

## Disrupting Narratives of Gender Violence: Hekatherina Delgado and Performing *La caída de las campanas* in Uruguay

### Abstract

This article examines the performance *La caída de las campanas* by Uruguayan artist, scholar, and activist Hekatherina Delgado to interrogate how, by intervening in public spaces, the piece critiques the pervasiveness of violence within a democratic society. First performed on 8 March 2015, for a two-year period the performance was enacted every time a femicide occurred in Uruguay. I argue that the performance is a form of activism which serves a commemorative function while also disrupting conventions associated with rituals of mourning. Through repetition, which is a key formal aspect of the piece, *La caída de las campanas* dramatizes and articulates the impact of gender violence on society and actively implicates state institutions. Drawing on Diana Taylor's concept of the "political body" and Ileana Diéguez's ideas on community, I argue that the performance has the potential to transform participants, audiences, and national and international discourses on gender violence.

**Keywords:** performance; Hekatherina Delgado; activism; Uruguay; gender violence; *La caída de las campanas*; femicide; mourning; community; state

**Disrupting Narratives of Gender Violence: Hekatherina Delgado and Performing *La caída de las campanas* in Uruguay**

**Introduction**

This article will discuss and analyze the performance *La caída de las campanas*, developed and directed by Uruguayan artist, activist, performer, dramatist, and scholar Hekatherina Delgado.<sup>1</sup> *La caída de las campanas* was first performed on 8 March 2015, International Women's Day, and for a period of two years it was repeated every time a femicide occurred in Uruguay, which is roughly every ten to fifteen days.<sup>2</sup> Since 2017, the piece continues to be performed on key dates such as 8 March and 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The piece emerged at a significant moment of increased awareness of the prevalence and persistence of gender violence in Latin America. Since 2015, which marked the start of the *Ni Una Menos* collective and campaign in Argentina ("Carta Orgánica"), there have been a series of protests, performances, and petitions for greater recognition of feminicides. Images, slogans, activities, and media reports linked to the campaign were shared on social media using the #NiUnaMenos hashtag (as well as others). This online networking served to create solidarity across campaigns and interventions from different countries and *Ni Una Menos* has gained global recognition.<sup>3</sup> Uruguay has witnessed increased demand for a more nuanced understanding and legal recognition of gender violence, which culminated in the Ley de Violencia hacia las Mujeres basada en Género, introduced in 2017 (Ley 19.580, *IMPO*) after the series of regular performances of *La caída de las campanas* had ceased.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, the march and strike on 8 March to mark International Women's day have become significant events and placed the fight for equality and the elimination of violence in solidarity with global

campaigns. The demands for gender equality and representation of women in positions of power have been evident in discussions, debates, and campaigns leading up to the 2019 presidential election. This indicates that while the aforementioned law constitutes significant progress, there is still work to be done within society and state organizations to ensure that women's voices are heard, to promote and sustain gender equality, and to eliminate gender violence.

The analysis which follows examines the performance *La caída de las campanas* as a disruptive dramatic intervention that takes place in public spaces in Montevideo and questions the pervasiveness of violence in a democratic society. *La caída de las campanas* has been named as activism by scholar Mariangela Giaimo, and I explore how this term can be used to understand the significance of performing in public spaces. Giaimo states that activism “es una forma de apropiación de la política desde el arte,” because through art, activism acts to take politics and the creation of political discourses outside of traditional institutions and thus it poses a challenge to the institutions themselves. Giaimo's definition identifies the crossing of boundaries and disruption of hierarchies which, I argue, are central to Delgado's work. This article examines how Delgado's subjectivity, particularly her experiences of marginalization, has motivated her activism in relation to gender violence in society.

I argue that the performance serves a significant commemorative function for the lives lost as a result of femicide. Through an analysis of the term femicide, I demonstrate how this term provides insights into the ways in which *La caída de las campanas* actively implicates the state in gender violence. I propose that through repetition, which is a key formal aspect of *La caída de las campanas*, the performance dramatizes and articulates the impact of violence on individuals and on society. *La caída de las campanas* creates and engages a range of audiences before, during, and after each performance. This involves the use of social media networks and

platforms, in particular a *Facebook* group that enables the involvement of new performers in each iteration of the piece. In 2018, a film entitled *La caída de las campanas* was released by documentarian Jorge Fierro. The film is not the focus of the analysis presented here, but I will discuss how it illuminates and extends some of the resonances of the performance. This article situates the piece within a broader context of street performances in Uruguay to identify key characteristics of *La caída de las campanas* that differentiate it from other performances.

