Article

TikTok as a New Player in the Contemporary Arts Market: A Study with Special Consideration of Feminist Artists and a New Generation of Art Collectors

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Abstract: How do social-media platforms such as TikTok function as a neutralising factor in the gatekeeping process in times of COVID-19 restrictions? How does TikTok change the experience culture in arts, and how does this impact how artists frame their working process alongside *primary gatekeepers*? During the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok attracted many artists, who used the platform to take their practice, and thereby their self-marketing, into their own hands. At the same time, a new generation of collectors use TikTok to discover art under popular hashtag #feministartists. When artists label their work with #feministartists, they insert themselves into the gatekeeping process, and use opportunities and restrictions bounded to that specific hashtag. The study examines this process of professional self-positioning by using interviews with contemporary artists, curators, and observations on TikTok, artist talks, and secondary interviews with artists on online platforms. The findings suggest a variation in how one trades in or trades on "feminist artist", accessing resources, and gaining exposure. A focus on "feminist artists" is restrictive for consolidating artists' efforts to pursue specific professional, social, political, and economic agendas through art.

Keywords: TikTok; feminism; female artists; gatekeeper; contemporary art; social media; Millennials; Gen Z; art market; COVID

1. Introduction

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, former US President Trump wanted to close TikTok in the United States (Banjo and Egkolfopoulou 2020). US authorities were concerned that, as TikTok, a video app with more than 800 million users, was produced and is owned by Chinese company Bytedance, it could pass on user data to the Chinese intelligence service. There was also a worry among Republicans that China could use TikTok to manipulate the US presidential election campaign. In June 2020, TikTok was also successfully used by a grassroots movement to call for a boycott of one of Trump's election campaign events. The resulting executive order banning TikTok emboldened even more users to protest the Trump administration (Schlitt 2020). The ban never came into effect, and in June 2021, President Joe Biden revoked the executive order by Trump (BBC 2021).

At the same time, many artists and cultural institutions on TikTok spoke about their worries that they would lose access to the platform. Due to Trump's executive order against TikTok, artists were afraid that they would lose their digital audiences and sales, especially as they were already under pressure because of the economic recession caused by the pandemic (Small 2020). Of TikTok's 800 million users, an increasing number are over 16 (Gens X, Y, and Z), and form audiences for many different cultural institutions and artists (Tidy and Galer 2020). Some cultural institutions (such as the Uffici Gallery in Italy or the Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands) found that, through their use of TikTok, they were able to attract a younger and broader audience. Still, many museums, galleries, or private persons as curators are not on TikTok, as they lack resources both in terms of personnel and time, or are sceptical (Small 2021; The Art Gorgeous 2020). Many art institutions, museums, and galleries were equally even forced to lay off their staff during lockdowns (Gural 2021;

Kenney 2020). Overall, it was individual artists and artist groups that were more frightened by the pending shut-down of the platform: artists still studying arts and using the platform to showcase their skills, artists who decided against university because of the financial strain, and those artists who struggled before finding their way into the art market and institutions (Gat 2020). Many artists made their first steps on TikTok even before COVID-19, but the entire art world was forced to go digital with the global pandemic (Graw 2020).

The commercial side of art adapted to its forced digital turn relatively quickly (Sidorova 2019). Pioneers in this, such as the David Zwirner Gallery or König Galerie, relied on digital showrooms such as online viewing rooms even before the COVID-19 pandemic and simply continued this work. Big art fairs such as Frieze Art or Art Basel adapted by relying on digital galleries, and produced elaborate digital exhibitions, with films, close-ups, and descriptive texts of single objects. Artists represented at these digital exhibitions were mainly established, white, male artists. The online viewing rooms presented artworks, reinforcing the notion of the artworks' self-evident value and worth, and inevitably influencing sales negotiations (Graw 2020). Therefore, the artists who most needed visibility and support during the pandemic in the art world—primarily young, female and black artists—were already under-represented before the pandemic, and their work was further marginalised in these digital viewing rooms. These were the artists protesting against the TikTok ban.

Many of these artists addressed feminist topics in their videos of up to 60 s long. The videos used the #feministartist hashtag. The artists have been using this hashtag by themselves or had their videos hashtagged by users via comments. The hypothesis is that artists use TikTok as a *virtual studio visit* to display their artistic practice and talk about related subjects, and not as an exhibition space like Instagram. Complicating matters is the fact that, as soon as an artist talks about female-associated topics, they are categorised and labelled with the #feministartist hashtag even if they do not describe themselves as feminists. COVID-19 threatens careers and lives. The impact of the pandemic on young, less established artists has been devastating, with exhibitions cancelled and nondigital outreach impossible. This research project thus analyses the phenomenon that significantly under-represented female artists used TikTok as their presentation channel and developed an extensive reach.

