In the abstract I submitted for this call for papers I said the following.

In the regional context of Southend-on-Sea I will contemplate what authenticity means within intersectional, feminist, activist, artistic practices and what is considered inauthentic or performative, before posing a possible methodological shift that I could employ within my own practice.

I am an ambitious person, however, clearly there is no small amount of delusion in suggesting that this is achievable in a 10 minute presentation.

I am presenting this paper from the point of view of being a practicing artist.

Considering the authentic as it relates to my practice has led to a number of outcomes for me.

In examining the constituent parts of my practice to determine their authenticity, I started with an understanding that much of what I do explores how to affect genuine change within the town of Southend on Sea for womxn, femme and non-binary artists.

That looks like a number of different things, for example drawing and installation, curation, book making, public interventions, networking, funding applications, planning, collaborating, research.

A lot of the work I do is awkward to consider as purely artistic/aesthetic because it sits within the context of feminism, a political framework. And for me, part of an authentic feminist methodology is not just an understanding of intersectionality, but also putting that into practice, which obliges collaborative work with women across the intersections of race, class, sexual identification, gender identification, disability, and age amongst others.

The difficulty in outlining a clear argument for authenticity within my practice arises because of my methodologies. The collaborative and curatorial elements of my practice derive their authenticity from ethical frameworks. The installation, drawing and other works I produce can claim authenticity from aesthetic frameworks, however, as the intention behind all facets of my practice is how agency and visibility can be increased for women through art, I find it becomes necessary to consider all elements under both frameworks.

Feminism in art sits firmly within the context of identity politics.
Identity politics are governed by ethical considerations – such as equitable representation. In her 2018 book Curatorial Activism, Towards an ethics of curating, Maura Reilly explains that "Statistics demonstrate that the fight for gender and race equality in the art world is far from over. Despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the art world continues to exclude the "Other" artists – those who are women, of colour, and LGBTQ. Discrimination against these artists invades every aspect of the art world, from gallery representation, auction-price differentials, and press coverage to inclusion in permanent collections and solo exhibition programs." [Reilly, 2018].

Authenticity then, can be derived from intersectionality, the inclusion of many voices. However, this can also become a stumbling block. Feminist activism suffers from a large proportion of performative ally-ship. It will not surprise you to discover that this performativity negates substantial progress and is frequently perpetrated by the feminists who hold the most privilege, such as the heterosexual, able bodied, middle class, white woman. This performance

of support for intersectional practices is rarely followed through and is often used as a means to gain cultural capital.

And then within artistic practice, can become a way of "outsourcing authenticity" according to Claire Bishop, whereby artists delegate their work to individuals who can perform an aspect of their identity, allowing the artist to sidestep the negative consequences of inauthentic performance.

Authentic performance here is again related to identity, the politics of identity. But performing identity can be viewed as inauthentic.

This tangle of identity and performativity in art, activism, and institution relies on continued ethical examination of motivations: what is the purpose of performing this authentic identity? For whom am I performing?

Looking now at institutional inauthentic performativity, I'd like to read a section of *The Problem with Diaspora Art*, by Zarina Muhammad. In which she discussies the public programme institutions invariably push by recruiting the "Other" artists. Muhammad is specifically interested in the use of people of colour.

"It feels like within the dynamic and experience of working in and around these institutions, there's a distinct lack of curatorial care. The interactions are short-term, for the day or evening, ur in and ur out. The brevity works to the institution's favour and the Maker's detriment. Maker is left without achieving something satisfactory; without support or care, precarious and burnt-out. Their only upside is the visibility, the social capital that they're left to liquidate into hard capital on their own. The Institution doesn't have to extend resources beyond a workshop fee and bits n bobs; they're spared the unfolding cost of sustaining a relationship with a Maker long-term to achieve something more meaningful. it feels like a conscious point that, for example, majority of the Tate's interaction with creatives of colour comes in the form of their public program that enables brief and unsupportive interactions…"

This performative and tokenistic inclusion of Othered artists is ethically ambiguous to say the very least and lends weight to the inauthenticity of performativity.

Moving away from performativity as ethically inauthentic, and towards the ethically questionable practice of social practice as raised by Bishop in Artificial Hells.

Bishop specifically outlines the historical context under which social engaged practice came to the fore. Her examination of how social practice was co-opted for political ends with the rise of centrist politics in the late 90s in the UK to "…reduce isolation by helping people make friends, develop community networks and sociability, help offenders and victims address issues of crime, contribute to people's employability, encourage people to accept risk positively, and help transform the image of public bodies…" sets the scene for a key insight. Namely, that "…social participation is viewed positively because it creates submissive citizens who respect authority and accept the 'risk' and responsibility of looking after themselves in the face of diminished public services."

Here too, ethical inauthenticity is prevalent, this time in the form of misinformation. Bishops insights into uninformed, well intentioned artists unknowingly colluding in political strategies they might not otherwise support, depicts a worrying pitfall social practitioners should be wary of.

Highly critical of the trend towards social practice within art, which is referred to as participatory art by Bishop, she calls for a re-evaluation of aesthetics over ethics. Her primary point of contention being that the social or collaborative element of these practices inevitably determine a critique of the works from an ethical perspective of either "good" or "bad" socially, rather than examining them from an aesthetic position.

However, she cedes an overlap between aesthetic authenticity within ethical territory by suggesting that "…Participatory art is not a privileged political medium, nor a ready-made solution to a society of the spectacle, but it is as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself; neither are legitimated in advance but need continually to be performed and tested in every specific context."

Performativity here then, returns as a criteria by which we can judge the aesthetic authenticity of participatory art practices on a case by case basis.

So, from this very brief foray into authenticity I would summarise:

That ethics and aesthetics act in different ways to establish authenticity in art, art institutions, social art practices, feminist art practices and activism; and, that performativity plays no small part in determining the outcome.

The potential methodological shift I could propose based on this is as follows:

Use ethical guidelines for any curatorial and collaborative elements of my practice in a meaningful way, not a performative way.
Recognising the limitations of solely ethical judgements on artistic practice, aesthetic judgements must also be prioritised.
Re-evaluate regularly and institute change even if it is difficult, and listen to feedback from other voices.