

## Art

## Let's Make Noise for Abortion Rights

On the day of the Supreme Court's decision to undo 50 years of constitutional rights to abortion, artist Elana Mann's "protest rattles" feel especially poignant and urgent.



by Renée Reizman  
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Elana Mann protest rattles from the series *Shake, Rattle, Roll* at the "Bans Off Our Bodies Rally," Los Angeles City Hall, May 14, 2022 (all photos by Monica Orozco, courtesy Elana Mann)

LOS ANGELES — On May 14, charged with fury over the leaked Supreme Court draft decision that would overturn *Roe v. Wade* — a forewarning that became a grim reality today, June 24 — thousands gathered in front of City Hall for the Bans Off Our Bodies rally. Among the protesters was Elana Mann, who angrily shook a ceramic rattle painted with the word "nooooo," the extra vowels stretching out the internal scream that leapt from her heart.



Mann, an artist and abortion advocate, has been creating handmade instruments and listening devices for more than a decade. Her collection of rattles, which she started making in 2019 after the birth of her second child, was inspired by increased political action and motherhood. The rattle's symbolism makes it a powerful object: It can make a joyful rhythm, drown out dissent, or soothe an infant.

Today, as throngs of activists and demonstrators **descend on the Supreme Court in Washington, DC** to protest its decision to eliminate the constitutional right to abortion, Mann's works feel especially poignant — and urgent. By overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the court has left abortion access up to individual states; **about half are expected to ban the procedure.**

“The news out of the Supreme Court is devastating,” Mann told Hyperallergic. “We all need a moment to mourn this cruel ruling, which will disproportionately impact women of color and poor women.”

“And then we mobilize,” she continued. “I am grabbing on to hope like it is a lifejacket, so I won't drown in a sea of rage and despair. In my other hand I am snatching a protest rattle to bolster my energy for the long fight ahead.”



Artist Elana Mann's rattles were inspired by increased political action and motherhood



Almost thirty people joined Mann at the Bans Off Our Bodies rally in LA this May, each of them shaking one of her rattles. Mann has produced nearly 70 such objects, which have a geometric, ceramic top — they're crowned with cubes, tetrahedrons, or hexagonal prisms — and a sturdy wooden base. They're filled with materials such as glass beads, metal shards, or plastic fragments. The different shapes, sizes, and fillings lend every rattle a unique sound. They also have a letter painted on each face, spelling out different expressions: “us,” “we,” “help,” “change,” or “ahhhh.”

“I started making them because I was going to protests, and I have a very quiet voice,” Mann said. “I wanted to make something that could project, make noise, and fill up space.”



Participants of *Shake, Rattle, Roll* included Jerri Allyn, Anne Bray, Frida Cano, York Chang, Courtney Fink, Janice Gomez, Everly Gomez-Hoang, Denise Gray, Maya Gurzantz, Micol Hebron, Robby Herbst, Juniper Herbst-Varella, Ella Hushagen, Michele Jaquis, Mick Lorusso, Shana Lutker, Susan Mogul, Mehregan Pezeshki, Claudia Pretelin, Jeremy Quinn, Milo Quinn, Michael Rippens, Ron Schneck, Sandy Shannon, Stephanie Sherwood, Colin Smith, Matias Viegner, Jan Williamson, Jemima Wyman, and Joan Zeta.

“Folks really wanted to make sure that the rattle they chose fit them or what they wanted to express. It became a really personal choice: How do I want to sound? What do I want to say?” Mann said.



When protesters connect with a rattle that speaks to them, it seems to hold a special power, emboldening the holder. “They’re not just protest objects, but I also think about them as ritual objects,” Mann added. “They’re widely used spiritual ceremonies all over the world.”



A participant at the Bans Off Our Bodies rally in LA

Mann, who is Jewish, had the *gragger* in mind when she designed the rattles, a **noisemaker** used on the Purim holiday. During celebrations, elders share the story of how Queen Esther, who was unknown to be Jewish, and her brother Mordecai saved the Jewish people from genocide. Whenever listeners hear the name Haman, the villain of the story who wanted to carry out the extermination, they shake their graggers and boo loudly.

Protesters harnessing Mann’s rattles mimicked this tradition. Pro-life counter-protesters showed up at the rally, and some of Mann’s group were emboldened to shake their instruments and drown out their opponents.





"They're not just protest objects, but I also think about them as ritual objects," Mann said.

Though the instruments can be wielded powerfully, their ceramic structure also makes them quite fragile. Three rattles broke during the rally. Two could easily be reassembled, but one shattered and has yet to be replaced.

"I like the fact that they're vulnerable because I feel vulnerable protesting. My body feels like a lot more at risk in situations," Mann said.



The rattle's symbolism makes it a powerful object.



Mann has repaired two of the broken rattles with a method inspired by *kintsugi*, a Japanese art that uses a bright gold pigment to reassemble shattered vessels. Mann's shiv-like rattles, which read "truth" and "power," now have bright red seams highlighting where they were fractured, like blood trickling down the folds of pierced skin.



Bans Off Our Bodies protesters on May 14

She's already working on a new series of uterus rattles, which will specifically call attention to the oppression the government is placing on people who can give birth. She hopes that she can eventually organize a more formal performance around her protest instruments, a concert that shakes for justice when making noise is more crucial than ever.

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