

mfa drawing & intermedia

becky thera | **lacuna**

*lacuna*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Drawing and Intermedia

Department of Art and Design  
University of Alberta

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Bits of string hanging  
covering the walls, the ceiling.  
Like the space behind the fabric  
it is chaotic.  
My great-grandmother's presence.  
Her story making sense  
as she was in this place too.

It is filled with ghosts.

I pull the strings to find a way out  
a reprieve from the darkness.  
My breath has become shallow.  
Sometimes absent.

The space gives way and I fall  
into water.  
A new space that is both body and sacred.  
Safety.  
The sun shines through my closed eyelids  
water whispering secrets into my ears.  
This ambiguous space.  
Do I still exist?  
My feet find nothing  
to hold onto  
no matter how hard they search.  
Toes stretching.  
Fragile movement keeping me afloat.

I submerge my face  
beneath the surface  
and let out a scream.  
It takes all the air from my lungs.  
Breath bubbling to the surface.

A voice is here within  
my lungs. I will keep  
searching for space  
to ground my feet.

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As survivors, our voices contain the language of resistance. Voices that have been silenced, dismissed and ignored for too long. Due to feelings of shame, humiliation or fear, over 80% of sexual assault victims do not report to the authorities (University of Alberta, 2015). With its roots in my personal efforts to navigate the aftermath of my assault, this exhibition is the culmination of my search for voice. I found my own, my great-grandmother's and those of a few brave women who chose to share with me. These voices have built into an overwhelming mass to fill the lacuna of a lost history of survivors. In the words of Tracy Emin, "I start with myself and end up with the universe" (Brown, 2006).



Thera\_001 **you are nothing (to me)**, 2018, Digital print on aluminum, 42" X 20"



Thera\_002 **installation view**, 2018, Digital prints on aluminum



Thera\_003 **Rapist**, 2018, Digital print on aluminum, 32" X 31"





Thera\_004 **Within and Without**, 2018, Digital print on aluminum, 32" X 31"

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The bathtub encompasses the horror of trauma – the disassociation, fear, and loneliness that fills its silence. I could float in the tub, completely untethered. In a world that feels frozen and distant, here I could feel. I could let go of all the tears that I could not cry in front of others. I could wash, a desperate attempt to feel clean again. To feel like me. There is a lingering violence in the unsaid, as I have felt the unspoken actions of my rape haunting me. In the stillness hangs the words of Dr. Laura Brown:

“These experiences are not unusual, statistically; they are well within the ‘range of human experience.’ They are the experiences of most of the women who come into my office every day. They are experiences that could happen in the life of any girl or woman in North America today. They are experiences to which women accommodate; potentials for which women make room in their lives and their psyches. They are private events, sometimes known only to the victim and perpetrator” (Brown, 2015).

