website and in travelling exhibitions, and; empowerment of girls and women in the community with ICT skills to reverse the downward trend in their participation in digital society and their consequent impoverishment and subalternation.

## Keywords

Art-based Research, Participatory Art, Empowerment, Multimedia Art, Gender Equality, Web Art Archive.

## Introduction: Digitalisation and gender inequality in the digital forum

Technology should be accessible to everyone and give them the opportunity to take an active part in building society. However, there is a paradox in contemporary digital and technological culture that leads us to consider that technology is still a space created, produced, and disseminated above all by white, privileged men. If, on the one hand, the idea that technology is universally accessible is disseminated in theory, on the other hand, things are different in practice, as it is the monopoly of corporations that use it above all to control and homogenise society. Paradigms and stereotypes that produce social inequalities in terms of

gender, race, ethnicity, and class persist stubbornly in technology.

The Digital Basket: Multimedia Labs for Gender Equality (DB) website – [www.cabazdigital.uevora.pt](http://www.cabazdigital.uevora.pt) –, an art-based research project, of CHAIA-Centre for Art History and Artistic Research, of the University of Évora, was created to raise awareness in society, through multimedia labs for students, women, and communities, disseminated on and in travelling exhibitions, of stereotyped and harmful conceptions of gender as a fundamental basis for structural inequalities between women and men, as well as a source of gender-based violence (Fig. 1).

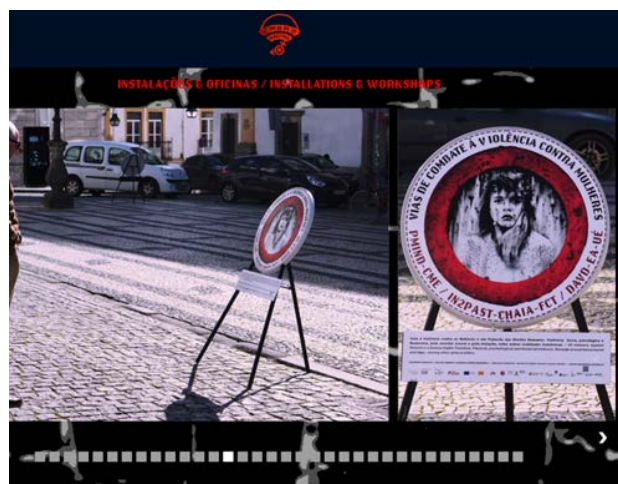


Figure 1. Installation in the city main square of traffic signs made by university students as part of the *Lab 05 / Traffic Routes for Gender Equality*. Image at the DB website. © Teresa Furtado.

According to Ian Sample, regarding the Internet, it is important to emphasise that more than half of the world's women cannot use it. [1] The high price of the Internet, the lack of equipment and skills to use it and the precariousness and feminisation of immaterial, poorly paid work associated with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) very often means that women do not occupy positions of power as producers and beneficiaries of the profits generated on the Internet. Today, women are once again isolated in domestic spaces, a place that has always been assigned to them throughout history, through feminized and precarious teleworking, which once again turns private spaces into a prison, this time a digital one, for women. Women are

represented above all at the lower levels of technological production chains, carrying out repetitive actions mediated by machines, but their presence is scarce in the leadership of IT industries, among those who mould technology, i.e., executive directors, computer engineers and scientists.

Conscious responses to this phenomenon are necessary to create a more equal digital society. The Internet initially emerged as a means of communication only for a privileged few, but in the last two decades it has consolidated itself as a means of mass communication, presenting enormous creative potential that has since been exploited by artists. Using the language of multimedia technologies as our main tool, this research aims to study net art, its genesis, modes of operation and artistic and historical contextualisation, to create digital net art platforms with students, communities, and women from shelters, trying to make these virtual spaces real places of citizenship (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Installation in the city council staircase of high school students' illustrations as part of the *Lab 06 / Steps to Equality*. Image at the of CHAIA-Centre for Art History and Artistic Research, of the University of Évora, website. © Teresa Furtado.

