

# Moving Stones 'Milhas pela Vida das Mulheres': social organisations, art and the struggle for women's reproductive rights in Brazil



**Talita Trizoli**

Universidade de São Paulo (Pós-doutorado/IEB), São Paulo, SP, Brasil

E-mail: ttrizoli@gmail.com



**Paula Borghi**

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil

E-mail: paulaborghi1@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Abortion policies in Brazil have historically been a stone in the path of women's social emancipation. Until nowadays, there are few possibilities for safe and legal termination of pregnancy in the country. Even in cases authorised by law, conservative agents find ways to intervene and make difficult to women to exercise their reproductive rights. The persistent taboo status of abortion in Brazilian society made the theme not often addressed in the country's contemporary art system. Therefore, the project 'Milhas pela Vida das Mulheres' is unique as it combines the support of women artists, who are also activists and sympathetic to feminist causes, to guarantee the right of abortion, by allowing 'Milhas' to sell fineart-prints from their works. Founded in September 2019, 'Milhas' is a mutual solidarity initiative that support people who want to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy in a safe and legal way, removing financial, logistical barriers, and the lack of information about the procedure. In the absence of support from the State, these networks of social practices help guaranteeing autonomy over one's own body.

**Keywords:** abortion, activism, feminism, Brazil, women artists

On September 18, 2020, an attempt to prevent a legal abortion was reported. It was a case of rape of a minor, a 10-year-old girl, sexually assaulted over four years by her uncle. She had her request for termination of pregnancy denied at the University Hospital of Vitória, capital of the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil. Although within the legislation, discriminated in a report by a judge, and with risk to her life, the 20-week pregnancy of this child was not authorised to be terminated, forcing the girl and her family to travel almost 2,000 km to the city of Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco, to have the abortion.

Throughout this outrageous process, but not surprising within the Brazilian context, what catapulted the news was the interference of the then responsible for the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, the evangelical pastor Damares Alves. In addition to attempts at direct coercion with the family, health agents and social workers, it was attested that the minister's team<sup>1</sup> (conservative and fascist) had leaked confidential data of the case to pro-life demonstrators.

This act triggered a wave of public condemnation towards this girl and her legal guardians, in addition to leading to the assembly, by conservative activists, of a barricade to try to prevent this girl from entering the Integrated Health Centre Amaury de Medeiros, where the abortion took place.

Such event, as absurd as it sounds due to the various violations of women and children's rights, is just one on several cases of abuse and violence involving the issue of abortion in Brazil. Whether it is the refusal of families, doctors, nurses or even the legal staff to execute the law, there is no sphere in the Brazilian society that is not contaminated by the desire to defending the life of the foetus at the expense of the pregnant woman.

To complement the story that opens this essay, it is also worth commenting on the case of an 11-year-old girl from the

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<sup>1</sup> During her tenure at the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, conservative and right-wing pastor Damares Alves reduced funds against domestic violence, and dismantled the support network for victims of sexual violence, in addition to staffing departments such as Guardianship Councils, responsible for the care and reception of children and women in vulnerable conditions, with Protestant and radical Episcopal agents. In the case of the girl from Espírito Santo, there were several face-to-face and online meetings between Damares and her ministerial team with social agents, judges and doctors, offering benefits in order to delay the legal termination of the child's pregnancy. For more information see Vila-Nova (2020).

state of Santa Catarina, pregnant as a result of rape, who, during an interview that was at least conflicting with judge Joana Ribeiro Zimmer, was questioned: "would you bear to stay a little longer?" (Guimarães; Lara; Dias, 2022) and "do you think the baby's father would agree to give it up for adoption?" (Guimarães; Lara; Dias, 2022). As if the several unreasonable questions were not enough, direct hurting the girl's desire and dignity, the judge, faced with this child's refusal to be a mother, decided to "admit" her to a shelter to prevent legal abortion, and even appointed a lawyer as legal representative for the fetus, something illegal in Brazilian jurisprudence – finally, the girl could undergo the procedure that was her right and desire, but already in the advanced 7th month of pregnancy, due to the imbroglio.

The right to free, safe and legal<sup>2</sup> abortion in Brazil does not face mere stones for its realisation, but a veritable mountain of legal, ethical and moral impediments, which are not even discussed broadly and transparently with the society due to the burden of conservatism and hysteria that hangs over the subject.

In the context of such a hostile environment to Brazilian women's rights to legal and safe abortions, one can understand the recent presence of feminist collectives dedicated to fighting and preserving CIS women's (and persons with uterus) reproductive rights. Groups such as 'Feminist Health Network Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights', 'Semperviva Feminist Organization (SOF)', and religious progress women such as the 'Catholic women for the right to decide' and 'Evangelical Women for Gender Equality (EIG)', are important organisations for the legal defence of abortion, whether in guaranteeing rights or in defending the expansion of possible intervention cases.

