

CERRUCHA'S *TRINCHERA*. A FEMINIST ARTISTIC RESPONSE TO THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN

"TRINCHERA", DE CERRUCHA. UNA RESPUESTA ARTÍSTICA A LA GUERRA CONTRA LAS MUJERES

ABSTRACT

In 2020, 66% of Mexican women endured physical abuse, and 70% suffered psychological trauma (ONU Mujeres, 2021). Despite the strong legal framework available since 2007, which Mexican legislators have built up to combat the scourge of violence against women. Rita Laura Segato's claim: "There is a war against women" (2016) gains clarity when authorities are complicit or perpetrators. With this in mind, Mexican *activist* Cerrucha called her most recent installation *Trinchera* (Trench). This street art installation appropriates the public space to send the message that women travel safely when they confront patriarchy together. I assert that Cerrucha's *Trinchera* encourages women's resistance against violence while embodying some of the main demands of the Mexican feminist agenda. By classifying Cerrucha's work as activism, we appreciate the intersection of art and activism, vital in addressing gender-based violence. Contextualising her creation within the feminist movement underscores the urgent need for women's protest in Mexico. Cerrucha's art actively calls for women to unite, amplifying the feminist agenda's core principles.

Keywords: Mexican feminist activism, feminist resistance, feminist street art.

RESUMEN

En 2020, en México, el 66 % de las mujeres experimentaron alguna forma de violencia física y, el 70 %, psicológica (ONU Mujeres, 2021). Incluso con un sólido marco legal, es posible citar a Rita Laura Segato cuando afirma: «Hay una guerra contra las mujeres» (2016). Esto resulta aún más claro en las situaciones en las que las autoridades y policías son cómplices de los crímenes o los perpetradores. Con esto en mente, la *artista* mexicana Cerrucha llamó a su instalación *Trinchera*. Esta instalación de arte callejero se apropia del espacio público para enviar el mensaje de que las mujeres viajan seguras cuando juntas se enfrentan al patriarcado. Por tanto, en este artículo afirmo que *Trinchera*, siendo una instalación de arte

1 I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Cerrucha, a Mexican activist, who graciously granted me permission to include her artwork in this article and whose art serves as a profound inspiration for my academic research. This article owes its existence to the courageous Mexican women who steadfastly resist the patriarchy. As a feminist, I wholeheartedly recognise that every achievement in feminism stems from collective endeavors, and, therefore, I am sincerely indebted to all the remarkable women at the University of Edinburgh and within my close circle for the impassioned discussions that have profoundly shaped this article.

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callejero, muestra algunos de los puntos más importantes de la agenda feminista. En primera instancia, observaré las implicaciones de llamarle una obra artista. En segunda instancia, contextualizaré la obra de Cerrucha como parte del movimiento artístico feminista. En este sentido, es esencial considerar los motivos por los que las mujeres se manifiestan en México. Finalmente, identificaré algunos elementos de la agenda feminista presentes en la obra. **Palabras clave:** activismo mexicano feminista, resistencia feminista, arte callejero feminista.



Figure 1. *Trinchera* [Photograph], Cerrucha, 2020 (*Trinchera* | CERRUCHA). Reproduced only for this publication with permission from: Cerrucha, 2023, Mexico City.

1. Introduction. An Artistic Contribution to the Feminist Movement

It is becoming frequent to see feminist iconography and street art throughout Latin America. The presence of feminist art on the street intensifies during protests and around the time of dates of special significance to the movement, such as March 8th (International Women's Day) or November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women). Some feminist artists and activists

appreciate the artistic value of feminist iconoclasm and have documented it,² and some of these artists have joined the movement and provided artistic tools for the activists. In that sense, Cerrucha's (Morelia, 1986) *Trinchera* (Trench) is a street art installation that embodies some of the main demands of the feminist agenda while encouraging female resistance. This installation was exhibited at the *Festival Tiempo de Mujeres* (Women's Time Festival), the first festival in Mexico City organised by and for female activists, scholars, researchers and artists. *Trinchera* may be regarded as a synecdoche of the Mexican feminist movement — as a fragment of it from which a bigger picture can be derived as I will explain in the following pages. By analysing this artwork by Cerrucha, it is possible to understand the Mexican feminist agenda, the protests that accompany it, the artistic strategies that feminists are using to get their message across, and how women resist violence more generally. Furthermore, *Trinchera* seeks to appropriate the public space in order to send the message that women travel safely while standing together against patriarchy.

Cerrucha's *Trinchera* is a photographic and collective project that involved over 100 women from diverse backgrounds who were photographed. The pictures are arranged in a composition resembling a queue. These women responded to an appeal by Cerrucha, who sought participants for a street art installation against patriarchy during the events surrounding international Women's Day in 2020. Later on, in different versions and sizes, *Trinchera* was subsequently printed on a full-size vinyl and pasted in three different public locations in Mexico City, utilizing street art installation techniques. While it was inaugurated on March 8th, the artwork continues to be displayed in the Glorieta de los Insurgentes. In this article, I will examine the connection of *Trinchera* with the feminist movement in section two, as well as analyse its significance and meaning within the chosen location in section three and provide the contextual framework concerning feminism in section four. For now, it is important to consider *Trinchera* in relation to other forms of feminist iconoclasm in Mexico. Iconoclasm differs from vandalism since the destruction or alteration of images, sites or symbols answers to the need of appropriating the public space and redefining the meaning of intervened objects. When such actions are undertaken to promote women, to protest against gender violence, or to challenge the patriarchy, they can be regarded as an iconoclasm (Hernández Moreno, 2021). Nevertheless, this practice is not new, for feminists, artists or activists, have been engaging in iconoclasm for a considerable period of time. However, there is no

2 A good example of a virtual exhibition showcasing photographs, both documentary and artistic, of the feminist protests in Mexico City on March 8th from 2016 to 2020, as well as on August 12th and 16th 2019, was curated by Mexican artist Lorena Wolffer. The virtual exhibition features pictures by Cerrucha, Nirvana Paz, Restauradoras con Glitter, Sonia Madrigal and Yolanda Andrade (Wolffer et al., 2021). This exhibition serves as a photographic documentation of various significant feminist demonstrations in Mexico City. Similarly, in Latin America, particularly in Argentina and Chile, there was a documentation of the street art and graffiti displayed during the feminist protest in 2019 and 2020 which was recently published. (Feminista 8 de Marzo and Tiempo Robado editoras, 2021).

consensus on what actions can be classified as iconoclasm. For instance, while some regard the performance by LasTesis *El violador eres tú* (You are the Rapist)³ as iconoclasm, others state that a tangible element is required. Therefore, I frame Cerrucha's work in relation to her immediate circle.

