📕 Movement Aesthetics Toolkit

A Guide to Digital Resistance

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1. Introduction

- What "movement aesthetics" means.
- Why visuals matter in advocacy (from castles + propaganda to AI + digital).
- Clarify: aesthetics are about *belonging, immediacy, and resistance*, not polish.
- As my grandmother Lily Minnock always said: *"History repeats itself, unless we repeat history."* This toolkit is one way to repeat history with purpose.

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2. History & Roots

- Old Irish posters (scarcity, black-and-white, unpolished design).
- Printing press as the original "tool of the people."
- Riddles + storytelling as hidden survival wisdom.
- Contrast: government propaganda for control vs grassroots imagery for resistance.

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3. Principles of Grassroots Design

Grassroots posters were never meant to be glossy. They were meant to *work*.

1. Symbols

Pick from your own culture or story.
- **Historic:** Irish posters used castles to symbolise landlords, or shamrocks for national pride.
- **Modern:** Disability rights posters use wheelchairs, canes, or digital icons like Wi-Fi.
➡️Symbols make the struggle visible.

2. Text

Keep it **bold, simple, and direct.**
- **Historic:** "Éire Aiséirí!" (Ireland Revived!) — short and explosive.
- **Modern:** "Nothing About Us Without Us" — clear and unforgettable.
➡️Clarity beats cleverness.

3. Colours

Less is more.
- **Historic:** Black ink + one shade.

- **Modern:** Zines with two-tone palettes feel authentic.
➡️Restriction sharpens impact.

4. Slogans

Always target **systems, not people.**
- **Historic:** Tenant rights posters attacked *landlordism* as a system.
- **Modern:** Climate justice posters target *Big Oil* or *policy systems*.
➡️Systems last. People change.

5. Imperfection = Authenticity

Hand-made edges weren't mistakes — they were signals.
- **Historic:** Secret press runs = uneven fonts, ink marks.
- **Modern:** Cardboard protest signs carry the same energy.
➡️Imperfection shows urgency and truth.

🔄These principles aren't "design rules." They're reminders: **movements are built by people, for people.**

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4. From Printing Press to AI

Yesterday's presses, today's AI. Different tools, same purpose.

Scarcity Then

- **Mixed fonts:** 1916 Proclamation shows misaligned letters (shortage of type).
- **Two-pass printing:** Sheets printed in halves, heavy inking top/bottom.
- **Limited palettes:** Ink economy = black + one accent.

Abundance Now

- **AI = abundance.** Too many outputs; the challenge is choosing.
- **Responsibility matters:** Not *can we print?* but *what should we print?*
- **Ethics:** Co-create with communities (Nothing About Us Without Us).

Side-by-Side Example

- **Then:** "Speak Irish / Revive Ireland" — cultural survival.
- **Now:** "Tell Your Story / Revive Power" — digital storytelling as advocacy.

🔄AI doesn't replace grassroots traditions — it extends them.

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5. DIY How-To (Quick Guide)

- Step 1: Pick a struggle or story.

- Step 2: Choose a symbol.
- Step 3: Add bold text.
- Step 4: Restrict colours.
- Step 5: Target systems, not people.

Worked Example

Struggle: Accessibility in public spaces.
Symbol: A ramp leading to a doorway (instead of stairs).
Text: Blocky stencil font: "ACCESS IS POWER."
Colours: Black background, white text, one accent colour (red).
Slogan: Target system, not person → "Design Systems, Not Barriers."

☮Final Poster: A stencil-style poster of a ramp leading upward, with strong block text "ACCESS IS POWER." Limited palette makes it look authentic. The slogan reframes critique at the system level.

Visual Step-By-Step Mockup

To make this clearer, you can build a **4-panel instructional poster**: 1. Panel 1 → A simple sketch of a **ramp symbol**.
2. Panel 2 → Add **bold text** over it ("ACCESS IS POWER").
3. Panel 3 → Restrict to **two tones** (black, white + red accent).
4. Panel 4 → Add the **system-focused slogan** at the bottom: "Design Systems, Not Barriers."

This sequence can be shared as a poster, slide, or social media carousel. It shows people exactly how to go from an idea → to a finished grassroots poster.

Sample Alt Text for Mockup

Four-panel instructional poster showing how to build a grassroots-style advocacy poster. Panel 1 shows a ramp symbol. Panel 2 adds bold text reading "ACCESS IS POWER." Panel 3 limits the palette to black, white, and red. Panel 4 adds the slogan "Design Systems, Not Barriers." The overall look is raw, stencil-like, and defiant, echoing historic protest posters.

6. AI Prompt Kit

If you want to bring these steps to life visually, here's a set of AI prompts you can adapt.

AI is today's printing press. Use prompts that echo immediacy, scarcity, and hand-made qualities.

