

by emily simpson

Siri, stop the patriarchy

a zine of memes
and non-binary
ramblings on
feminism..

introduction

This Zine was made for a commission with Lancashire Textile Gallery. I was invited to make an artwork that reflects upon a piece from their collection, and was paired with a banner made by Selina Cooper, one of Lancashire's many prolific Suffragettes.

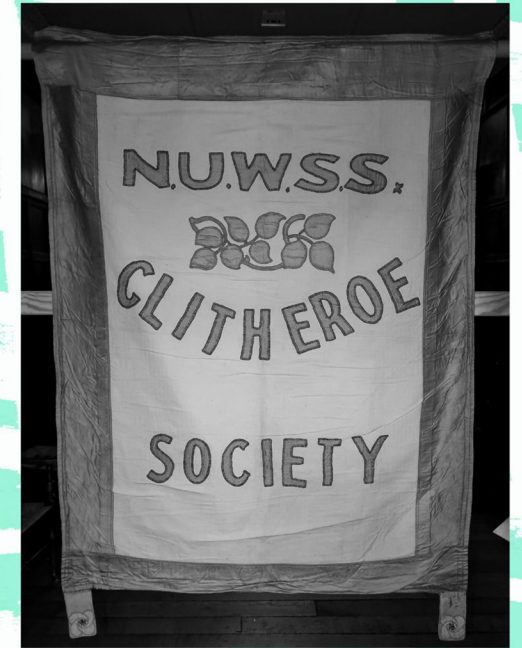
Selina was an activist and advocate for the rights of women. She was born in Cornwall in 1864, but after the death of her Dad she was left with few economic options other than leaving school to find work to sustain herself and her family. She moved up North, finding work in one of the region's many textile mills, nestled in the hills near Nelson. Her work was laborious, hard on the heart, head and hands. Appalled by the horrendous working conditions that she found herself in, she became involved in the labour movement and unions, to advocate for the rights of her colleagues. She quickly became frustrated by the lack of any conversation about the rights of female workers and bounded into activism, joining the women's Suffrage movement. When a petition for women's suffrage was taken to parliament, she single handedly gathered two thirds of the necessary signatures from the women she worked with in the mills, by speaking to her peers and politicising her workplace. Selina was one of only four women who were invited to speak to the (then) Prime Minister about women's Suffrage. She remained involved in local Labour activism, and became the first ever female counsellor for her town. Later in life she left the Labour Party, as she felt they didn't take a firm enough stance against facism. She was a pacifist, and was vocally anti-war. Selina was a life-long advocate for the rights of others. She was incredible. I look at women like her, and feel stunned, in awe of all she's achieved, humbled by the

generosity of her direct action.

Selina's banner was made using calico; the same fabric produced by the mills she worked in. It reads 'N.U.W.S.S. Clitheroe Society' (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies). The banner is cream, with red lettering and a sage green border. Underneath the text there is an applique twist of leaves, and on the bottom are tags, with two embroidered flowers. The banner is functional but fierce, made from a humble no nonsense fabric with minimal ornamentation. It demands an understated authority. It's unknown which of the many protests for women's rights it was marched in - but it's 'safe' to assume that it was present for many acts of state violence from the police and male oppressors who sought to silence women's voices. This banner unified those who marched beneath it. It made a noise; demanding the fundamental right for women to vote and live without fear of state and gendered violence.

Whilst researching Selina's life, I couldn't help but think about our contrasting and correlating experiences of work, life and gender. Had I been born 100 years ago, I imagine that my life would have been economically similar to hers. I'm from Lancashire, so probably would have gone to work in one of the mills as well, given that the majority of Lancashire's population worked in them, unless they were super rich. But I was born in the 90's. And whilst the fight for equal rights across gender is far from over, I live a comparatively gentle existence, one which Selina wouldn't recognise. When my Dad died, my economic position didn't change. I was able to continue where he left me, allowing me some breathing room to grieve his huge loss. I have a choice of jobs, and a lot more freedom to pick and choose where I work and can leave when it suits me (although I've still been running away from undesirable workplace conditions in doing so...) My relationship to textiles is ridiculously decadent; it's about art, identity and

when your nonbinary friend is sad because they keep getting misgendered



The Selina Cooper banner

Uh oh someone sent me a box of masculinity again



Textile mill, Nelson

expression. I make banners, some of which have been for the walls of art galleries, some for protests. I've always had the right to vote. I've always voted. I'm nowhere near the amazing activist that Selina was, but I've been involved in direct action; particularly around our diminishing rights to protest - which is quietly being erased by our current government. I've made noise; marching alongside many others to demand the fundamental right to live without fear of state and gendered violence. **Still.**

