

I'll Cry If I Want To

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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MASTER OF FINE ART

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# *I'll Cry If I Want To*

## *Abstract*

In my artistic practice, I employ a wide variety of media to create work intended to create an immersive, personal and vulnerable narrative for the viewer, connecting to my own and hopefully sparking a memory of the viewer's personal experience. I use labour-intensive hand textile practices such as embroidery, crochet and sewing. I also use collected objects, especially kitschy, crafty ones, drawings, photography, and video to form immersive installations. I am interested in making work that doesn't require the viewer to have prior academic training to understand at least part of it, to bring it outside the insular sphere of the art world, which can be stifling. I often refer not just to art and cultural theorists but to pop culture, blogs, feelings and conversations I have when making and talking about art. This thesis statement contains a chronology of my experience in the MFA program, as well as descriptions of influences on the context of my practice.

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# 1. Introduction

*Feelings, nothing more than feelings...*

-Morris Albert

The process for my work, especially my thesis installation, *I'll Cry If I Want To*, is the culmination of multimodal experimentation and personal encounters. It is important to discuss the chronology of the work for the final piece to be fully explained. I often consider my work to be about feelings because my practice is based in contemplative processes and inevitably connects my personal history to the final work.<sup>1</sup> With the personal ever in mind, I also veer into topics that have influenced the work and sometimes appear there, including online activism, selfies, and the politics of girl zines.

## 1.1. Anxiety, Embroidery

Just before the final year of my undergraduate degree<sup>2</sup>, circumstances lead me to realize I had a serious problem with social anxiety.<sup>3</sup> I began to attend therapy, where my

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<sup>1</sup> It is important that, while containing the necessary academic sources, this statement be connected also to personal experiences and feelings. While affect theory is often employed in these discussions, it is often high impossible to explain and I have only scratched the surface of it yet in my own research. In specifically choosing 'feelings' instead, I connect to the memory of being that kid who was always crying in the school yard, telling her tormentors, "You hurt my feelings!" I also playfully toy with making art that comes close to sentimentality, which is often maligned and associated with women's work or low culture.

<sup>2</sup> Alberta College of Art + Design, BFA in Fibre, 2011

<sup>3</sup> "People with social anxiety disorder feel very nervous and uncomfortable in social situations like meeting new people. Or they might feel very anxious when they have to do something in front of other people, like talking in a meeting. Some people feel very anxious in both situations. People with social anxiety disorder often feel like they will say or do the wrong thing. Or they might think that other people will look down on them and think poorly of them because they're "strange" or "stupid." It's important to know that adults with social anxiety disorder recognize that they feel too anxious, but they may not be able to control it."

From the Canadian Mental Health Association - <http://www.cmha.bc.ca/get-informed/mental-health-information/social-anxiety-disorder>

psychologist suggested a contemplative art process to help slow down my racing anxious thoughts.<sup>4</sup> I had done a bit of embroidery from a young age, but hadn't used it much during my time in the program, as it veered dangerously close to quilting, which my mother has done for thirty years. I decided to give it another try and this work became my grad piece, dubbed *The Anxiety Series (figures 1 and 2)*. These small-scale works combined confessions about my experience with anxiety and therapy, and my annoyance of self-help culture. My rediscovery of the process of embroidery was a "Where have you been all my life?" moment. Online, I found a younger community of embroiderers than the 'biddies' of the quilting guild my mother went to, and I quickly made several friends there.<sup>5</sup> Once *The Anxiety Series* had run its course as a body of work, I again became lost because I still had all these anxious feelings, but had seemingly taken that work to its logical conclusion. I continued to embroider and revisit other time consuming and contemplative techniques such as rug-hooking and crochet. While I hadn't ceased other facets of my practice, including photography, drawing and collage, I wasn't sure how to create a cohesive body of work that included more than one medium that could transcend some of the automatic assumptions I encountered from viewers about its origins as 'mere' hobbycraft.

