



# GENDER

Explore your powers  
through art



Exploring Gender and  
Power through/in Art



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Creating an art mediation workshop to tackle gender

# COLOPHON

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**POWER is composed of the following members (in alphabetical order):**

- **City of Women (CoW) The Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture, Ljubljana, Slovenia.**  
<http://www.cityofwomen.org/en>
- **DADAU (de l'art et de l'autre). Paris, France.** <https://delartetdautre.com/> (coordinator)
- **EARTDI, Research group in the field of art and psychosocial inclusion, University Complutense of Madrid, Spain.** <https://www.ucm.es/eartdi>
- **Elan Interculturel, intercultural organisation, Paris, France.** <https://elaninterculturel.com/>
- **MOH - Mobility Opportunities Hub, sociocultural association in Bari, Italy.** <https://www.mohbari.eu/en/>

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# Hi! Welcome! We are so glad to see you here!

## WHERE ARE YOU?



You are at the start of a journey into exploring gender through art.

We've created tools for you to use in your adventure. Tools that you can use and share later with others! Use this book as a map in an adventure in which you are the explorer.

Your mission is to play, your compass is your instinct and curiosity your best companion.

## Ready...? Okay, let's begin.



So, like any good story we need a little bit of a founding myth before it starts. POWER is a project funded by the program Erasmus + that aims to investigate how to raise awareness on the question of gender through art mediation. We are five organisations based in Spain, Italy, Slovenia and France and we've tested different means to do so in our countries. Together, we wanted to create new pedagogical tools on the matter of gender and art for youth workers. This exciting journey has led us to invent and test out many activities following certain themes : podcast-making, itinerary in museums, collage-making, art campaign creation... We've produced several outcomes such as two manuals, a card game, radio podcasts, visual arts etc. We've met artists, curators, researchers, youth workers and, of course, young people.

... So, now we've picked out the best activities for you to test out and make yours through this playbook!

## The chapters :



1. "But...Hey! What is gender?" Intro to main concepts
2. "What if I have a conflict about gender?" Gender and Interculturality
3. "Hmm... how to look at art?" Museum visit
4. "How do I use artmaking to reflect on gender?" Artistic mediation

## YOUR TOOLBOX



In each chapter, you will find a theoretical part to give you a bit of foundation regarding the subject addressed in the question and a series of activities in link with the notion. Take this book as suggestions : all exercises are open to interpretation. Which brings us to...

## HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

1. Read in any order you want
2. Start with whatever makes you feel excited
3. Make this book yours : write in it, draw it, talk through it etc!
4. Treat everything as an experiment
5. Play!
6. Share what you learn with it!
7. If you want more, check out our full manuals: [here](#)



## We think you can start now... Enjoy the journey!



## **“But... Hey! What is gender?”**

### **Intro to main concepts of Gender identity**

- Universidad Complutense de Madrid

This guide aims to delve into concepts related to power, empowerment and the construction of gender, and is based on the idea that gender is a social construction. It is aligned with the premise that each human being is a unique construction. Such an idea, allows certain human groups to organise themselves to claim equal rights when experiencing social, economic, symbolic or political discrimination because of their origin, ethnicity, gender or social class.

### **Well, mmmm, Am I the wo/man my mo/fa/ther was?**

From the moment we are born, we are assigned characteristics by which the society in which we live identifies us throughout our lives. Theorists call these, in the case of gender, the “gender mandates”. They are changeable across history, religions and cultures, but often become a burden that we carry throughout our lives. Many women do not identify with the characteristics society ascribes to women and many men do not identify with the characteristics society ascribes to men.

### **But, What is it to be a man, what is it to be a woman?**

Our identities are always under construction. We are no longer the child we were, and probably not even the person we were ten or fifteen years ago.

### **So what does traditional society expect of wo/men?**

Globally, western society expects men to be strong, competitive, individualistic, providers of the family and to support it financially. If the occasion demands it, they should be able to respond with violence; not show emotions; they should identify with the military man, the warrior, the hero of wars. Art History and later photography, cinema and advertising have reinforced these models.

In the same way, History of Art and mass media have shown what is expected when contemplating a woman: a body available to sexual demand by a male gaze of power; an eternal capacity for seduction and paradoxically, at the same time, an obligation of modesty and chastity; the values of an assumed, passive and obligatory maternity; or the danger of a woman who looks straight ahead and embodies the male fear of losing his virility.

Today, these social constructions are increasingly being called into question, supporting the freedom of human beings in the construction of their own characteristics, beyond the cultural expectations of gender, class or race, and in their right to establish themselves as political subjects with equal rights.

### **How do we look?**

We can reeducate our gaze, free it from prejudices, learn to decode visual language and look in a different way. All this can help us to see the world from other perspectives. A critical gaze can help us understand how advertising, cinema and the media point out gender models as the norm. It

can help deconstruct those limiting messages and, at the same time, construct liberating alternatives that work visually.

The history of Western Art has been a transmitter of these stereotypes. Yet, it also presents other possibilities of being beyond clichés and stereotypes! They can be tools to rethink not only what we are told to be, but also what we want to be!