2. Literature Review and Institutional Setup

Social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, and now also TikTok have long permeated society. Our relationship to the social and material world is increasingly invisible through digital representations and the complexity of their technological constitution (Cornell and Halter 2015; Bishop 2015, pp. 337–52; Quaranta 2015, pp. 425–38). Communication in the digital field is described as equally "real" and "close" as "analogue" communication is. The bound of social activism, such as feminist activism, through social media, has already been accomplished within studies of political activism, concerning fake news and election manipulation on social media (Hocks 1999, pp. 107–19; Berry and Dieter 2015; DeLuca 1999). The TikTok platform is still a rather new research field, as the product was only released in China (under brand name Douyin) in 2016, and outside China as TikTok in 2017. It hit 800 million active users during the lockdown periods of 2020/21. It is a social-media platform like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. A fundamental understanding of the function of the video streaming app has been gained (Anderson 2020, pp. 7–12; Ngangom 2020), and on its impact on the development of meme culture (Zulli and Zulli 2020). The first studies on the labour of visuality and its relationship with government, and TikTok's political influence in the USA, China, and India have been conducted (Zhang 2021). Algorithm bias against LGBTIQ or PoC has also been discussed (Hern 2019; Cox 2018; Broderick 2019). Surveys on TikToks, as TikTok videos are called, in the art world are still missing. Instagram still seems to be the more popular and art-friendly platform, considering that it has already been on the market for 10 years. Some studies and even exhibitions deal with artists' self-representation on Instagram (Hogan 2010; Kang and Chen

2017; Visione 2015). Instagram also has significant influence on young audiences and art collectors, such as Millennials and Gen Z. Social media, especially Instagram, were part of the Hiscox Online Art Trade Report (The Art Market 2019, pp. 8–12), which outlined the direction of development in the art market, and included a survey on the new generation of art collectors, Millennials. It showed that Millennials tend to buy their first artworks through online platforms and auctions or directly from the artist over Instagram. Since then, Instagram and the influence of social media on the buying behaviour of collectors have been included in art-market surveys, with the exception of TikTok (TEFAF 2017; The Art Market 2017, pp.138–39; The Art Market 2018, pp. 252–58; The Art Market 2019, pp. 258–309). Moreover, TikTok's use for artists is still underanalysed territory, with few studies on its influence, and existing ones focus mainly on music and the political scene. The present study tries to fill this gap in the literature by highlighting artists on TikTok and how the app could affect the art market.

3. Methods

This article is part of ongoing research and a series of interviews with artists, curators, and art dealers about digital art exhibitions, and their influence on gatekeepers and the changing experience culture. TikTok is one of the research fields in the study of digital art exhibitions. As there is no dataset or research for these research questions, it is crucial to understand how artists use TikTok to bypass primary gatekeepers, and why feminism is used as a determining label in the app. By analysing artists labelled with #feminsitartists, through their TikTok feeds, articles, and artist and indepth interviews, it is possible to reach a well-based understanding of the still-developing research field.

The study begins by placing TikTok in the context of social media and distinguishes it from Instagram. From here, the effect on the audience and the utilisation by the artists to circumvent primary gatekeepers is elaborated. In this process, the theory of the "intimate screen" (Alexander and Hahner 2017, pp. 225–43) is discussed. The study then explores different TikTok artists, how these under-represented artists use TikTok to gain visibility, and how the #feministartist hashtag works as a grouping but limiting label. The last part of the investigation is about how TikTok changes our experience culture of art, thereby helping to shape a new generation of interested persons and future art collectors.

4. The Art Market in the Age of TikTok

New types of media have repeatedly influenced artistic forms of communication and art itself. Andy Warhol, Edward Ruscha, and Lucy Lippard, for example, experimented with the aesthetics of advertising visuals and media. Books, magazines, newspapers, and advertising brochures became newly discovered playgrounds and sources of inspiration for art. Visual culture is nourished by the flood of images in mass media, which influence art and vice versa. The tension, friction, and mutual influence of visual culture and art have been discussed for a long time. The way in which we consume images, where, and when influence both the creation process of art and its reception.

Now, art has found its way into the digital realm since the advent of the Internet for private and commercial use. Since the late 1990s, this has happened in the form of websites from private persons or cultural institutions, and, since 2010, on social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest. These digital spaces reproduced, perpetuated, or limited physical exhibitions. Digital exhibitions play a decisive role in the rapidly changing, digitalising art market, which has resulted in a shift in distribution channels and all changes associated with accessing the market and the shift in (media) power structures (Gnyp 2015). They, therefore, disrupt established power structures and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, traditionally organised by gallerists or art dealers in their role as gatekeepers in the art market. At the same time, it must always be examined to what extent the transfer of structures of the art market into the digital, including social media, reinforces or consolidates exclusion mechanisms. The digital art market is profiting from the easy and nearly limitless transmission of visual objects, and the effects of mass circulation, a