Regarding the systematic exclusion of women from history, according to Inês Brasão

It is not possible to tell the story of women without mentioning how much they have been deprived of their ability to think, create, produce, and innovate. What's worse, women's creative ingenuity in a wide variety of areas has remained in the shadows of official history. The digital revolution is one of them. The name we bring up here is that of Ada Lovelace. Of noble descent, Ada was the daughter of Lord Byron, the same poet who was enchanted by the town of Sintra. Her mother encouraged her passion for maths as a strong "antidote" to poetry and other romantic tendencies. To Lovelace's ingenuity we owe the first steps in programming, and the computer language "ADA" was named in recognition of the person who wrote the first algorithm to be processed on a machine. [2]

In fact, the digital revolution of the 1990s owes much to the work of a pioneering English woman, Ada Lovelace (UK, 1815-1852), who went down in history for writing the first algorithm to be processed by a machine. In this context, we can consider her the first female programmer in history. However, even today the digital space is not an equal space in terms of gender, among other things. Women are very under-represented in all these areas of digitalisation and should be protagonists in their creation, for the well-being and sustainability of societies.

### The importance of training and education in the fields of STEAM for gender equality

Since the 1960s, feminist art has adopted creative methodologies based on producing representations that emancipate women and reveal the burlesque and irony of the patriarchal system. Cyberfeminism in the 1990s claimed that the Internet was characterised by enabling horizontal relationships between people, as opposed to the hierarchical pyramidal powers of society in general, in which a few people exercise power over many. It is regrettable, however, that the digital realm is still a place created by men thinking above all their own interests, profits, and benefits.

Digitalisation should benefit men and women equally and not contribute to widening gaps in the field of gender inequality. There can be no gender equality without equal access to digital infrastructures such as social networks, online services, and e-commerce web platforms.

Digital technologies are an important economic driver and to break down this gap, actions and initiatives are needed, particularly in education, to accelerate the participation and interest of women and girls in this important area. Science and technology topics should be promoted in education, using female scientists and artists as role models for girls. Many girls, from pre-school to university age, feel less able than boys to take up careers in engineering and science, which have prestige and status. The problem lies in the roles and models we have created for women, which are reproduced in the discourses and practices of parents, teachers, colleagues, and the mass media.

Although recent data shows that girls are increasingly finishing secondary school with higher averages than boys and are therefore better placed to choose courses that have a higher employability rate and, in principle, give them access to better paid jobs, the facts show the opposite. According to data from the Portuguese Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics, the percentage of women enrolling on courses traditionally considered to be technical, particularly in the areas of Physics, Computer Engineering or Mechanical Engineering, continues to be much lower than that of men. Thus, for example, the most recent data, for the 2020/2021 academic year, published in June 2021 and based on the figures provided in the "Enrolments by Sex" table: at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Porto, of the students enrolled on the Physics course in the 1st cycle, 74.60 per cent are men; of the students enrolled on the

Geospatial Engineering course in the 1st cycle, 78.38 per cent are men; and of the students enrolled on the Computer Science course in the 1st cycle, 84.43 per cent are men; at the Instituto Superior Técnico in Lisbon, 84.62% of the students enrolled in the Telecommunications and Informatics Engineering course in the 1st cycle are men; 85.59% of the students enrolled in the Electronics Engineering course in the 1st cycle are men; and 86.82% of the students enrolled in the Informatics and Computer Engineering course in the 1st cycle are men. [3]

Since women must be agents of change, contributing to social construction as creators, explorers and researchers, there is an urgent need to continue working to ensure that their attendance at technical courses and their future practice of the profession is seen as normal and legitimate. There is an urgent need to provide women and girls with basic knowledge of multimedia technologies, but at the same time to question, reflect on and debate the models, values and behaviours that continue to subordinate women to men. What is needed is an integral, interdisciplinary, and horizontal vision that includes the humanities, sciences, and arts, and that reflects on the type of technology and world we want, that is humanised and truly recognises and seeks gender equality and equity, multiculturalism, and pluralism of knowledge. Women make up half the world's population and if we don't, societies and economies, the banking sector and the investment sector will not move forward.