### **Hekatherina Delgado's Work: *La caída de las campanas***

Delgado (Montevideo, 1984) trained in philosophy, dance, and theater and her work spans a range of plays, novels, and performance pieces.<sup>5</sup> The preoccupations of violence and subjectivity permeate her work; she consistently interrogates how subjective experience is shaped by access to certain opportunities as well as exposure to multiple forms of violence, exerted physically on the body, and experienced through forms of exclusion. Delgado created *La caída de las campanas* in 2015; it is the first of a trilogy of performances that experiment with sound as a way to disrupt the expected soundscape of the city and draw attention to a particular issue. Since 2016 Delgado has been developing and performing the second performance, *La evolución de las plumas*, and in 2019 she was in the process of developing the third piece. During this time, she has also presented several site-specific performances in Montevideo. In the last five or six years she has undertaken consistent activism, both through her work as an artist and performer and through her role in activist groups, such as *Paro Internacional de Mujeres, Lesbianas y Trans*. This group promotes and coordinates a series of activities around International Women's Day centering on women withdrawing their labor on 8 March and participating in a march along 18 de julio, the main avenue running through the center of Montevideo. Through her work as a

performer and also as an advocate for change, Delgado disrupts and challenges dominant narratives around gender violence and questions the role of the state in making violence permissible.

In *La caída de las campanas*, a group of people who identify as women meet together in a public place, usually a square in central Montevideo, the steps of a public building, or in the shadow of a national monument. The chosen site is usually one that is symbolically linked to democracy and not an established place for performance so there is no stage or designated performance area.<sup>6</sup> Directed by Delgado, the performers, all dressed in white, occupy the space by spreading out. They begin to ring hand bells which disrupt the soundscape of the city, rupturing the noise created by traffic and altering the rhythm that one might normally associate with bells chiming or marking the passing of time. The sound made by the group increases during the performance and draws attention to it. At a certain moment, an individual performer falls to the ground and continues to ring their bell, often banging it against the ground. This action is repeated several times by each of the performers, meaning their bodies also take on a distinct rhythm as they fall and rise, aided by the presence and sounds of their co-performers. The falling and rising of their bodies contributes to the irregular sounds that they create with the bells, meaning both movement and sound become disruptive in the performance. The key actions of ringing, falling, and rising are repeated throughout the piece, which can vary in length but often lasts about 50 minutes.

### **Invitation to Perform**

Each time the piece is performed, it is initiated with an invitation to participate and a set of instructions disseminated via social media: bring a bell to ring, wear white clothes, and meet at a

certain place and time. This invitation to participate is shared via the *Facebook* group *La caída de las campanas* which is managed by Delgado. The group can be searched and viewed by anyone, but to receive notifications (or regular updates) *Facebook* users must “like” the group. *Facebook* users who do this can also share the information with others. As a result, the *Facebook* group has a sustained audience that has opted in, and *La caída de las campanas* has the potential to reach new audiences as group members share content. Following a performance, this usually includes images and, on some occasions, recordings. These images and recordings are often shared using hashtags associated with campaigns to raise awareness of and eliminate gender violence throughout Latin America, such as #VivasNosQueremos, #NiUnaMenos, #SolidaridadNuestraArma, #TocanAUnaTocanATodas. The collective response to the impact of violence upon all women is manifested through the references in these hashtags to: ourselves, our, and all women. More recently, as Delgado has campaigned to create greater awareness of gender equality and inclusivity, collectivity is seen through the modification of hashtags to use inclusive language: #TocanAUneTocanATodes.

*La caída de las campanas* is usually performed by a group of people who are regularly involved, but each new call for participants opens up the possibility for new people to take part. This means that there are many changeable factors in each iteration of the performance, even though the reason for the intervention, the instructions given, and the form followed are the same. Marcela A. Fuentes proposes the concept of “performance constellations” as a way to analyze and understand the significance of the interconnectedness of performance and digital networking “in ways that are key to responding to contemporary systems of exploitation and subjection” (3, 2). Digital networking has been central to the organization of *La caída de las campanas* because it has enabled Delgado and her collaborators to respond to the urgency of the

issue of femicide by reacting in the days immediately after the femicide occurred. It also enables the performance to have a digital afterlife as it is shared across multiple platforms, thus reinforcing its potential to create and communicate with a community of artist-activists.