Feminism has been a fixed point within my identity - which has shifted a lot throughout my lifetime. When I came out as non-binary, it was a sharp reality check when I stepped out onto the street and still had to fend off the unwanted advances of lecherous men who felt entitled to my time, body and attention. I realised (with a sigh) that I would never be able to disentangle myself from the feminine. Misogynists really don't care how I identify - they will always misgender me as a woman, and treat me to all the aggressions that come with that. The nuance of being 'not female but sometimes feminine' doesn't apply, when faced with gendered violence, discrimination and harassment. The patriarchy believes in a binary, because by categorising us into clear and definable boundaries, the ideas of good/bad, strong/weak, oppressor/oppressed, profit/loss, mine/yours, man/woman, controller/controlled can be carefully policed and maintained. One subtle way to undermine the patriarchy is to move beyond these ways of thinking that benefit existing structures. To allow space for nuance, change, radical and amorphous thinking. **The future is non-binary** (ideologically speaking).

This zine is a collection of feminist feelings, thoughts and provocations, from a feminist who isn't female (but sometimes looks it). Please download, share, print, add, redact, and continue with your own ramblings. I have also included interviews with my Mum and 3 year old niece on gender and feminism. I encourage others to talk to the

people around them; we have much to learn from each other's experiences, and learning is a lifelong journey. Please always vote, but never for an egotistical government who prioritises profit over people. Please join a union, and talk to the people you work with about how they are coping and the pressures they face. Please don't always feel you have to be polite, especially when dealing with the patriarchy. And please please please, always protest. **Protest is a human right.**



Someone: "Are you a boy or a girl?"

Me:



an interview with my mum (the first feminist I met)

Me: I wanted to ask you about how feminism has changed over the course of your lifetime. I remember you mentioning that in one of your first jobs, you were paid less than a man doing the same job?

Mum: Yeah! I was working in a swimming pool as a lifeguard. I had a male colleague who was nick-named Pixie due to his size - he was smaller than me. We were therefore equal in physique, qualifications and capabilities for the job. If anything, our only difference was I had more experience than him. But by virtue of him being male, he was on a higher pay scale than me! Yeah, so that was interesting... But it was just something you took for granted. It was a part of the wallpaper back then really.

Me: It's bonkers to imagine. I guess now, women still get paid less on the whole but it's done in sneakier ways. 'female' (in inverted commas) vocations like care workers get paid pennies in comparison to lots of other jobs.

Mum: Yeah 'female' vocations are on the lower end of the pay scale disproportionately. Or more women have to work part-time due to childcare, so come away with less money. But in the 70s, before the Equal Pay Act, the same job had two different pay scales depending on gender.

Me: That wasn't even that long ago.

Mum: Yeah!! Other things have changed too in the workplace. When I first got into teaching the men were overwhelmingly patronising to me. By the end of my teaching career that had changed. I remember one particular example that shows this well. In my first year of teaching I taught a group of engineering lads 'Social Studies' at a technical college. They had to pass this as part of their engineering qualification. They were appalling at the class. One lad was particularly bad, so he didn't get a good grade in his exam. I was hauled into the vice principal's office (who was male) and leant on by him to change his grade. Feeling pressured and uncomfortable, I changed the grade and the lad was allowed to pass. I think as an older woman, I would have said no.

After the meeting, the vice principal said to me, in earshot of the whole staffroom, 'well, I hope you're as good at cooking as you are at cooking the books'. That level of patronisation is gone.

Me: What did he mean by cooking?

Mum: Well, I agreed to fiddle the grades, smudge them so that he passed. But I felt pressured into doing it. This was the vice principal asking me, and I was young, new to teaching. I was in a room, with the door shut, with my male superior. He was using the hierarchical structure and his authority as a man to get me to do something I didn't agree with. And then put the ownership for that on me, by undermining me in front of my colleagues.

I was due to get married that same year. I remember my head of department (also male) asking me, 'are you sure you want to get married? Don't you want a career?'

Me: Well you got both, thank you very much.

Mum: Regardless, it's my choice. That's a judgement on somebody else's lifestyle that men feel they have the right to speak about. I wouldn't dream of asking a man the same thing. It was beyond his remit.

There was also a job where I was asked (as an interview question!) if I had a boyfriend! They asked with the prejudice that as a coupled up woman I would be asking for maternity leave, or would leave the job if my husband was offered a job elsewhere. I just said no, even though the answer was yes, because I understood the subtext. I just thought, that's none of your business!!! Would you have asked a man if he had a girlfriend??