Today, the importance of training and education in the fields of STEAM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics – is increasingly recognised for the development and sustainable economic growth of today's global societies. The arts mobilise creative and imaginative skills that stimulate critical, creative, and innovative thinking and action, which are key aspects of the jobs of the future. Training young people in STEAM areas seeks to encourage them to continue their studies in scientific-technological courses, which require a mathematical basis and skills of analysis and abstraction. There is a link between engineering and creativity and this interdisciplinary intersection in school curricula should be made from a very early age in pre-school, which should be continued throughout school, and can help to deconstruct the symbolic weight of masculinity associated with engineering and attract more girls to this area. It is essential that public policies invest in STEAM training that helps women to take up digital jobs and participate in and be responsible for conceptualising and building the societies of today and tomorrow. With this orientation, incomes, and the occupation of positions of prominence and power will be able to reach more equitable levels between men and women.

### **Online systemic violence against women**

One of the main issues around which the DB project is centred is the violence against women generated by profound gender inequality worldwide. The repetition and normalisation of violence against women on the Internet means that

the effort of feminist artists and activists who work there must not only be to adopt a reflective and analytical gaze towards these encrypted and invisible discourses present online, but also to overcome their own blindness, since we all unconsciously incorporate patriarchal structures and ways of seeing into our perceptive structure.

In its early years, the Internet was seen by many women artists, who were also activists and feminists, as an opportunity for action and the exercise of emancipatory creative and political practices, free from asymmetrical gender models. However, today we can observe, in the networked world, a fictitious and digitalised post-corporeal universe online, and in it the repetition and naturalisation of the codes of gender violence against women that are in force offline. A gender violence, both symbolic and real, that spreads invisibly in the structural context and practices of Internet use, in the structures where technology is thought up and (re)produced.

Women continue to be excluded from being able to occupy an active place as Subjects on the Internet, and among the main reasons is online gender-based violence. This violence makes the Internet an unsafe place for women and girls, subjecting them to sexual harassment, threatening messages, and discrimination, and forcing them to quit jobs, skip school, silence their opinions, particularly regarding non-white women, LGBTQ+ communities and other minorities. According to APAV – Portuguese Association for Victim Support, more than half of young women who use the Internet are victims of online violence, including sexual harassment, threatening messages and private images shared without their consent, with the vast majority believing that the problem of violence is getting worse. [4]

To combat online abuse, it is imperative that more data on women's experiences is collected and published, and that the global market designs its products and services according to inclusive policies about dimensions such as gender, sexual identity and orientation, race, and disability, among others. Likewise, governments must strengthen laws that hold abusers accountable and penalise them and help protect and support victims. There is a repetition, which tends to be exacerbated by Artificial Intelligence, of stereotypes and various forms of discrimination regarding race and gender, among other dimensions. [5]

Activists and computer scientists have warned that as our computational tools have become more advanced, they have also become opaquer, and their mechanisms reflect traditional power structures. All people incorporate patriarchal ways of seeing and perceiving that are based on an essentialist and hierarchical view of power and gender differences. As such, no technology or science is impervious to these codes, which have become standardised and naturalised as being rigorous, clear, and objective. The data on which they are based, such as postcodes, social affiliations, and income, can reflect prejudice and amplify the inequalities that affect social minorities. According to Bettina Büchel the data that feeds the machines reflects the unequal history of our own society, so the software integrates the

same prejudices and inequality mechanisms that structure our societies into its algorithms and codes. [6]

Many computer applications were created from the 1980s onwards by men like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, who opted to exclude women from the teams creating these technological tools and for the absence of integrated programming in the software that prevents harassment, violence, discrimination and misogyny, issues that directly affect them. Large digital companies such as Meta (owner of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger), Alphabet (owner of Google, YouTube, and Gmail) and Amazon, which act as intermediaries between consumers, goods, services, and content, should be obliged to guarantee the digital safety of the women who use them and to monitor and prevent the publication of content associated with gender inequality and violence.

On the Internet, the private merges with the public through the webcams that invade our homes and turn them into places for public relations, and gender violence, both symbolic and real, is present in texts, images, and audio recordings, and is reinforced by gender stereotypes.