This article chooses to discuss the Brazilian project 'Milhas pela Vida das Mulheres' (Miles for women's lives) which involves Brazilian women artists advocating for the right to abortion and its relevance to contemporary debate on reproductive rights in Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to legal induced abortion, it is important to assert that there are three classifications according to the Brazilian Criminal Code from 1940: therapeutic or necessary abortion, eugenic and humanitarian or sentimental. Therapeutic or necessary abortion concerns the risk conditions of the pregnant woman, the eugenic one concerns the malformations of the fetus and its possible limitation of life, with the sentimental or therapeutic abortion being linked to either the pregnancy resulting from sexual violence, or the woman's desire to not being a mother (the latter being the most condemned by society) (Jesus 1999).

## Taking action through art

In November 2020, the curators Gabriela Davies<sup>3</sup>, Maira Marques<sup>4</sup> and Paula Borghi (one of the authors of this article) designed the 'Potência Ativa' project (Active Power project)<sup>5</sup>. It was an "umbrella" proposition that worked through until February 2023, focusing on the possible articulation of art projects that debate social emergencies and which could generate resources for organisations supporting social struggles.

The same year 'Potência Ativa' established a partnership with another social care program, 'Milhas Pela Vida das Mulheres' (Miles for women's lives), which helps women in vulnerable conditions to obtaining legal abortions. To generate this support, a partnership 'Arte, substantivo feminino'<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 01 – Graphic picture with two spheres (colors orange and rose) with demonstrate the interpolation of the three different feminist groups related to the abortion support campaign ("Active Power", "Miles for women's lives" and "Art, feminine noun").

Fonte: Elaboração própria.

<sup>3</sup> Organizer of the 'Fotos Pró Rio' project, which raised the gross amount of R\$477,250.00 in October 2020 for artists and vulnerable communities that were impacted by the pandemic. To find out more visit: <https://www.fotorio.fot.br/>

<sup>4</sup> She also worked at 'Miles for women's lives'.

<sup>5</sup> To find out more visit: <https://www.potenciativa.org/>

<sup>6</sup> To find out more visit: <https://www.potenciativa.org/a%C3%A7%C3%B5es-ativas>

Founded in September 2019 by filmmaker Juliana Reis, 'Miles for women's lives'<sup>7</sup> is a mutual solidarity initiative to help people who want to terminate an unwanted pregnancy safely and legally, removing financial and logistical barriers and providing necessary information otherwise not available or restricted.

Effectively, it is a network that advocates for the decriminalisation of abortion in Brazil – the cases presented in the introduction to this chapter illustrate the difficulties to obtain legal termination. The mission of the network is, as the curators keep saying on public and informal conversations: "Who can, sharing resources with those who need it".

To raise resources for the 'Milhas' program, a partnership between the 'Art, feminine noun' (active between 2021 and 2022) emerged through 'Potência Ativa' as a solution for medical bills, airplane and bus tickets, hotel rates, lawyers and even legal medication not available through the Public Health System.

It is important to emphasize that the focus of the "Milhas" project is to support cases of legal abortion in the country, even paying the costs for women to travel to neighbouring countries to undergo the procedures legally, but the project is not able to expand its efforts to other elements of reproductive rights, such as contraceptive methods, routine medical examinations for CIS women or especially medical interventions in the gynaecological area, just to name a few.

A brief summary of the history of abortion in modern Brazil is necessary here, in order to understand the context of women's difficulties and the singularity of these initiatives.

## They (the women) don't decide anything

One of the first attempts at public discussion about women's reproductive rights was led by the suffragist movement in the early 20th century – but not a "well-behaved", institutionalized suffragism/feminism, but one linked to the anarchist movement,

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<sup>7</sup> To find out more visit: <https://www.milhaspelavidadasmulheres.com.br/sobre-n%C3%B3s>

with the paradigmatic figure of Maria Lacerda de Moura as one of the best articulated spokespersons:

It is barbaric to damage virginity, forced chastity for the female sex, chastity imposed by law and society, just as "necessary" prostitution is barbaric [...] to satisfy the hungry of all ages and all marital statuses. Unwanted motherhood is also savage, the motherhood imposed by self-indulgent husbands on ignorant and doubly sacrificed women (Moura Maria Lacerda. 1932, pp. 151 apud Leite, 2005: 221)

Although the term abortion was not used at that time, but instead the expression 'desired motherhood', the question of female control over pregnancy, bodily autonomy and integrity emerged between the lines as a political position in defence of self-determination. Such approach, however, was articulated in libertarian circles, not reflecting the current and widespread belief that the feminine ideal is linked to motherhood and so the termination of pregnancy should be criminalised.<sup>8</sup>

The effective criminalisation of abortion acquired legal status in the Brazilian Penal Code of 1940 (Brasil, 1940), reflecting the conservative, patriarchal and punitive perspective of Brazilian society. In this document, the practices of termination of pregnancy are contemplated on the item "crimes against life", in articles 124 to 128, with the punishment of imprisonment of up to ten years, reservations on the exceptions of risk to the life of the pregnant woman or in case of rape (but it is important to note that the Penal Code indicates that the doctors will be exempt from prosecution in these cases, but not the pregnant persons).