While I have been referring to the participants in *La caída de las campanas* as performers, it is important to note that the way in which the invitation is created and disseminated, as well as the performance itself, which does not entail any kind of formal rehearsal, means that not all those who take part have previous experience or training in acting or performance. Delgado has not received any formal funding to train or rehearse with her collaborators. Furthermore, the fact that the performance takes place in a public space enables members of the public who have not responded to the invitation but who are present to become part of the performance, to act as spectators or to respond in other ways, immediately and afterwards. *La caída de las campanas* therefore brings together different people with differing experiences of violence, activism, and training in performance.

In his chapter about “Teatro de frontera,” Gustavo Remedi proposes that forms of theater occurring outside of established and recognized spaces act as a kind of laboratory in which an encounter and exchange take place between people from different social and cultural backgrounds (84). These people have a range of experiences of theater both as actors and spectators (84). The emphasis on the space beyond the establishment evokes Giaimo’s analysis of activism cited earlier in this article, but Remedi’s analysis can be used to expand our understanding of *La caída de las campanas* by placing emphasis on the performers themselves. Remedi refers to the idea of a *frontera*, perhaps the edge or limit of what is recognized as a performance space and what is sanctioned by institutions (“Teatro” 83-84). This concept resonates with ideas expressed by Delgado in an interview in which she referred to a “fisura”

(Sand), a crack or divide in society, that she identifies and locates as a site of resistance where she can act in order to challenge imposed boundaries of space, discipline, and hierarchies of knowledge and power. Remedi suggests that these spaces can operate as experimental sites that can be productive in generating new types of work and new communities of performers (“Teatro” 85). *La caída de las campanas* is not only about using art as a way to create a political and activist voice, but it is also about the appropriation of spaces where this voice can be articulated, performed, and heard within a community. It is important to recognize that even outside of an institution, hierarchies can exist. Furthermore, performing in the street can expose performers to other types of real or assumed authorities as the public interacts with the piece, for example, by stopping to watch, heckling, or calling the police. Nevertheless, the potential for this type of work to create diversity in terms of the range of performers and audience members is crucial.

### **Collectivity, Community, and Communication**

In *La caída de las campanas*, the enactment of the relationship between the individual and the collective is central because the piece begins with the death of a woman in Uruguay and sparks action on the part of others. The performance is a form of collective witnessing: it recognizes the femicide, and it raises awareness of the significance of the issue through public commemoration that takes place in a public space. It therefore occurs both *as a result* of the death of the woman, as a form of mourning in response to it, and also *on her behalf*, as her agency is stripped away by the act of violence that caused her death.<sup>7</sup> The burden of this public commemoration comes across forcefully as Delgado has frequently referred to the idea of “un duelo público,” including in her comments made in the film *La caída de las campanas*. The



performance challenges the audience, who are not a formal audience but passers-by “formed in response to a spectacle” (Sommer 25), to also respond. The proximity to this audience, who will have come across the piece in the street, been drawn into it, or find themselves unable to ignore it, means that there is potential for engagement and transformation. Giaimo points out that this intimacy and immediacy is an important aspect of activism pieces like *La caída de las campanas* because the performance possesses a “dimensión comunicativa, es decir, tiene una necesidad de llegar al otro, de intervenir en la sociedad.” The performers occupy the space with their bodies and by falling to the ground. The unexpected bodies and noises of the performers intervene in and disrupt the use and aesthetic of the space, and communication with the audience occurs through the body. *La caída de las campanas* becomes an interruption or “irrupción sonora” (Sand), which through sound and movement intervenes in the public space, changes how it is used, and creates a way for both the performers and the audience to engage with the loss of life as a result of the prevalence of gender violence in Uruguay.