Anita Sarkeesian points out that social group that has become one of the biggest recipients and disseminators of this violence is young boys who consume and reproduce it through video games, most of which are created by men with a mainly male audience in mind. [7]

The imagery of video games, focused on heteronormative male desires and gender roles, idealised according to a patriarchal imaginary, appeals above all to young boys, the main users of video games. Although we are currently witnessing the growing participation of women in this industry, bringing new perspectives and more egalitarian values, the images that young people construct of themselves are often very much based on these patriarchal models, disseminated not only in video games, but throughout film, television, comics, and social media culture, leading them to perform gendered patterns of behaviour through which boys learn domination and girls embody subalternity.

According to Patrícia Gouveia it should be added that in the present day, multiple serious games and artistic games dismantle the mainstream culture of digital games, which is more sexist and misogynistic. [8] [9]

These serious and artistic games propose a whole set of narratives that question stereotypes of sexuality and gender, emphasising the contribution of contemporary artists to the creation and dissemination of multiple alternative play possibilities. In this context, we should highlight the work of artist Anna Antrophy (USA), whose creations, such as “Dys4ia”, 2012, explore her autobiographical experience of gender dysphoria and hormone treatments. [10]

In this context, it's worth considering the role of platforms such as “Games for Change”, 2004, which over the last twenty years has been an active space in fostering and creating alternative narratives that aim to contribute to demystifying the hegemony prevailing in the digital games industry. [11]

## **Integrating references of women into the web narratives**

It is essential to train women in digital technologies and to occupy the Internet, a place traditionally considered masculine, through education and the transmission of thought models that do not repeat the clichés, norms and traditional patriarchal social hierarchies that diminish women and exclude them from active participation in social construction.

It is fundamental to integrate female images and models of emancipation and empowerment into content, narratives, and educational books. Narratives are one of the most effective ways of conveying new paradigms that place women, such as scientists Ada Lovelace and Marie Curie, at the centre of the story, so that girls feel that building the world is also their responsibility. We believe that we have a social duty to create conditions so that girls don't think that jobs linked to technology and science are out of their reach. It is vital to change the imagery by integrating references of women into the narratives conveyed in educational content, advertising images, series, films, books, video games, toys, and digital mass media, among many others, that encourage girls to take an interest in science, maths, the arts, and digital professions.

Social narratives continue to divide the world in two, as, for example, in toys aimed at boys, where there is a great diversity of models for these individuals to draw inspiration from and think about possibilities for living their lives. Many of these possibilities are based on the connection with technology and demonstrate how the manipulation of simulations, processes and machines can be vital for the future. In contrast to these challenging technological professional worlds, girls are offered models that are not very diverse and that continue to repeat very stereotyped ideas that encourage them to become reified in adopting conservative professional roles, which often take advantage of bodily and sexual exploitation. Caring for others is often presented as the only viable alternative for women. Unpaid care of the home and family continues to fall to them, and there is still a widespread mentality that this is women's work. As a result, women often have little time to improve their communication and information skills. The public policies of the welfare state, in combination with those of the private sector, should be geared towards education and innovation that promote equality by stimulating women's participation.

The digital forum, like all other social sectors, is not neutral, but very masculinised, and it is urgent to include women in leadership processes in technological creation and production. Likewise, the occupation of management positions and the creation of e-commerce is extremely important so that women can sell their products and become entrepreneurs. The pandemic and precariousness have affected those who were already in a situation of greater labour vulnerability. In the territory of the Internet and the technology industry, we are witnessing the production of power and violence, based on a vertical hierarchical structure that constantly naturalises and trivialises heteronormative power narratives. In this territory, horizontal relationships between people do not



circulate in a rhizomatic and equitable way. Technologies are not neutral, but rather rigidly regulated at an ideological and cultural level.

Regarding the use of technologies by women, Rosi Braidotti argues that “The most effective strategy remains for women to use technology to disengage our collective imagination from the phallus and its ancillary values: money, exclusion and domination, nationalism, iconic femininity, and systematic violence”. [12]

Similarly, using Braidotti's concept of nomadism, Remedios Zafra argues that one way of subverting the genderised and hierarchical body according to patriarchal norms in the technological sphere is to experiment with new discourses that constitute the virtual body. Thus, with regard to the use of the Internet, Zafra warns that:

(...) the anti-essentialist approach would be fundamental to linking the materiality of sexual difference to the body on the Internet. Nomadic identities could be an effective way of freeing ourselves from the blind eye. It would undoubtedly be a creative exercise through which we could use the eyes of the other by resorting to the use of fluid, immaterial, dismountable, and nomadic bodies. [13]

Following a similar line of thought, our main aim was for the co-creative net art practices developed in the laboratories to contribute to making visible the invisible symbolic script of gender violence, and to publicise and subvert these mechanisms. In this way, we sought to provide a perception of reality through the eyes of women survivors of domestic violence and not through the patriarchal gaze that is widespread on the Internet.