phenomenon linked to contemporary visual culture (Wallerstein 2018). Mass circulation has allowed for the art world to grow beyond the limiting and elitist boundaries of physical venues such as galleries and museums. The art world embraced Instagram in particular as a social-media platform, basically using it as a "white cube" for digital images, something that has enabled many art-market entities to reach a larger global audience. On Instagram, it appears as though anyone can make their curated exhibition in the digital space. The word "curation" is used in the digital culture to describe any form of the selection process compared to the physical space, where curation refers to the bespoke selection process and care for cultural objects and works of art (Wallerstein 2018). Digital curators are the persons who carefully select works, reduce the possible choice, and combine artworks or things in particular ways to bring attention to a specific item or history or describe various topics. Curators gently weave objects and art into a narrative or web of explanations for exhibition visitors. A social content feed on Instagram works similarly, as the owner, one's Instagram profile, can focus on various topics or create a digital exhibition through the "curation" process.

A long-time trend on social-media platforms has been looping-video creation. Instagram or Facebook have integrated looping videos like Snapchat, Vine, and Music.ly have, which later merged to Douyin (China)/TikTok (outside of China) from Bytedance (Anderson 2020). Bresnick's (2019) study on the cinematography of the trending app TikTok describes the app as a virtual playground by pointing out that "TikTok liberates young people to play without adhering to the visual styles, narratives, and online cultures of the past."(ibid, p. 10) According to him, this in particular differentiates the app from other social-media platforms.

TikTok favours playfulness over certain styles and looks; accordingly, the younger generation is no longer trying to build their online personality as a brand, as Millennials do. The short, looping videos appear to be a mirror of Gen Z: "While millennials earnestly tweet about the stress of their student loans and freelance precarity, Gen Z TikToks in joyous nihilism, mocking a society in which self-determination and upward mobility have long since collapsed."(Citarella 2018). If Gen Z, as Citarella (2018) points out, is nihilistic, why do social injustice and hashtags such as #blacklivesmatters or #feminism trend, and why do artists start accounts on TikTok instead of using Instagram with its *curatorial* aesthetic?

5. The Intimate Screen Is Omnipresent

"the relationship between reality and its online mirror has changed to the point where the real and the digital have merged into a single thing: *isn't Google real?"* (Quaranta 2015, p. 425)

To understand the influence of increasing screen time and changes in our social behaviour by and through social media, and accordingly through TikTok, Alexander and Hahner's (2017) approach to speak of the "intimate screen" in their study of digital activism for children with Down's syndrome is appropriate. Alexander and Hahner (2017) show with their analysis of a private Instagram channel of a family with children with Down's syndrome that they can raise awareness for the children and overcome stereotypes only by inviting people through pictures into their home to see their family as being similar to other families. The audience sees family pictures from trips, parties, and family breakfasts accompanied by positive descriptions in the captions. The audience can thereby identify and sympathise with this family. In the comment section, you can see so many positive reactions, with people giving their view and appreciating the portrayed family life. The community often then grows together into a digital circle of friends, where people share pictures and stories with each other. This demonstrates the engagement and bonding potential of social media.

Furthermore, the authors describe how our lives are influenced by constantly available screens, by the use of TVs, notebooks, tablets, smartphones, or public screens. We communicate via Facetime or other digital video-communication tools. The all-surrounding screen came even closer as the global pandemic forced people to stay at home, with closed office

buildings and curfews in many countries. The day was filled with Zoom meetings, schooling through the screen, Zoom birthday parties, or digital therapy and sport sessions. The screen of mobile and technical devices became even more invisible and the only channel to the outside world. At the place of a lifeless, cold object is now a supportive, empathetic, and useful tool, and our connection to the public sphere through familiarity.

6. Feminstartist: Art and Activism on TikTok

Hashtags are not the only factor within TikTok to find somebody's videos. TikTok has a character limit, which prevents hashtag spamming on videos, unlike Instagram, where people can use up to 20 hashtags. The TikTok app is divided into two upper sections, the *Following* and *For You* feeds (see Figure 1). The *Following* feed shows only content from creators that someone follows, and the *For You* page is to discover content from new creators. On the *Discover* section are trending #hashtag challenges, created by users, paid company challenges, and TikTok-generated challenges. Challenges are #hashtag-based invitations to create content with the inspiration of others. Content can be found not only by hashtags, but also by using music and sounds from the music library, filters, and the beforementioned *For You* page. The algorithm that provides new content is triggered by the user's interests, what they see, and for how long, and it is constantly learning. The algorithm is one of the factors that make it easy to be discovered by many new users, compared to other social-media platforms such as Instagram. A new creator can reach a couple of hundred views with their first videos. The network reach at TikTok is exponentially growing, whereas the algorithm of Instagram is mainly fed by the connection of users. The discover page on Instagram, for example, only shows new content that already has high coverage. Previously unknown profiles with fewer followers are found less easily. Contrary to this, new creators on TikTok can easily connect with other users, and the app promotes collaborations (with, e.g., the duet function) or grouping under one hashtag with challenges.