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<sup>4</sup> While in traditional contemplative art, the process is more important than the end result, I skewed the definition to my own design and was able to create work with a product that I believed people could relate to, but which was originally rooted in process. More information on contemplative art here: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/contemplativeart>

<sup>5</sup> As a child, I would often attend quilting guild meetings with my mom, which were exciting because someone always brought baked goods. I would bring a book to read, some drawing, crochet or embroidery to work on. One of the quilting ladies would inevitably ask, "So are you going to become a quilter?" and I would become very angry and shout, "NO!" My mom has made hundreds of quilts throughout the years and the idea of an all-consuming hobby that filled the entire house with pieces of fabric and treacherous pins and needles terrified me.



Figure 1 - Lindsay Joy, *Dread*, from *The Anxiety Series*. Embroidery and appliqué on linen, 2011.



Figure 2 - Lindsay Joy, *The Anxiety Series*, install view, Embroidery and appliqué on linen, 2011.

## *2. A Chronology: Looping Attempts at Belonging*

*Feelin's just lead us on till we know where we're goin'*

-Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty

I arrived in Winnipeg with a half-finished hooked rug which reads, “But You Shouldn’t Feel Like That,” and now marks the entrance way into my current studio space. The entries from my personal blog – I have kept an online journal on and off since 2002 – from this point speak extensively about feeling homesick and not knowing what to do with myself.

“I’m not sure if I’ve ever really felt ‘homesick’. I think a big part of this is not really having a ‘home’ to long for, maybe. Even though I was in Calgary for five years, I didn’t create much of a base there. Right now I’m experiencing some kind of sickness for a place that doesn’t exist yet, I guess.”<sup>6</sup>

I had a difficult time getting started, and often spent time covering the studio itself in different objects, rather than make what I had considered to be ‘artwork’. I lamented in my blog, “Today is supposed to be a studio day, and all I’ve done is tidy and tape more crap to the walls.”<sup>7</sup> I looked further and further inward through the work and created various hiding places for myself through installation, which explored the tiny-ness of my studio space and ways to cover myself and other objects. In one experimental installation, I crammed the space between two walls, meant to divide our studio space, with objects.

“The tunnel is a load-bearing gap in the walls built to separate our studios. I would walk to the back and place my forehead on the cool back wall, peering through the crack as if there was some magic on the other side.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Feeling Homesick” blog entry, September 20, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> “What do I do?” blog entry, October 5, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> “Experimental Installation” blog entry, January 28, 2013.

At the end of the space was a projected video into a frame of a slow pan down the crack in the back wall. This was the first video I made intentionally as an artwork. During this time, I also made cards to hand out, which read, “Do you need a friend?” and contained a link to a secret page on my website. The recipient was to fill out a questionnaire to ‘apply’ to be my friend, but I abandoned this project after two events: A friend told me that eventually I would have to accept or reject applicants. Secondly, due to technical incompetence, the website disappeared. I began a sporadic series of embroidered works at this time, covering the pre-printed aida cloth of a kit with a chosen stitch instead of following the pattern. *I Have Run Out of Pithy Remarks* used the humorously named ‘Burden stitch,’ found in the instruction sheet, and the coloured wool thread meant to stitch the original design, ‘Autumn Bouquet’. I felt at a loss for what to say, as an artist who continued to hold text at a high level of importance, but the repetitive motion of stitching was pleasant and made me feel productive. I began to relate with an image in a vintage knitting instruction manual of a hand-knitted snowsuit, which I dubbed the ‘Sisyphean Snowsuit, a time consuming, laborious project to create a completely useless (but lovingly made and gifted) object.

*Safety Net* was meant to allow me to work by changing the atmosphere of my studio. I had a friend photograph me there, under the net. In my accompanying statement, I wrote:

“A comfort object or security blanket is often used to help someone cope with a new or difficult situation. The emotional bond is almost always formed by touch, which in a handmade item is twofold, the touch of the maker and the touch of the user. I have made the *Studio Safety Net* as a comfort object, specifically to render the institutional art studio more comfortable to facilitate creation, an often terrifying process. This also creates a loop - I need to make the object before I can feel safe in making. The pleasure and labour of hand crochet, which the dictionary describes as



'pulling loops through other loops,' the repetition and counting of the stitch, and the tactile feeling of the wool between my fingers instil a sense of calm. Making such an item for myself is a form of self-care for my own anxieties, an act of self-love. I've chosen colours based loosely on the hazy colour memory of the baby quilt my mother made for me, the first quilt of hundreds; the creation of a monster. The exaggerated holes and length allow it to embrace any objects it comes into contact with, to create the feeling of safety associated with a lack of responsibility. My studio can be turned into a fort, a safe protective place where something can be made without fear of failure."<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3 - Lindsay Joy, *Safety Net*, Crocheted wool, 2012.