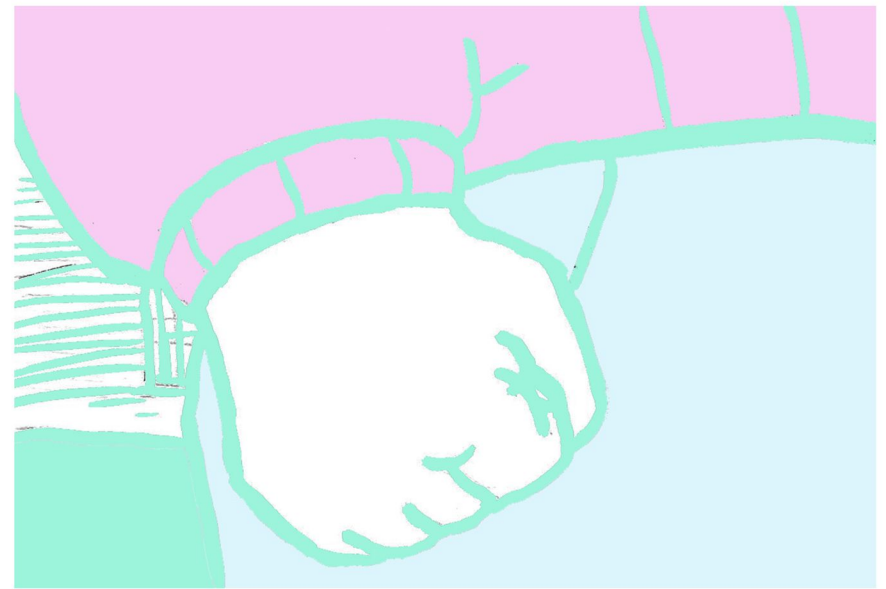
Me: It's also very heteronormative.

Mum: Yes. And it's like, what other private details do you want to know about me? Do you want to know what contraception I'm on too? What my star sign is? It's all an irrelevance to my ability to do the job.

Me: 'We only employ Capricorns!'

Mum: Haha that's right. So I can see things are gradually getting better. I think they've gotten worse at the moment thanks to the current government. But on the whole, better.

Me: My other question was about how you feel your role in society has changed as you've aged. How men interact with you differently now, if they do? Because I've noticed, even at 31, I get less unwanted attention from men on the street than I did when I was say 15 or 16, which is problematic in itself... I appreciate having (slightly) less street harassment to deal with. But there's an element of feeling like you're starting to become invisible to society. Which is a very odd feeling. Society values women for being decorative, for their appearance as their number



when a random man
says 'smile love'

one attribute of value. Even though I don't want that to be my value, it's an uncomfortable feeling, knowing that my stocks (in the eyes of many people) are going down...

Mum: I think it took me years to realise that that was the case. It really does knock your self esteem slightly, because that's the value you have been told you have. You scan the room and realise no one is paying you attention anymore.

Me: I guess there's a power that comes with that too.

Mum: Yes. When I was younger, I would have to face men on the street saying things like 'cheer up love' or 'smile' and if you responded with anything other than politeness you were often put in a vulnerable position. When I worked at the technical college, there would often be sexist jokes being told in the staffroom. And if I called them out, I was treated like a kill-joy, like I was being overly sensitive. Now that I'm older I'm less polite. I have permission to be more assertive and surly.

I've noticed younger men respond to me with patronising comments often. You've witnessed it; usually a young lad on the supermarket checkouts, who asks if me and we're sisters (when we're clearly not). I just glare at them now. It's not flattering. Men that call me 'miss' too. It's infuriating because it's got an undertone of 'well I know you're in your 60's, but I'm going to pretend you're in your 30's because that has more value to it'. And I'm never flattered by that.

Me: Yeah, why is youth so valued in women? I don't want to be younger. This is how old I am.

Mum: Yeah, and it wouldn't happen the other way round.

Me: Aside from the fact that there isn't a 'miss' equivalent for men, their value isn't tied up in whether they're married

or not. They're just mister. But yeah. Men are allowed to be, like haggard, and bloated and old.

Mum: Yeah exactly. But more recently, I'm realising that older women aren't actually as invisible as I'd thought. You can be the subject of male attention **because** you're older. I was in an art gallery recently, minding my own business, enjoying my own time, and a man in his 40s came up to me. He pointed to a picture of the artist (a woman in her 30s, looking very pretty) and said, 'Oh! you look the same!' I was enjoying my day. I didn't know him, or want to speak to him. I felt he was hitting on me, preying on the fact that I was an older woman on my own and assuming that he was 'doing me some sort of favour' in talking to me because of this. He'd assumed a vulnerability I didn't have because of my age. I was pleased with my reaction though, because I just said, 'I don't know what you mean' and walked off. I didn't pander to it. The next time I looked around, he'd vanished, luckily. But you realise that somebody has scanned the room, seen an older woman by themselves and thought, 'well, here's an opportunity'.

Me: Yeah, I think some men think that they're flattering you by hitting on you, like you should be grateful for this rubbish gift you didn't initiate or ask for.

Mum: Yeah, why was he doing it? It made me feel that I was being looked upon as not being entitled to my **OWN** time. Which I really am. I love spending time on my own. But he obviously felt that he could intrude, by virtue of me being a woman, alone.