As Dixon (2014) and Boling (2020) noted in their studies on the #feminism hashtag, digital forums and social media are places where many under-represented and vulnerable people, such as LGBTIQ*, BPoC, or other social and political groups seek exchanges and support. Still, social media are not a safe space, and people are increasingly exposed to hate speech, harassment, and shadowbanning. It was also revealed that the algorithm of TikTok discriminates against black and overweight people, and that TikTok has shadowbanned LGBTIQ hashtags in certain countries (Strick 2016; McCluskey 2020; Perrett 2020).

The grouping of creators, as video producers on TikTok are called, or content thus serves, on the one hand, to create communities (with the aforementioned downsides) and, on the other hand, to find new content on topics, but also to motivate the activist movement on the net, such as well-known hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #MeeToo, or #FridayForFuture (Fielitz and Staemmler 2020). These hashtags help to collect varying information and assign people to a specific cluster. As a result, TikTok, through its structure and focus on interaction and empowerment of grouping through hashtags with its creators' challenges, taps into what is known as social-media activism. This is achieved as many creators spread ideas under a single term, the hashtag. TikTok uses activism strategies and transforms them into "challenges" that are commodifiable and suitable for a general audience. Activism strategies on social media are challenges (e.g., the ice-bucket challenge to raise awareness for ALS), hashtag challenges (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter), sharing real-life experiences, providing data, and partnering with influencers, fundraising and donations, and calls for Patreons. Activism strategies are an integral part of TikTok's success. Therefore, creators who have achieved a particularly high reach through their activism in certain subjects or areas, as they implement the use of hashtags, topic setting, and thus community building to a significant extent.
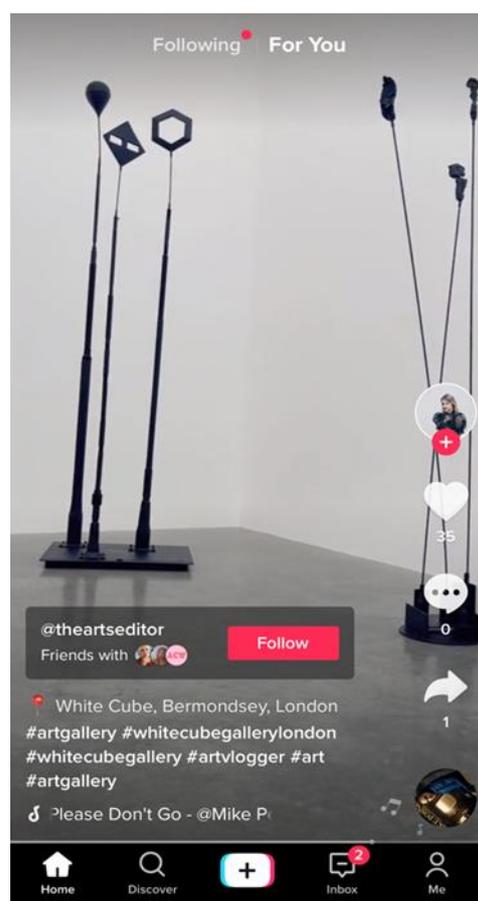
Figure 1. Main page of TikTok with Following (upper-left) and For You (upper right) feeds.

A selection of the most successful and known artists on TikTok are Colette Bernard (@colettebernard), a sculpture artist; Emonee Larussa @emon33y, a media and NFT artist; Erin Samjo (@erinsamjo), famous for gluing everyday objects onto her face; Landin, @Landinart, a sculpture artist; Leila Mae Thompson, @lmtweet, a self-thought artist renowned for her artistic responses to the death of George Floyd; Rosa Kusabbi, @Rosaillustration, with her colourful illustrations on equality; Helena (@ssquidand.co), an embroidery artist; @glass_goddess_33 a glass artist; and Kelley Emmrich (@kellyemmrich), an animation artist. Under the 800 million active users are much more artists who can be found under #artiktok. All of these artists can be found through the #feministartist hashtag, which has 16 million views (last accessed on 26 June 2021).

When looking at the most popular videos of the artists that went *viral*[1], it is noticeable that they address issues either directly related to feminism or through a feminist lens. Issues such as equality, birth control, freedom of speech, antiharassment, antiracism, and body positivity. However, in first and secondary interviews (Andrews 2021; Breen 2020; Small 2020, 2021; Fielitz and Staemmler 2020), only three of the mentioned artists, @ssquidand.co, @glass_goddess_33, and @rosaillustration, actively identified themselves as feminist artists. The remaining artists did not identify as feminists, though they did say that they address feminist topics. Nevertheless, all aforementioned artist agreed that they address (intersectionally) feminist[2] topics within their videos and art. All of these artists are full-time artists and secure their main income through TikTok.