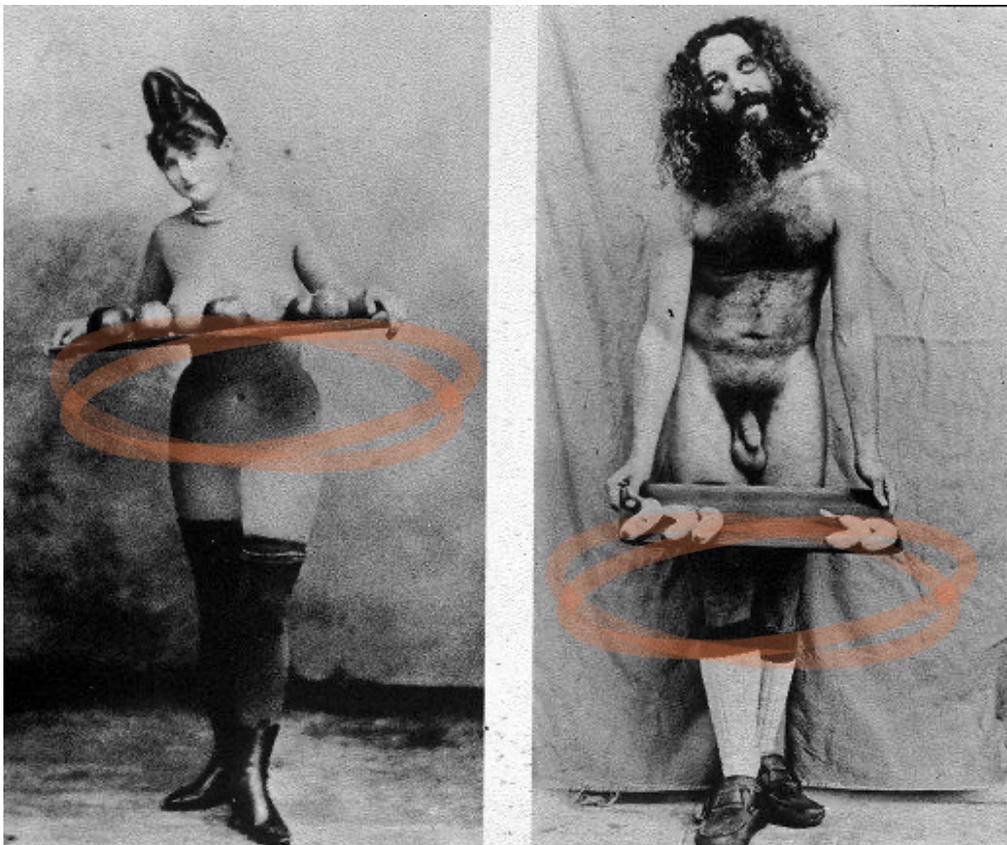
Contemporary art and art made by non-hegemonic groups can help us have other symbolic and visual alternatives.

## The creative process: an element of transformation

Making art helps to understand how the images we see are made and, at the same time, immerses us in a process of deconstruction and personal reconstruction that can be of great help to young people who debate social constructions. Artivism is nothing more than art at the service of social transformation. For instance, fanzines are collective, horizontal and participatory artistic actions that have been developed for the last century, taking advantage of the new modes of technical reproducibility. Therefore, through techniques such as collage, cyanotype and stencils, you can intervene in messages relating to power and patriarchal strategies. You can question them, interrogate them through humour and irony!

## Okay... Got it? Now time for the activity!

Based on Linda Nochlin's example "achetez des pommes - achetez des bananes", we propose to do something similar.



Artist: Nochlin, Linda 1931- (American)

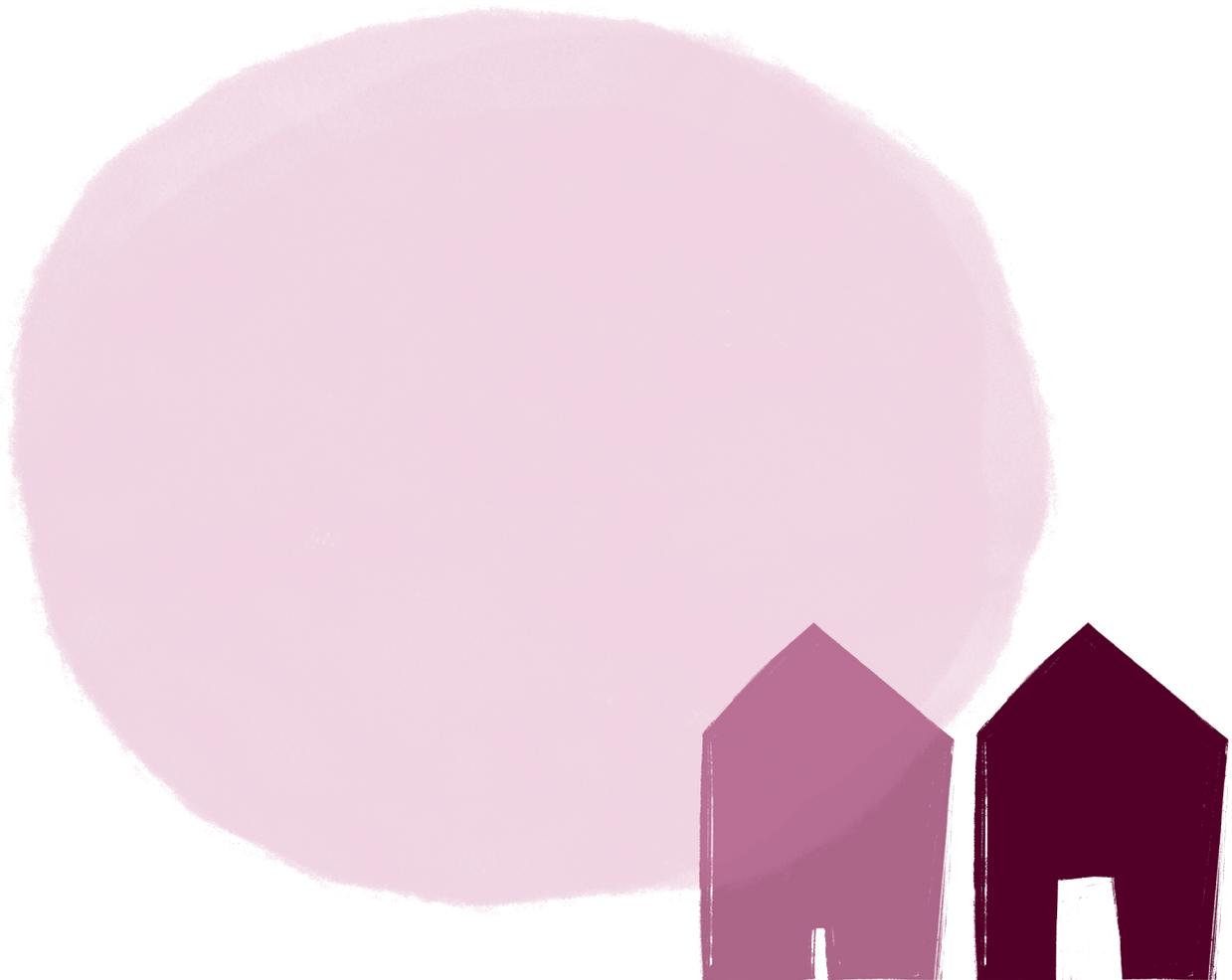
Title: Buy my Bananas (Achetez des Bananes). 1972 detail: with cf "Buy My Apples" from 19c French mag. Permanent Link:

<http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/fisher/n2003040049>

1. Take a picture from a magazine in which a man and a woman are depicted in a classic style (a picture of a naked woman, a pin-up, etc.). Or a man in a heroic position.
2. Change the heads (put the woman's head on the man's body and vice versa).
3. Look at the result, discuss it in your group, with your family. Do you find the image shocking? What do you think of Linda Nochlin's image? Discuss why you find one image more normal than the other.

## Sharing

With your friends or your family, look for images on film covers that still represent these stereotypes, ask your parents and grandparents about films where these gender stereotypes have been present. Look for new role models in film! Make a family tree with them from the films they have seen to the films you have seen. Ask yourself what has changed and what has stayed the same. Do you think this is a good thing or a problem?



## “What if I have a conflict about gender?” Gender and Interculturality

- Elan Interculturel

Humans are culturally biological (Rogoff, 2003). This means that we may have a body that is seemingly biological, but all we do with it, how we think of it is already a consequence of the culture(s) in which we grew up: the way we walk, sit, eat, the way we dress it, what we put in it (i.e. what animals if any we consider food), what we hide in it and what we let others see, the way we categorise it (ugly or beautiful), etc., all these are consequences of culture. And, maybe, in none of the other domains of life this “double nature” triggers as much excitement and anxiety than concerning sex and gender. For instance, when we pronounce the word “woman” we refer to a category of biological sex or cultural gender and, based on how we think about this now, the two only partially overlap: a person born in a seemingly male body can have a feminine identity, a person born with a female body can identify as non-binary, etc .

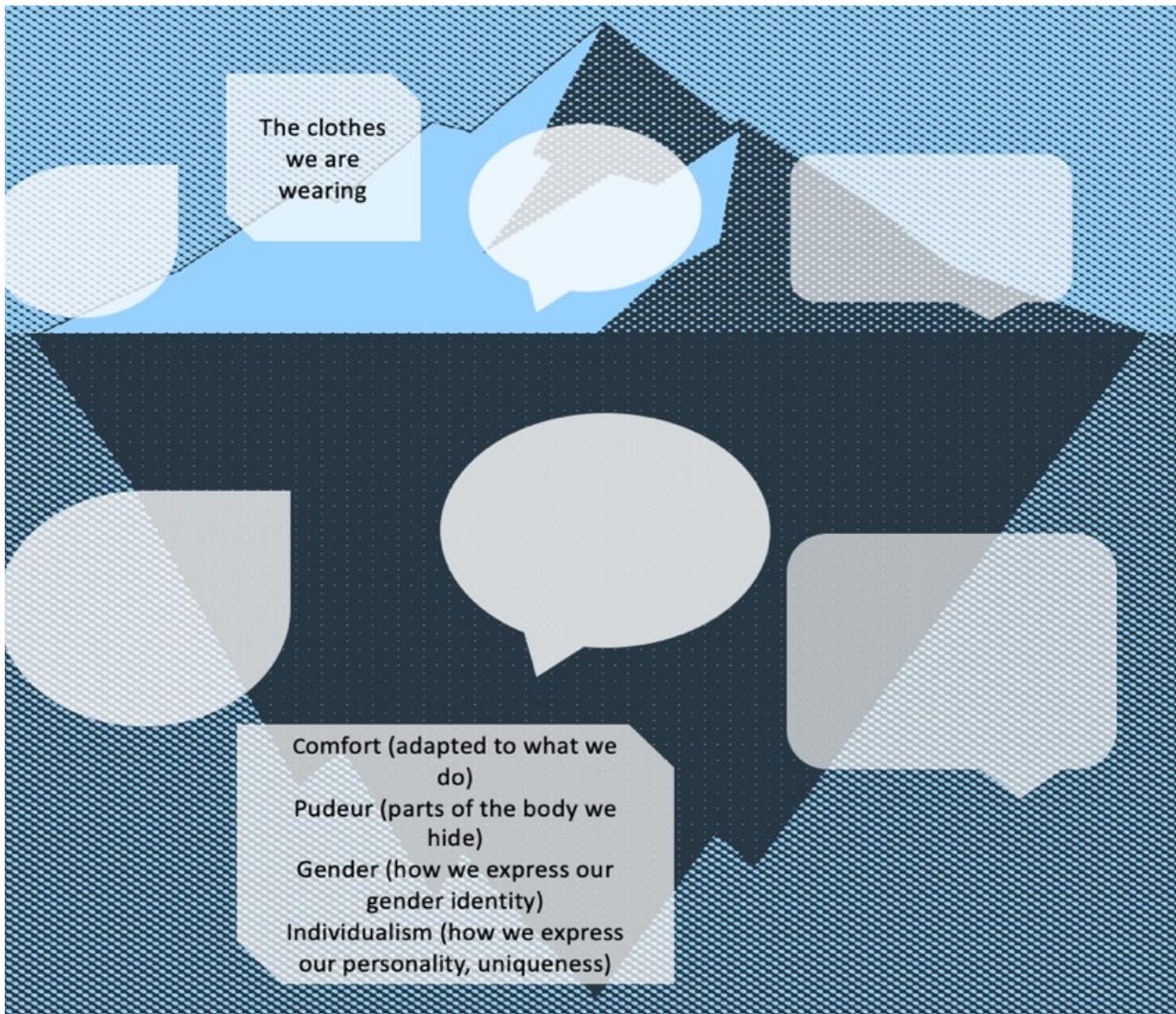
The fact that gender is a cultural construct also implies that it is not determined by biology. If each culture gives a different answer to what is real, true and beautiful, each culture gives its own response to what is gender, how many genders there are, what is a man, a woman and what the other genders are, and so on. But let’s take a step back to contemplate a bit more the concept of culture.