In 2020, Cerrucha cofounded the artistic collective platform Disidenta with artist Lorena Wolffer (Mexico) and art historian María Laura Rosa (Argentina). The collective is sponsored by Mónica Mayer and Magali Lara, who are among the first generation of Mexican feminist artists. Considering the trajectory of Cerrucha's colleagues in Disidenta, I will provide a brief historical context of iconoclasm that might be related with Cerrucha's work. Mayer was involved in the socio-artistic intervention *Three Weeks in May*, coordinated by her professor Suzanne Lacy at the Woman's Building in California (Jones and Mayer, 2016). This initiative aimed to engage with women who had experienced gender-based violence by taking art outside traditional spaces. Mayer, Lacy, and other participants appropriated some streets in Los Angeles, intervened in various locations, and organised public gatherings to protest against rape. Mayer's installation featured a clothesline on which women hung denouncements of violence. As of today, *El tendadero* has been recreated multiple times (even without Mayer) in both digital and physical formats. Following this event, Mayer has coordinated other artistic projects that prioritise the social and political impact of her work over aesthetic achievements. Meanwhile, Wolffer has employed diverse street art techniques to address issues such as the objectification of women. Her actions range from emulating advertisements to printing stickers featuring testimonies of violence and discrimination, which she places around the streets. She has even set up a dining table as a space for women to gather and chat. Wolffer has also recognised and embraced iconoclasm by other feminists; as an example, she created in collaboration with CIEG-UNAM WhatsApp stickers with pictures and messages used during the feminist demonstrations, thereby acknowledging and providing WhatsApp users with visual tools for digital protests. Alongside Nadia Lartigue and Vivian Abenshushan, Wolffer has praised feminist artistic projects that foster connections amongst women, challenge the commercialization/capitalisation of the streets and public spaces, and encourage the collective efforts (Fiesta del Libro y la Rosa 2023. *Mesa La calle: ¿Un lugar para expresarse?*, 2023). As it will become evident in this analysis, these discussions and this background are present in Cerrucha's work.

Cerrucha is a Mexican feminist *activist*⁴ who combines photography, street art, and performance to present artistic strategies to promote feminist objectives. On her website, she provides an explanation of her pseudonym, offering a deconstruction of the light-hearted etymology behind it. According to her, *Cer* is

3 The Chilean collective LasTesis created this performance to protest sexual violence. Their main influence was Rita Laura Segato. Women from all over the world have replicated the performance, with the largest replication taking place in Mexico City in 2020 (Colectiva Registro Callejero, 2020).

4 Because I will provide a definition of this neologism, it will only appear in italics in this first mention.

the Latin for 'to exist', while *serrucha* is the Spanish translation of 'saw'. Wittingly, she further elaborates that her artistic aim is "to saw other people's minds, to break preconceptions, to encourage questions".⁵

Strictly speaking, *Trinchera* is not feminist art but feminist activism since Cerrucha calls herself an activist. The neologism was coined by Chicano and Chicana artists from the Big Frente Zapatista and members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in 1997. The Big Frente Zapatista, employing this term and engaging in collective musical composition, founded the musical group named Quetzal, the idea behind which was to resist racism and neoliberalism through singing and performing. Their music is therefore simultaneously, art and activism. Regardless of its original musical connotation, the neologism is now used to understand other forms of political art. Furthermore, being both feminist and activist in nature, it incorporates elements of both traditions, united in their resistance to the patriarchal system. Martha González, one of the original members of the Big Frente Zapatista, observes the importance conferred upon the body by Chicana activists, stating that: "artists center the body in community art discourse. The 'brown body' as a source of knowledge is done through a strategy of what Sandoval calls 'differential consciousness'"⁶ (Gonzalez, 2021, pp. 39-40). It is common for activists to engage in dialogue with academics and to transform their expertise into art, or to integrate it into their practices. Meanwhile, for feminist artists and activists the body has also been fundamental: whether as a medium of creation or a representation of what being a woman means, it is usually featured in their work.

There is a second definition of *activism* worth exploring to fully grasp Cerrucha's intentions. *Trinchera* could be analysed in light of what the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera demands from political art in her *Declaración de arte político* (Political Art Declaration) (Bruguera, 2010). It is worth mentioning that, since 2017, Bruguera uses activism as a political art category that describes her artistic goals more precisely than "political art"; thus, her art institute in Cuba is called Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt (Hannah Arendt Artist Institute) and not Instituto de Arte Político (Political Art Institute). This suggests that, as of today, she prefers the neologism to *political art* even if that is how she used to refer to what she does. Meanwhile, Cerrucha uses the *Declaración de arte político* to explain *Trinchera* (Cerrucha, 2021). It would be naïve to claim that the artwork is eradicating gender-based violence; however, it is possible to observe that, by urging women to stand together against violence, it is calling on them to protect one another. According to Bruguera, political art (now activism) is readily accessible, is a provocation,

5 "[C]erruchar las mentes ajenas, ruptura de preceptos, siembra de cuestionamientos" (Cerrucha, 2021).