6.1. Minimum 15 s of Art

The aforementioned artist creators or artists are labelled as feminist artists, by themselves and by others, even if they do not identify as feminists. The artists use several different video types, usually lasting in the range of 15–60 s, to present themselves to their

audiences. The three primary ones are: *performance*, *work-in-progress*, and *direct-address* videos. Two other types are also fairly common: *reviews*, where the creator reviews exhibitions and other works of art; and *sociohistorical* videos, where the creator discusses art-history or sociopolitical issues. The first three video types serve to present the art itself, and the other video types serve to demonstrate one's own expert position. All videos are accompanied by background music.

The first three types of videos are characteristic of artists on TikTok, and are now explored further. The *performance* of art on TikTok can take various forms, including expression through body movements (see Figure 2), filmed stage performances or performances in daily life situations, such as the viral video of Colette Bernard, who carried her sculptural work of a birth-control pill blister pack through New York City streets (see Figure 3) (Castillo 2019). *Work-in-progress* videos are particularly widely used and are intended to show the production of a piece of art. The audience is looking over the artist's shoulder in their studio (see Figure 4) and can partly influence the artwork if they are asked to do so, or can be invited to guess in which direction the artwork is heading. This invites the spectators into the studio and allows for them to participate in the artistic process. In addition to close-ups, there are also videos showing the artists in their studio where the works are realised. The videos alternate between the rooms, the works, the working process, and the artists recording themselves. Here, it becomes clear that the very short videos are elaborately edited down to 15–60 s. @LandinArt, an artist producing bronze sculptures, often invites viewers to guess which famous people her works-in-progress might be, for example. *Direct-address* videos present the artist's artworks in detail and show the artist, or an off-screen voice discussing the work. Work-in-progress videos and performances are primarily used to present the artist's own artistic work. This also shows a clear difference to Instagram, where mostly finished artworks are presented in the studio or exhibition space. It was only with the later addition of Instagram Stories and Reels that artists also used the opportunity to show their works-in-progress. Here, too, the important point of engagement and the inclusion of the audience in the process is missing when compared to TikTok, where audience engagement is paramount.
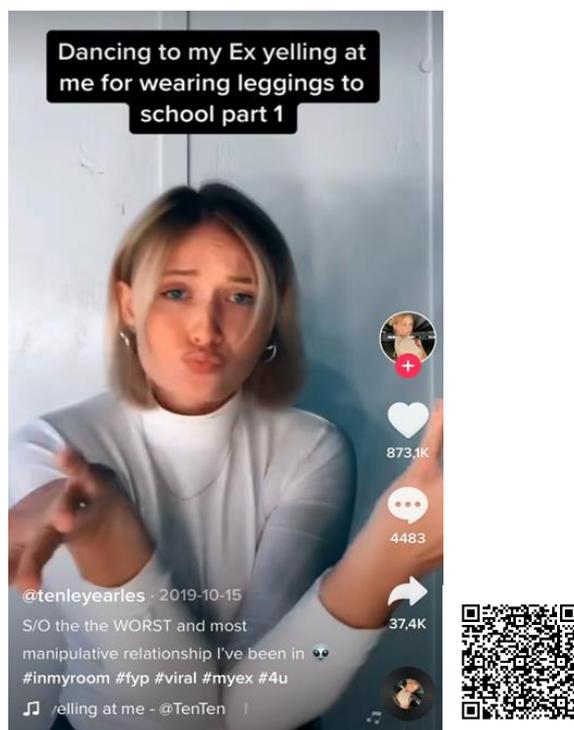