We argue that it is essential and urgent to bring women into these technological domains and have them contribute to the work of idealising, leading, and using digital technologies and the Internet, occupying these forums where we currently find power being exercised. Only in this way will it be possible to transform the very structure of power and render obsolete the symbolic violence present on the Internet, which resorts to a primary Manichean binarism, a basic duality founded on irreconcilable opposites, in which the masculine is in the place of good, privilege, strength, power and potency, and the feminine in the place of evil, weakness, devaluation and subalternity. This dichotomy makes the Internet fertile ground for the manufacture, reception and distribution of stereotypes, symbolic violence and patriarchal mechanisms that produce the social dimension of gender, which traditional capitalist systems are so keen to preserve and on which their survival depends.

### DB Lab 03 / Being what we want to be

This art-research based project, which sees art as cultural heritage, collective and individual heritage, and the expression of identities, has the main aim of helping women who suffer gender inequalities to create a liberating gender awareness, to develop full and conscious citizenship and to empower themselves through the creative use of digital technologies.

During these workshops, the participants use mobile phones and computers, as ubiquitous technological media in women's lives, aimed at consumers and emitting unidirectional signals and messages, particularly the former, to create a dialogical, interactive, and participatory online space, open and responsive to art and communication. This exploitation of technological interfaces to transform them into transmitters of interactive messages is common among net art creators. During the co-creative laboratories, the basic function of communication that characterises, expresses, and determines art in general is highlighted here, through its interdisciplinary intersection with multimedia digital technology and with citizenship and sustainability issues in the context of gender equality (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Woman creating plasticine sculpture within the *Lab 04 / Mapping the body like the garden of a sort*. Image at the DB website. © Digitalias.

About the importance of participatory art in the context of changing paradigms regarding art, François Matarasso argues that:

New forms of information and communication technology have put the means of production, distribution, and cultural criticism within the reach of an increasing number of people. Whether or not European society today is more diverse than it was a century ago may be debatable, but the fact that voices that were once marginalised, including women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community, now have a voice that they didn't have, and with it are changing and democratising the ideas we have about art, is unquestionable. This is important because the growth of participatory art - its generalisation - is, above all, a consequence of the gradual disappearance of that split created by the Enlightenment in the Western concept of art. Although not everyone sees it (on both sides of the argument), the differences between Purists and Democrats are no longer important. The question is no longer “Is it art?” but “Is it good quality?” [14]

Through co-creative and participatory artistic methodologies, the aim is to empower women and girls with digital tools, contributing to their affirmation as Subjects, empowerment, and social inclusion, while at the same time raising awareness in the community of the social scourge of gender-based violence.

It takes the form of creative workshops with women from shelters, the purpose of which is to continue the support and reception given to victims of domestic violence by organisations such as AM, a Shelter Home social solidarity association. These workshops take place during artistic creation sessions for net art projects that enable participants to gain self-knowledge, self-analysis and realise their individual potential as citizens and women.

As part of this research's participatory community practice, we used an action-research methodology aimed at social change, which adapts continuously and flexibly to the needs of the co-creating participants, with regular critical reading and evaluation of the project's partial results. It is, in fact, an ongoing artistic project of a procedural nature, in which the path to be travelled is regularly conceived and recreated using a working method specific to community art. This method is characterised by being: participatory, cooperative, collaborative, inclusive, integrative, and listening actively and empathetically to people. The importance of empathetic listening is defended by Suzi Gablik, who argues that:

Empathic listening makes room for the Other and decentralizes the ego-self. Giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium 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. [15]

Throughout history, women have become adept at taking charge of men's private lives so that they can rule the public space. But little by little this has been changing and if there is one thing that should be common sense, it is that all people, regardless of their gender, have similar abilities to cook a stew, dust, change a nappy, programme on a computer, run a company, fly a plane, in short, to be whatever they want to be. This short text, published online at DB website on the "Being what we want to be" laboratory page, was the basis for the workshop. The construction of women as Subjects cannot take place in a context of male domination, insofar as the creation of any true Subject, for both women and men, requires independence and liberation from the domination of others, in the context of a culture in which freedom prevails.