6 The "differential consciousness" introduced by art historian and Chicana expert Chela Sandoval stems from Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "border consciousness". It implies a recognition of a long history of being "brown" in a system that privileges white and male bodies. Hence, it involves embodying a history of discrimination, engaging in dialogue with queer and feminist theories, discussing borders, and resisting culture as a Eurocentric hegemony.

seeks to influence beyond the artistic sphere, is characterised by doubts rather than certainties, might result in the viewer feeling uneasy and becomes useless once it is politically irrelevant. It is critical art, in the sense that it aims to make some audiences feel uncomfortable — to unsettle those who must feel unsettled; those who ought to be held accountable for the injustices it exposes (Bruguera, 2010). Regarding being readily available, it is probably the easiest quality to identify of *Trinchera* as it is pasted in public spaces, no need for tickets or particular interests in the arts. Furthermore, the printing and pasting techniques used by Cerrucha entail a non-elitist means of communication, as similar vinyl pictures, used as decoration or advertising, are a charmingly familiar mainstay of life in the city. The fact that her installations will remain in place indefinitely, rather than only during the International Women's Day celebrations, signals that their content will remain relevant until the movement's demands are met. However, by inaugurating her installation on March 8th 2020, Cerrucha joined the feminist protests, her photographs stood with other women against the Mexican patriarchal system. Therefore, it should not be considered a closed project given that the protest to guarantee a life free of violence for women continues. *Trinchera* could grow into phases by including more women and pasting it all over cities in Mexico.

Regarding *Trinchera* as a feminist activist project entails that we ought to examine certain aspects of the work when evaluating it. Through this article, to highlight one of *Trinchera's* activist qualities, I will analyse it in relation to the feminist discussion around gender-based violence that is taking place in Latin America. I will then go on to discuss those feminist elements of the work that derive from an artistic tradition first introduced to the Mexican artistic sphere during the 1980s. Throughout the text, I will identify the political art characteristics listed by Bruguera present in Cerrucha's work. This implies evaluating its artistic language, composition, techniques, and locations. Finally, taking into consideration that, since the '80s, feminist artists have experienced a number of triumphs, I will observe the contemporary elements present in feminist art; mostly, what it means to use *cuerpa* (body in feminine) instead of *cuerpo* (body) and the matter of inclusivity as a core quality of feminism.

2. *Trinchera* as Feminist Activism

Trinchera refers to ground excavations with military purposes. Feminist anthropologist Rita Laura Segato observes how the war-like language and behaviours are inscribed into patriarchy: "es la pedagogía de la masculinidad lo que hace posible la Guerra y sin una paz de género no podrá haber ninguna paz verdadera" (Segato, 2016, p. 23). So, the first question that comes to mind is this: if war-like language is patriarchal, why is a feminist artwork employing the language of war? In this project, Cerrucha seems to establish a dialogue with Rita Laura Segato, the first anthropologist who interviewed men convicted for feminicides and one of the main references when discussing violence against women. In line with Chicana activist strategies, Cerrucha is therefore discussing the theories of

a leading feminist scholar and incorporating them into her artistic practice. The relevance of Segato's theory is that it offered one of the first hypotheses about the origins of feminicides in Mexico. In her book, *La Guerra contra las mujeres* (2016), Segato declares that a war is being waged against women; an expression of a new kind of war out of the formal sphere that pervades Latin America. Since these violent confrontations are derived from internal conflicts, they lack honorific justification and are devoid of the symbolic constructions of victory typical of traditional war. The aggressors are not looking for a triumph or land; they want power and control. In this sense, women are no longer the spoils of war, but the property of the enemy, over which warring factions exert their violent patriarchal capacities to demoralise the 'other side'. In this context, the State's role is to fight over who has the most control over the population's bodies (Segato, 2016). Cerrucha therefore proposes that women dig themselves metaphoric trenches. These trenches serve a dual symbolic purpose: on the one hand, a trench is a place of relative safety where one is surrounded by a friend rather than a foe; on the other, however, trenches house soldiers, and soldiers must be ready to fight back. *Trinchera* is therefore the reply to a silent declaration of war. Cerrucha's artwork does not suggest that women ought to declare war in return. It does, nevertheless, advocate for women being able to defend themselves when the authorities nominally entrusted with their safety fail to adequately ensure it.

If activism is supposed to be socially effective, one might suggest that *Trinchera* fails at protecting women. The objective of a trench is to create a den where soldiers are sheltered from the enemies' attacks. Meanwhile, Cerrucha's trench does not actually build or create a safe space for women. Nevertheless, identifying who Cerrucha is framing as the enemy vanishes this possible objection. Hers is a trench to take shelter from the patriarchal system — not men. Thus, what she constructs is a "cultural trench" — she is not seeking to create a literal safe space, such as a support group or a rape crisis centre. In this regard, she is dialoguing with Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia, who has collaborated with Cerrucha in *Disidentia*. Valencia discusses the violence that pervades life in Mexico, which she terms *gore capitalism* — the idea that capitalism can only be sustained through the perpetuation of widespread organised crime and violence in Global South countries such as Mexico, as well as and in their economies.⁷ (Valencia, 2010). Under *gore capitalism*, men are taught that violence is the proper masculine behaviour, and women learn to behave as submissive subjects. When understood in this way, violence ceases to become something noteworthy; it is not the exception, but the rule. It is a pillar of the establishment, and therefore not something that governments have any interest in tearing down. Valencia continues her argument by discussing heteropatriarchy, pointing out that the socioeconomic and cultural system rejects any non-hetero male identities. This system, she claims, operates as follows:

7 The concept was firstly used by Carl Oglesby to describe the actions of the USA in Vietnam which resulted in "an intolerable social order". Since then, the term has been developed by other authors from the Global South. In Mexico, Ivan Illich discussed the notion of conviviality and described the cultural identity of the Global South (Di Nicola, 2020).

the capitalist and gore heteropatriarchy brings little opportunities of living or being considered a political citizen and, whenever it does, it is as a stipend for those who exist according to the binary visual epistemologies, meaning that they represent the powerful side of the sexual, racial and gender differences.⁸ (Valencia, 2018)

Hence, violence and the binary order under which males are perceived as superior to females are necessary to sustain an economy reliant upon criminality. Thus, the government is complicit with rapists and murderers as it legitimises a criminal economy to generate income at the expense of female autonomy. To save women and any non-binary identities, this system must therefore be deconstructed. Feminist artists and activists believe that the potential to do so resides in the artistic, as it can lead to the questioning of cultural assumptions that justify and support patriarchy. The notion that cultural resistance goes beyond a symbolic answer to violence is rooted in another Chicanx concept: *radical tenderness*.



Figure 2. *Trinchera* [Photography], Cerrucha, 2020 (Trinchera | CERRUCHA). Reproduced only for this publication with permission from: Cerrucha, 2023, Mexico City.