**Figure 2.** @Tenleyearles performing to audio message.
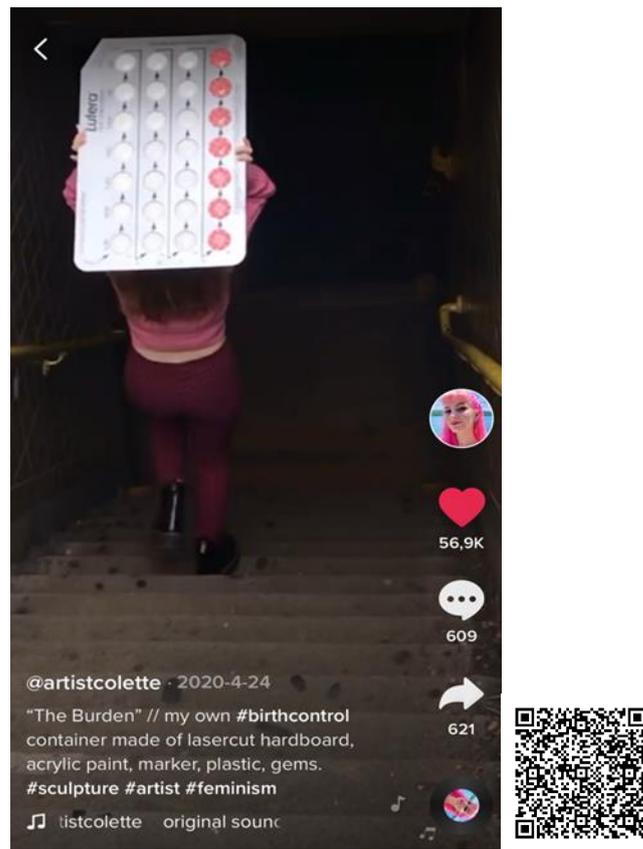
Figure 3. Performance of Colette Bernard "The Burden".
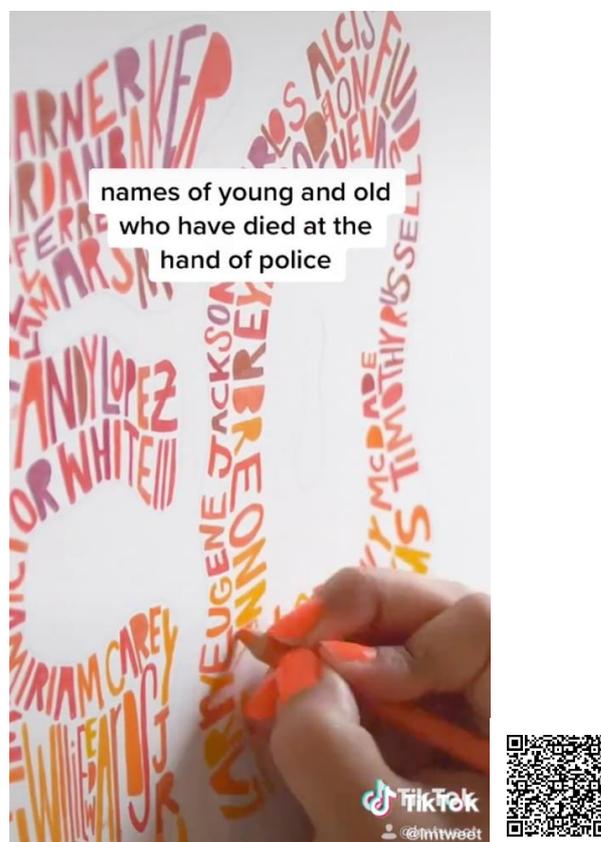
Figure 4. @lmtweet Leila Mae Thompson with her work-in-progress video.

The artists use the three video types on TikTok to present their works away from the rigid insistence on the aesthetic presentation of intellectual or artistic ideas, and generate the point of presence and touchability (Wallerstein 2018). The dematerialised, digital images of works on viewers' screens can be closely perceived, if not exactly felt, by the users via the screen in their hands, as the works have adapted to the digital space (Sholette 2006). The size of the works can be assessed, and their materiality experienced without directly touching them. The invisible, but touchable intimate screen is the bounding bridge between spectator and artwork. In this way, even sculptural works can seemingly be experienced by the viewer from all angles, albeit in a predetermined digital environment. Works with a performance character, such as those by Colette Bernard (The Burden, see Figure 2), have experienced a new flowering through TikTok, which, far from being firmly circumscribed by a performance in a gallery, places them more firmly in the midst of people's lives. In this way, the performance character of this art form is taken up and transformed into the social medium in order to continue the discourse outside of high culture. The performance on TikTok moves away from the enjoyment or puzzlement of the elites to give space to the masses to enjoy, question, or even be perplexed by these artworks.

The interplay of intimacy through the device, and the verbal and visual closeness to the artist creators allows for viewers to fall into friendly familiarity. At the same time, TikTok, as a mainstream site far from the critical and financially exclusionary structures of the art market, allows for artists to present themselves and, through the highlighted video types, to extensively introduce and inscribe themselves into the lives of the viewers. Of the 15–60 s videos, the artists upload about 2–5 a day (Bernard 2021). This media presence cannot be achieved by the classical art market with its institutions. In this way, the artists inscribe themselves almost unnoticed in viewers' lives by "increasingly inexpensive technologies that allow informal and activist artists to network with each other have also made the denizens of this shadowy world ever more conspicuous to the very institutions that once sought to exclude them. In short, dark matter is no longer as dark as it once was" (Sholette 2006). The "creative dark matter" (Sholette 2006) that we find on TikTok consciously works in the realm of mainstream art, autonomous and free from the critical and economic structures of an art market that (still) excludes them. However, it should not be forgotten that TikTok as a platform is not free from bias and exclusionary mechanisms. TikTok admitted that content from black, obese, or LGBTIQ creators has been shadowbanned by the algorithms (Bernard 2021; Perrett 2020).