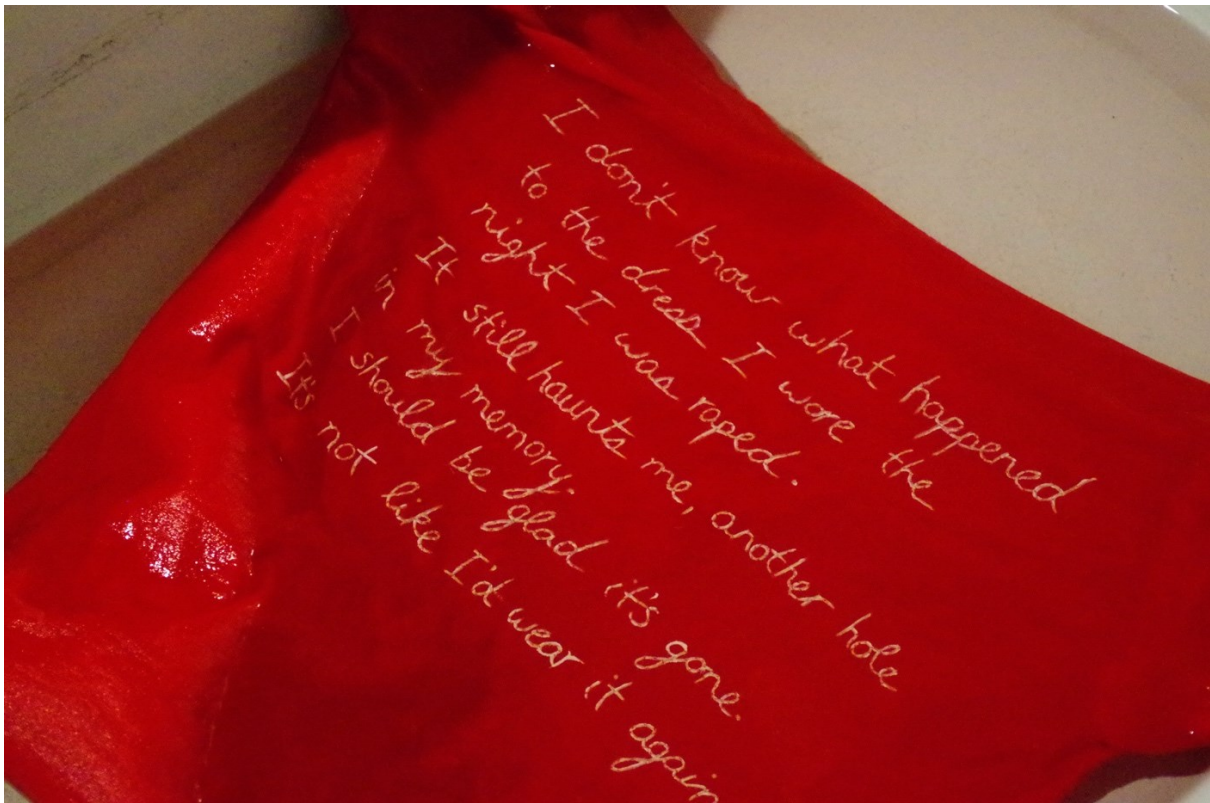


Thera\_005 **Release (installation view)**, 2018, bathtub, fabric, embroidery thread, water, audio, 3 videos





Thera\_006 **Release (detail)**, 2018, bathtub, fabric, embroidery thread, water, audio, 5.5' X 2.5'



Thera\_007, **Release (detail)**, 2018, bathtub, fabric, embroidery thread, water, audio





Thera\_008, **Release (video still)**, 2018, video



Thera\_009 **Release (video still)**, 2018, video



Thera\_010 Release (video still), 2018, video



Thera\_011 Banners (installation view), 2016-2018, fabric, embroidery thread, ink, digital print, silkscreen



Thera\_012 **Silence**, 2018, fabric, ink, silkscreen, 45" X 117"





Thera\_013 **Silence (detail)**, 2018, fabric, ink, silkscreen



Thera\_014 **Dissociation (detail)**, 2017, fabric, digital print of an ink drawing, embroidery thread



Thera\_015 **Dissociation**, 2017, fabric, digital print of an ink drawing, embroidery thread, 45" X 117"





Thera\_016 **my body isn't mine**, 2016, fabric, ink, embroidery thread, 45" X 117"





Thera\_017 **my body isn't mine (detail)**, 2016, fabric, ink, embroidery thread



THERA\_018, **so many women**, 2018, Fabric, ink, embroidery thread, 45" X 117"



Thera\_019 Like Synchronized Swimmers, 2018, fabric, embroidery thread, silkscreen, 45" X 117"





Thera\_020 **so many women (detail)**, 2018, fabric, ink, embroidery thread



Thera\_021 **Like Synchronized Swimmers**, 2018, fabric, ink, embroidery thread, silkscreen

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As I began to access the language to discuss my personal trauma, I opened my practice up to the experiences of others. These voices ranged from the daily violence of cat-calling shared over a community stitching group to more gut-wrenching private interviews. The importance of feminist research methods rings true here, the need for story-telling as activism. Our experiences are folded into the act of embroidery. A skill that was passed down to me from my great-grandmother, embroidery holds a history of women's work and calls for empathy and care through each stitch. This technique brings in the voice of my great-grandmother, of generations of women who have suffered their own trauma.