### Losing the illusion of our cultural neutrality

Wherever you are, take a moment to look around, and name some manifestations of “culture” that you see. Most probably you are sitting on a chair, by a computer, or holding a mobile phone, or reading printed paper. All these are cultural artefacts. Your clothes are also cultural, and so is the way you are sitting, so is your hair. Well to be precise: not the genetic material of your hair. Whether it is naturally curly, brown, or blond are not cultural features. But how you wear it, how you shape or colour it is part of culture. In fact, you may need to go through quite some trouble to point at something which is completely outside of the culture around you (a rainforest, the sky – when there are no airplanes in it..).

For us interculturalists this exercise of spotting what is cultural is an interesting one, because where there is culture, there is also structure, and underlying norms and values. None of the manifestations of culture are freely floating, they all stand to represent something that is meaningful for the society that created them. And no other metaphor is as useful in this exploration than the iceberg. You guessed why: it has a small visible part, which is sustained by a much larger and hidden part. This hidden part is the realm of values, norms and representations that give the meanings of what we see. Could you now think of what are values, norms hiding underneath the manifestations of culture you’ve noticed before? Inscribe them in the iceberg below! To help you get started, we give you an example..

**1** In fact some feminists raise the argument that there is no biological sex at all, that we project the culturally learnt binarity of genders onto biology and have the illusion of the biological sexes. But then the question emerges: where the illusion of binarity comes from? As of Today biologists tend to maintain the necessity of the concept of “biological sexes”, so that we can explain the sexual reproduction. However, this biological binarity does not imply at all a biological determinism.

