

# Moving beyond Visual Representation: Seeking Critical Interventions in Reality

Jessica Hamlin, Dipti Desai  
NYU Art Education, United States of America

## Abstract

The current enthusiasm for social justice art education has spurred questions for us about the limitations of these terms in practice and the expectations for art making that can affect real change in the world. Even those of us who consider ourselves to be critical art educators with a social justice vision must question the forms of representation we encourage our students to create; who will engage with their representation, who does it serve, how, and with what impact? Although aware of the politics of representation and advocating for a problem-posing approach to social justice art education, we are still guilty of reducing this process to a focus on thematic inquiry. For instance when students explore homelessness through a critical lens, they learn to pose questions, do research, and may even talk to homeless people. However, the translation of their understanding into visual form often still remains a form of self expression, albeit a political expression of the issue, and does not necessarily impact the social issue explored.

We seek to address Freire's call for "the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality." What are examples of and models for art education

**that not only address current issues and urgent social inequities, but that also stage interventions into the social realm that have the opportunity to spur real change? We are eager to learn across educational contexts and seek the experiences and expertise of other critical educators working with students and local communities to move beyond visual representation.**

### **Keywords**

Critical pedagogy, Visual representation, Social justice, Social action.