Me: So things change, but also nothing has changed enough.

loose threads

I drove up the grand gravel driveway towards Towneley Hall with relief - it'd felt like a long drive over from Manchester and I was running late for my appointment. As a new driver, I still hadn't gotten used to how long it takes me to turn right at junctions and Google maps doesn't factor in my polite hesitation. I always felt an added pressure to be really good at parking too (as someone who is misinterpreted as a woman) so it took me extra time to make sure I was as straight as could be within the lines. I left my car and ran through the beautifully maintained grounds, smoothing down my hair fluff as I jogged. I was there to view the Selina Cooper banner so that I could begin working on my commission. I was nervous and a little excited, unsure what to expect. As I dressed that morning, I'd paused to consider which clothes would make me look the most feminist (and then laughed at how unfeminist this was). I figured dungarees hit the right vibe.

When I arrived, I was warmly greeted and taken up to a big, grand, old room. I watched in quiet anticipation as Selina's banner was carefully unrolled. It was handled with such reverence and respect, that the process took a long time, with the banner needing to be meticulously laid out on tissue paper to protect it from dust. Staff wore blue vinyl gloves, to protect the fabric from the oils and residues that rest on fingers. I winced internally upon seeing the gloves, as they're a sharp reminder of my care job during the pandemic. I watched, waited, and my mind wandered...

At the beginning of 2020, I'd taken a break from working in the arts to work full-time in adult care at a college and care facility for adults with SEN (Special Educational Needs).

This was a decision I'd made due to an increasing disenchantment with contemporary visual arts... how it's often all TALK and very little game. It had begun to trouble me how the artworld - including myself - was good at talking in exhibition descriptions and panel discussions about a better world, an economy of care, radical reshaping of society, but didn't do heaps of tangible stuff to make those things actually happen, including within those institutions. I felt like we'd all been sharing the same radical meme for years, and decided that that translated into 'change'. IRL, I did very little to actually care for anyone other than myself, my art career, and my Instagram appearance. So I decided to give actually working in care a go, as I wanted to **know** what it looked like.

It was an amazing decision at first. Every day was fulfilling. The young adults I worked with were some of the most interesting people I'd ever met, and despite being largely non-verbal they were some of the most enriching conversations I'd ever had. I felt intellectually nourished; learning so much about life, laughter and love. But slowly, and then VERY suddenly I became disenfranchised with my job. As I realised.. **no one cares for the people who care.**

The pandemic put a lot of extra strain on a sector that was already stretching its staff too thin; expecting people to work for minimum wage and spend their mind and body on others. It's a vocation that already comes with too many personal risks before you add a deadly virus into the mix. I was suddenly a key-worker (ie. disposable labour with a lofty title). The government didn't offer ANY guidance for SEN schools, sending a clear message that disabled people and those who care for them aren't that important. My workplace then had to muddle together its own Covid strategy, with management picking and choosing which guidance suited them best, when it suited



Blue gloves and banner



Selina Cooper (2nd from right) anti-war protest, 1934

them (and not us, the frontline workers). Without any advice, we suddenly had even fewer rights than before. It was harder to protest when we **knew** our safety was being compromised, because there wasn't a standard to push against.

When people at work started testing positive for Covid, we were given flimsy plastic aprons and blue vinyl gloves (which as anyone who works in a hospital will tell you, is utterly inadequate PPE). We were told we couldn't go home to self-isolate like the rest of the country (because we had gloves on so we were immortal apparently). We had to go to work, knowing we were probably gonna get Covid, and would probably pass it on to everyone's nan on the train home. All because management knew it would be more profitable to keep the workplace open (and receive their daily lot of funding per young person). We felt like we didn't matter, like our lives were as disposable as the gloves they supplied us with.

THANKFULLY unions exist. By speaking to our union rep, we were reminded of our collective voice. We were told we had the right to **REFUSE WORK** (who knew????) if the workplace was unsafe. We all agreed it was, and refused to work. Management was forced to 'close the bubble' and send everyone home to self-isolate. The union made sure we were paid for this.

As long as we are living under late capitalism, we will always be seen as labour, rather than people. But a union's strength in numbers gives the people in power something they can't ignore. As one worker, you can be silenced or replaced, but collectively we are a force much stronger than they are. Strike, walk out, unionise your workplace, talk, stay together. They can't ignore your basic human rights forever. The work of activists like Selina Cooper shows us how collective change can happen, when enough people say, enough.

By the end of this mental detour, the banner had been unveiled. I was back in the ridiculously grand room, blinking as my mind caught up to the moment. The moment where I could see a physical link to the direct action, unions and activists that made progress possible. I felt a lump in my throat. I wanted to cry.