Thera\_022 **The Antidote**, 2018, fabric, lace, embroidery thread, metal hoop, 10'

*The Antidote* is a piece of documentation of an ongoing performance project. The performance calls for participants to embroider a message, drawing, etc. onto a large, communal skirt. The intent of this project is to create a community to counter the overwhelming presence of rape culture in our daily lives. Many discussions were born from this project, as participants shared stories from their daily lives about cat-calling, harassment and assault.

This project is not only to share our experiences, but to offer messages of hope and strength to others (or ourselves). In a small way, our community is able to challenge rape culture through thought, discussion, empathy and making. The craft of embroidery is essential to this work, as it calls for meditation, thoughtfulness and care. This act of stitching is a micro representation of what can be done as a society to heal and change. It asks the participants to consider how rape culture affects their lives, and to tear it down.

To reference Dr. Judith Herman, “The solidarity of the group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience” (Herman, 1997)

This project has been performed in various meaningful locations around Edmonton. The first took place on a residential street at night. The second, at a pub. Third, a parkade. The last three locations were selected to expand the community involved. A performance was done as a part of PARK(ing) Day Edmonton, one was hosted by the Feminists at the U of A, and finally, one at my home. Each location offered something different to the performance. However, all fostered wonderful conversation, awareness, and profound additions to the skirt.

The participants were both men and women, friends and strangers. I would like to thank all who participated in this project. Over thirty people have contributed so far, and I am sorry I cannot name each of you individually. I am truly grateful for the time and effort you shared to this project.

This is an ongoing project. I look forward to taking this performance to other locations, to fill the lacuna of our lost history with voices.

The quotes on the adjacent walls are taken from anonymous interviews I conducted during my MFA studies. This research was essential to creating a better understanding of survivor’s experiences with trauma and healing. Thank you to all my anonymous participants. I am grateful for the strength and bravery it took to share your stories. You are certainly not alone.