The performance does not contain a single spoken word or message: there are no signs, posters, or explanatory notes. This amplifies both the communicative potential of the piece and the challenge to the audience to respond to find out more about it. Diana Taylor refers to this type of disruptive intervention as “animative” and highlights the significance of the “inappropriate” body (127): “Bodies make their own claims in ways that cannot be adequately understood by looking primarily at linguistic paradigms. Political bodies are amplified bodies—expanded by the mission, emotion, and aspirations that animate them” (128-29). *La caída de las campanas* does not depict violence, but the fact that the performers come together to enact the piece as a collective response to the current crisis symbolizes the impact of violence on all women in society. The repetition of falling can be seen to evoke the acts of violence, the

prevalence of gender violence, and the multiple ways in which women suffer as a result. It is for this reason that the action of rising is so significant, as it symbolizes resistance and perseverance. The sound of the bells is loud and ceaseless, even when the performers fall, and this continuous sound becomes imposing and disruptive. The sound becomes a collective voice for those affected by femicide, who will not be silenced. At the same time, the constant sound represents the idea that against the backdrop of a societal acceptance of gender violence, women will continue to suffer in multiple ways. Ileana Diéguez emphasizes the potential for performances, which are motivated by the need to mourn and advocate for those who are absent, to communicate, provoke, and thus, to engage audiences in multiple ways. In her analysis of the ways in which people in Mexico have come together to mourn and demand justice for victims of forced disappearances, Diéguez states:

I want to stress the possibility of putting the pain in writing or in a visual medium through actions that can continue to emphasize the fight against impunity and oblivion. Because in all the cases I have observed, turning mourning into a public event means much more than just displaying grief. It means to reclaim, to document, to testify, and to demand, with tears and deeply moving words if necessary. (51)

Crucially, as the performance provokes the audience to realize and respond, this collective witnessing can lead to societal change. Sommer states that: “To follow through from the call of social challenges to the responses of aesthetic innovation is to stimulate collective change” (51), meaning that the communicative and collective aspect of the performance is fundamental to bringing about a change in society. Fuentes also stresses the potential for performance to create change as it both “produces and communicates embodied and situated knowledge about the

world,” which in *La caída de las campanas* focuses on conveying the significance of the reality of feminicides in Uruguay, and also “actualizes possibilities for worldmaking through consciousness-raising” (12). Performance and activism can transform both participants and audiences, first, by enabling them to recognize and challenge accepted narratives linked to and even perpetuated by the state. Second, by inspiring them to imagine possibilities for the future through a process of worldmaking that enables them to imagine solutions to issues faced, new types of discourses, and future actions.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the performers intervene in, occupy, and disrupt the space, they do not permanently change or modify it, or leave a mark in the way that violence does. *La caída de las campanas* is not a protest, but in the repetition of the piece the performance protests against the recurrence of violence and it can form part of protests and marches. The piece disrupts the discourse of the city and the discourses around gender violence. Since 2017, when regular performances motivated by feminicides ceased, the piece has been performed at specific moments, such as International Women’s Day, and its commemorative function has changed. These performances nevertheless link to previous ones, which were motivated by specific feminicides, and thus extend their resonance. The capacity of the piece to evoke its own previous iterations as it “reactualize[s]” (Taylor 15) them, thus becoming part of the series of performances, means that the connection to femicide remains even when the performance is not in response to a specific death. Taylor draws on the work of Richard Schechner to specify that “[p]erformance—as reiterated corporeal behaviors—functions within a system of codes and conventions in which behaviors are reiterated, re-acted, reinvented, or relived. Performance is a constant state of again-ness” (26). This re-actualization of the piece and its potential for ongoing impact is exemplified through the film *La caída de las campanas* which creates an afterlife for

the ephemeral interventions. It documents aspects of the performance and other performance pieces in dialogue with examples of activism around women's rights in Uruguay, initiatives designed to improve safety on the streets of Montevideo, and official state discourses around security. The film premiered in Cinemateca Pocitos, Montevideo in 2018 as part of El DETOUR: Festival de Cine Nuevo; in the future, it could be disseminated to wider audiences. This could provide another way for *La caída de las campanas* to enter into dialogue with other artistic practices and political discourses.