The banner was beautifully mundane; faded cream and magnolia, without much ornamentation or decoration. It was made from calico, a sturdy fabric popular in the 1900s for its hardy weave, woven by the same mills that Selina worked in. I mentally gasped, realising that all of this had been hand stitched, including the thick bevel of embroidery on the banner's lettering. It takes me days to make a banner on my sewing machine. It must have taken weeks to make this, so it was probably made collectively, many hands making up the time.

I thought about Selina working away in the mills; this banner would have been sewed in the evenings after she'd endured long, gruelling hours. Manchester was made on this industry, on the slave trade, colonialism, and the terrible working conditions working class people were subjected to, whilst they made garments for the middle classes. As I thought about Manchester's current industry, the unethical fast fashion company Boohoo came to mind. Boohoo have their headquarters nestled in the heart of our Northern Quarter, in a heritage building from the era of the industrial revolution. I thought about the terrible working conditions faced by the people who make the fabrics and textile garments in the factories in China where Boohoo source their products from, whilst reaping the benefits of cheap work and weak labour laws. I thought about the boujee office jobs that the Western (and often white) women they employ here have, going for a decaf oat latte on their lunch break, which costs a Chinese worker's entire weekly wage. (No shade, I drink oat latte's too). I thought about how contemporary feminism is often



Banner detail



**when the feminism isnt
intersectional**



Selina Cooper (centre)

this, white, wealthy and privileged women outsourcing the domestic and low waged labour to migrant or foreign workers, so that they can join the workforce like their wealthy male counterparts and make lots of money for capitalism (aka rich men). I thought about how they are still not holding the power in those jobs, and still getting paid less in money and privileges than their male counterparts. I thought about the companies that pay textile workers nothing to make their horrible fast fashion disaster clothes in foreign countries, so that women over here can look amazing in them, and then be told (by all adverts ever) that they look absolutely horrible and they need to buy better clothes, go on a diet, and be better looking.

Not so long ago, I'd passed the Boohoo building and was cat-called by the security guard who stood all day at its door. The circle of my inner monologue was completed as he whistled and I hurried away, feeling self-conscious and wishing I hadn't put heels on for the first time in weeks. Did it make me look like I was asking for attention?? Did I look too hot?? Do heels always make this much noise??? I think of all the extra time and mental energy I'd put into managing my appearance and how men will perceive it, as someone who resembles a woman. All the thoughts I could have been thinking and energy that would have been mine to keep, spent assessing the street for potential male dangers, smiling with just the right level of politeness as to not get assaulted but not be asked to smile (love), not looking like I'm asking for it, but not offending the fragile male ego. It's exhausting, and it's a mental load that women often forget they are carrying.

I thought again about fast-fashion, and how tacky all of Boohoo's clothes are. They fall apart after looking at a washing machine. Their fabrics are cheap, synthetic, nasty (gal) on the skin and made me itchy and uncomfortable in more ways than one. Years ago, before I

knew what companies like this did I'd made the mistake of buying an animal print bikini from Boohoo. On the model, it looked stunning, draped over a bronzed, buffed body without a care or conscience in the world. When it arrived...all I could do was laugh. The fabric was rough, chonky, it wasn't made to fit a real body. When I put it on I looked like the ugly extra in a budget Flinstone's themed porno. It fell apart before I had the chance to take it near a pool (thankfully). I thought about how much better off the environment would be if our garments were made to last, like this banner before me.

And I was back in the moment, looking at the banner in awe, with feminist feelings racing around my head. I moved closer to take in all its details, knowing this was probably the only time in my life I'd have the privilege of being so close to a tool wielded by the women who gave me my rights. The banner was faded, mottled with age, marked and scuffed with unknown stains and dirt. I wondered if it had been involved in scenes of police brutality - handled by men who didn't treat it with the same respect that we now do, when trying to suppress the Suffragettes in their protest. As I moved to the rear of the banner, I was momentarily floored to see one small area of fabric; a smudge of fingerprints from where the banner was held and supported whilst marching. The fingerprints of the feminists that we all owe our rights to. I got a lump in my throat, overcome with gratitude and a deep love of humans and their capacity to **believe** in **better**. There's something all twisted up in their fingerprints being left there forever, and I wondered if their fingerprints are anywhere forever on another record - one kept by the policemen who will have harassed and detained them.