8 Valencia's original text is written in the Spanish inclusive language using the "x" instead of "a" or "o" to include all non-male identities living outside the binary order: "el heteropatriarcado capitalista y gore brinda pocas oportunidades de vivir, de ser consideradx ciudadanx políticx, y cuando lo hace es como prebenda para aquellxs que están en concordancia con las epistemologías visuales binarias, es decir, que representan el lado poderoso de las diferencias sexuales, raciales y de género".

I envision *Trinchera* as a symbolic trench which serves to protect women from symbolic violence in three different ways. Firstly, it replaces advertisements that perpetuate the objectification of women or utilise marketing tactics to promote the sale of products targeting women, such as diet or antiaging products. Secondly, it affirms the presence of women who willingly stand, protest, denounce and support one another. Thirdly, as it is evident in the expressions captured on their faces, it serves as a reminder that women will not remain silent: each of the photographed women will stand against violence. The expressions vary, with some smiling, others appearing solemnly at the camera, and some displaying anger. By embracing this diversity of reactions to patriarchy, I believe that Cerrucha celebrates the freedom and various ways in which women can engage in the feminist movement. Each woman featured in *Trinchera* generously donated their time and allowed their portraits to convey the message: “you are not travelling alone”.

Trinchera embraces a sort of *radical tenderness* by inviting women to find self-defence mechanisms. Radical tenderness, originally in Spanish *ternura radical*, is an artistic, pedagogic and performative practice. The concept was popularised by Chicano performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña⁹ and the collective he is part of, La Pocha Nostra, to refer to the practice of artists providing the audience with artistic resistance techniques. It is not a vertical exercise, since the teacher/artist is tuned in to the response of the community with which he/she/they is communicating, modifying his/her/their practices in line with the feedback he/she/they receive — an exercise rendered possible only through empathy (d’Emilia and Coleman, 2015). Its objective is to create a safe space “where very sensitive issues can be addressed” (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011, p. 193) embracing each member’s struggle, while recognising each participant as subject in a dynamic where “those who are more discreet [can] speak up while those who have more powerful voices have to learn to listen” (Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, 2011, p. 193). The term is popular nowadays in theatre and performance workshops in Mexico. As the Mexican cultural collective ADA (Self-managed Direct Action)¹⁰ claims when teaching self-defence strategies: “feminist self-defence is grounded in deep love and radical tenderness”¹¹ (del Cielo and Gonzaga, 2021, p. 170). Justified female rage is transformed into love and tenderness that emerge from creativity. One can appreciate something similar in the testimonies left by the participants of *Trinchera* (Cerrucha, 2020).¹² For example, Marisol Zúñiga said: “Together, organised, hugging while embracing what makes us unique, we can build a common ground

9 Gómez-Peña was one of the artists invited by Lacy to explore the *new genres of public art*. He is a Chicano artist constantly working in the border between Mexico and the USA creating an activist and artistic link between both countries (Gómez-Peña, 1995, pp. 94-111).

10 ADA stands for Acción Directa Autogestiva (Self-managed Direct Action). A collective from Puebla, Mexico which organises self-defence, poetry and artistic workshops.

11 la autodefensa feminista parte del profundo amor y de la ternura radical.

12 Other testimonies are available in the artwork’s documentation: <https://www.cerrucha.com/trinchera>

to eradicate the violence that breaks us through. The artistic protest is a powerful mean to reconquer the public space" (Cerrucha, 2020).¹³

Although it derives from and embraces the activist tradition, *Trincherá* is also a product of the feminist artistic movement in Mexico. In the following section, I will introduce how Cerrucha embraced the notion of feminist art and reproduced some of the strategies used by the first generation who thought of their work as an active element of the feminist movement.

3. *Trincherá*, Embracing Feminist Art

Contemporary Mexican feminist art projects, such as *Trincherá*, are indebted to the practices of Mexican feminist artists from the 1980s. The first generation of feminists embracing the political characteristics of their work included artists such as Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante, Magali Lara, Karen Cordero Reiman and Ana Victoria Jiménez, amongst others. Since Mayer was the first one to teach feminist art workshops in Mexico, and continues to actively collaborate with Cerrucha in *Disidenta*, I will mostly focus on how it is possible to identify Mayer's influence in *Trincherá*.

Cerrucha's engagement with the feminist artistic tradition can be appreciated in *Trincherá*'s location as well as in its strategy. The installation was displayed on each column of the Glorieta de los Insurgentes, a large roundabout where two of Mexico City's main avenues intersect: Avenida Chapultepec and Avenida de los Insurgentes; the latter being one of the longest avenues that crosses the city from north to south. The roundabout distributes the traffic going to the city's centre and has access to the most important forms of public transportation, the subway and the Metrobús. Since it was a meeting point for pedestrians, it was remodelled in 2012, taking inspiration from Times Square and Piccadilly Circus. The intention of the government was to create a shopping centre, a tourist attraction and an entertainment space with billboards and commercial advertisements. With this in mind, Cerrucha is modifying the meaning of the landscape by substituting commercial advertisements for feminist campaigns, which serves the further purpose of confounding the expectation of regular visitors, as instead of the usual dose of advertising, they are confronted with the image of a woman standing with other women. By replacing the advertising and using techniques common to advertisements, Cerrucha appropriates a well-known, non-elitist art form; something her work has in common with that of the original feminist artists who used magazine publications, posters, postcards or even popular TV shows to get their message across.¹⁴

13 Juntas, organizadas, abrazadas desde nuestras diferencias: podemos construir un piso común para erradicar la violencia que nos atraviesa. La protesta artística es un medio potente para retomar el espacio público.

14 The description of this performance was based on art historian María Laura Rosa examination performance *Madre por un día* that was part of "¡Madres!". For it, Maris Bustamante and Mónica Mayer organised a performance with the journalist Guillermo Ochoa during his famous show *Nuestro Mundo*. The show was transmitted in open TV in Mexico in Channel 2 (Rosa, 2017, p. 139).