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<sup>9</sup> Artist statement, *Safety Net*, February 2013.

## 2.1. Influences

*Feminism changed my entire outlook on the world and its impact on my life has never diminished. Nor could I have gone back, even if I'd wanted to: it's like jumping off a roof – too late to change your mind halfway there.*

-Lucy Lippard, *Moving Targets/Concentric Circles*

In attempting to reconcile numerous parallel practices, I discovered what Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer coined, in 1977, as *femmage*, or feminist collage. To qualify as *femmage*, work must contain at least seven of these fourteen elements:

“1. The work is by a woman; 2. Saving and collecting are important elements; 3. Recycled scraps are fundamental to the process; 4. The theme has a woman-life context; 5. There is covert imagery; 6. An audience of intimates is addressed; 7. An event is commemorated; 8. The work has a diarist's point of view; 9. Drawing and/or handwriting are sewn in; 10. Silhouetted images are fixed on other material; 11. Identifiable images form a narrative sequence; 12. Abstract forms produce a pattern; 13. Photographs or other printed matter are included; 14. It is both practical and visually pleasing.”<sup>10</sup>

While not *exactly* fitting, this term allows an entry point in discussing work like mine, that varies wildly in medium but converges in its aesthetic and theory. Lucy Lippard also often discusses collage as ‘particularly feminist’ and describes it as “an aesthetic that willfully takes apart what is or is supposed to be and rearranges it in ways that suggest what it could be.”<sup>11</sup> The processes at play in my work, from arranging imagery for an embroidery, to assembling an installation, could all be described as collage. *Femmage* is also invoked in the discussion of contemporary artists who make what has been (unfortunately) coined by craft theorist Glenn Adamson, ‘Sloppy Craft’, which is most

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<sup>10</sup> See Schapiro and Meyer 66.

<sup>11</sup> See Lippard 25.



commonly associated with the artist Josh Faught. ‘Sloppy Craft’ continues the thread of investigation begun by early feminists such as Schapiro and continued in the 1990s by artists including Mike Kelley and Tracey Emin.<sup>12</sup> While Faught’s work is often written about as a “haywire pileup of textile techniques and confessional imagery,” it is clear that it is very deliberate in its presentation, and not haphazardly put together as is often the first impression.<sup>13</sup> The 2006 piece, *Nobody Knows I’m A Lesbian*, combines gold lamé, many textile techniques, collage, beeswax, silkscreened wallpaper and a wide array of textures and colours. The artist often plays with notions of queerness, self-help and popular culture in his work and incorporates found and collected objects, including abject ones, artificial nails as one example.<sup>14</sup> Another influential artist whose practice could fall under the ‘sloppy craft’ umbrella is Allyson Mitchell. Mitchell combines a rigorous academic background with accessible artwork that is often humorous and anti-aesthetic and has also incorporated zines and more traditional activism surrounding fat and queer politics. Julie Hollenbach’s *Comfort/Discomfort* discusses how Mitchell’s work subverts the gallery space in several ways. She does this through the domestic – juxtaposing domestic objects with the institutional space itself, and through the collaborative space the Feminist Art Gallery, which is a project she shares with her partner, artist Deirdre Logue. Through the FAG, as it is known, the institution situates itself in the literal domestic space of their home and garage. The gallery often spills into their living room, and artists are often invited to lodge in their home. Her work subverts the expectations of the average viewer. *The Finger of Craft* was an assemblage of found

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<sup>12</sup> See Adamson 36.

<sup>13</sup> See Adamson 38.