<sup>8</sup> In 1937 Bertha Lutz, a Brazilian feminist and scientist, proposed during her term as Federal Deputy to create the Statute of Women, a document which would be part of the guidelines of an institutionalised Brazilian feminist movement. Articles 116 to 121 of the proposed document explained the condition of criminalization of abortion, whether for pregnant women or for medical staff, with the majority of cases being proven of "carnal violence", including those determined as "fruit of seduction", "illegitimate partner", "aggressor", or in which the pregnant woman is a minor, mentally incapable or financially dependent, when would be recommended as "abandonment of the incapable", which would not exclude the detention of the pregnant woman. It is important to point out that such Statute never came into force, existing only as a project and a symptom of the current mentality, since the National Congress was closed in 1937 with the coup d'état of the Estado Novo, led by the then president Getúlio Vargas.



The resumption of the public discussion on the abortion issue in Brazil took place in the 1960s, but not as a condition of a possible change in legislation, but as a ghost that hovered over. Although the presence of the feminist movement was not widespread at the time<sup>9</sup>, there were occasional mentions of the abortion practices in some articles and journalistic notes, always in a tone of terror, tragedy and crime – and some of the examples are discussed below.

In *Jornal do Brasil*, one of the main journalistic vehicles in the country, the issue published on August 28, 1960, featured a medical column called “Your doctor, your friend”, which included several warnings concerned with women’s health, and where abortive practice more than once was mentioned as the cause of the so-called ‘genital cancer (breast and uterus)’. Beyond the medical advices and warnings, at every journalistic piece related to the abortion subject, even the ones written by women<sup>10</sup>, its criminal status was emphasized citing police notes, referring to narratives of doctors and midwives, named ‘curiosas’ [curious women], and cases of intervention due to bad formation of foetuses. Also, in other publications of great circulation<sup>11</sup> termination of pregnancy was explored through moralist terms and contextualised within terror stories.

Even so, there is an exception of *Revista Realidade* case, a pioneer in the approach to controversial themes during its editorial existence (1966 to 1976). Unveiled in several published reports<sup>12</sup> in which the class division on the attempts at birth control is highlighted, as well the social need for contraceptives as a public policy, and the presence of abortion practices, including illegal, the magazine took a unique position on the subject of

<sup>9</sup> To find out more see: Barros (2016), Trizoli (2018).

<sup>10</sup> This particular piece was written by a female doctor, Yeda de Medeiros.

<sup>11</sup> Newspapers as *Correio da Manhã*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Última Hora*, which were the main publications at the time, presented several articles about abortion, mostly to condemn it or cause guilt.

<sup>12</sup> Between 1966 and 1976, the *Revista Realidade* had around 28 articles about abortion and methods of birth control, for example “Brasil: 60 milhões de pílula ao ano”, issue 02, May 1966, p. 17-22; “A Mulher Brasileira, hoje”, issue, 10, January 1967, p. 20-29; “O Aborto”, issue 27, June 1968, p. 156-165; “Especial: um dossiê sobre aborto”, issue 76, July 1972, p. 54-60.

reproductive health compared to other publishing outlets (which earned it episodes of censorship and even attacks).

In the June 10, 1967 issue, a survey was carried out on the practices, reasons, and profile of women searching for abortions, within a broader discussion on birth control. In this research, both the traumatic character and the dissemination of the practice stands out, given the absence of other fertility control devices:

Is abortion permissible in extreme cases?

Nearly two-thirds think it is. 80% of non-religious women admit abortion, 65% of Catholics and only 41% of Protestants. Once again, however, the greatest differences of opinion depend on the level of education: while only 4% of illiterate women admit abortion in extreme cases, 73% of university students consider it admissible.

Have you already had an abortion?

Frightening fact: one in four interviewees answered that she had already had an abortion. Here, there were no significant differences of social class. However, despite the fact that only 34% of the illiterate women considered abortion permissible under certain circumstances, 44% confessed to having already had an abortion. (Revista Realidade, 1967: 26)

At 1968, in the June 27 issue, the journalist Norma Freire (1968) explored the topic of the abortive experience and its social implications, but framed it at times in moralist terms. Bringing comparative statistics with other countries<sup>13</sup> where abortion is or is not legalised, Freire observes that abortive practices occur in the most disadvantaged layers of society due to difficulty in accessing other contraceptive methods, but also in cases of sexual liaisons not legally permitted, financial limitations, in addition to risks to the pregnant woman's health or life. The reasons are countless,

<sup>13</sup> Freire (1968: 156) comments the case of Sweden, Poland, Japan, Puerto Rico, Denmark, Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as places where abortion was legalized on different conditions, even developing a system of "tourism" to women. Greece and Italy are pointed as countries where the illegal structures are predominant, with older women and midwives providing abortion services.



but they emerge aligned with a common feeling, a result of the oppressive situation towards women: fear.