Cerrucha's artistic intentions and concerns align closely with those of her predecessors in the feminist movement. As the Mexican art historian Araceli Barbosa — a critic who has been writing about feminist artists since the 1980s, accompanying the first generation of feminist artists — pointed out, the first Mexican feminist artists stood, and stand, against centuries of women's sexual objectification reinforced by marketing campaigns employing: "codified women whose bodies have been genitalised, used to sell every kind of publicity while transformed into an object of consumption" (Barbosa, 2008, p. 23).¹⁵ Barbosa continued this argument listing a variety of pernicious female stereotypes that have been used to sell all manner of products: the roles of the housewife, the lover, and the sexual object, for example. The women of *Trinchera* are not acting or attempting to reproduce a role, they are just standing and holding hands. However, there was an active involvement from the models since they decided how to dress and which make-up they wanted to use, if any. In a way, considering how women have been traditionally photographed or painted, what they did was to challenge gender paradigms and the male gaze.

Since the women portrayed in *Trinchera* are actively involved with the artwork and this work acquires meaning when being received in the public sphere, it is possible to identify two of the precepts under which Mayer worked. The first one is that she makes the personal political — a target most feminist creations aimed at. The notion that gender-based violence is a personal matter rather than a political issue — especially when the perpetrator is the woman's partner — becomes impossible to sustain when the gaze of several women accompanies all those arriving at the roundabout. There are many women willing, like those involved in *Trinchera*, to listen and help those surviving violence. In a similar vein to Barbosa's observations, Griselda Pollock praised Mexican feminist artists for how they mimicked the media and everyday representations of women, and for how they "examined the rituals and the mythic elements of everyday media representation that reinforced ideologies about women and muted people's response to quotidian violence" (Pollock, 2016, p. 123). *Trinchera*, as a public installation exists because there is a recognition of the problem gender-based violence represents; furthermore, by allowing this format of installation, there is also an acknowledgement of how reinforced ideologies have contributed to gender-based violence. Another significant aspect of the project was the fact that it spanned two moments. The first of these was the photoshoot itself, where participants exchanged their experiences, found allies and were encouraged to be more than mere models by making active decisions regarding exactly what they wished to communicate via their pictures. The second related to the moment that it became seen; if the spectator is feminine, they are reminded that there is support out there for them, whereas if the viewer is masculine, they are confronted with the message that women are ready, willing and able to protect and support other women.

15 mujeres codificadas cuyo cuerpo ha sido genitalizado, utilizado para vender todo tipo de publicidad y vuelto a su vez objeto de consumo.

Trinchera, as many other projects by Cerrucha, shares certain similarities with the work of French artist JR, such as the use of black and white pictures pasted in urban spaces and a deep engagement with both the subjects and the audience. Cerrucha openly acknowledges the influence of JR on her work (Cerrucha, 2021). The genealogy of street art and feminist art, albeit brief, is complex and varies in each country. Therefore, I will mention two art projects that can help provide context for *Trinchera*.

In addition to Mayer's *Tendederos*, which gained popularity after the MeToo movement for denouncing aggressors, other feminist artists have employed street art strategies to amplify their political impact. Similar to Cerrucha's work, in 2000, Lorena Wolffer, a member of the second generation of Mexican feminist artists, intervened in Mexico City by appropriating ten billboards for her artwork *Soy totalmente de hierro* (I am absolutely of iron). Her work challenged the billboards created by the luxury department store *El Palacio de hierro* (The Iron Palace), subverting the sexualisation and confinement of women to the private sphere. Wolffer imitated the store's advertising aesthetic and playfully reworked their slogan: *Soy totalmente palacio* (I am absolutely the palace).



Figure 3. *Trinchera* [Photography], Cerrucha, 2020 (*Trinchera* | CERRUCHA). Reproduced only for this publication with permission from: Cerrucha, 2023, Mexico City.

Street artists not only intervene in physical public spaces but also utilise social media as a platform. On 9 February 2020, in Mexico City, Ingrid Escamilla was

brutally murdered, and the police leaked graphic images of her murder on social media. In response, feminist illustrators such as @yasmini.gif, @paulinapaulipau, @seloexplicoconplastilinia, amongst others, contributed with their artwork to create beautiful drawings of Ingrid. Their intention was to replace the circulating leaked pictures with alternative illustrations using the same hashtag. Although online content never truly disappears, feminists succeeded in ensuring that primary search results related to Escamilla were linked to illustrations honouring her memory. Like *Trinchera*, the case of Ingrid Escamilla exemplifies the commitment of numerous women dedicating their time, work and efforts to protect and support one another.



Figure 4. *Trinchera's documentation* [Photography], Cerrucha, Pablo León, Patricia Balderas y Lupe Olaya, 2020 (*Trinchera* | CERRUCHA). Reproduced only for this publication with permission from: Cerrucha, 2023, Mexico City.

The second location Cerrucha chose was on one of the subway's trains. The train coach selected for *Trinchera* was not random, but part of a strategy. Unlike the installation in the Glorieta de los Insurgentes, where the photographs of each woman were displayed individually in each site, the subway's version showed all the women portrayed holding hands along nine train coaches. The artwork reinforces the affirmative action implemented in Mexico City's subway, which designates a specific coach for women. This affirmative action's aim is to ensure a safer travel experience for women. In certain stations, police officers restrict men's access to these coaches, while in others, the mere presence of women is enough to deter male passengers from boarding them. The selected line was the pink one, also named "number one". This is the subway system's oldest line, and its colour was specially selected by the government for its significance to the Mexican people, due to its deep and lasting association with the culture of the nation. In the 1960s, the colour became highly associated with the Mexican identity, more evocative than even the colours of the flag (green, white and red), when it was started to be used by the painters Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, the fashion designer Ramón Valdiosera and the architect Luis Barragán (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2017). Ironically, pink is also associated with the female gender, and yet this is the line with the

most denunciations of violence against women; specifically, the station Pino Suárez has the highest number of reports (Cerrucha, 2020). Furthermore, Mexican pink is the colour used for the crosses placed by mothers of victims of femicide; they are victims of the Mexican system, transformed into scapegoats by virtue of their “pink” gender.