<sup>14</sup> See Faught’s profile for California College of the Arts: <https://www.cca.edu/academics/faculty/hfaught>

textiles not in the main space, but the lobby and hallway of Halifax's Khyber gallery, which surprised viewers with its aesthetic, unusual location and vaguely sexual title.<sup>15</sup> Mitchell also subverts the particular institutional structure of the museum through the anthropological display of the large and hairy *Ladies Sasquatch*.<sup>16</sup> Finally, as another point of departure, rather than 'Sloppy Craft', theorist Mireille Perron suggests the term *inappropriated* to describe artists who use textile practices to negotiate gender and combine domestic practices with other media to "produce meaning and provoke social discourse."<sup>17</sup> Perron writes:

"Their historical position does not allow comfortable relations with the self (textile practices) or the other (dominant art fiction). To be an inappropriated artist is to be in critical relation to one's practice. The inappropriated artist is committed to tension – she does not want to embrace and reflect the values of a practice, she prefers to diffract and displace them. Inappropriated artists live *in the border*."<sup>18</sup>

These are just some ways that theorists have attempted to describe multimodal practices involving domestic craft. Perhaps the blurring of boundaries in this work defies categorization.

I have recently discovered and personally relate to some early feminist video works, such as those of Lisa Steele. In *A Very Personal Story* (1974), a nude and seated Steele recounts the events leading up to the discovery of her mother's body in 1963. In the video, the positioning of Steele's body and hands obscures her face, and she shifts

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<sup>15</sup> Of the title, Mitchell says, "The finger of craft—it's supposed to be kind of gross. ... It's a play on the hand of Christ, and the naughty kind of finger-bang thing. But it's also a play on touch—the finger of craft, it's a magic spell: 'I told you to decorate this place, the finger of craft is angry!' And this building needs the finger of craft—a little love." see Hollenbach 66.

<sup>16</sup> See Hollenbach 13

<sup>17</sup> See Perron 124.

<sup>18</sup> See Perron 125.

and fidgets throughout the piece.<sup>19</sup> The irony and duality of the representation of selfhood in early feminist works like Steele's have been compared to the tensions in Canadian video and textile artist Joyce Weiland's work; between nationalism and formalist aesthetics through crafty quilted objects, humour and eroticism in works such as *Reason Over Passion* and *O Canada*.<sup>20</sup>

Weiland's legacy lives on in the work of contemporaries of mine, the Ladies' Invitational Deadbeat Society (LIDS) collective. Run by Nicole Burisch, Anthea Black and Wednesday Lupiciew, who all have artistic and writing practices in their own right, LIDS has proposed the co-optation of July 1st as 'Joyce Weiland Day'. Images on their site of the inaugural celebration, during their residency at The New Gallery's John Snow House in 2012, depict the three women staging a bed-in under a Weiland-esque quilt they made especially for the occasion<sup>21</sup>.

I am interested in narrative in many forms, including zines, fiction, poetry and comics. Kate Beaton's recent experimental comic, *Ducks*, details her experience working at a mining site in Northern Alberta, including the ambivalence surrounding the sexism she experienced there, as well as the oil industry's impact on the environment, including the titular ducks found dead in the tailings pond.<sup>22</sup> Beaton draws with a simple, carefree,

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<sup>19</sup> See Wark 108.

<sup>20</sup> See Wark 93.

<sup>21</sup> From their website: "The Ladies' Invitational Deadbeat Society (LIDS) was founded in 2006 as a closely-knit affiliation of then-unemployed cultural workers, not working, but still bustin' ass within Alberta artist-run culture. Their activities make visible and politicize women's roles in the local arts economy through tactical laziness, crafty collaboration, over-performance, and wild hilarity." See <http://ladiesinvitationaldeadbeatsociety.wordpress.com>

<sup>22</sup> See *Ducks* on Beaton's blog: <http://beatonna.tumblr.com/post/81993262830/here-is-a-sketch-comic-i-made-called-ducks-in>

almost naïve line and includes humour in this very personal and emotional tale. As another example, the work of Lynda Barry often dwells on issues surrounding girlhood, including her own biracial upbringing. In the comic novel *One! Hundred! Demons!* Barry delves into many topics, including trying to impress boys, dealing with lice and living with her Filipina grandmother, who taught herself to smoke with the lit end of the cigarette in her mouth<sup>23</sup>. Barry's gruesome graphic novel, *Cruddy*, is fictional but contains many references to her own life as the daughter of a butcher living in a poor neighbourhood in the 1970s. The protagonist, Roberta, recalls the main tale, a journey/killing spree with her father at the age of 11. She is discovered covered in blood in the desert and eventually returned to her home, after her mother sees the 'mystery child' on television. In a parallel narrative, Roberta simultaneously recounts mundane details of her current teenage life, hanging out with her manipulative friend, Vicky Talluso. The real combines and complicates the narrative, from seemingly physical markings on the book itself, to a handwritten note from Roberta's sister, imploring, "WHERE ARE YOU?" after the author's apparent suicide.<sup>24</sup> This metanarrative, as well as the protagonist's multiple identities, some appended on her by others, and some self-identified, greatly influence my notions of autobiography and storytelling.