General Prompt Structure

"A street-poster style design, printing texture, bold text, limited colours, slogan: [your slogan]. Symbols: [your symbols]."

Example Prompts

1. Scarcity / Archival Aesthetic

"A vintage 1910s black-and-white photograph, grainy and uneven, resembling an old clandestine printing press image. Ink smudges, crooked letters, scratches, dust, immediate feel."

Alt Text Template: Black-and-white poster with grainy paper, blurred ink, and misaligned lettering. The message looks raw and urgent, evoking clandestine printing.

2. Grassroots Symbol Poster

"A stencil-print style poster with ink textures and bold, simple lettering. Restricted palette: black, white, and one accent colour (red or green). Central symbol: [castle / wheelchair / network icon]."

Alt Text Template: Grassroots-style poster with block text and a central [symbol]. Colours limited to black, white, and one accent. Looks defiant and hand-made.

3. Storytelling Continuity (Old → New)

"Blended diptych. Left: historic Irish monochrome poster with press texture, slogan 'Speak Irish / Revive Ireland.' Right: colourful modern poster with digital symbols, slogan 'Tell Your Story / Revive Power.' Both halves fade together."

Alt Text Template: Split poster blending historic Irish slogan with a modern colourful advocacy poster. Old and new aesthetics merge, highlighting continuity of storytelling.

4. Systems vs People

"Grassroots poster with stencil-like textures. Symbols: castles, government buildings, oil rigs, corporate towers. Bold red and black text: 'Critique Systems, Not People.' Restricted palette."

Alt Text Template: Street-poster design with red and black block letters over symbols of systemic power (castles, rigs, towers). Text reads "Critique Systems, Not People."

5. Abundance vs Scarcity

"Split composition. Left side: 1916-style printing press scene, monochrome, smudged paper texture. Right side: colourful laptop screen showing AI generating posters. Slogan: 'The Tools Changed. The Purpose Didn't.'"

Alt Text Template: Poster split between a vintage press in black-and-white and a bright digital laptop. Beneath: "The Tools Changed. The Purpose Didn't."

6. Collective Gallery Wall

"A wall covered with overlapping posters, some black-and-white, some colourful modern designs. Peeling paper, smudges, chaotic but alive."

Alt Text Template: A crowded wall of overlapping posters — old monochrome and new colourful designs layered together. Chaotic but vibrant, representing collective resistance.

7. DIY Challenge Poster (Step-By-Step)

"Instructional poster in grassroots style. Four panels: (1) Symbol (shamrock/wheelchair). (2) Bold Text. (3) Limited Colours. (4) Systems, not People. Caption: 'DIY Grassroots Design.'"
Alt Text Template: Four-panel instructional poster in stencil style showing symbol, text, colours, and system-focused slogan. Caption: "DIY Grassroots Design."

How to Improve Your Prompts

- **Add texture details:** e.g. "ink smudges," "grainy paper," "stencil edges."
- **Mention scarcity cues:** "two-tone," "archival," "hand-printed."
- **Be explicit with symbols:** e.g. "castle walls" vs just "castle."
- **Control the vibe:** use tone words like *defiant, immediate, collective, raw.*
- **State what NOT to include:** add "no frames, no polish" if you want unpolished visuals.
- **Set format:** mention ratio (e.g. 2:3 portrait) or medium (impasto oil, stencil print).

Accessibility Reminder

Every AI image must come with **alt text** describing its style *and* message. Templates are provided above for each prompt.

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7. Participation & Collective Action

- Run your own poster challenge.
- Build galleries online/offline.
- Share responsibly, credit creators.

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8. Closing Reflection

- *"History repeats itself, unless we repeat history."* — *Lily Minnock*
- Storytelling as survival → resistance → empowerment.
- Invitation: adapt this toolkit to your culture, history, and struggle.

Quick Reference Sheet

Principles: Symbols • Bold Text • Limited Colours • System-focused slogans • Imperfection as authenticity.
DIY Steps: Pick struggle → Choose symbol → Add text → Restrict colours → Target systems.

Top Prompts: Scarcity Poster • Storytelling Continuity • Systems vs People.
Alt Text Tip: Always describe both the *style* (archival, stencil, raw) and the *message* (slogan + symbols).

Sidebar: How to Cite Images Ethically

- **Public Domain:** Free to use, but give context.
- **Creative Commons:** Respect license (BY = credit, CC0 = free use).
- **Archives/Museums:** Credit the institution.
- **AI Images:** Be transparent: *"AI-assisted, in grassroots style."*
- **Alt text:** Always add meaningful alt text.

References & Further Reading

- "Ireland Revived! / Speak Irish" poster, ca. 1950s.
- The 1916 Proclamation (Liberty Hall, clandestine print).
- Disability rights slogan: "Nothing About Us Without Us."
- W3C: Alt Text guidelines (WCAG).
- National Museums NI & CAIN poster archives.