

# Can Art do Good in the World?

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## Introduction & Outline

This paper will research the question 'can art do good in the world?' It is a fundamental question for people in any field, to wonder if what one commits one's work to is a positive or a negative in the world. In order to address this question I must first discuss the definition of the central language in the question. To examine this question I must define what is the meaning of the word *good* and the word *art* for the purposes of this essay. The meaning of the word *good* is a much discussed and debated topic, with a variety of philosophical and practical definitions from various philosophers throughout history. For the purposes of this research I am going to consider *good* as positive outcomes that improve human life and/or happiness or ability to thrive in some capacity, which is alignment with the dictionary definition (Hayward and Sparkes, 1968) of 'good' as:

'possessed of moral excellence, righteous, virtuous,...that which contributes to happiness, that which is right' (1968).

To the question of what *art* is, the dictionary definition is:

'human skill or workmanship, as opposed to nature; skill applied to subjects of taste, esp. The art of representation and design;' (Hayward and Sparkes, 1968).

Art is a broad term, used to encompass many types of self expression and human output. It is another debated term, and a word so broad in what it can encapsulate it becomes a challenge to define. Attempt to to expand and define it, Alfredo Casella and Otis Kincaid (1992, p.1) state,

'Disregarding all past definitions of art. Be they religious, moral or philosophic, let us postulate that art is LIFE in the highest sense of the word, seeing that it is a pure creative activity of the human spirit'.

This definition attributes an evolutionary element to art, that it is an inalienable part of human existence. Within the framework of my research *art* is, but not limited to, film, photography, fine art, writing such as novels and poetry, graphic design and performance. Nato Thompson in 'Culture as a Weapon', asserts,

'Art, even at its most public and most ambitious, doesn't have nearly the kind of effect that the culture industries can have. It's also true that the story art can tell is more contingent, more radical, and ultimately far less beholden to power' (2017, p. 7).

Here he is asserting that while art itself does not have the power or reach that 'culture industries', such as mass media, major advertising companies, public relation departments of large companies etc, art does have a freedom to go against the grain as it is, theoretically, less beholden of powerful financial entities. It has been argued by a number of philosophers that art can create discourse that traditional political and philosophical debate also seeks, such as creating space for thought experiments, displaying examples of virtue and vice, stimulating inductive reasoning where conclusions are drawn from a particular body of observation, appealing to viewers emotions in order to put forward an argument and bringing clarity to concepts by suggesting particular applications for such concepts (Simoniri, 2021, p. 2). These examples suggest art has capabilities within political discourse that are akin to more traditional styles of political communication. Simoniri (2021, p. 2) refers to the example of Margret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) as a piece of art that could be thought of as a 'carefully constructed thought experiment of a life lived under extreme misogyny'. The particular work gained enormous mainstream popularity with a widely distributed major television show based on it. It is not hard to see why a work such as this, with a huge reach, is referenced as an example of art having the ability to

encourage or even create political discourse on a given topic. Atwood's work could be seen as a useful introduction to anti-patriarchal ideas that is distributed widely and reasonably accessible. The iconic crimson cloaks and white bonnets worn by the oppressed characters in the book and TV show, have been worn by pro-choice activists internationally including, in Ireland in 2018 during the referendum to repeal Ireland's abortion ban, the 8th amendment. Visual and aesthetic devices were used as an alternative to traditional debate. The imagery was used as a tool to depict women's oppression visually and without the use of words and sought to draw an equivalency between the dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale* to modern day abortion restrictions.