### ***Feminicidio***

The term *feminicidio* was first introduced into academia in 1987 by Mexican feminist scholar, activist, and politician Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos (Fregoso and Bejarano 5). Her work to specify the significance and severity of femicidal violence both in Mexico, where the murders of young women in Ciudad Juárez have gained international notoriety, and beyond has created awareness of this issue as rooted in cultural and structural problems in society throughout Latin America. Femicide specifies the targeted murder of women *because* they are women and serves to underscore the prevalence of these cases while actively working against the gender-neutral language often associated with such crimes. Nuala Finnegan concisely traces key aspects of the development of the definition of the term and, citing the work of scholar Diana Russell, states that she “insists on the political dimension to the killing of women and in this way, she charts an important pathway for the understanding of the crime worldwide” (3). The extreme violence frequently exerted upon women, combined with power structures within society which allow it to continue, mean that women are devalued and dehumanized. Consequently, to think of femicide as a concept which indicates the killing of women (so as a gendered term to denote

female homicide) is insufficient in understanding the necessary scope of the term as it denotes a societal problem (Fregoso and Bejarano 7). Therefore, as many scholars have pointed out, femicide necessarily encompasses, indicates, and cannot be separated from the structures, hierarchies, and inequalities in society which enable violence against women to exist (Fregoso and Bejarano 7-8; Lagarde y de los Ríos xxi; Segato 2). Fregoso and Bejarano specify that the concept of femicide implicates the state:

The concept of femicide bridges the “private” and “public” distinction by incorporating into its definition *both* systematic and systemic or structural violence sanctioned (or commissioned) by state actors (public) and violence committed by individuals or groups (private), since most of the violence suffered by women happens at the hands of private actors. (8; emphasis in original)

In dialogue with the work of Fregoso and Bejarano, Finnegan points out that the term femicide is important for researchers both within and beyond Latin America, particularly in Europe. First, because it obliges us to acknowledge the role of the state in perpetuating violence, which we must take into account in our analysis. Second, by using a term that emerges from the Spanish language, it obliges us to recognize the contribution made to scholarship by academics, activists, and feminists based in Latin America (Finnegan 3-4).

In the context of Uruguay, Helena Suárez Val manages the website *Femicidio Uruguay* where, since 2015, she has maintained a database of femicides in Uruguay and displays these on an interactive map showing the location for each case. The point on the map expands to show the key details: the name of the woman, her age, the number of femicides that year, the date and place at which the femicide occurred, her relationship to the perpetrator and how she was killed. Where possible, there is a link to a media article reporting it. Suárez Val collaborates with

Delgado and her research focuses on mapping as a form of feminist activism.<sup>9</sup> Suárez Val, like many of the feminist scholars already mentioned in this analysis, uses the term femicide in her work and by employing this term in its fullness (as detailed above), through the map she details the violence that each of the women suffered and who caused it. The term is significant in relation to these forms of violence which, through the use of a more neutral and sanitized language can, as Finnegan argues, cover up or even erase the importance of the fact that women were affected (3). The details on Suárez Val's map actively work against this neutrality.

The issue of a lack of specificity when discussing violence against women is also raised in the film *La caída de las campanas* where, in a voice speaking over the images, the director, Jorge Fierro, discusses how news reports on feminicides are often sanitized. He tracks a pattern followed in the Uruguayan media in which the camera focuses on an unidentified house, a typical street, the flashing lights of a police car, and then a wider shot of the street. This sequence is repeated time and again as new reports are disseminated. While, of course, one must acknowledge legal restrictions on what can be shown and reported, the absence of people (with the occasional exception of passersby in the shot of the street) in these reports is striking. These crimes are, once again, abstracted from the gender of the perpetrator (in the majority of the cases, male) and the female body upon which the violence was exerted. An understanding of the term femicide, and the ways in which it constantly draws us back to the Latin American context and the structures that allow violence against women to exist, enables us to consider the impact and significance of *La caída de las campanas* in ways that are both challenging and productive. The significance of the bodies that occupy the public space in the performance becomes even greater as it poses a challenge to the absence and neutrality often created by media reports, thus forcing those who witness the performance to acknowledge the impact on the female body and the body

politic. Furthermore, *La caída de las campanas* emerges forcefully from the prevalence and recurrence of gender violence in the context of Uruguay. The performance actively implicates the state and poses a challenge to both state and society by forcing them to acknowledge that they have created an environment in which femicide is permissible. *La caída de las campanas* draws significant attention to the state's role in this violence because the state plays an integral role in both the reason and the chosen site for the performance.