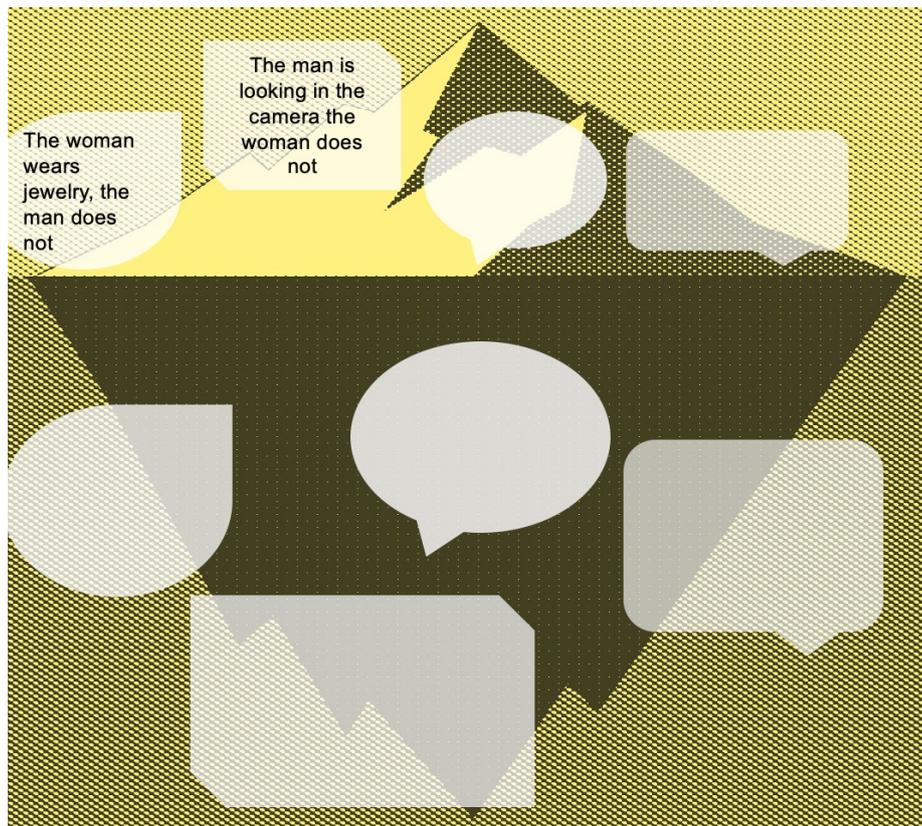


## Okay... Got it? Now time for the activity!

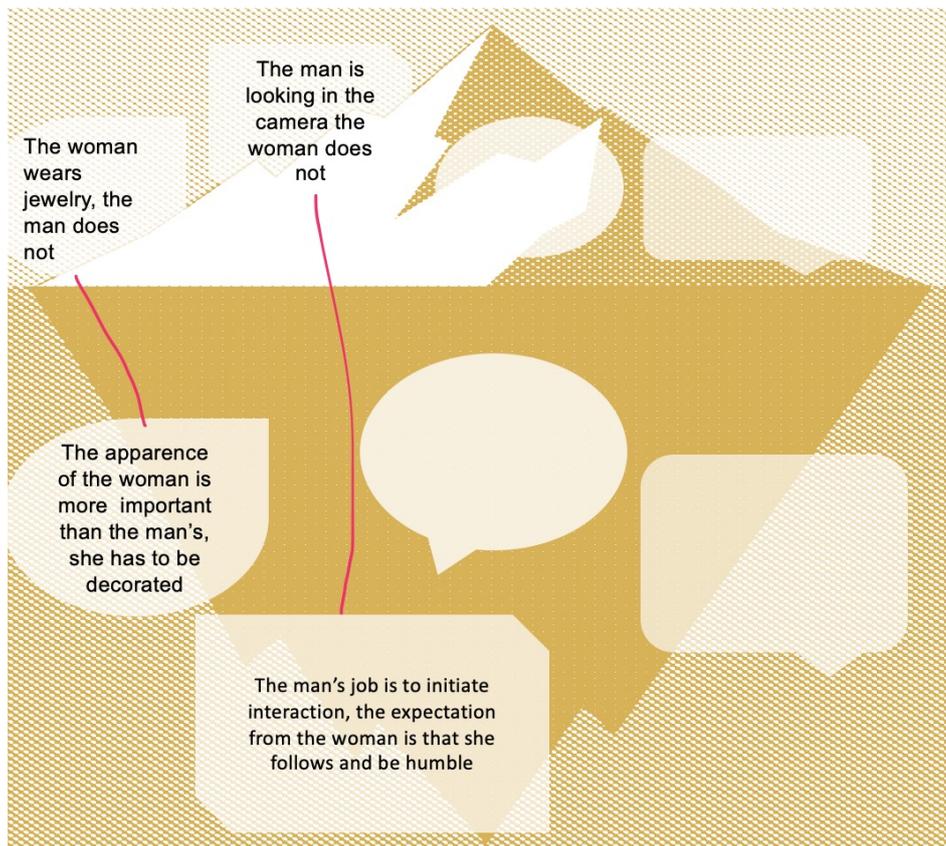
Consider now the image below, that offers a depiction of gender, set in a particular space and time. Can you name what are visible manifestations of “culture” in this image?



Start by naming all that you can objectively see, and write them on the top part of your iceberg. We give you two examples to get you started.



Now let's try to decode what values and norms related to gender are hiding behind each of them...





You could do this with every single publicity that you see in journals or in public space. Deconstructing them this way could help you be more aware and critical of the hidden messages.

## Sharing

We're all a little bit ethnocentric: this means we are positioned in the values, norms, representations of our own culture(s) and we contemplate and evaluate others through our own lenses – through our own frame of references. For instance, depending on your cultural frame of references, you may see the woman in the image as...



- A) An oppressed woman subjected to patriarchy that asks her to hide her hair and prove her identity
- B) An emancipated Muslim woman, who wishes to incorporate her relationship to god in the way she dresses

Or you may see this woman as...



- A) An oppressed woman subjected to patriarchy that asks her to undress to become an object of desire
- B) A woman who owns her body and is not afraid to present it the way she desires

What you see does not only depend on your personal views, but also on the society you live in. Some groups have more status than others and cultural behaviour is often used to justify why the lower status groups can be discriminated against. In France, for example, wearing the veil is often interpreted as a sign of oppression, even if many feminist Muslim women wear it too. The idea of the oppression of women is then generalised to all Muslims, and justifies a negative attitude and institutional discrimination.

We propose you to put into practice your intercultural lenses. Find someone whose cultural frame of reference may be quite different from yours (be mindful of making assumption based on looks, it can be refreshing to discover that who you expect to be different is not so different after all ☺)

Once you have your partner, identify images that depict some gender-related behaviour that seems interesting or ambiguous to you. Explore together through the iceberg game what are the norms and values that each of you connect to different aspects of what you see. Be gentle and open to each other: the objective is not to agree on one possible solution, but precisely notice and admire the diversity of values and norms.

List of references:

Rogoff, Barbara (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



## “Hmm... how to look at art?” Museum visit

In every era, society constructs and validates gender codes that have been transmitted to us from many spheres, including museums. Museum institutions are places where our collective memory is kept; they are custodians of what a society considers worthy of valuing and preserving for future generations. For this reason, beyond the pieces housed in them, it is important that current and future citizens know how to read their heritage and cultural legacy.

Approaching a museum from a gender perspective means questioning one's own history, knowing how to distinguish between what we really see and what we have been told or what other stories have been hidden or ignored. For years, the academic feminist movement has been warning against this false traditional historiography, which has excluded women from universal history. That's why we propose four common axes which help us leave behind this inherited historiographic approach!

1. We must continue to call for a permanent “reinvention of the museum”, and of heritage sites, developing new narratives based on direct contact with the works.
2. We must revise the exhibition discourse, starting with questions such as: what is known about women (as a plural and diverse group)?
3. We must ask ourselves why some works are exhibited, and others aren't.
4. It is necessary to reread history, avoiding the dilemmas and blind spots of the current discourse.

### **This leads us to critical thinking through observation**

1. The first activity can be carried out in most museums and temporary exhibitions. You are invited to go around one of the exhibition halls and note how many works by female and male artists are visible there. A discussion with other participants can then follow based on the numbers received.
2. For the next activity, you and the other participants of the workshop group are invited to take a smartphone and search for male artists and authors (e.g. Van Gogh, Pirandello, etc.). Then you, with the other attendees, write down on a post-it the first adjective you can read, referring to the male artist/author that you found on Wikipedia. Would the same adjective be used for female artists/authors?

### **Okay... Got it? Now time for the activity!**

- Choose a work of art (preferably two-dimensional) that depicts a story where men and women have different roles, for example, the meeting of King Salomon and the Queen of Sheba. In a black and white reproduction of this artwork, you have to choose one single element of the painting, and change it in such a way that power relations are transformed in the scene. You can add or remove an element with a black felt-tip pen or a white corrector.