(McQuillan, 2018)

Artists will often engage in political discourse through their art. This type of political engagement is very different from traditional political discourse, which endeavors only to deepen the understanding of an issue. The tools of art in traditional discourse are used only when needed to further its central aims. Art remains bound to challenges such as plot placing, rhythm, aesthetic merit, etc. With art it seems that it remains possible that

there could be a greater challenge securing knowledge compared to a disciplined theoretical approach (Simoniri, 2021, p. 3). While political discourse often aims to be centered around reason, logic and adhering to certain rules of debate, art does not default to needing to aspire to such aims. Taking this to be the case, can art be useful in politics if it is operating on such a different playbook? That appears to be what Simoniri (2021) argues here. We must consider the possibility that art can evoke something in people that straightforward debate and discussion cannot. Using art for political and social issues can draw attention to an issue in a way that is different and often more successful than traditional debate and communication. Art can often be used to evoke an emotional response such as the use of the aforementioned *The Handmaid's Tale* costume during the Repeal the 8th campaign in Ireland.

The idea that art has the ability to impact society is not one simply held by those in favour of art. The arts have also been seen as a threat to society and the fear that art could influence people has led to governments treating art as a threat at different points in history. In the USA a clear example of this can be seen. Over the 1980s and 1990s 'direct grants for artists were eliminated' (Thompson, 2017, p. 4) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) engaged in a pattern of cutting budgets to an already curtailed government department (Thompson, 2017, p. 4). Notably in 1990 John Frohnmayer, the recent chair of the NEA (appointed chair by George H. W. Bush) vetoed proposed grants to four artists: Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, John Fleck and Tim Miller, who subsequently became known as the NEA Four. These artists' works explored, in various ways, themes of sexuality and concerns of oppressed communities

(Thompson, 2017, p. 17). There was significant backlash to this decision and the attempted censoring had the effect of shining a light on these artists, but the intent of a government appointed official was to keep public funding and attention away from this art, treating it as a threat, as unacceptable for American public consumption. Different types of art have different capacities for impact and reach. Work by the late photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, who will be discussed further in this essay, has the ability to influence in a way that is quite different to that of the film director Ken Loach's work, who will also be discussed. I will explore how a certain topic and medium interact with each other in an attempt to ascertain the impact of both and establish whether certain topics are more successfully explored in a particular medium and what role, if any, the ideology of the artist plays.

Since the question of this thesis is arguably a broad one and it is beyond the scope of this research to look at all art in general, I am going to limit focus to a few key examples of well known artists and artwork as a tool to analyse whether art can do good. I will attempt to find evidence and measure if art can do good. I will analyse four key creatives: British film director Ken Loach, American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, anonymous Bristol graffiti artist Banksy and the anonymous American group of women artists called the Guerrilla Girls. These were chosen as they are all high profile, highly regarded artists and since this thesis is limited in size, choosing prominent creators was the best route to investigate the thesis question. While this does bring some limitations, it is important to note that these case studies are from either the United States or the

United Kingdom which brings with it a limited cultural diversity. However, having a small number also provides the opportunity for deeper analysis of each one.

### Ken Loach

Ken Loach is a British film and television director working since the mid 1960s with his most recent work coming out in 2019. Loach is politically outspoken and his films and television work have been made through that lens. His work, as well as being politically motivated in its subject matter, has had real-world impact on both public perception and awareness of topics by provoking public outcry and in some instances policy changes. His style is realist, and while the films are fiction, they have a strong documentary feel, with the characters seeming ordinary and relatable to audiences. His films 'challenge the orthodoxies of contemporary capitalism and champion the struggles of oppressed groups' (Archibald, 2017, p.25). When researching the question 'can art do good?' Ken Loach's 1966 television drama *Cathy Come Home*, is a key example. It is the story of a young woman who, after her husband loses his job, they lose their flat. They move from place to place, until Cathy becomes a single parent, homeless with her children, culminating in the social services taking her children from her. The 'harrowing story of a fictional young family evicted from their home put disadvantage and homelessness into the public consciousness and on the political agenda in a new way' (BBC News, 2020). Part of how *Cathy Come Home* (1966) could reach people was because it was shown on television on the BBC where 'a quarter of the British population tuned in' (Robb, 2016). Access to media was such that in 1966 large portions of the population

consumed that same media via home televisions at the same time, a situation far different to today where individuals have variety and ability to choose what is on their screens and when.