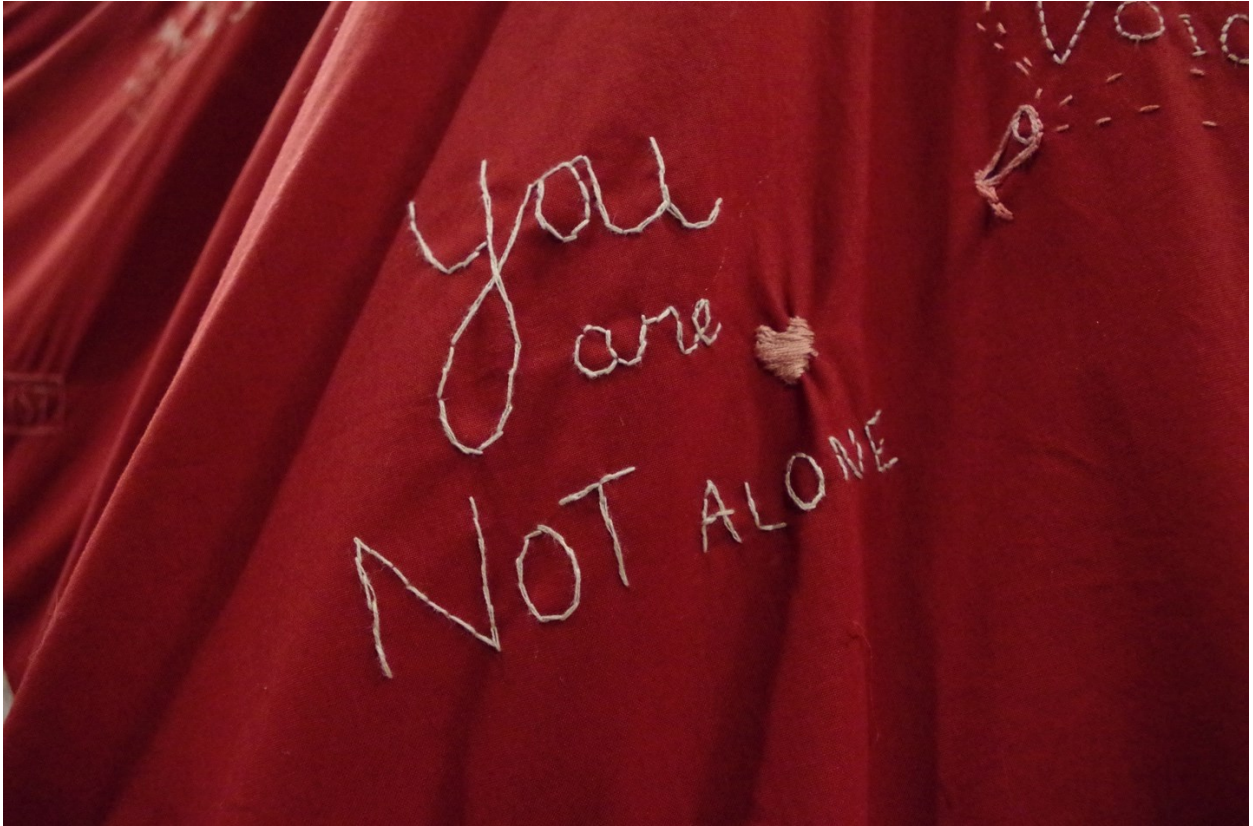




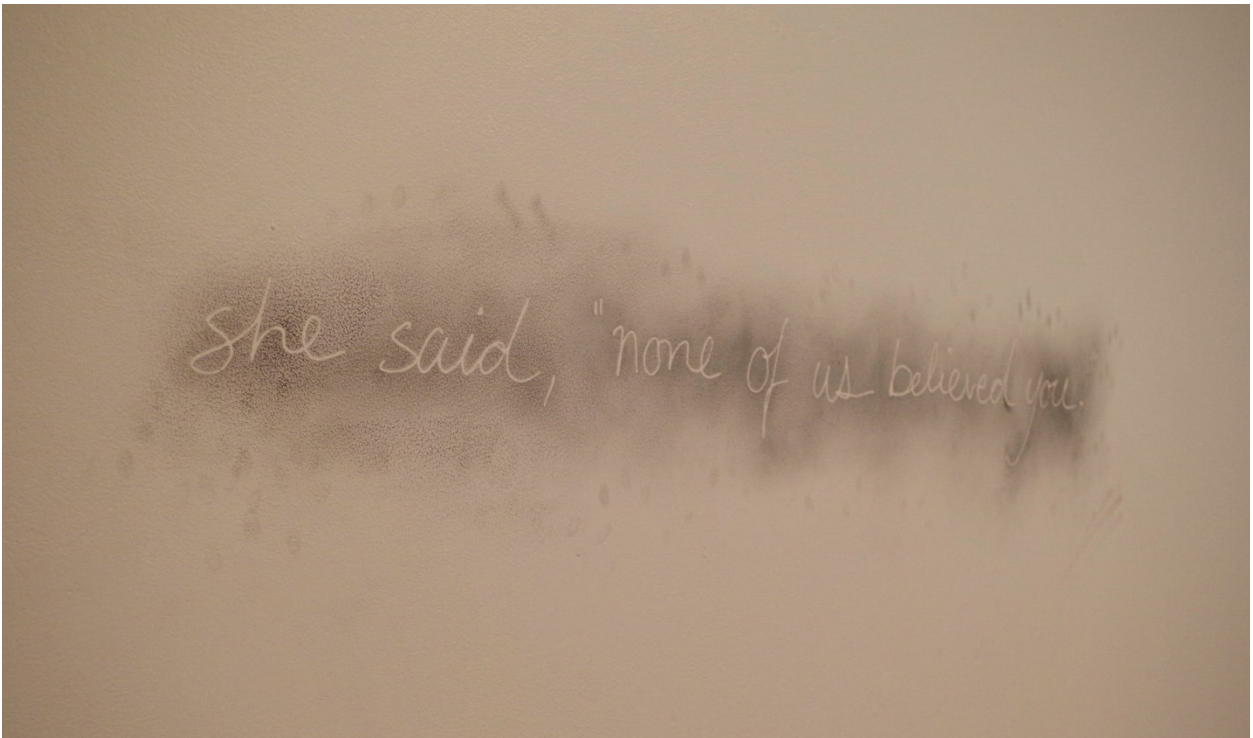
Thera\_023 **The Antidote (installation view)**, 2018, fabric, lace, embroidery thread, metal hoop, vinyl