The movement towards individualisation, which gives impetus to the subjectivation of women, is based on the construction of a personal experience, linking all aspects of their lives, public and private. The Subject manifests her freedom and rights against the obsession with power, profit, and identity, i.e., selfish individualism in which one looks only at oneself and is separated from the true forms of

subjectivation and individuation, which are themselves collective movements. However, subjectivation is threatened unceasingly by forces that are overwhelming, authoritarian, and coercive, such as financial markets, religions, communitarianisms that isolate and segregate certain groups of people and, finally, selfish individualisms, reduced to consumer choices and individual well-being.

In the "Be what you want to be" workshop, the participants put on performances inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's drawing "L'Uomo vitruviano", Italy, 1490, and the achievements of women on 25 April 1974, which put an end to 41 years of Salazar dictatorship, which contributed considerably to their formation as Subjects (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Image at the DB website of the *Lab 04 / Being What We Want to Be*. © Digitalias.

The issue of gender inequalities and how they influence the way women live their lives, raised by feminist movements in the 1960s, continues to be important and recurrent today, maintaining a prominent place in our co-creative labs. In the course of the labs, if, on the one hand, artistic practices seek to denounce the patriarchal exploitation and subjugation that women are forced into in general, not having the right to control their lives so that they can freely form their identities and self-determine in all social spheres, from work to sexuality, on the other hand, these practices propose the creation of new representations of themselves, giving them the opportunity to create themselves as Subjects. Too often, media discourses represent women victims of domestic violence as fragile, vulnerable, and oppressed, but during the workshops, the participants were mainly interested in creating an image of themselves that was very different from this. In our conversations and through their artistic expressions,

the women often positioned themselves as strong, active, and powerful women who were trying to find a safe place in society, for their families and for themselves.

Regarding the social context in which the drawing “L’Uomo Vitruviano” was created, at the end of the 15th century, the Italian Renaissance discourse was in force. It proposed an organicist model using man’s body as a way of creating harmony between culture and nature, establishing a feeling of closeness, and understanding with the non-human, thus leaving the domain of a mythical and religious transcendental logic, and creating the scientific paradigm. This model was represented in the well-known drawing “L’Uomo vitruviano”, which shows a male figure with arms and legs stretched out, inscribed in a square and a circle, touching the four corners of the universe. With this imaginative drawing, the male body, fantasised as a pure form, was chosen as the model for the perfect geometric shapes of the circle and the square. In making this drawing, the artist was inspired by the book “De Architectura” by the Roman architect Marco Vitruvius Polion, c. 40 BC, where cosmic order and the potential for perfection are represented through an ideal and rational male body, i.e., the white man, with Vitruvian architecture as the scale for his proportions. In the drawing, the head is the element that stands out in the composition in relation to the other body parts, exalting reason. This ideal body, conceived as masculine and absolute through immaculate geometric rigour, is thus freed from the organic and sensory contingencies of the subject, which have been attributed to the feminine.

In fact, we often choose to use a one-dimensional ruler, i.e., a phallic one, with its univocal scale to situate the diversity of beings, bodies, and organs. In this design, the masculine signifies culture, logos, order, and geometry, as opposed to the invisible feminine, which symbolises nature, matter, transience, and variability.

Despite this persistent attempt to establish the male body as an ideal, from the 1970s onwards several women artists managed to break through and question these regulatory discourses, as can be seen in the work of German artist VALIE EXPORT, who implicitly criticises this ideal of the male body as the measure of the cosmos in her series of performative photographs “Körperkonfiguration”, Germany, 1982, in which she situates and inscribes her body in the city, architecture, culture and history.