(Loach, 1966)

A central stresser in the film for the main characters was the homeless policy, which was actually real-life policy in the UK at the time, whereby fathers could not be housed in homeless accommodation with their wives and children. Ken Loach spoke of this directly,

'To us [Loach and Garnett, the producer] it was a great scandal that families were split up and children couldn't see their fathers just because they fell through that social services safety net and hadn't anywhere to live.' (Loach, 2007).



Loach's film is credited as a contributing factor to the eventual change in this policy, which allowed fathers to be housed with their children and their partners. Up until 1974, responsibility for assisting homeless families was with the Social Service Department, which had very little housing stock and tended, until the late 1960s, to place families in temporary hostels where they may be split up (De Friend, 1978). By the early 1970s 'local authorities, particularly in London, were tending to place homeless families in hotels or guest houses' (De Friend, 1978). Richard De Friend in an article for The Modern Law Review attributed the shift in policy towards housing families together,

'partly from increasing demand for temporary accommodation and partly from public outcry following the screening of the television play *Cathy Come Home* (1966) leading to central government pressure on local authorities to limit their use of hostels' (1978).

Loach himself is more critical of the actual impact of the film saying in a 2017 interview that the impact of the film on society as a news story 'was immense', but,

'the impact in changes was minimal. There was one small change in terms of the local authorities having to house the man of the family, they would have to house husbands so that families wouldn't be split up so that was a good thing, but it was not big. And of course the long term impact has been pretty well zero, um, because homelessness is much worse.' (BBC One, 2017).

While Loach is skeptical of the film's impact, he does acknowledge the positive change which meant fathers could be housed with their children and wives. In addition to that outcome, homeless charities at the time such as Shelter, set up shortly after the film, and another charity Crisis, found a surge in donations and support (Allan, 2016) and both credit *Cathy Come Home* (1966) with creating and outpouring of support which help 'establish their early work' (BBC News, 2020). Loach's 2019 film *I, Daniel Blake*, is another example of Loach's work garnering media attention and winning the Palme d'Or among others major awards. The fictional story follows Daniel Blake in his fight against

the bureaucracy of the British welfare system after being denied Employment and Support Allowance of which he had been a recipient on account of the fact he had to give up work as a carpenter under doctors advice following a heart attack.



(Loach, 2016)

This film is Loach and screenwriter Paul Laverty's 'vision of post-2008- crash Britain. In this increasingly neoliberal polity, right-wing governments cynically invoke the specter of austerity in order to tear away post 1945 welfare state's protective provisions from large swaths of the population...' (Murray, 2017, p.49). Loach's film is heart wrenchingly real in its style and the characters' ordinariness and relatability is one of its many strengths. The film is not simply an observation on the modern welfare systems cruel consequences on the working class, it recognises and investigates some of the 'discursive mechanisms that allow the system to function thus in the first instance.'

(Murray, 2017, p. 50). I, *Daniel Blake* (2019) does more than simply tell a story of distress under austerity, it uses the storytelling tool of focusing on two central characters to evoke moral unease in the viewer in order to instigate a reconsideration of the privatization of welfare and the effect on the dispossessed populations (Murray, 2017, p 51). A nuanced critique of welfare state bureaucracy such as this, that is simultaneously accessible and easy to comprehend while also having entertainment and artistic value, could not be achieved through any medium other than film. It would appear that film, as an art form, has a powerful ability to impact discourse, educate populations, and reach a population's empathy.

### Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe's work drew vitriol and moral panic in America during his lifetime. This would suggest that conservatives felt threatened by his photographs and feared the impact on the American public if they were seen.

“The American people... are disgusted with the idea of giving taxpayers' money to artists who promote homosexuality insidiously and deliberately’,

were the words of Jesse Helms, a North Carolina Senator on the floor of the US Senate in 1989 condemning a number of images one of which was Mapplethorpe's (1980) *Man in Polyester Suit* (Viveros - Faune, 2018, p. 27).