6.2. Performing Feminism on TikTok

Feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous, in her essay "The Laughter of Medusa", writes about the aesthetic dimensions of language and expression by the woman's body, passion, voice, and words as a means of cognition. Through the metaphor of the laughing Medusa, Cixous traces the lack of femininity in culture, which has always been repressed, and turns the image into an appeal to the repressed to write themselves into visibility. Cixous' writing is a constant repetition and transformation of her thoughts, and carries the reader into her movement. This technique could also be compared to TikTok videos by #feministartists, as artists, like Cixous, constantly redraw and write themselves, like a never-ending sketch or an unfinished paper, carrying out ongoing research on themselves, and their artistic work and purpose. The videos, if not swiped away, are on a constant loop, repeating themselves and massaging their massage into the spectator's mind (Cixous 2013, pp. 39–62).

TikTok videos used by artists can, on the one hand, be a form of trust building and be used as digital activism. In the first form of trust building, the public is invited into the artist's studio through personal videos with close-ups on their hands and face, looking at the artworks, seeing their living spaces and studios. By giving the audience the feeling of looking at the artist over the shoulder or generally physical closeness, trust slowly increases. The audience becomes a friend through the screen. The videos are not digital exhibitions; they are, rather, a studio visit. This "friendship" with the artists also opens the possibility for digital activism through the *invisible screen*. The artists can subvert

dominant perceptions of political slogans while simultaneously using the narrative of feminism to present their artistry. This combination allows for women artists to reach an audience outside of the classical art market, even and especially in the uncertain times of COVID-19. They create a community of like-minded young people by visually and narratively transforming the issues into a celebrated and familiar life, thus managing to bypass initial gatekeepers in the art market.

To understand how and why artists are choosing TikTok as their place to gain visibility especially in the times of COVID-19, it is crucial to understand the audience on TikTok. The primary audience on TikTok are young: Generations Y and Z. However, TikTok also tries to attract more of the older generations and higher-education institutions on the platform by initiating a global "Museum Moment" (TikTok Newsroom) on TikTok with live exhibition tours or by the creation of a EUR 5 million COVID relief fund for art and cultural institutions in Germany (Schneider 2021).

For young audiences and what they are seeking online, TikTok Germany published #digitalnativesmonitor, a study focusing on two generations of users to find answers to questions such as, "What moves Gen Z and Millennials?" (Digital Natives Report 2021, p. 2) and "How do they express themselves?" (ibid). The study showed that the pandemic has increased the existing awareness and preoccupations of Gens Z and Y about social inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change. These generations are more likely to express themselves with memes and short videos instead of long discussions (ibid, pp. 6–7). The results of the report highlight that issues of social inequality, which is a main subject of intersectional feminism, are one of the main concerns of the younger generations, and thus firmly inscribed in their online behaviour. Themes of intersectional feminism, such as Rosa Kusabbi with her illustrations about empowerment, Colette Bernard's birth-control performance, or Helena's gender-equality embroidery, successfully permeate the digital space and are perceived by these generations (Breen 2020). This means that these videos have a higher probability of being shared, thereby going *viral,* and that other creators or artists also deal with these topics. Unfortunately, by using the same parameter, antifeminist videos have an equally higher likelihood of being shared.

The named examples show that the featured artists present their own artistic practice through the narrative of feminism, visually foregrounding the artworks, while hashtags, captions, and direct speeches, challenges, or off-screen texts tie the videos into the themes of feminism. The elaborated level of trust between artist and viewer allows for the visual narratives on feminism to merge with a gentle form of mobilisation towards #feministartist activism. The organic weaving of latent activism in the app encourages viewers to recode the unknown into the known. Moreover, the forms of interaction and collaboration that TikTok enables are conducive to feminist discourse, and provide the opportunity for mass mobilisation to achieve not only individual artist visibility, but also visibility for issues of sociopolitical change. The extent to which these imagined forms of artistic activism on TikTok can be carried beyond the app or what barriers to censorship are built into the app cannot be elaborated here, and are part of the research on censorship and platform regulation.

7. TikTok's #Feministartists and the Art Market

The artists grouped by #feministartist are mostly women. As mentioned, the artists do not all identify themselves as feminist artists; for example, Colette Bernard would say that she is a "queer leftist artist" (Bernard 2021). Nevertheless, the hashtag can be stated as a strategy to gain the necessary visibility for the individual and the group on TikTok, thereby breaking through the historical exclusion of women, which is not to say "feminists", as that could apply to men too, from the art world, and thereby the art market. However, the grouping process does not stop with the positive aspect of gaining visibility, as it could be used as the positive discrimination of minorities and under-represented positions. Through this grouping process with the label of #feministartists, many different artists are aligned by having their characteristics removed in favour of the label. Therefore, the strategy of

visibility could eliminate many individual characteristics; thus, positions beyond feminist issues are omitted. In doing so, artists set the stage for feminist issues, and at the same time serve feminist activism in the belief that they can compensate for the lack of female representation in the art world in the past. The interview sample of female artists listed here also shows the consequence in connection with the hashtag that feminist artists seem to always be female artists and vice versa, thus seemingly becoming a general consensus. Therefore, it becomes clear how easy it is to group female artists as feminist artists, which is a generalisation that misses the differences between being a woman and a feminist, makes it more difficult to perceive an artwork made by women to be seen outside of feminist topics, and pushes the gap between the generalisation of differences between male and female artists further apart (Hayden 2020, pp. 57–84).