### **Artistic Practice**

Delgado's work constantly questions accepted disciplinary categories, structural divisions, and institutional policies by drawing attention to their limitations. At a symposium entitled *Las Hermanas de Shakespeare: Perspectivas de género en el teatro* held in 2017 in Montevideo on the topic of gender and theater, Delgado formed part of a panel on Performance, multidisciplinaria y activismo. The conference brought together Latin American scholars and practitioners to discuss the impact of gender and existing inequalities across different aspects of production, training, practice, awards, and casting in theater. It was held at the Teatro Solís in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Artes Escénicas and organized by the Equipo de Igualdad del Departamento de Cultura de la Intendencia de Montevideo. This is another example of how the discussion around gender and discrimination is evolving and becoming more visible in Uruguay. It also demonstrates how the role of women as creators and practitioners, as well as their access to spaces to do their work, is being interrogated. The summary report from the conference shows that Delgado argued for the role of political performance in challenging preconceived ideas about disciplinary and institutional divides and the inequalities they simultaneously rely on and perpetuate within society (*Simposio* 46). Delgado argued that rigidity of existing structures led to

critiques that undervalued and undermined her work and also made her feel marginalized for her identity as queer, artist, director, and political scientist (*Simposio* 46). The fact her play *Brujas del Plata* (2014) has not been performed in Uruguay but was performed in Spain in two theatres in Seville, Teatro Viento Sur (2018) and Teatro La Fundación (2019), contributes to this type of exclusion.

Delgado's choice to perform in non-traditional spaces therefore seems two-fold: she is motivated both by the limited opportunities to develop and share her work and by a desire to disrupt established narratives. In an interview she discussed how in *La caída de las campanas*, she sought to create an intervention using sound, her body, and her subjectivity, in a state of mourning, in order to problematize recognizable and personally painful symbols, particularly religious symbols (Sand). Two of the key symbols in the piece are the color white and the bells; both of these have strong religious connotations, particularly in Judeo-Christian religions, and the color white is strongly associated with purity. Delgado stated that: "El color blanco era un color que era necesario ensuciar, era necesario que la pieza tuviera el desgaste que muestra algo que empieza a impregnarse, el desgaste que tiene un cuerpo que hace, que activa, que roza" (Sand). In Judeo-Christian traditions, the color white is associated with rituals, such as baptism, first communion, and marriage, which mark important moments in a woman's life and her progress through a religious journey. However, *La caída de las campanas* associates this color with a different ritual: that of violence against women. It also subverts images connected with ideas of women as passive; as the performers act and intervene their clothes become dirty, even torn. This use of the color white, as well as subverting the associations with these religious rituals, also subverts colors and actions associated with mourning, particularly in the public



space. Black has been used by female activists across Latin America as a sign of mourning and loss and as a form of activism in many different contexts, as discussed below.

### **Context of Street Performances**

*La caída de las campanas* dialogues with recent and more established performance and protest groups in Uruguay. Delgado acknowledges that her work builds on traditions, and she states that performance throughout Latin America has played a long-standing role in challenging the state, rebuking the church, and denouncing violence (Sand). Uruguay has a carnival tradition meaning that outdoor performances are not unusual. *Murgas*, which are musical, satirical pieces traditionally performed by groups of men, have often criticized the status quo and sought to shed a different perspective on politics and issues in society (Remedi, *Carnival* xi). Nevertheless, the annual carnival activities in Uruguay, including performances on *tablados*, “precarious wooden stages built specifically for Carnival in the neighborhoods of Montevideo’s popular classes” (Remedi, *Carnival* xiii), and processions such as *Las Llamadas*, a carnival procession through the neighborhoods inhabited by the African diaspora, follow certain conventions, at specific times of the year and in recognizable formats. A certain space is granted and in the case of *Las Llamadas*, this is within specific areas of the city (Sand).