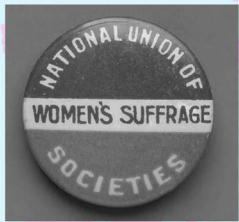
It's unnerving to think that there was a time when women asking to be given equal access to the resources, democracy and rights enjoyed by men was considered 'radical'. That their protests were heckled, interrupted,



if every boohoo order was summed up in one image



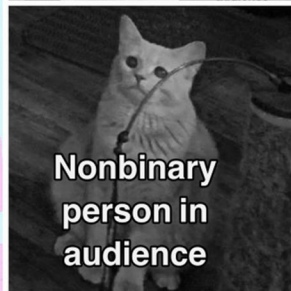
The 'angel of freedom' by Sylvia Pankhurst



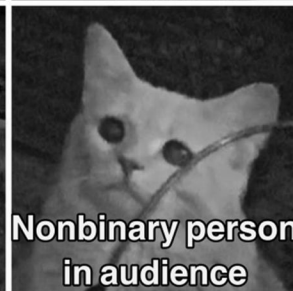
"Ladies and gentlemen"



Nonbinary person in audience



Nonbinary person in audience



Nonbinary person in audience

forcibly stopped and subjected to police intervention and brutality. It's unnerving and troubling to think that the fundamental human right to protest is now quietly being erased and undermined by the current government. We are slowly being silenced on the streets, as the police are given more powers to intervene and prevent. It's terrifying that a piece of legislation now exists that tells the police force that it can arrest and detain protesters for being 'too noisy'. Protest has to be loud and disruptive, or it isn't a protest. The Suffragettes started out with politeness - and were ignored. They noticed that men valued their money more than the rights of women - so the only way to gain attention was by taking this away from them. The Suffragettes smashed the windows of wealthy men's property. Men were outraged, because their precious windows had to be replaced, and now there was enough media attention to generate momentum for the Suffrage cause. Nowadays, we see climate protesters using the same tactics, only the windows are covering expensive paintings made by famous men. It's not about the spectacle of destroying art, rather the gesture of 'destroying' property - the only things that people (still!!!!) care about.

The subversive means of protest used by Suffragettes in the context of our contemporary culture, which knows women deserve equal rights, seem justified. Necessary to get us to where we are today. I wondered what basic human rights we are going to be taking for granted in the future and looking back in horror at those who silenced the voice of progress. The right to protect our planet? To ask for it not to be smothered and turned into another commodity, the property of the rich, to be used, abused and destroyed to turn over profit? The rights of refugees and asylum seekers to be given recourse to public funds and offered a safe and welcoming home? The rights of trans people, to be safe from harassment and given access to life-enabling medical care and appropriate

pronouns? The rights of people of colour to walk safely on our streets free from prejudice and without fear of the state? The rights of disabled people to not be overlooked and be disabled by the same society that tells them they're of no value? The right to protest about anything, full stop.

I freaked myself out with all these thoughts, but found calm in the knowledge that protest **DOES** work. And I was standing in front of the physical proof of that fact.

After a long time gazing contemplatively at the banner, I asked a few questions about Selina and her life. I remained in awe of every new thing I learned about her. Selina, as mentioned before, worked in the textile mills of the North from a young age. She became involved in politics through trying to improve the working conditions of her colleagues (who were mainly women). When she noticed that lots of her peers weren't able to take time off from work to visit the doctor's when they were ill, she began studying medicine at home so that she could treat people on the job. She founded libraries in the mills she worked in, wanting to provide education and improve the lives and literacy of the women around her, most of whom had to leave school early to earn money, as she did. As far as I'm aware, she did this for free, with her own resources.

One of her campaigns which resonated with me the most was for the right to wee safely at work. As the mills had been made by and for men (despite being a majority female workforce), their toilets were built without doors, more like a public urinal. Selina began campaigning for doors to be fitted so that she and her female colleagues could use the toilet in privacy, without fear of men ogling and harassing them. It surprised me, because toilets are still such a battleground for basic human rights, but the gender in question has shifted. For a lot of trans and gender non-conforming people, having a wee in a public

When I hear the phrase "men don't start drama"



Jenny Holzer,
Truisms T-shirts



Police brutality, Sarah
Everard's vigil, 2021

place or at work is terrifying, for fear of being attacked verbally or physically about what space they are permitted to pee in.

As a non-binary person who was assigned female at birth and currently presents pretty feminine (I said currently, as in the past I was androgynous, and who knows for the future) I felt hugely privileged to just be able to take a wee where I wished (which is the women's toilets, because there is usually wee all over the floor in the men's). This isn't an option for lots of trans people.

More gender neutral toilets would be such a simple solution to the problem. But they are rare to find, other than being lumped in with accessible toilets. We all have a gender neutral toilet in our home, so why can't we extend this thinking to outside of it? If it's for the safety of women, then what about the statistics that show that women are more in danger of sexual assault and gendered violence within their own homes, from the men that they know?*

And all of the harrowing studies that show how many trans people get assaulted in public places, including toilets**.

Instead of highlighting the need for safer spaces, tabloid papers focus on spreading misinformation and fueling trans hate to gain clicks (aka money). It is men that are (often) the perpetrators, men who are often inflicting the violence, but somehow (trans) women who are taking the blame. It feels the fight is still all about gender - but has expanded to what the boundaries of those genders are and who gets to enforce it. Usually it's the people with the most power, as was the case back then. All toilets should have doors, yes, and all genders should have equal access to use them safely.