(Mapplethorpe, 1980)

Mapplethorpe's work was swept up in the debate at the time about taxpayer money funding the arts, particularly art that caused offense or shock, which Mapplethorpes certainly did. Paradoxically Mapplethorpe never received taxpayer money for his art. This fact however did not stop his photographs from being targeted (Viveros - Faune, 2018, p. 27). There was something about Mapplethorpe's art work that frightened

authorities. When the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center held a survey exhibition of his work in 1990, the opening night, April 7, was raided by police and Dennis Barrie, the director at the time, was indicted on obscenity charges, though eventually acquitted six months later (Viveros - Faune, 2018, p. 27). Mapplethorpe's impact on the art world is referred to regularly. As a result of his prestige the outrage surrounding his work led to major discourse on the topics of his photography. Even today he is an often cited artist in the context of Queer photography and pornographic art. Mapplethorpe was chosen as a case study for this thesis because of his prominence and acclaim. However, on the question of whether his work did *good*, it fell short of being able to be interpreted as such in this instance. General exposure of gay people in the public is understood, by today's social standards, as good and Mapplethorpe's work was part of that unveiling. He is often cited as inspiration for future artists and the fact he put particular types of gay sex into the public sphere is celebrated. However, specific outcomes and specific examples of *good* in relation to his work proved challenging to find. His work is considered highly influential, but as regards definitive outcomes related to good achieved in the world, Mapplethorpe's work did not appear to result in as measurable *good* the way the other case studies in the essay did.

## Banksy

'I always wanted to be a fireman, do something good for the world.'  
(Banksy in Howe, 2005).

Has Banksy, the famous English graffiti street artist who operates the aforementioned pseudo-name, done good as an artist? Or would he have done more good as a fireman? Banksy is an interesting case study because of his high profile in popular culture, as well as the subject matter of his art. His artwork often has anti-establishment, anti-authority tones. Banksy's intentions with his art is to have a meaningful impact:

"Art's the last of the great cartels," "A handful of people make it, a handful buy it, and a handful show it. But the millions of people who go look at it don't have a say." "I don't do proper gallery shows", "I have a much more direct communication with the public." (Banksy in Howe, 2005).

Banksy makes artwork that engages directly with the public, rather than at a remove or from an inaccessible pedestal. Banksy's work is often overtly political, tending to use visual metaphors to make a statement about institutional issues, inequality and injustice. His work also injects beauty into non beautiful situations and places. An example of this is his use of images of rats as a proxy for humans. Rats often evoke disgust and live on the margins. With his image of a rat passionately playing the violin (Art of the State, 2005) Banksy is 'trying, it seems, to carve a bit of art out of a sterile environment' (Howe, 2005).



(Art of the State, 2005)

Banksy has wielded his popularity in various altruistic ways. A key example of doing moral good and art overlapping is Banksy's refugee rescue boat. Named the MV Louise Michel, he purchased it with money made from art he created about the refugee crisis (Stierl and Tondo, 2020). In September 2019 Banksy contacted Pia Klemp, former captain of several NGO rescue boats involved in saving thousands of lives over the years, and offered to buy a boat to assist in search and rescue missions (Stierl and Tondo, 2020). Banksy's involvement is limited to only financial support, with Pia Klemp stating "Banksy won't pretend that he knows better than us how to run a ship, and we won't pretend to be artists." (Stierl and Tondo, 2020). The former French Navy boat was painted by Banksy in a vibrant pink and white pattern with his distinctive graffiti style painted onto the side.