Why does a woman have an abortion? The reason seems to be almost always the same, anywhere in the world: fear. Fear of childbirth, due to ignorance or bad experience in previous childbirths. Fear of society, when it comes to a single mother. Fear of not being able to support the child that will be born. Some fear that the pregnancy will worsen their already fragile health, others experience marital conflicts and think that the child will further jeopardize the failed marriage. Women in these conditions suffer a terrible psychological drama. To get rid of the nightmare, they are capable of practicing what their own conscience disapproves of, which the law calls a crime and religion condemns with all rigor: abortion. (Freire 1968: 156)

The topic is taken up again by the magazine in its 76<sup>th</sup> edition in 1972 by the journalists Audálio Dantas and Domingos Meirelles. Between 1968 and 1972, the data presented did not change much: still criminalised but widespread, to the point of being dubbed the "female endemic in the world", the practice of abortion was presented as a simple, even banal surgery provided by doctors, with moral implications and leading to blaming women.

However, the article presented a new and more assertive positioning on the subject and included graphical images of the procedure. In the report, physician Décio Teixeira Noronha, one of the few in favour of the full legalisation of abortion, stated that, 'What happens is a known fact, and in a way, tolerated. It is impossible to hide the fact that thousands of clandestine abortions are practiced. So, there is a hypocrisy of the law, which exists but is not enforced: it is violated all the time.' (Dantas; Meirelles, 1972: 58)

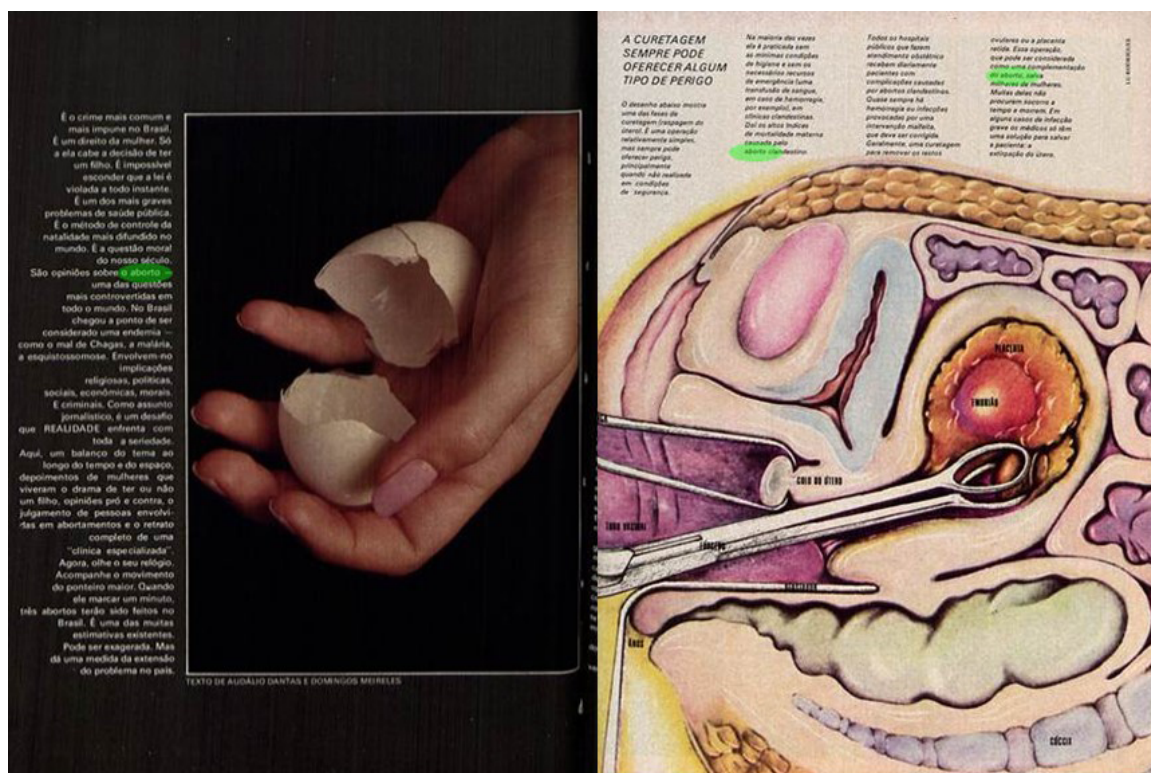


Fig.02 – PrintScreen from Realidade Magazine. Article by Adálio Dantas and Domingos Meirelles, 76th edition of 1972.