- You can work with a reproduction of five-six works of art. On a large sheet of paper, with other participants you can cut out the characters and background elements, and on a large sheet

of paper, your group can arrange them in collages, taking care to change not only the context of the story, but also the gender roles conveyed by the original compositions.

## Sharing

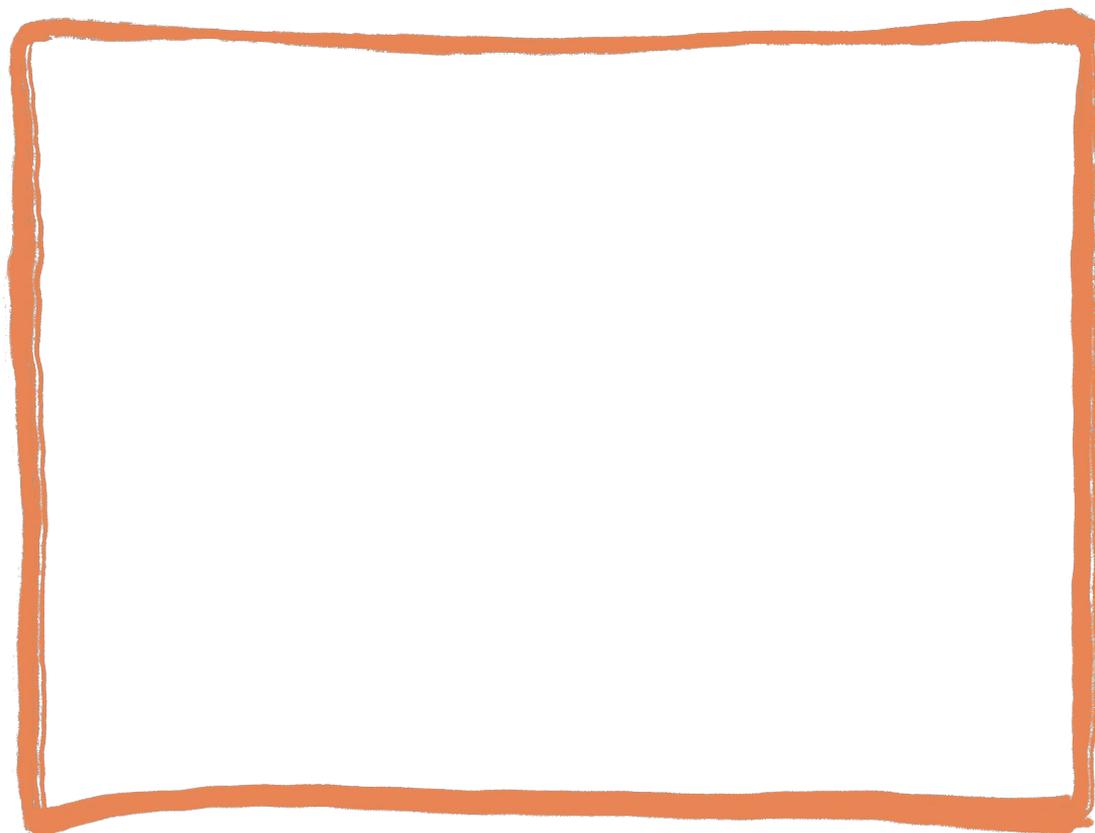
Choose a work of art representing a mythological or biblical story. Please reread or recall the description of the story and observe the pictorial representation. Then try to imagine the same events from the point of view of other characters in the story, especially women. For example, how would Helen describe her abduction by Paris? What would Judith's maid say before or after the beheading of Holofernes?

Notice something? Maybe some sort of pattern? Once the different perspectives have been discussed, with the group you can look again at the work of art in question and try to figure out from what point of view the artist chose to depict the story.

Now following this activity let's focus on the participants' experiences!

Create two circles of people, so there is one group outside and another inside. The group inside will start the story of a woman. Then they switch, the group outside moves to the center and starts to construct the story of a man in the same way.

As they go along, ask them to imagine a scenario or an environment and to answer the following questions to shape the story: What do they do in that place? How do they behave? What do they talk about? How do they express their feelings? How do they relate to each other?



## “How do I use artmaking to reflect on gender?” Artistic mediation

- City Of Women & - Mobility Opportunity Hub

Artistic mediation processes are taught in a variety of settings: educational, therapeutic and social, as well as in formal adult education programmes. Techniques of visualisation, drama, dance, collage, creative writing and acoustic and musical performance are used to structure learning processes, uncover and depict conflicts or problems, address issues collectively, communicate with the outside world and for self-expression. Artistic processes also play a role in the context of social and political activism, where they serve the aims of self-empowerment, self-representation and intervention in public debates.

### **Create, think, observe and reflect through making artwork!**

It enables an opportunity to engage in artistic creation, even if you have never done it before. One of the fundamental assumptions is that creativity is not the domain of a certain group of people with specific characteristics or knowledge, but that the creative impulse is present in every individual and every human activity can be creative. Nor is the goal of the process the best work of art. The primary focus is on personal research work and the personally transformative potential of creative activity and sharing only this with the world, as a possibility for different, critical thinking, which is the basis for change.

Analytic engagement with images and texts, quite often drawing on examples from the history or present day of the arts, is used to help people develop visual literacy, an ability to read images critically.

This provides a foundation upon which you can produce other images and texts of their own creation that differ from the depictions found in the mainstream media and the advertisements ubiquitous in public spaces: to design posters and flyers or create theatrical and musical performances in connection with demonstrations or interventions in public spaces or in connection with existing images.

This is why now we will focus on addressing the subject of gender! They will open the space for your own experience, reflection and new concepts that can be explored in relation to these topics. In the activities below you will have a chance to learn how to integrate the subject of gender in an artistic mediation workshop, how to facilitate the identification of a subject matter for one's artwork and how to transmit artistic tools for yourself, other participants in their artistic creation.