By placing *Trinchera* on this train, Cerrucha’s work embraces the feminist social and political struggle that started in the 1970s. The subway was constructed as a government initiative to regain its popularity after the student massacre of October 2nd 1968, in which a peaceful student protest culminated in a state-sanctioned slaughter at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas,¹⁶ as the government became desperate to clear the streets before the start of the Olympic Games. Ten days before the opening ceremony, the government infiltrated the student demonstration as a pretext to justify the use of force and violence against them (Allier-Montaño, 2016).¹⁷ To this day, the exact number of students that were murdered remains unknown. In the wake of the massacre, the then President Díaz Ordaz rushed the construction of the subway, determined to see it opened as soon as possible as a means of boosting his ailing popularity (Navarro Benítez, 1984). Nevertheless, some artists refused to work with the government as a rejection of the violent events of 1968. These artists organised in groups, and this became known under the name of Generación de los grupos as a means of standing against the government and generating collective support. Amongst this generation of artists worked the first feminist artists, including Mónica Mayer and Maris Bustamante.

The fact that *Trinchera* is legally pasted on a wall — on surfaces in which a street artist has permission to display their work — serves to encourage a discussion between feminists, street artists and institutions (either public or private). Aside from the No Grupo (to which Maris Bustamante belonged), the Grupos had no gender perspective — for, as Edward J. McCaughan explained, feminist artists found even less support than their male counterparts (McCaughan, 2007). Even if many of the original feminist artists belonged to a group (aside from Bustamante, Lourdes Grobet and Magali Lara were also part of these groups) the collective proposals were not articulated inside the feminist political and social movement. As Barbosa explains, “the theorisation about art and feminism was not one of the ideological debates carried by the groups” (Barbosa, 2008, p. 28); and the lack of such a debate led to a dearth of direct connections between these groups and feminist artistic practices. It was harder for women to find exhibition spaces or resources. However, like street artists, feminists understood that they were challenging the artistic sphere by choosing to display art rejected by it. They were aware of the

16 In the centre of Tlatelolco, there are three buildings: an Aztec pyramid, a Catholic Church and a modern edifice which held the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs; the three of them face an esplanade called the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The *plaza* was meant to symbolise and embrace the mix-raced Mexican identity.

17 The article presents a good historic recollection of what happened during the massacre. Her article also explores the historians’ narrative, and the political parties’ influence in reporting what happened on 2 October 1968 at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas.

importance of the feminist message beyond their personal or professional interests. Hence, they did not break relations with cultural and artistic institutions, but they continued to work the way they wanted outside cultural institutions and accepting invitations — albeit very few in number — to museums or galleries. As with the case of *Trinchera*, which was part of an official event, using any given space to exhibit such artwork presupposes the recognition of the relevance of these efforts against certain issues, problems or phenomena that the feminists have identified. The feminists, as well as other minority groups, should protest marginalisation wherever they see fit — mostly in locations of particular significance. A pending question concerning Cerrucha's *Trinchera* — one I will come to address in greater detail — is whether it is sufficient to display women in a public space in order to secure the safety of women.

While *Trinchera* is well situated within a tradition that started in the 1980s, it also praises the qualities of more recent feminist protests. I consider that her installation aims at being part of the feminist demonstrations; therefore, her work is, at the same time, activism, a political tool and a demonstration strategy. In the following section, I will examine *Trinchera* in light of the recent demands presented by feminist activists.

4. If it is feminist street art, then it must be political, radically tender and inclusive

As the work of a committed feminist, Cerrucha's *Trinchera* portrays, represents, and reproduces the ideas of the movement. Contemporary intersectional feminism aims at having a horizontal, collective, non-hierarchical structure. Instead of elevating individual leaders, it creates platforms from which women from different backgrounds can speak up. For modern feminists, inclusivity is a precondition for its success; they seek to ensure that, this time, women from different ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds ought to benefit from the struggle. Amongst their list of demands, two in particular stand out, bodily autonomy and the eradication of gender-based violence. Considering these, my goal is to identify the feminist qualities and characteristics portrayed in *Trinchera*.

In order to produce a street art installation, Cerrucha photographed over 100 women. These pictures are close ups, set against a totally white background; a completely empty space that serves to imply that only those who identify as women are occupying it. In the Glorieta de los Insurgentes, one can find these photographs; each of a single woman, each placed on a different column. The women have therefore become the structure that supports the station, as Cerrucha magnified and expanded the photographs to cover the entire column, giving the impression that the subjects are holding up the ceiling, translating the legendary image of Atlas holding up the world into the language of feminist thought and action, in which it is not a lone male figure who carries the burden, but a collective of women. Like the ancient Greek Caryatids, the women in *Trinchera* bear a shared burden. However, unlike the Caryatids, who were sculpted to conform to the male gaze, these women had an active role in determining how they would pose for

the photographs. Additionally, they are not positioned around a religious figure, as the Caryatids were around the Goddess Artemis. Instead, they stand together, representing the support and protection they offer to one another as women. In viewing these columns, we are confronted with an equal —a reflection of ourselves—, thus entailing that we are also part of the movement and carry the burden of our own column.

Cerrucha's subjects volunteered to be photographed, consenting to their images being used to protect the female gender. As mentioned before, they posed how they chose, as autonomous beings rather than sexual objects. This is an example of *poner la cuerpa* (which translates roughly as "to place the feminine body"), in which women use their bodies as shields in posing a challenge to the male gaze. The use of *cuerpa* is significant in this phrase, as it does not really exist in the Spanish language — it is a play on the term *cuerpo*, meaning "body". Given that in Spanish, the "o" ending generally belongs to the masculine gender, the term *cuerpa* is a feminist reconstruction of the word, using the feminine "a" ending. The term *cuerpa* is therefore in and of itself a challenge to patriarchal norms — it supposes that women control what happens to their bodies and, decide how to display them. While *poner la cuerpa* is a safeguarding strategy, it is also a celebration of diversity. By rejecting cosmetic and sexualised beauty standards, feminists reject the idea of a homogenous, archetypal female body that can be imposed as a standard upon the female population. As the Mexican sociologist Itandehui Reyes-Díaz described it, the feminist embodiment of the struggle enriches the feminist experience of resistance and the movement itself:

[...] when at the heart of the city we are "standing against the system" and embracing the diversity of bodies, each body is like an extension of another body, the history and origins of each one does not matter; we are like a mercury river.¹⁸
(del Cielo and Gonzaga, 2021)

When feminists stand against the police or the State, they engage in a physical act of confrontation; meanwhile, it is also a symbolic act of confrontation when feminists decide how to pose and appear in feminist iconography.