The performances carried out by the participants in this laboratory, inspired by this drawing, sought to create choreographed bodies that could be inscribed in the geometric shapes of Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing. Therefore, the participants and their children photographed and filmed themselves in body positions like that of the “Vitruvian man”, i.e., with their legs and arms open, against a wall.

The images were then digitally edited and superimposed on the drawing. Carnations were placed at the bottom of the image to allude to the 25th of April 1974, the Portuguese Carnation Revolution, which put an end to the long dictatorship of Salazar’s New State (Estado Novo) and the obvious domination of women.

Before 25 April 1974, the public sphere was seen as masculine and the private sphere as feminine, both of which were hierarchical and dominated by men, based on women’s weakness and fragility. The exclusion of women was declared or implicit in numerous areas of public life, such as the Armed Forces and the government of the Republic, and they were denied rights such as the right to vote and to be elected and appointed. In terms of labour, women were not allowed to pursue professions such as the judiciary, a career in the Public Prosecutor’s Office, diplomacy, leadership positions in local administration and even, for a long time, university professorships. Similarly, marriage was not permitted in professions such as primary school teachers, telephone operators, nurses, and hostesses, as they required full-time dedication, which was incompatible with the role required of married women.

Thus, throughout this laboratory, a process of symbolic inscription of the feminine was carried out in a design that glorifies the masculine and reproduces the canons of patriarchal society (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Image at the DB website of the *Lab 04 / Being What We Want to Be*. © Digitalias.

As far as intimate family life was concerned, this was regulated by the state and the husband’s role was to represent it, giving him the power to decide on matters such as voting and power over his wife and children. The Estado Novo created the practical and ideological conditions for women to return to the home and focus on the family and domestic work. However, there were almost no women in working-class circles who were solely domestic, almost all of whom worked outside the home in the same way, as labourers, farm workers, saleswomen or maids. And although to be seen as “honourable” women they didn’t have to be confined



to the home, nor were they obliged to marry, marriage was seen as a way for women to be fulfilled and the paradigm of the feminine was based on heterosexual relationships as the norm.

In the context of a restrictive understanding of the body, women's sexuality was regulated to be passive and obedient and, when married, to satisfy their husbands and fulfil their role as mothers. Male sexuality, on the other hand, was built on ideas of competition, emphasising predatory and promiscuous behaviour both inside and outside of marriage. Thus, husbands who killed their wives in the act of adultery were granted almost impunity. Only a few years before 25 April 1974, the differentiation between legitimate and illegitimate filiation was abolished, women were allowed to vote in the National Assembly and the requirement for a husband's permission for a woman to leave the country was removed. In this regime, which repressed essential rights and freedoms, women functioned as a commodity exchanged between men, existing only within the patriarchal discourse, so that, in this sense, women were talked about, women didn't speak. In the field of habits, which were outlined in detail as being moderate and mild, to authorise the perpetuation of violations of human rights, they were based on the principle that women had the duty of decorum, modesty, and decency. Today, as male power is increasingly threatened, women are subjected to acts of violence of various kinds – physical, psychological, sexual, socio-cultural – with great frequency and intensity, and men, who generally continue to control all social fields, both privately and publicly, are more violent towards women, seeking their domination and subordination.

## Conclusions

Today, people are immersed in a digital age where engineering, technology, artificial intelligence maths algorithms, work platforms, online commerce and access to knowledge are increasingly mediated by screens. Screens are at the centre of their lives, from the micro to the macro, from the personal home to the public workplace. The great digital transformation is still underway, and the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown measures have imposed new models of interaction and accelerated this process even more. These new models of acting, being, living and feeling are not neutral when it comes to different social inequalities, such as gender. At present, men are still associated with prestigious jobs and higher salaries, while women are associated with precarious labour conditions.

Throughout the DB project, social relationships of sharing were fostered between all the participants, and it was not relevant that some of the participants had no previous experience of fine art practice. As a result, artistic knowledge was produced from experiences in the field of the body, emotions, affections, senses, as well as the intellect, based on alternative research methodologies to the traditional ones, participatory and co-creative artistic research, knowledge that we believe cannot be achieved through conventional methods. These artistic methodologies, as well as

strengthening the participants' sense of belonging to the community, draw the community's attention to gender inequality thus contributing to social cohesion and positive social change.

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