### **Observing your surroundings...**

Sit in a public space with your notebook and a pen and observe a group of people or a scene that caught your attention.

Now take your pen and write down the description of the scene changing just one element of it. You can change the interaction between people, their gender, their skin colour or their body shape, etc.

Now share the new scene with friends. What did you change and why? How does the meaning of the scene change?

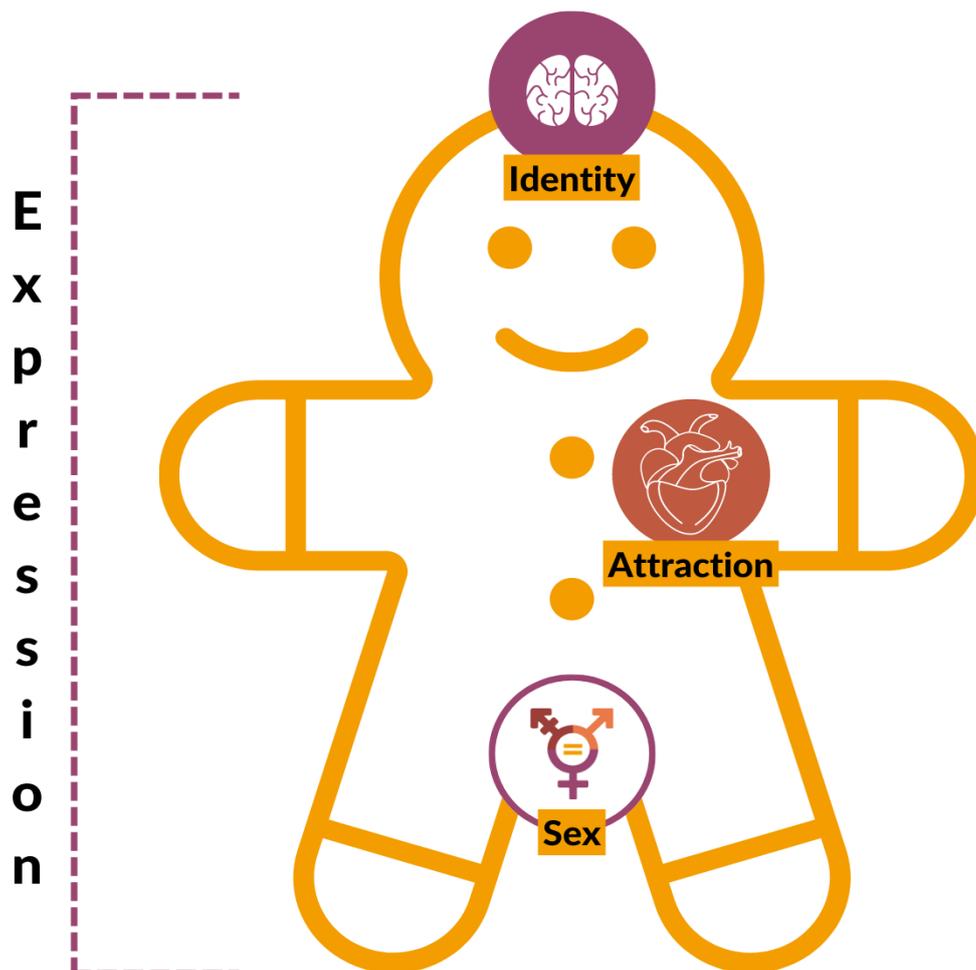
## Okay... Got it? Now it's time for the activity!

This is inspired by the genderbread person, created by Sam Killerman, author of [itspronouncedmetrosexual.com](http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com) and LGBTQ+ advocate.

It represents a way to simplify all the components of gender identity and expression, sexuality and gender assigned at birth. To do so, create your personal genderbread person. Take cut-outs from newspapers and magazines and glue them on the section related to identity, attraction, sex and expression.

Collage is perhaps the most accessible art technique because it does not require complex art training, but instead creativity and freedom in looking! Collage goes beyond just cutting and glueing: it is a way of making sense of one's world, thoughts and emotions, contemplating both one's sense perceptions!

For your collage, did you make a style choice or did you just think about the idea you wanted to convey? How did you feel about juxtaposing images from different materials? How do you like the collage?



Inspired by: <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/>

## Sharing

Portrait without looking.

Share an artistic practice with a friend or a relative, sit in front of the person and portray him/her/ them.

You have to follow these three rules:

1. Never look at the paper (keep your eyes fixed on the other face)
2. Try not to lift the pen from the paper
3. Make the two portraits simultaneously.

At the end, you can even overlap the two sheets and observe the result together!

Do you think there is a need for special skills to make art, or that everyone can express a message through art if guided?