(Neugebauer, 2020)



(Neugebauer, 2020)



The boat launched in August 2020 and shortly after its launch it rescued 89 people in the central Mediterranean (Stierl and Tondo, 2020). The Louise Michel has been involved in several rescue missions, one occasion where it rescued 130 people (Stierl and Tondo, 2020). During the time of writing the Louise Michel was involved in a rescue which was updated via the boats twitter account:

'Last night the #LouiseMichel reached Lampedusa and our 31 guests were able to disembark. We wish them all the best for their journey ahead. Our thoughts are with the around 65-70 people who were pulled back to Tunisia. #FreedomOfMovement #SolidarityAndResistance' (MV Louise Michel, 2022).

It has proved difficult to get an exact number of people saved by the Banksy funded boat as information on the boat and even its whereabouts is limited. It cannot be known for sure whether Banksy has saved more lives by funding a rescue boat with the profits of his work or if he would have by becoming a fireman, but this example of *good* being done through the mechanism of art is significant and would suggest art can and does have the power to do good in the world. This particular example demonstrates not only a clear, practical *good* outcomes of Banksy's work but the example also garnered media attention, shining a light on the ongoing humanitarian crisis that is the migrant crisis and showed the need for a 'homemade emergency vehicle' (MV Louise Michel, 2020), which exposes the fact that governments and the European Union have neglected to provide adequate search and rescue resources to save people on their journey to safety.

This arguably philanthropic, as opposed to artistic, project of Banksy' aligns with the political commentary of his work. His genre of political cartooning targeting globalization and its discontents' and his 'sardonically figurative and anti authoritarian' messaging

(Viveros - Faune, 2018, p.41) align with the mission statement of the MV Louise Michel's crew, 'In solidarity with people on the move, we are working against any policy that willingly lets 'non-Europeans' drown in its waters. We are fighting for freedom of movement for everyone, because as Louise Michel said, "Something besides charity is needed in order to provide bread for everyone." Humanitarian aid is not the only answer' (MV Louise Michel, 2020) . This rescue boat is funded with the profits of Banksy's artwork, while not the specific work itself did the good, Banksy's the good. Additionally Banksy as an artist brings a benefit to this cause greater than simply another philanthropist would. Banksy's artwork has made him a voice against injustice, as an anti-authority figure, willing to break the law for art. Banksy's boat not only measurably saves the lives of the individuals that are picked up by it, but its presence and the crew's voices being heard, communicating live via twitter and through their website, are elevated as a result of the spotlight Banksy brings. This endeavor, facilitated by Banksy and carried about by experienced rescuers, is ongoing and while facing challenges, it continues to save lives in the Mediterranean sea.

Looking further afield at Banksy's art and the good it has done in the world it is worth investigating the benefit Banksy brings to a location where his work appears. A key example of this is his hometown of Bristol, UK. Bristol, historically, was a shipping and trade region which were central to its economic activity. In recent decades Bristol has fast become a city famous for arts and culture. It was shortlisted for the European Capital of Culture 2008 (Glancey, 2003) losing out to Liverpool, UK. When researching the intersection between Bristol and the arts, it is impossible to ignore the regularity with

which Banksy's name appears. Banksy is one of Bristol's most famous and renowned artists, and crucially he did not leave Bristol behind when he became celebrated. He continued to be present in Bristol and has had a significant impact on the Bristol art scene and the international perception of the place. This is animated perfectly by the enormously popular 2009 exhibition 'Banksy versus Bristol Museum' at the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery where an estimated 300,000 visitors (Kelly, 2012, p. 89). The show far exceeded expectations, demonstrated clearly by Simon Cook, the deputy leader of Bristol Council at the time, when he said,

'We were told by Banksy's PR people that we would get 100,000 people to the exhibition - in fact we got more than 300,000. I think there is a great feeling of warmth towards Banksy with his legacy of artwork around Bristol and beyond.'  
(Cook in Kelly, 2012, p. 95).