*according to Rape Crisis England and Wales, 1 in 2 rapes against women are carried out by a partner or ex-partner

**according to Stonewall UK, 48% of trans people don't feel comfortable using public toilets. A third of trans people reported being discriminated against in public places because of their gender identity in the year prior to the study.

Having said this, as a non-binary person I have still received reprobation for my gender in my place of work. In my last job, I only felt comfortable 'coming out' to a select few people - as it was common place for conversations in the staffroom about 'these ridiculous new pronouns' and scaremongering about non-binary people erasing everything this country holds sacred to be brought up casually over a lunchtime coffee (with the assumption that everyone in the room would agree.) As a non-binary person I didn't feel safe to be myself or my gender in that space. I'd felt excluded from workplaces that were male dominated due to appearing female, only to be in a female majority workplace and be excluded for not being female enough. My experience is only the tip of the iceberg, a small slice of the experience that many trans people face. Thanks to the work of incredible women like Selina Cooper it's universally accepted that women should have the same rights as men (even if it isn't universally enforced) but when will this sentiment be expanded to cover all genders, and expressions within those genders?

As I left my meeting with the banner, I felt slightly stunned, a confusing mix of raw, revolutionary energy, middle-class guilt and inertia - how could I begin to talk about feminism, as someone who is barely female, and who's impact upon contemporary feminism has been so small??? I felt overwhelmed, and resolved to return to activism, as soon as possible. I doubted whether art was the appropriate place for this conversation, as its impact can seem so wishy-washy. But then I thought about the banner, and how absurd a protest would look without it; textiles, slogans, graphics, images, humour, creative imagination, are all a part of political change.

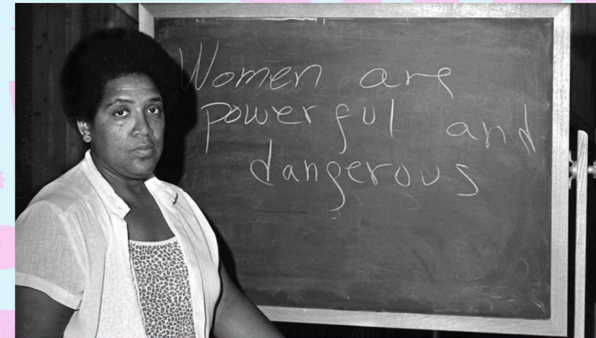
The Suffragettes used a strong visual language to create a clear and unified message, and propagate their cause. The fact that the Suffragettes did this is no coincidence. Emmeline Pankhurst (Manchester's most famous

Suffragette, who worked alongside Selina Cooper) had a sister named Sylvia Pankhurst, who was an artist. Sylvia studied at Manchester School of Art, whilst she was involved in the women's Suffrage movement. She combined her artistic talents with politics, painting women and the conditions they worked in (which was very much not the done thing at the time). She also designed posters for the Suffrage movement, most famously designing the 'Angel of Freedom' which appeared on banners, posters and political pamphlets. It was an emblem of hope, to march under. Activism needs many prongs, skills and strengths to succeed. Art **can** work amongst this.

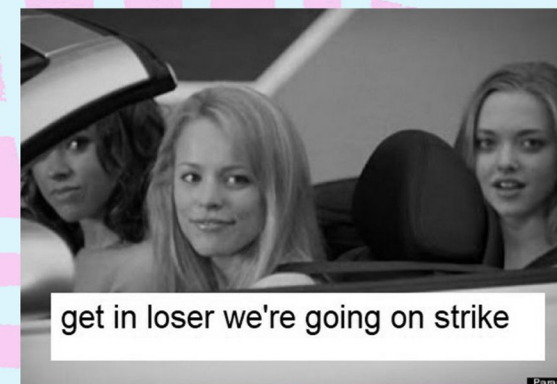
As I walked back to the car park, I chatted to the photographer who had joined me to document the banner. He told me how he'd noticed how **happy** the staff of Towneley Hall appeared to be to have us there. Which I had been too busy mentally monologuing to notice. They had expressed how lovely it was for the banner to be **SEEN** and be out in public, even if only for the afternoon. How ready they were to share their knowledge on the local area, its radical roots and links to progressive change. And how happy they were to answer my many, many questions...