Thera\_024 **The Antidote (installation view)**, 2018, fabric, lace, embroidery thread, metal hoop, digital prints



Thera\_025 **The Antidote (detail)**, 2018, fabric, embroidery thread



Thera\_026 **The Antidote (installation detail)**, 2018, graphite powder



Immediately after I felt sick.  
Really sick.

We can't process things  
that don't make any sense.

He was the adult.

This motherfucker gets to be dead  
and not suffer anymore  
and I have to go on living  
and suffer with what he did  
to me.

Something in me understood  
that what happened  
wasn't ok.

Was it my fault?



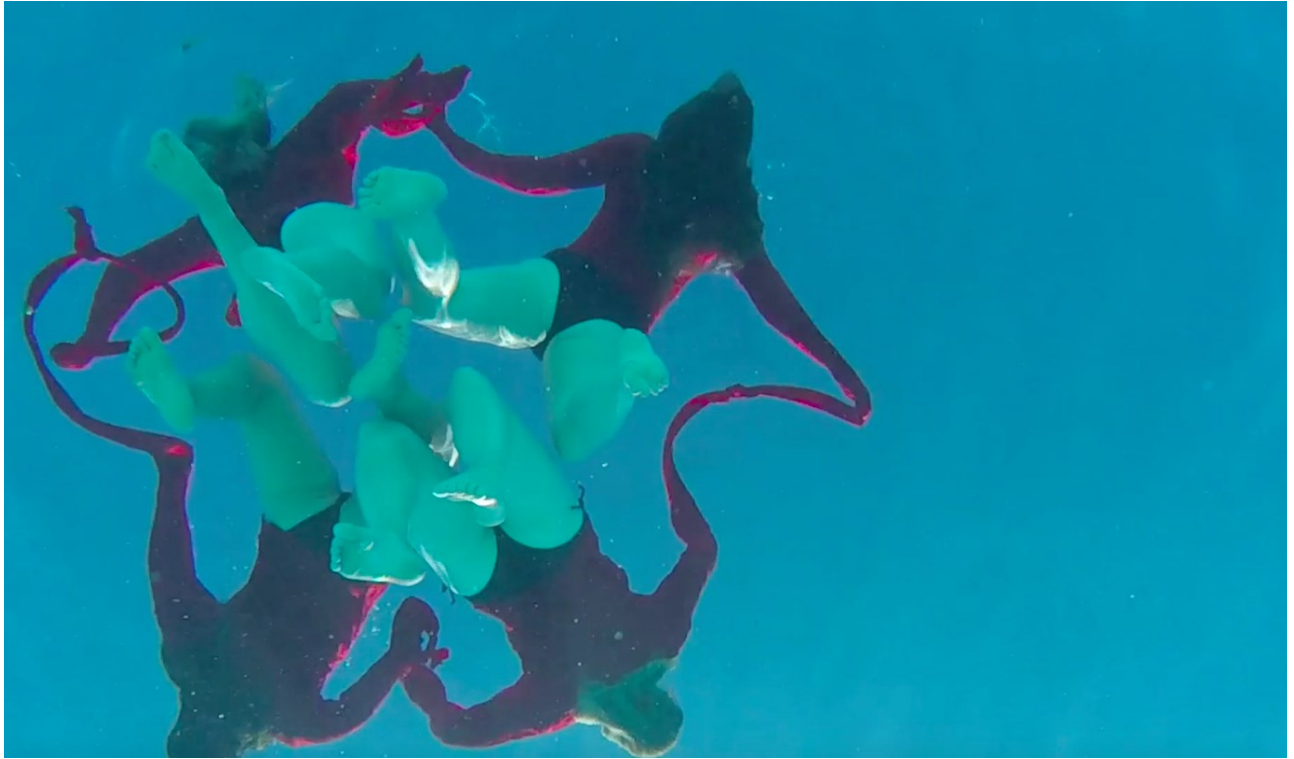
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The final gesture of this exhibition is the shout. The video acts as both poetry and activism, as it challenges our societal notions of what “normal sexual assault” looks like through the use of embodied affect. In our current political climate, art is necessary to explore the ugliness that accompanies gender-based oppression. The rawness of trauma. We deserve a place to embrace negative affect through feeling uncomfortable, angry, sad and confused. These emotions are as valuable as reason and thought, as valuable as hope and optimism. I want to embrace negative affect to propel change.