Available at: <https://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/docreader.aspx?bib=213659&pasta=ano%20197&pesq=aborto&pagfis=13369> Accessed on July 10, 2023

If public discussions about the legalisation of abortion were sparse throughout the 1960s and 1970s, despite widespread debates on public health, it is in the context of the 1980s, by the end of the dictatorial regime<sup>14</sup>, that effectively the issue was put on the agenda.

The feminist movement at the time, re-institutionalised with the restoration of the democratic regime after two decades of military control, was a driving force behind the debates on the subject in Congress, especially with the elaboration of the New Constitution of 1988. Several bills and laws concerned with women's issues were proposed for inclusion in the new Constitution by way of the 'Lipstick Lobby' (Sardenberg and Costa 2014, 58), a unified

14 See: Borges (2013) Holanda (1994); Karawejczyk (2018), Macarini (2000); Moraes (1996); Pinto (2010).

front of female deputies<sup>15</sup> who, despite the differences between the various political parties they represented, decided to unite themselves to guide women's demands in the new constitutional law – which received the wedge, initially pejorative, due to its focus on women. Concerning the abortion issue:

[...] the first bill includes a provision on the permissibility of abortion when the pregnancy results from rape deleted from the Penal Code of 1969 after amendments to the 1973 law and that the second bill repeated the mentioned Law of Criminal Misdemeanours in relation to the prohibition of the advertisement of abortion, updating the fine in this regard. (Rocha, 2016: 393)

Therefore, it is not surprising that this topic is rarely, if ever, discussed by the artistic community, even by militant feminist women artists – and that is why the proposition of 'Miles' is so important.

## Art, feminine noun

The first action of "Art, feminine noun" – a partnership program between the projects "Active Power" and "Miles for women's lives" – took place in December 2021, with the online sale of unlimited editions of photographs printed on fine art paper, approximately the size of 21 cm x 30 cm, for a unit value of R\$200.00.

Mostly through social media, the sales were opened during December, so the prints were made on demand, taking a couple of weeks to be sent by e-mail, together with a certificate of the project and artists.

The project had the participation of 23 cisgender women artists, from different generations, race, sexuality, religion, social

<sup>15</sup> The 25 women constituents were: Abigail Feitosa, Anna Maria Rattes, Benedita da Silva, Beth Azize, Cristina Tavares, Dirce Tutu Quadros, Eunice Michelles, Irma Passoni, Lídice da Mata, Lúcia Braga, Lúcia Vânia, Márcia Kubitschek, Maria de Lourdes Abadia, Maria Lúcia, Marluce Pinto, Moema São Thiago, Myrian Portella, Raquel Cândido, Raquel Capiberibe, Rita Camata, Rita Furtado, Rose de Freitas, Sadie Hauache, Sandra Cavalcanti and Wilma Maia.

class and place of birth, highlighting that abortion can affect anyone disregarding their social identity.

The artists included were: Aleta Valente, Agrade Camíz, Anitta Boa Vida, Anna Costa e Silva, biarritzzz, Caroline Valansi, Débora Bolzsoni, Enrica Bernardelli, Fabiana Faleiros, Fernanda Gomes, Juliana dos Santos, Kalor, Kitty Paranaguá, Laura Lima, Lenora de Barros, Livia Flores, Luciana Whitaker, Maria Antonia, Maíra Marques, María Sabato, Moara Tupinambá, Rosângela Rennó and Val Souza.

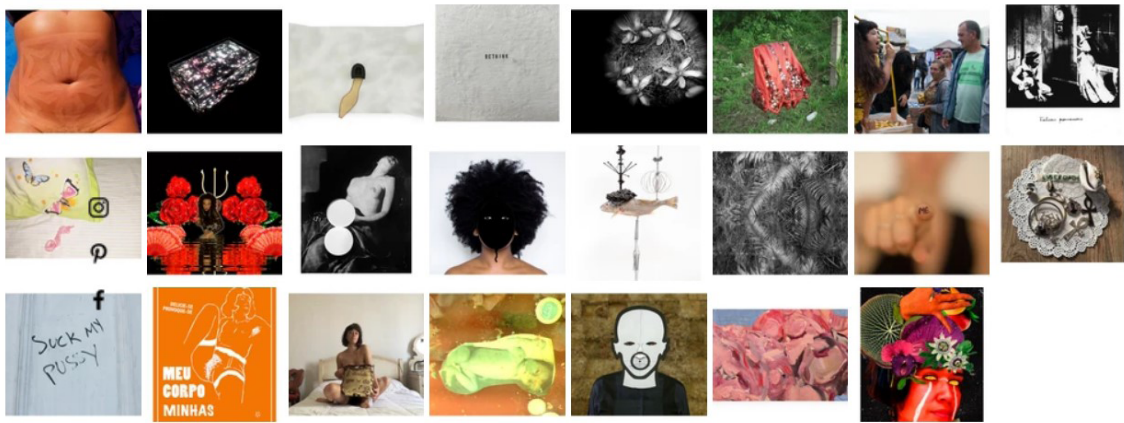


Fig.03 – PrintScreen of the works included in the “Art, feminine noun” project.