The artists mentioned under #feministartist are almost entirely young and nonestablished. In the case of Colette Bernard or Leila Mae Thompson, they have just emerged from academia and the global pandemic, which also led to the loss of their part-time jobs and exhibition opportunities. They concentrated entirely on TikTok as the only channel to the outside world for their artistic practice. COVID-19 acted as an amplifier for a group of artists who moved into digital spaces, and provided them their income. Some of the still-young audience do not have the financial means to buy large material-intensive artworks. However, many TikTok artists produced smaller items, such as stickers, editions, and T-shirts with their artworks. Small art objects generate USD 5000–10,000 dollars for the artists (Bernard 2021). In this way, artists have managed to monetise their visibility and sell small replicas of their artworks. Similarly, museums sell replicas or bags of their popular artworks, and the König Gallery has also used this strategy with König Souvenirs: "We notice the strong need for participation" (Plag 2018). The need for participation and commitment, and the urge to exchange about art and sociopolitical issues that appeal to the young generation of art enthusiasts is what makes the aforementioned (#feministarist) artists successful on TikTok. In all the mentioned positive and negative facets, TikTok unites the possibility for the exchange, cooperation, and enthusiasm of young interested people, the art collectors and patrons of tomorrow.

"They wanted to support me in my art", Collette (Bernard 2021) described the reaction on her TikToks, which is an extremely positive message at a time when people had almost no physical access to art and cultural experience. This also shows how important exchange is on both the side of the artist and the side of the viewer. Artists have indeed overcome the first hurdle to visibility on TikTok and in the art market. However, how far they will make it into institutions and large collections is still up for debate. A longer observation of the development of artists' careers, and the inclusion of TikTok in the grid of art agents and curators is still to come.

8. Conclusions

This study on feminist artists on TikTok during COVID-19 in 2020/21 analyses artistic self-presentation in social media in general and on TikTok in particular. In contrast to Instagram, the preferred social-media platform in the arts and culture sector to date, extensively covered in art-market studies, this study identified the essential functions of TikTok for the representation of art and female artists. Using the theory of the intimate screen, a stronger focus of the TikTok app on activism strategies emerged with less emphasis on an aesthetically curated feed. An algorithm that focuses on maximising the rate of new discovery significantly increases reach, including for new users. Emphasising hashtags and generating hashtag challenges, while limiting the number of hashtags leads to stronger community building and stronger target group outreach. This increases the visibility of the individual and the probability that individual videos would go viral.

Artists who use the #feministartist hashtag do not always refer to themselves as feminist artists, even if they address feminist theories and demands. By using the hashtag and using activation strategies in videos, such as direct address, hashtag challenges, and through performances, the artists have managed to build not only a community, but also a

low- to midmarket buyer base. However, the hashtag can lead to a one-dimensional view of the artists and their works through the lens of feminism, and artists are wrongly or at least insufficiently included under the collective term, which can also have a negative effect on their inclusion in exhibitions.

The three main video types that were elaborated by the artist creators made it clear that, in contrast to Instagram, the viewer is more likely to gain insights into the artistic work, comparable to a visit to a studio. Therefore, the multitude of possibilities for addressing the viewer, the interactivity and virtual proximity created by the intimate screen enable a strong bond between artist creator and viewer. For this reason, artists have increased opportunities to holistically present themselves and their artistic work. However, this also means high media-usage time when the artists post an average of 2–3 videos per day.

Despite their success, the female artists also pointed out that cooperation with other artists is particularly important, as the shadowbanning of certain videos or hashtags, and the bias against BPoC and PoC were also identified as problems among the featured female artists. Despite or even because of the criticism, social-media platforms such as TikTok should be further investigated in their functioning and usage. Social media make changes in our digitalized society and the art market particularly apparent.

Notes

[1]   The word *viral* means that certain digital content spreads quickly on the Internet. In the context of TikTok, this means that the video is seen and commented by many people. In addition, other TikTok users internally share the video in the app and on other social networks. Individual videos of a creator can go viral, which is not equivalent with the general reach of this creator. For example, one single video can reach a hundred thousand people, but all others reach only one hundred views.

[2]   Intersectional feminism is considered to be feminism that is not only fighting for equal rights for women, but also includes the interests of Black/People of Colour, disabled people, other minorities, and under-represented persons.

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