Trinchera expresses a clear commitment to the notion that, this time around, there will be no woman left behind by the feminist movement. There is widespread consensus amongst feminist thinkers, ranging from internationally acclaimed feminist such as Nancy Fraser (Arruzza et al., 2019) to indigenous feminists like Magdalena Teitipac (García González, 2021), that the achievements of feminism in the past century disproportionately benefited white women. With the intention of acknowledging and remedying these disparities, contemporary feminism actively seeks to give voice to women from a diverse range of backgrounds, ethnicities and socio-economic strata, aiming to generate a more complete picture of female reality.

18 al "plantar cara" con toda la diversidad de corporalidades en el corazón de la ciudad, cada cuerpo es una extensión del otro, no importan las historias y los orígenes, somos como un afluente de mercurio.

Trinchera therefore includes women from a variety of backgrounds — of different ages, different social contexts, different ethnicities, different working conditions, different degrees of ableness, different heights and different weights.

The colouration of the pictures included in *Trinchera* also has an intentional meaning. All the women are in black and white; thus, avoiding racism. Cerrucha left some significant colours; she preserved purple and green as those are colours of the feminist flag: the first one used in the eradication of violence against women, the second one used when demanding legal abortion. Finally, Cerrucha retained the colour of indigenous clothing, which might be related to recognising the indigenous population. The indigenous clothes are part of their ethnic identity, and while non-indigenous Mexicans have marked them out as objects of discrimination, the retention of these colours symbolises their resistance to such discrimination. As Yásnaya Elena Aguilar, a Mixe linguist, has explained, the imposition of one single Mexican identity with a common language and set of traditions is a form of symbolic violence that denies the existence of indigenous identities (Aguilar Gil, 2016). While *Trinchera* confronts and recognises the problem of racism that women experience in Mexico, it is not an indigenous artwork. Cerrucha has recognised that she is a privileged woman who does not belong to any indigenous ethnicity; therefore, her work is respectful of different traditions rather than an expression of those traditions (Cerrucha, 2021). Her work is not a substitute for indigenous artistic projects, but a means of encouraging indigenous women to join the movement and create their own projects. *Trinchera* expresses solidarity with the causes of multiple ethnicities, but it does not appropriate their fight. After all, Cerrucha's work aims to prove the fundamental incoherence of the idea of a single, homogenous Mexican female identity. The diversity in *Trinchera* portrays the intersectionality of violence and the different possible ways of inhabiting the city. Nevertheless, it is not enough for the subjects to be women protesting to achieve this “poner la cuerpa”; there must be a communal agreement between those involved and those who encounter the installation. There must be an act of recognition.

By embracing diversity as a relevant element of feminism, *Trinchera* makes it possible to encounter the “Other” — spelt with a capital letter, as it is an otherness in which we can finally recognise ourselves. Furthermore, it demonstrates the accomplishment of the aforementioned radical tenderness. In the *Radical Tenderness Manifesto* it is stated that: “Radical tenderness is to embody in *Lak'ech*¹⁹ because you are my other me” (d'Emilia & Coleman, 2015). This recognition of myself as the Other, or the Other as myself, also defies the mechanisms of *basurización simbólica* (symbolic debasement).²⁰ In particular, Rocío Silva Satisteban's theory

19 *Lak'ech* is a modern Mayan term that means “you are me, and I am you”. It is popular in Chicana culture and has been included in several Spanglish manifestos, poems and texts. For example, *Pensamiento Serpentino* by Luís Valdez: “Tú eres mi otro yo (You are my other me). Si te hago daño a ti (If I do harm to you), Me hago daño a mí (I do harm to myself). Si te amo y respeto (If I love and respect you), Me amo y respeto yo (I love and respect myself)” (Owens, 2018).

20 This is a translation of the concept *basurización simbólica*, which is clearer in the original Spanish. The notion includes debasement, degradation and devaluation. However, it is also a metaphor of how some people are treated as disposable or trash.

is highly pertinent (Silva Santisteban, 2008). Drawing from Kristeva's ideas of disgust and the abject, Santisteban observes how what makes us feel disgusted is determined by culture, history and psychology (2008, p. 58). As we mature, we acquire notions of what is supposed to please us or disgust us. This leads to a social dynamic where some subjects are praised, and others rejected. Following Daniel Castillo, Santisteban affirms that these "trashing mechanisms" are determined by a hegemonic North "trashing" the Global South (2008, p. 61). The problem deepens when the Global South subjects become/are conditioned to be disgusted by themselves, leading to "self-trashing". From a feminist perspective, this hypothesis may also explain one of the problematic aspects of cosmetic and beauty standards: since we are socially and culturally indoctrinated to consider certain features beautiful, the notion of an attractive body (usually white, thin, youthful-looking and tall) to which we compare ourselves can lead us to reject those aspects of our own bodies that fail to conform to those rigid beauty standards. It is not a secret that only "perfect" bodies such as these generally appear in advertisements. It is therefore noticeable how Cerrucha replaces the archetypal "beautiful bodies" of adverts with a variety of bodies thus allowing women to encounter and identify with someone who looks more like themselves or their friends. These bodies do not conform to the unattainable, largely white standards of advertising — she is not setting out a standard for women, rather generating a commitment and solidarity between them. This is particularly significant to strengthen the feminist movement in Latin America and to ensure that feminism remains a collective commitment, rather than an individualised one.

Is *Trinchera*, or similar actions, sufficient to ensure the safety of women in the face of gender-based violence? In a country where there is an average of eleven feminicides per day, no artwork alone can guarantee complete safety for women. However, every feminist's action that confronts gender-based violence is a part of the collective efforts that could potentially save a woman from becoming a victim in the future. By reducing the prevalence of advertisements that perpetuate symbolic violence, *Trinchera* serves as an effective tool for replacing them with empowering images. Additionally, there is a possibility that some spectators may recognise the presence of women protecting and supporting each other, which could make potential perpetrators think twice before harming a woman. Above all, the significance of *Trinchera* lies in its message to women that there are feminists who are willing to dedicate their time, images, and bodies to protect and stand alongside them.