## Conversation starters cards

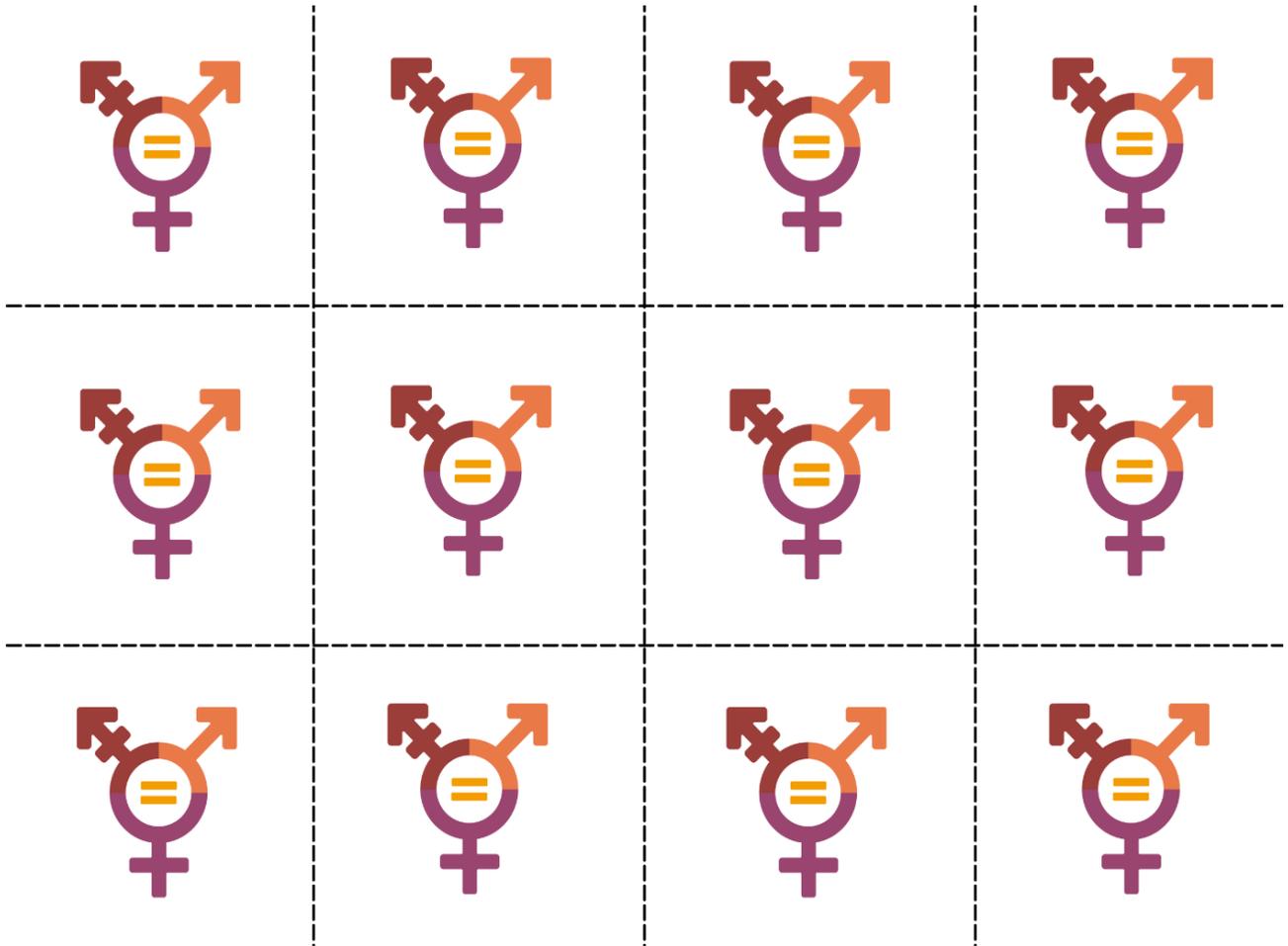
Start a conversation with one of your relatives, or a stranger by choosing one (or more than one) of these questions. Feel free to add your own questions to the last two cards.

Do you think everyone can do art?

Show your genderbread collage and ask them to reflect on it. What can they see?

Do you think art is able to address gender or power issues?

Do you know any artists that work with gender or power issues?

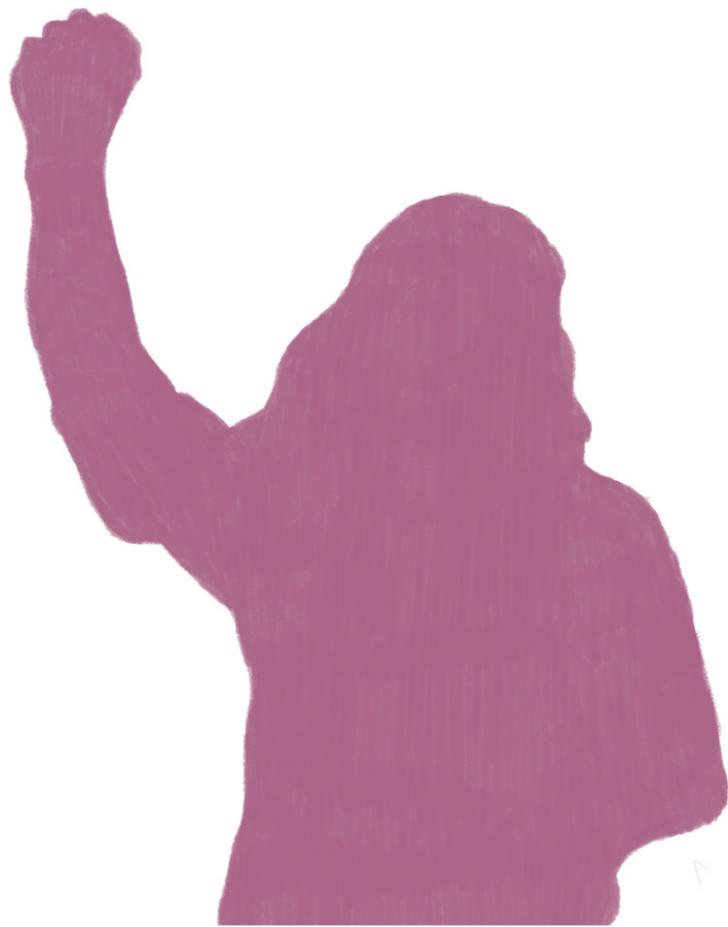


## Gender-neutral toilet signs

Cut out these gender-neutral toilet signs and put them on the public toilets (of bars, restaurants, etc...) that still have the gendered toilets.

If you enjoyed doing these activities, please, share your products on the Instagram account of our project: [@power.project.eu](https://www.instagram.com/power.project.eu)





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