There was a measurable economic impact of this event. Destination Bristol, the body responsible for tourism in the city, conducted research on this exhibition. It found seven out of ten people traveled to Bristol from outside the city specifically to see the exhibition along with 55,000 extra hospitality rooms booked by Banksy fans. External visitors spent an estimated £10.3 million in local businesses and Bristol locals spent an approximate £4.3 million (Kelly, 2012, p. 94). This is an undeniably significant level of financial influx to be associated with a single art show. What is also undeniable is that Banksy is a very important part of Bristol. At the time of writing the 'Visit Bristol' website has Banksy referenced on its homepage and has Banksy and Street Art specific sections within the website (Destination Bristol, 2022). Bristol's tourism sector is clearly aware of the draw of Banksy and the economic benefit he has the potential to bring. This favourable impact on a location is evidence of good, positive outcomes an artist like Banksy can achieve in the world. An artist such as Banksy can assist in boosting

economic activity and potential the wealth of certain sectors in a location. This is, like the MV Louise Michel boat, not a direct line from a piece of artwork straight to a good outcome for the world. What appears to be the case, for Banksy at least, is that his engaging artwork draws an audience, which brings with it influence and funds that can manifest in a variety of ways that can benefit individuals and society as a whole.

### The Guerrilla Girls

My final case study is the anonymous collective and self declared 'conscience of the art world' known as the Guerrilla Girls (Viveros - Faune, 2018, p. 34). The Guerrilla Girls was formed in New York in 1985 by a group of women artists who wanted to highlight and expose inequality and discrimination in the art world (Mullins, 2019, p. 13). The group was formed in direct response to the inequality visible in The Museum of Modern Art's *International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* in 1984 which had 165 artists exhibiting with only 13 of these being women (Viveros - Faune, 2018, p.33). The group, who are still active today and remain anonymous, use graphic design art practices with image and text combinations with the explicit intent of making the world, more specifically the art world, a better and more equal place. Through posters and flyers they have posed questions to museums and gallery collections such as 'When racism and sexism are no longer fashionable, what will your art collection be worth?' and 'Q: If February is Black History Month and March is Women's History Month, what happened the rest of the Year? A: Discrimination' (Mullins, 2019, p. 13).



(Guerrilla Girls, 1989)

The image above, 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?' (Guerrilla Girls, 1989), was created when they were asked to design a billboard for the Public Art Fund in New York. The Public Art Fund then rejected it as a billboard saying it 'wasn't clear enough'. As a result the Guerrilla Girls instead ran it in the advertisement sections on buses in New York (Guerrilla Girls, 2021). This poster was the group's seminal work, the piece that catapulted them to notoriety and has been replicated and shared many times over. On their own website the Guerrilla Girls refer to it as 'The Poster That Changed It All' (Guerrilla Girls, 2021). The Guerrilla Girls work is an example of art made with the specified intent to do good, as opposed to other types of art and artists that may end up making a positive impact as a consequence of the artwork but is not the central aim. During its existence the Guerrilla Girls have produced hundred of projects, such as posters, actions, books, videos, stickers, interventions and exhibition in museums (Guerrilla Girls, 2021), billboards, bus advertisements, spreads in magazines, protests letters and fake prize givings targeting the mechanisms underlying

the art market (Grosenick, 2003, p.74). They use advertising tactics and graphic art to try and shame institutions and society into equality.

The Guerrilla Girls practices are inspired by second wave feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s. “A lot of the things that the Guerrilla Girls did had been done by feminist groups earlier, but with a different language and a different style”, Guerrilla Girls member, under the pseudonym “Lyubov Popova”, acknowledges (Chave, 2011). Experimental art practices have long been tied to feminism. Since women artists in the 1960s and 1970s were underrepresented in traditional gallery and museum spaces they were forced to make art that could exist outside the conventional *White Cube* environment (Casagnini, 2012, p.28). The practices that came out of this such as the public and social interventions, performance and participation work and site specific projects, have influenced many art practitioners and the Guerrilla Girls are a key example (Casagnini, 2012, p.28). Making work consisting of only text or text and images combined was a central part of conceptual art in the 1960s onwards. The Guerrilla Girls’ work evolved from that style and their graphics became consistent and established a ‘brand’, a recognisable aesthetic (Chave, 2011, p.106). What began in 1985 as a group criticising art institutions from the outside has now become celebrated by those very institutions. The Guerrilla Girls’ posters hang in the collections of many major museums and they are now regularly invited to speak and critique major establishments such as the Tate Modern, Venice Biennale and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Casagnini, 2012, p.28), unthinkable 30 years ago when they started out as a thorn in the side of this very type of institution. The group's intentions were very clear. They set