With *Trinchera*, Cerrucha attempted to reproduce the horizontal organisation that the intersectional feminist movement is seeking to achieve. Instead of reproducing a hierarchy with leaders at the top, contemporary feminism aims at giving the opportunity for each woman to be equally recognised (Feminista 8 de Marzo and Tiempo Robado editoras, 2021). Even if Cerrucha coordinated the photographic session and designed the vinyl, her role is just that of any other feminist contributing to eradicating gender-based violence. She did not control who arrived or what they wanted to communicate in their portrait. They gathered

with a common objective: joining the fight against gender-based violence. The fact that Cerrucha added her photograph to *Trinchera* marks her out as the equal of the portrayed women. She became just another soldier in the trench. She shattered the dichotomy between those who represent and those who are represented, also known as the artist (who represents and usually a male) and his muse (the represented subject and commonly a woman).



Figure 5. *Trinchera* [Photography], Cerrucha, 2020 (Trinchera | CERRUCHA). Reproduced only for this publication with permission from: Cerrucha, 2023, Mexico City.

Trinchera also gave the opportunity for some feminists to spread their own messages or denunciations. Since some women used Cerrucha's invitation to make their struggle more visible, it ceased to be a single artist's installation, becoming instead a collective protest. For example, some used a marker to write over their bodies, transforming themselves from messengers into messages. In one particularly arresting example of this, one of her subjects wrote across her body: "A las gordas también nos acosan, gordófobos" (Fat women are also harassed, fatphobic); the entire message is readable only because another woman is holding her dress in order to reveal the text that she wrote on her leg, transmitting the idea that we need each other's help, especially in a collective feminist movement. Another one, covering her face with a mask, is protesting the sports team's pride as she is wearing a generic basketball sweatshirt and writing on her legs: "¿Cuál orgullo? Fuera acosadores" (Pride? Stalkers out!). One of the many mothers photographed, carrying a baby, wrote on her arm: "Tiempo propio" (My own time), referring to the lack of free time mothers experience while trying to balance their family, public and working lives. It can be no accident that she chose to place this text on her free arm, she is holding her baby while simultaneously recognising what she is forced to sacrifice on account of being a mother in a patriarchal system; those two arms

are the same that hold a baby, work, clean a house, cook. Working moms have so many roles it is not unusual to find them represented in illustrations as many arms women.²¹ Finally, two young women wrote on their arms the motto “Ni una menos” (Not even one “woman” less). This phrase is the motto of a Latin American feminist movement that started as a protest against feminicides in Argentina. One of the ladies with this motto is wearing orange, a colour used in campaigns against gender violence; she is raising her arm and that of the woman next to her to convey the idea of protesting together, collectively lifting their fists against the state. Each one of these women are exhibiting themselves to send a message. The pictures look just like feminist protests where women hold banners with messages, denunciations or demands inspired by their own experiences.

Finally, I would like to highlight a connotation specific to the installation of the work on the subway. Although it is a symbolic act, it is still significant that one is greeted and embraced by a chain of women who, while staying outside of the train, as they cover the exterior walls, are letting us know that we are safe. After all, we are literally part of the chain by entering any of the nine coaches — this is true for the men who enter the subway just as much as it is of the women. There is therefore a subtle recognition of the fact that the disarticulation of patriarchy is a responsibility taken by all genders. When the train is in motion, the artwork is perceived differently. Either stopping or starting, when the movement is still slow, the portrayed women appear to be marching. When it is moving faster, it is impossible to identify the women: they form a blurred picture of indiscernible individuals. They become an image akin to what has been called the *mareas feministas* (feminist tides), in which several thousand women walk together wearing the same shades of purple or green. From far away, they look like a wild sea carving a path through the urban landscape. Although this might be an accidental quality of the artwork, since Cerrucha intended for people to appreciate the installation while waiting for the subway, the message of protesting feminists travelling through twenty stations persists.²² It is not only on March 8 or November 25 that one may find feminist demonstrations: there is one perpetually coursing through the subway system.

5. Conclusions

Trinchera successfully communicates that no woman is alone; solidarity among women will afford each woman protection. Cerrucha’s installation decries the indifference of those who witness acts of violence — in this specific case, those that occur on public transport in Mexico City. Without knowledge of the context of the feminist protest movement, and the academic discussions surrounding it, it might be hard for the average viewer to grasp its intended message in its entirety. Therefore, this analysis has had the purpose of providing some cultural referents

21 For an example, visit: <https://www.anclabogados.es/conciliacion-de-la-vida-laboral-y-familiar/>.

22 In its 16 km trajectory this line goes from Observatorio to Pantitlán, crossing the city from east to west and covering many of the centre’s stations.

that may help the viewer, especially those from outside Mexico or unfamiliar with feminism, to appreciate the installation.

Cerrucha's high-quality photographic street art installation is in dialogue with other Mexican feminist artists and gender studies that analyse violence. I explored how it is a visual argumentation based on Rita Laura Segato and Sayak Valencia's theories. I argue that the justification for using war terminology comes from the description of the sort of violence women experience. Meanwhile, I also highlighted how it embraces the language and traditions originating in the first generation of Mexican feminist artists. First, it considers how women are portrayed by the media and provides a rebuttal, mostly by rejecting the objectification of women's bodies. Secondly, it continues to politicise the private sphere. Thirdly, and finally, it rejects the notion of the passive spectator and seeks to make the audience involved, or even to give them a key role in "activating" the artwork.

In conclusion, with *Trinchera* it is possible to highlight how a location can bestow meaning upon a work of street art. Both *Trinchera* and other artworks by Cerrucha enlighten what activism means, and why it is worth exploring the neologism's connotation to propose a comprehensive analysis. Amongst the elements of the feminist agenda that are represented in *Trinchera*, there are five easily spotted: feminism as a resistance movement, the rebellious act of *poner la cuerpa*, a radical tenderness effort aimed at fostering empathy and mutual protection, the diversity that is part of feminism and a rejection of the binary idea that there is one normal way of being a woman. *Trinchera* is not an act of war; it is an act of self-defence against a war declared against the female gender.

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