In terms of occupying public space for protest and performance in Uruguay, one example is the *Mujeres de Negro*, founded in Uruguay in 2006. They are a women’s rights group that forms part of an international collective of women who took inspiration from Palestinian and Israeli women who joined together in Jerusalem in 1987 to protest Israeli occupation of Palestine territory. Dressed in black and usually acting in silence, *Mujeres de Negro* Uruguay campaign for equality, the elimination of violence against women, and an end to conflict. As well as

forming part of protests and activities on International Women's Day and other significant dates, *Mujeres de Negro Uruguay* meet regularly on the first Thursday of each month to protest and perform outside the Intendencia (Montevideo's local government), thus posing a challenge to the state to respond.<sup>10</sup>

*Diez de cada Diez* is another performance piece that began in 2015 and which seeks to denounce, communicate, and create awareness of the extent of gender violence in Uruguay. A group of women wearing red perform a piece in a public space that involves movement, dance, and dialogue based on several texts: *La Mujer, Su salud, Su higiene y Su belleza* by Dr. René Vaucaire (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1929) and articles from the press about violence against women in Uruguay. The piece culminates with the performers in pairs, as one wraps plastic around the head and shoulders of the other and secures it with tape. They then carefully remove the plastic and affix it to the ground to leave a mark of plastic silhouettes that simultaneously evoke presence and absence. Several funding awards, including from the Ministry of Education and Culture, have enabled *Diez de cada Diez* to train and engage creative artists and performers and to travel to other regions of Uruguay.<sup>11</sup> The group of performers have also started to develop other performance pieces. In her previously cited article, Giaimo includes *Diez de cada Diez* in her examples of "artivismo."

These are some contemporary examples of women activists regularly occupying public space and using different techniques, including artivism, to raise awareness of gender violence in similar ways to *La caída de las campanas*. Both *La caída de las campanas* and *Diez de cada Diez* challenge stereotypes around images of women and how women should behave and follow certain rituals in public spaces and in society. This is evidenced in the information from the creators about the performances, the texts and themes that they evoke and critique, the use of the

colors white and red, as well as the ways in which the performances intervene in the public space. The fact that between 2015 and 2017, the performances of *La caída de las campanas* were motivated by a specific femicide differentiates the piece from these other examples, as the performance responded explicitly to feminicidal violence in Uruguay and performed an act of public commemoration in the days following a femicide. The repetition of the piece and the chosen site for performance actively and explicitly critiqued the role and involvement of the state in these feminicides to a greater extent than the other interventions examined here.

A key link between both *La caída de las campanas* and *Diez de cada Diez* is that through activism they perform a collective response to show the effect that violence and femicide have on all women in society. The sense of community, the multiple functions of these interventions, and the sharing of the burden of repeated violence evoke Diéguez's comments cited earlier in the article, which seem particularly relevant for each of these groups. Writing about Mujeres de Negro in northern Mexico, Melissa Wright states that many women activists take to the streets to campaign for information about missing or murdered children; by framing their activism in this way, they legitimize their activism and private mourning in the public space. She describes them as women "whose domestic allegiances are publicly performed," and this becomes another strategy to overcome the public-private divide (317). Diéguez, Taylor and Wright refer to the mothers and grandmothers, dressed in black and peacefully protesting while carrying photos of their children on a weekly basis in Buenos Aires, as an emblematic example of a durational performance of searching for family (Diéguez 50; Taylor 148-49; Wright, 316). The particular focus on community in both *La caída de las campanas* and *Diez de cada Diez* means that these artist performances do not use or rely on familial connections to legitimize their performance in the public space; this opens up possibilities for multiple collaborators and participants. In the

case of *La caída de las campanas*, the open invitation circulated to engage people without rehearsal means that participant-performers can turn up and take part. Therefore, Delgado maximizes the possibility for a diverse and evolving performance laboratory that does not exist in the same way in *Diez de cada Diez*, which has a regular group of performers trained for the piece.

### **Conclusion**

Disruption is at the heart of Delgado's artistic practice and the performance *La caída de las campanas*. Through this piece, which crosses disciplinary boundaries as a form of activism, she finds and occupies new spaces, locating sites for performance in the "fisura[s]" or ruptures in society (Sand). Delgado creates new work that challenges expectations and stems from her subjective experience of violence, marginalization, and activism. These challenges are explored both from and through the body, and as part of a community. Delgado's practice intervenes in the sound and space of Montevideo and involves an evolving group of performers, as well as an online community. By locating *La caída de las campanas* outside of established institutions, yet often directly in front of state institutions and symbols, the piece disrupts the narrative of the city to raise awareness of the pervasive narrative of violence against women. It challenges both the agency and passiveness of democratic institutions, which allow the violence to continue, and seeks to initiate a collective response from both performers and spectators. As a durational performance between 2015 and 2017, *La caída de las campanas* served to commemorate feminicides in Uruguay and to raise awareness of the impact that gender violence has upon on all women. This ritual, repeated every ten to fifteen days, is a unique aspect of the piece; the repetition of the performance and the repetition of the sound of the bells, as well as the actions of