out with the specific intent to do good in the world, to attempt to make the art world more equal. A founding member, operating under the pseudonym 'Frida Kahlo', stated,

'We felt the old forms of protest weren't working anymore, so we used humour as a way to get people's attention. We realised that if you try to speak reasonably about these issues that nobody listens, so we developed a shtick – we did the anonymous thing, we did the name the Guerrilla Girls, we wore gorilla masks – it was all to get people to stop in their tracks and listen' (Castagnini, 2012, p.32).

When asked how successful their efforts have been in achieving the goals they set out, a group member said, "we've made dealers, curators, critics and collectors accountable. And things have actually gotten better for women and artists of color. With lots of back-sliding" (Small, 1998, p. 39). The irony, which is not lost on them, is that they are fighting for the underrepresented women artists of the world while having become internationally famous, filling speaking engagements all over the world, receiving government grants to fund their newsletter and their work is held in libraries and colleges around the world (Small, 1998, p. 39). The Guerrilla Girls applied pressure at certain tipping points, such as in 1992 when the Guggenheim Museum was opening a branch in Soho, New York, and it was rumored no artists of colour or women were set to exhibit at its inaugural exhibition. Louise Bourgeois was later revealed as the sole female artist in the show. On the show's opening night the Guerrilla Girls protested by distributing paper bags with gorilla masks printed on them for protesters to wear. This high profile critique has been described as 'a kind of tipping point: a moment after which no one could plan an exhibition or a slate of exhibitions in the contemporary art world any longer without considering the gender and complexion of the participants, and having a compelling defense ready if those elements were homogeneous.' (Chave, 2011, p.110).



(Guerrilla Girls, 1992)

The Guerrilla Girls' influence continued to grow. After their 2006 appearance at the Tate Modern, the gallery announced a 'women's initiative'. Following on from that MoMa and the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris 'mounted various—exceedingly belated and at times (be it said) clumsily conceived— catch-up initiatives. Institutions can no longer hide behind the pretense that some would-be transcultural, universal measure of quality exists to serve as their sole criterion for work featured, or that the best art is invariably, ideally innocent of gender and ethnicity.' (Chave, 2011, p.110). Their impact was international and Irish institutions were not immune to criticism from the Guerrilla Girls. The groups 2010 poster *'Let's Toast to Irish Art, Lads (Pssst: Not so Fast, Lasses)'* features a glass of Guinness surrounded by information attacking leading Irish art



institutions such as the National Gallery of Ireland, IMMA and the Hugh Lane Gallery, as well as major art universities including the National College of Art and Design, for major disparities in gender representation.



(Guerrilla Girls, 2010)

In the years following their activism (and the activism, undoubtedly, of other campaigners in the field) there have been some measurable changes. IMMA's 2019 line up of solo exhibitions 'featured Mary Swanzy, Helen Cammock, Doris Salcedo, Janet Mularney, and Kim Gordon' (Philips, 2020). IMMA's use of resources to confront gender and facilitate women artists is significant growth from where it stood in 2009 (Philips, 2020). At the time the Guerrilla Girls made this work about Ireland the Hugh Lane

Gallery's collection was 90% men. According to representatives from the gallery that 'no gendered record of acquisitions exists', but with regard to the gender ratio, they "assume it hasn't changed much." (Philips, 2020). What is clear is that progress in this area internationally is slow and does not always progress in a linear fashion, as one Guerrilla Girl member herself said,

'Well sometimes it's, you know, it's three steps forward two steps back. One step forward two steps back. Your progress isn't, isn't even' (New York Times, 2015).