Available at: <https://www.potenciativa.org/a%C3%A7%C3%B5es-ativas> Accessed on July 12, 2023

The curatorial scope of the project focused on showing the diversity of women’s experiences through various visual means, as seen for example in the work of Rosângela Rennó, in which the artist presents a melancholic black and white image of Fairy Tales that ironizes romantic love; or in Moara Tupinambá’s collages engaging with the traditional practice of body ornaments and the stereotypes applied to indigenous women; Deborah Bolzsoni, in turn, alludes to the idea of an imperative path of femininity towards the depths and its possible risks, since the window and/or black hole, sewn into fabric by the artist, refers to the entrance to a cave; Agrade Camíz, with a colour photograph of her belly with geometric sun marks made with plastic tape (a common practice



among young women from the outskirts), which the design on her skin is similar to *cobogós* bricks, a popular element in Brazilian architecture used to control light and ventilation, plays with the protocols of female vanity and its spatial relationship with the city.

With this first sale, the project managed to raise a net amount of R\$22,214.48 and resulted in a positive media coverage. Even though it was considered successful by the curators and artists in giving visibility to the discussion of the legalisation of abortion as a public reproductive health issue (a significant increase of 'Miles' followers on Instagram were recorded), and in financially supporting women in more vulnerable positions, the sale results did not meet expectations in financial terms.

In May 2021, in order to raise more money for 'Miles', the 'Art, feminine noun' program launched a box called 'Collection for the life of Women', with a limited edition of 10 units numbered and signed by the artists already mentioned to increase the market value of the box (at the first initiative, the photographs were not signed and numbered, only certified).



**Fig.04 – For the Lives of woman, Collection 2020-2021**  
Wooden and acrylic box containing a collection of multiples of 23 female artists,  
one of each printed in varying sizes on fine-art paper with mineral pigments  
2.75 x 13.77 x 9.64 in

Fonte: Elaborada pela autora Paula Borghi.



Fig.05 – Picture of the project “Gentil Wall N° 37”, with 23 images of the art works from “Art, feminine noun” project, 2021.

Courtesy of “A Gentil Carioca Gallery”.

The box was launched together with an open-air exhibition that bore the title of the program (‘Art, feminine noun’), and participant at the program exhibition ‘Gentil Wall Project N° 37’, from the gallery ‘A Gentil Carioca’, located in Rio de Janeiro. For this, the artists’ works were printed in the approximate size of 84.1 cm x 118.9 cm on paper and glued directly to the gable of the gallery building.

It is also worth mentioning that ‘Gentil Carioca’, in addition to the partnership with the open-air exhibition, made the first sale of the ‘Collection for the life of Women’ box, and in the following month, the art gallery ‘Desapê’ from São Paulo took the box to the SP-ARTE fair (held online due to the pandemic) and sold two more.

Regarding the sales made through the project, artists received a percentage, and some of them donated the full profit to ‘Miles’. Artists’ commission on sales was defined by the artists themselves accounting for individual needs and not exceeding



50%. It is important to highlight that all artists were very engaged with the project – nothing would have been possible without their involvement and support. In addition to sales, the “Arte, substantivo feminino” program carried out several public actions to publicize and discuss the project and issues related to abortion.

In July 2021, there was an online talk about art, activism and abortion by the Dutch institution 'Framer Framed'<sup>16</sup>, with the participation of curators Gabriela Davies, Maíra Marques and Paula Borghi, as well as 'Milhas' creator Juliana Reis and the artist Kalor<sup>17</sup>. In October of the same year, some integrands of the project participated in person at the 'Talks Program'<sup>18</sup> at the SP-Arte Fair through the 'Active Power' project – this time with speeches by curators Gabriela Davies and Maíra Marques and artist Fabiana Faleiros. 'Art, feminine noun' was also included in the 'Apex Art international'<sup>19</sup>, an independent curatorial program with grant support, and its exhibition took place in December 2022 at 'Paço Imperial', in Rio de Janeiro

At the time, the project featured new works by the team of artists, as well as an online public program aimed at raising awareness of the importance of decriminalising abortion. The involvement with 'Apex Art' grant highlights some specificities of the Brazilian art scene, such as the necessitated that a foreign enterprise was needed to support the exhibition and to host the first public discussion on the project. Despite a good presence in the media and an optimistic number of sales, there was an evident lack of local institutional support for the project, mostly because of the moral prejudice on the subject and a strong conservative position from Brazilian collectors.