falling and rising within the performance, enact the burden of public mourning while simultaneously challenging expectations about the rituals, clothes, bodies, sounds, and spaces that this mourning entails. The disruption begins with the intervention of the performers themselves and extends to the audience, transcending imposed hierarchies and creating moments of communication that stem from the political bodies in performance. *La caída de las campanas* has the potential to transform ideas, behaviors, and attitudes to provoke further action to transform societal responses to gender violence both within Uruguay and beyond. The impact of the piece is amplified as it enters into dialogue with other activist interventions and campaigns to end gender violence throughout Latin America.

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<sup>1</sup> A title in English is used for an audio recording of the piece available on *Soundcloud*; “The Fall of the Bells, White Piece for Bronze Bell and Woman in Mourning.”

<sup>2</sup> I consulted various sources which show different figures. Gago records 29 feminicides in 2018 and 30 in 2017. Suárez Val records 30 feminicides in 2019, 40 feminicides in 2018, 39 in 2017, 23 in 2016, and 40 in 2015. “El 2018 cierra con 31 femicidios en Uruguay” records 31 feminicides in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the case of Peru, the violent attack on Cindy Arlette Contreras by her partner sparked the biggest protest in Peru’s history under the slogan *Ni Una Menos*. See Gelbart. Contreras was named as one of the “BBC 100 Women of 2018” which demonstrates one way in which the *Ni Una Menos* campaign has gained international recognition.

<sup>4</sup> “Normativa” sets out the new law. “En Uruguay contás con una ley” provides a clear and accessible overview. See the *IMPO* website.

<sup>5</sup> For details, see “Hekatherina Delgado.”

<sup>6</sup> I saw the performance on 8 March 2019 in the main square in Montevideo, Plaza Independencia, in front of an imposing monument containing the remains of national hero José Gervasio Artigas (1764-1850). As on that occasion, the chosen sites for performance are usually public spaces that are linked to historical or contemporary figures or institutions that represent Uruguay as a democracy. These have included the space in front of government buildings, the entrance to courts and public squares, e.g., Plaza de Cagancha, also known as Plaza Libertad.

<sup>7</sup> This is reminiscent of the *Marcha del silencio* in which people march in silence through the streets of Montevideo and other Uruguayan cities. Since 1996, it has taken place annually on 20 May to commemorate, raise awareness of, and seek information about people who were detained and disappeared during the civic-military dictatorship (1973-85). The lack of words is a strategy to evoke those who no longer have a voice.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of “worldmaking” is at the heart of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project *Language Acts and Worldmaking* where I have developed this work on performance and activism as a post-doctoral researcher. See website for further information.

<sup>9</sup> More information about Suárez Val’s research can be found on the webpage “Helena Suárez Val, Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies.”

<sup>10</sup> Information taken from *Mujeres de Negro Facebook* page.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2017, the piece was awarded funding through a Ministry of Education and Culture scheme. It then received further support from the Instituto Nacional de Artes Escénicas and FiraTàrrega, Catalunya. The majority of this information is taken from the information sheet distributed at the end of the performance on 8 March 2019, when I saw the piece performed. Some of it is replicated in the “About” section of the *Diez de cada Diez Facebook* page.

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**Bio**

Dr. Sophie Stevens is based at King's College London where she is a Post-Doctoral Researcher on *Language Acts and Worldmaking*, an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project which seeks to renew modern languages teaching in the UK. Her current research into theater, performance, and activism in Latin America expands upon work carried out in her PhD thesis, which forms the basis of a forthcoming monograph, [\*Uruguayan Theatre in Translation: Theory and Practice\*](#), published by Legenda. She is a member of the Out of the Wings Theatre Collective and has presented English translations at the annual Out of the Wings Festival.

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