The impact of the Guerrilla Girls on international art institutions, during the past 30 plus years of their existence, by shining a light on entrenched inequality creates outcomes that are undeniably good. Their work has had a positive outcome by virtue of being artwork with an intention. To be a force for good, artwork does not need to be flawless or entirely successful. This research suggests the Guerrilla Girls have had a positive impact on the issue of inequality between genders within the art world, and in recent years beyond gender to include race and sexual orientation. Large institutions have been forced to respond and take their criticisms into account, with the Guerrilla Girls being one of the many forces steering them in a direction of inequality.

## Conclusion

This paper addressed the question 'can art do good in the world? The subjects of the four case studies were selected as they are high profile, culturally significant and established art makers. They are each different styles of creativity and their methods of conveying a message and communicating a narrative are distinct. Director Ken Loach uses fiction films to comment and critique real world issues, appealing to the public

through the dynamic field of film making. As discussed, his fiction films have had tangible consequences in Britain. The Guerrilla Girls artwork, similarly, have had real world impacts using the more static, less dynamic medium of graphic designs and poster making. Their content is based on data and fact, differing from Loach's work which, while based on real life, uses creative license and fictional characters to tell a story. The Guerrilla Girls work tells a brief, punchy, numbers based story which provokes public outcry, similar to how Loach's films did, though on significantly different themes. The similarly impactful artist, Banksy, uses a different method again. There are some similarities to the Guerrilla Girls such as 2D art, the work appearing in public spaces suddenly and unannounced, being anti-authority while, ironically, being famous and making art that sells for high prices.

One thing these three creatives have in common is the explicit goal of making a positive impact with their work. Banksy's work varies from clear political and social commentary to a more subtle commentary and more traditional graffiti style work, though most of his work, on some level, is in response to the world around him. His more subtle work, such as the previously discussed *Rat with Violin in Brighton*, has the ability to inject some beauty into the concrete world on which it was painted on, with an animal that would be considered unsightly. Loach and the Guerrilla Girls have been clear about the fact that one of the key purposes of their work is to influence people and bring change. Banksy, while more understated in his public relations, has similar objectives. These three high profile examples have had good, positive improvements on people's lives and general societal perceptions and would appear to support the claim that art can do good in the world. In contrast, the forth case study, acclaimed photographer Robert Mapplethorpe,

was investigated to see if *good*, as defined for the purposes of the thesis, was achieved by his work. While his work is highly regarded as having major influence on Queer art and the perception and place of gay men in art and society, it proved challenging to find information or research on measurable *good* outcomes, compared to the three other examples within this thesis. While Mapplethorpe is undeniably an important figure in the history of photography, especially in the history of Queer art, I could not conclusively find outcomes that fit the definition of *good* within which thesis was operating. The writings on his work suggested outcomes that were overly vague and therefore could not be compared to the other case studies or stand alone in response to the thesis question.

Moral goodness is difficult to measure. It is a question that philosophers have grappled with and continue to seek a perfect definition. To understand if art can do good for the purposes of this particular thesis. I sought to find some evidence and clear outcomes, where positive things occurred in the world as a result of artwork. This study revealed the some issues received greater attention resulting in institutional change, there were improvements in human lives as a result of art, along the funds art created and information on an important issue being disseminated to wide audiences are some of the good that has arisen from art, and specifically from the chosen case studies. In three out of the four case studies, the research showed *good* did come from art through greater attention to particular issues resulting in institutional change, that some important issues were better disseminated to a wide audience through art and that actual lives were saved through the funds that art created. It showed that, in those cases, the ideology of the artists was important and that artists are in a particular

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position because of their creativity to use their art to do good if they are motivated to do so.

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