<sup>16</sup> To watch the conversation, visit <https://framerframed.nl/en/projecten/female-voices-arte-substantivo-feminino/>.

<sup>17</sup> Artist Aleta Valente was also confirmed to participate in this talk; however, she did not attend.

<sup>18</sup> To find out more visit: <https://www.sp-arte.com/programacao/talks/2021/#:-:text=Pot%C3%Aancia%20Ativa%20%C3%A9%20uma%20art%C3%A7%C3%A3o,no%20front%20das%20lutas%20sociais.>

<sup>19</sup> To find out more visit: <https://apexart.org/mulheres.php>.



Fig. 06 – Flyer from the public talk with Gabriela Davies, Maira Marques, Paula Borghi, Juliana Reis and artist Kalor at the “FramedFramed” project.

Available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CRZDYHrJdWI/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CRZDYHrJdWI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==)  
 Instagram PotenciaAtiva. Post do dia 16 de julho de 2021



Fig. 07 – Flyers from the exhibition “Art for Women’s Lives”, first image in Portuguese, the second one in English.

Available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CltGTuLDTc/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==](https://www.instagram.com/p/CltGTuLDTc/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==)  
 Instagram PotenciaAtiva Post do dia 3 de dezembro de 2022



Fig. 08 – Art for Women’s Lives. Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro december 2022 - january 2023

Fonte: Foto de Mariana Bley (2022).

After the exhibition at 'Paço das Artes', it was decided between all the members to end the partnership with 'Active Power' and 'Miles' projects in order to develop other projects by the respective teams with more attention – which did not imply an abandonment of support for the legalisation of abortion in Brazil.

By the end of 2022, 'Miles' proposed the event 'Art, feminine noun #2', a continuation of the first action of selling works of art to raise money for the abortion cause, but with some differences in relation to the first action. This time, the focus was on the online sale of unlimited editions in the approximate size of 21cm x 30cm, for a unit price of R\$ 250. Maíra Marques and the 'Artistas Latinas' collective<sup>20</sup> were in charge of curating and 49 artists were included in the event; even though this edition featured more than twice as many artists as the first edition, there was a decrease in diversity among artists.

The following artists participated in this second edition were: Adriana Varejão, Amanda Perobelli, Ana Branco, Ana Dalloz, Ana

<sup>20</sup> To find out more visit: <https://www.artistaslatinas.com.br/>.



Miguel, Analu Prestes, Angélica Dass, Barbara Milano, Bel Pedrosa, Bruna Castanheira, Celina Portella, Cris Bierrenbach, Daisy Xavier, Fernanda Pinto, Francela Carrera, Gabriela Serfaty, Giovanna Lagnone, Helena Cooper, Joana Stefanutto (It'sNotForYou), Josefina Bietti, Julia Debasse, Juliana Notari, Laura Lydia, Laura Peretti, Lia Chaia, Liana Nigri, Livia Moura, Maria Lynch, Maria Nepomuceno, Marcia Foletto, Mariana Falcão, Mariana Guimarães, Mariana Palma + Cassia Tabatini, Marta Jourdan, Marta Supernova, Mercedes Lachmann, Mônica Piloni, Mônica Zarattini, Nana Moraes, Patricia Borges, Priscila Barbosa, Rafaela Celano, Raquel Versieux, Renat Castillo, Rosane Marinho, Sophia Pinheiro, Verena Smit and Yasmin Assade.

This time, the project raised a net amount of R\$ 148,500.00, of which works of Adriana Varejão alone sold for more than R\$ 100,000.00. In addition to the significant increase on the number of participating artists, the presence of famous artist such as Varejão, with a high market value, and well-articulated on social networks, was an asset for the commercial success of the action.