This exhibition is an investigation, an exploration, a journey. I want you to question your own experiences, to listen to others and to feel less alone than I did. Rape is a tool of patriarchal power, but we, the survivors, are stronger.



Thera\_028 **At Dawn, I Will Win**, 2018, Video installation with audio



Thera\_029 *At Dawn, I Will Win* (video still), 2018, video installation with audio



Thera\_030 *At Dawn, I Will Win* (video still), 2018, video installation with audio

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## Becky Thera | *acknowledgements*

I would not have made it through this journey without all of the incredible people who generously offered support in so many ways. Thank you.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Sean Caulfield. Our meetings were always supportive and thought-provoking, while constantly pushing the work to be better. They were often moments of relief when I was feeling doubtful. Thank you so much. For all my colleagues who offered critiques in my studio, including Marilene Oliver, Tanya Harnett and Natalie Loveless. I am grateful for our interactions which fostered new perspectives and at times, challenging revelations.

Thank you to Michelle Meagher, for your continual support in providing dissemination opportunities, feedback and discussion. Thank you to Scott Smallwood, for your expertise on sound. Your patience and sharing of knowledge was so valuable. Thank you to Brian Webb for your consultations on choreography. Thank you to Cam Wallace for your technical help.

Thank you to Blair Brennan for your gallery expertise. Your knowledge and experience was extremely helpful in bringing this show to fruition. Thank you to all the gallery staff for your installation help, you are all amazing! Thank you to Sue Colberg for your incredible design work.

To my peers, working with you and being surrounded by such incredible art has been inspiring.

Thank you for the funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Arts, the Green and Gold Grant, the Walter H. Johns Fellowship and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

To all of my collaborators. Three years ago, I never would have guessed that my work would become centred on collaboration. To the wonderful women who swam for me to create videos: Liz Scott, Abigail Nyman, Randi Burton, Paulina Hauf, Xenia Cravetchi, Anna Embury and Meghan Pohlod. You gave so much time and energy to creating these videos. I truly enjoyed the give and take that came with creating this work. Thank you to the Edmonton Aquamasters for renting pool space for me to work. Thank you to my dad, David Thera, for filming me at the lake.

To all of my collaborators who helped create *The Antidote*. Every one of you added your voice to this piece, and for that, I am so grateful. There were over 30 people who stitched something onto this piece, including both friends and strangers. I am sorry I cannot name all of you individually, but your contribution is greatly appreciated.

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To all of the anonymous people I interviewed as research for this show. I cannot say enough how grateful I am that you shared your stories with me. This show is truly for survivors like all of you. I am constantly inspired by your bravery, strength and optimism. Thank you.

To my dear friend, Arden Anglely. Thank you for the editing help, support, inspiration, and the sharing of ideas. Through difficulties and celebrations, you have been with me the whole way.

To my friends and family, I am so grateful for your unflinching support. I know it hasn't been an easy journey, but I'm not sure where I would be without your strength and love.

To my mom, Lynn Thera. I am constantly inspired by you, through both your work and character. You have given me more than I can possibly put into words. Thank you for the strength, reassurance and love when I needed it most. You are the arms around me. Thank you.

Finally, to my partner Rishi Jaipaul. You are my ground. You believed in me throughout the last few years, especially when I lacked confidence in myself. You constantly helped with the work through our discussions, your technical expertise, and even transporting a 300-pound bathtub. You lift me up, you make me feel safe. Thank you, my love.

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