Because, if we are not careful, people like Selina will be forgotten and fade quietly into the recesses of our collective consciousness, into a time when 'things were different'. We need to keep voices like Selina's present, keep talking about change and reminding ourselves **HOW** and **WHY** it was possible. We need to remind ourselves that (all too recently) in our past, things looked very different and very bleak. That our rights are hard won, and something we haven't always had. That with the wrong government and enough silence our rights could be revoked. That we need to be vocal, noisy, and keep demanding change and progress until all of us are equal. Challenge people when they assume that sexist jokes are

ok, and correct people when they use the wrong pronouns, and listen to what people of colour have to say. Keep having conversations with colleagues about the workplace, and talk to our union reps. Tell our children that their rights were won, not inherited. Remember that there is power in the North, and power in the people. That the people, united, can never be defeated. We cannot be silent. Because, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, **our silence will not protect us.**



Audre Lorde



an interview with a very smol feminist

It's important to engage in feminism across the generations, so I decided to interview the freshest one I know; my 3 year old niece. I wanted to know her opinions on gender as someone who is just learning what it looks like. As the generations go on, gender becomes less constricting. Whether you identify with the gender you're assigned to at birth or not, gender doesn't predetermine your place in the world as much as it used to. There is more room to move within gendered expectations, and the permission to do so. The interview was a good idea, but it didn't really work as well as it had in my head... as anyone who has met a 3 year old could have told me. Here are some fragments of conversation we had:

Me: *(points at photo of me and my cat, Tofu)* Who's that?

Niece: It's Tofu!!!

Me: And who else?

Niece: Emmy

Me: *(points at photo of my male friend, who she hasn't met)* Who's that?

Niece: It's a man

Me: *(points at screen-print of Frank n Furter from 'Rocky Horror Picture Show', which hangs on my sister's living room wall)* Who's that?

Niece: It's a woman

Me: It's a man, wearing makeup

Niece: *(pauses)* Can I see picture of Tofu again

My sister: Some men wear make-up, some women do. It's up to them. Some people are men, some people are

women, and some people are non-binary. Emmy is non-binary.

Niece: *(pauses to reflect)*

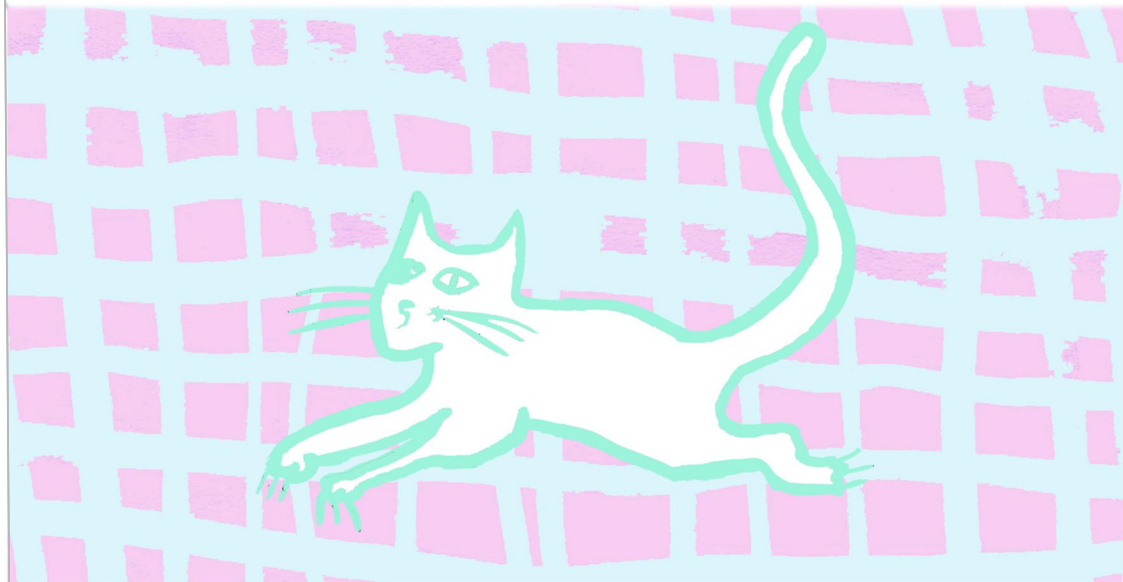
We carry on playing a game, the conversation moves on. Much later...

Niece: I'm a non-binary cat!!!!!! (looks very happy)

My sister: Yay!

Me: Piers Morgan would have a heart attack if he heard this conversation.

The point is, my niece isn't bothered about people's gender presentation, or what pronouns they use. She sometimes calls me 'she', sometimes calls me 'they'. It's really not an issue for her, and I don't mind either way because she's 3 and sometimes I like 'she'. Oh, and she already manages to gender me more correctly than most of the adults I know. The idea that some people (like me) are non-binary is a very matter of fact thing to a toddler. All my niece cares about is if she can see pictures of my cat, if I want to play with her and if I love her. We can all learn a lot from this.



with thanks to:

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Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum,
Burnley Borough Council.

Selina Cooper (and all of Lancashire's Suffragettes).

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further reading:

<https://greenandblackcross.org/action/know-your-rights/>



the uk government,
listening and learning
like