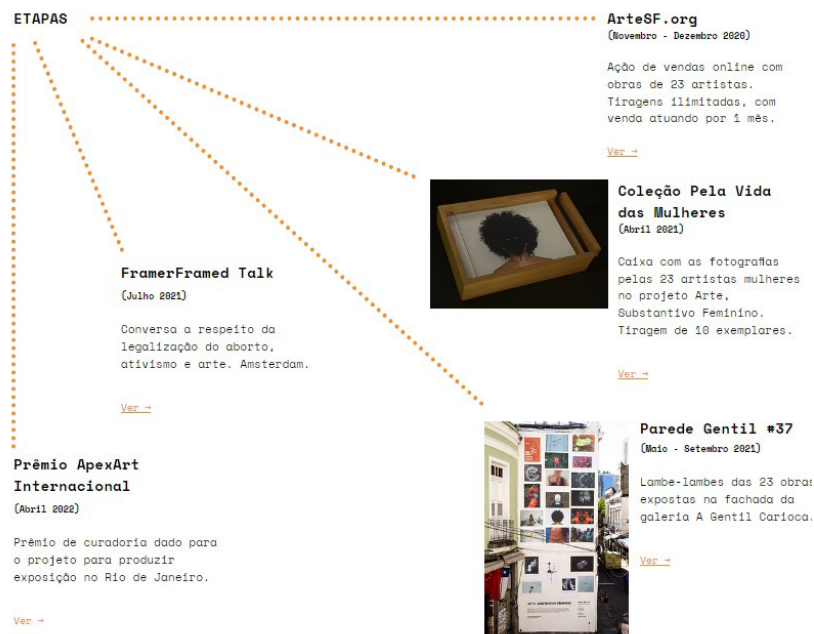


Fig. 09 – Graphic explaining all the derivative projects from the partnership of “Active Power”, “Miles for women’s lives” and “Art, feminine noun”.

Available at <https://www.potenciativa.org/a%C3%A7%C3%B5es-ativas>. Access 10-14-2024

## Some considerations

Developing the above discussed projects allowed the feminist curators and activists involved to investigate the contemporary legal status of abortion in Brazil and the obstacles women faced claiming their (still very restrictive) right to terminate unwanted pregnancy.

It turns out the lived realities of women have not changed so much, both from legal and moral perspectives, since the re-democratisation of the country despite the feminist-led health campaigns since 1980s.

The subjective and objective autonomy over the right to be pregnant or not is still decided mostly by cisgender, heterosexual, white and Judeo-Christian men. A drastic example of this misogynist, sexist and patriarchal policy is the fact that in the last decade 80% of the bills presented in Congress were to increase the criminalisation of abortion in Brazil. What should be a debate about public reproductive healthcare (mental and physical) ends up being a debate about religion and crime.

Meanwhile, one in five Brazilian cisgender women has had or will have at least one abortion by the age of 40 (Diniz; Medeiros; Madeiro, 2016). According to a federal government study, between 2016 and 2020 there were 8,665 court-authorized pregnancy terminations in the country, meaning the abortions were legal because they met one of the three exceptions to the law: anencephaly, pregnancies resulted from sexual violence, or there was a risk of death for the pregnant woman (Freire, 2021).

Meanwhile, in this same period, the "Serviço Único de Saúde - SUS" (Unified Health System) helped a hundred times greater number (877,863) of cisgender women who suffered miscarriages or complications from procedures carried out outside hospitals (Freire, 2021). In other words, the numbers mentioned above demonstrate that the majority of Brazilian women who have undergone abortion are carrying it out illegally, endangering their health and lives, and putting themselves at risk of imprisonment.

Let's remember that, according to Art. 124 of the Penal Code established in 1940: "Causing an abortion on oneself or allowing someone else to do so: Penalty - detention, from one to three years."<sup>21</sup> In the words of judge Katy Braun do Prado, from the 'Children's, Adolescence and Elderly Court' of Campo Grande - MS: 'The most common situations of abandonment are babies found even in the trash' (Souto, 2021).

In this context, initiatives such as the programs discussed in this chapter demonstrate audacity to activate artistic practice towards advocacy and consciousness raising to highlight the urgency of abortion debate, and to offer financial support to women who cannot afford to travel to care centres in Brazil and abroad, or don't even know their rights.

According to the database of 'Miles'<sup>22</sup>, in 2019, year on the begging of the project, 1.968 pregnancy termination procedures were realised in Brazil at 'National Health System', and only 0,05% occurred with the support of 'Miles' program. In 2020, the number of pregnancy termination procedures increased to 2.071, and the share of 'Miles' was 127 interventions, an increase of 6,1%. In 2021, the number of legal abortions in Brazil was 2.017, with 182 in collaboration of the 'Miles' program, resulting in an increase of 9%. Until May 2022, the project finished, 481 abortions were realised in Brazil, and 30 with the 'Miles' support.

These numbers may look insignificant at first glance, but the continuous increase of 'Miles' participation in delivering public health care implies a unique connection between practices of women artists advocating for reproductive rights, political defence of birth control methods and safe interruption of pregnancy.

We can leave this essay with the question that, if abortion were fully legalised in Brazil, we would be able to see a decrease on the number of women that realised the procedements, and/or a reduction in the number of abandoned children? Without knowing

21 BRASIL. Decreto-Lei nº 2.848, de 07 de dezembro de 1940. Código Penal, artigo 124. Available at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decllei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-2848-7-dezembro-1940-412868-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> Access 14-10-24

22 To verify the numbers, see: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cd3GzsarCln/> and <https://www.milhaspelavidadasmulheres.com.br/sobre-n%C3%B3s>



the answer to this hypothetical question, we can at least ask what all this has to do with art. Well, nothing ... and everything.

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