## *2.2. Zines and Other Autobiographical Narratives*

*My emotions are bothersome because they are completely inappropriate.*

*My emotions are inappropriate to my size.*

-Louise Bourgeois

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<sup>23</sup> See Kirtley chapter six.

<sup>24</sup> See Kirtley chapter four.

Writing is often an important component of my work. Early in the MFA program, I made a presentation about nostalgia which veered away from a purely academic lecture and delved into personal details. In this presentation, I discussed my own experience scanning almost 900 (to-date) of my grandmother's photographs after her passing.<sup>25</sup>

"The removed quality of these photographs was like a mystery to solve, in some ways (*figure 6*). The thing about the past, is you can't just ask someone what was going on. I wondered why there were pictures of certain things and times and not of others. There was a large gap in the early to mid sixties where there were almost no photographs at all. My mom said that was a time when they were really broke, but no one knows for sure. And then, why, for example, were there no photographs of my grandmother sewing or doing any of the activities she enjoyed, but many, professionally-taken prints of my grandfather in his workshop with his guns? (*figure 4*) I have one in my studio. Some things might have been lost to the past if I hadn't been scanning the photographs and asking questions. For example, apparently my grandmother used to work in a flower shop, but had to quit because she was too afraid to answer the phone (*figure 5*). I wonder what else was lost."<sup>26</sup>

I went on to discuss my current experience as a newcomer to the city of Winnipeg.

"A respite against complication: when I first got here, I scrambled to feel stable. I was staying with a friend and was feeling lonely and bored. I found these home movies on Youtube and watched a bunch of them.<sup>27</sup> Something about the history of a place is comforting, even if I wasn't there. People always went to the store, or shovelled snow. It made me feel like a part of the place. [...] This next one, of all things, really made me vibrate with nostalgia. It's CBC British Columbia's signon/sign off.<sup>28</sup> This is the part where they tell you all the towns that can receive this station by satellite, as if you care. I get really excited when they mention my town."

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<sup>25</sup> I've posted the presentation on my blog in parts but may eventually turn it into a bookwork, although readers may be asked to open and play CBC's *O Canada* sign-on while they read it: <http://www.lindsayjoy.ca/?s=nostalgia>

<sup>26</sup> Nosy readers may enjoy browsing the photographs: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ednaabrahamson/>

<sup>27</sup> "Downtown Winnipeg in 1966 8mm film" uploaded by Kert Gardner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Nf0NyunbVQ>

<sup>28</sup> "CBUT Sign-On (1989)" uploaded by RetroWinnipeg: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndXay4yhZQc>



Figure 4 - My grandfather in his workshop, 1950s.



Figure 5 - My grandmother (centre) and the flower shop ladies, 1970s.



Figure 6 - My grandmother (right), her twin sister Eva, unidentified giant hand, 1980s.

I had not originally intended this to be an art piece, but it accessed an important narrative element in discussing my attempts to feel belonging. I had made artist books with text in the past (*figure 7*), but their audience was limited to one person at a time. With this in mind, in the summer of 2013, I finally made a zine, entitled *Misgivings* (*figure 8*). This zine detailed my difficulty with summer due to unemployment, anxiety, and self-doubt. In it, I experimented with a few modes of narrative and documented attempts at beating inertia, including writing myself a contract to go outside every



morning and take one polaroid. I also discussed my newly adopted cat and my obsession with Lesley Gore's *You Don't Own Me* (figure 9). I continued to make zines throughout the year, which discussed personal issues and ambivalently nostalgic stories. I often wonder if my constant story recall is related to anxiety. The things I remember most often and in the most detail are times when I felt ashamed or embarrassed in the past. Nostalgia at first feels like a way to escape my current responsibilities, but I quickly remember every embarrassing utterance and every snide comment.<sup>29</sup>

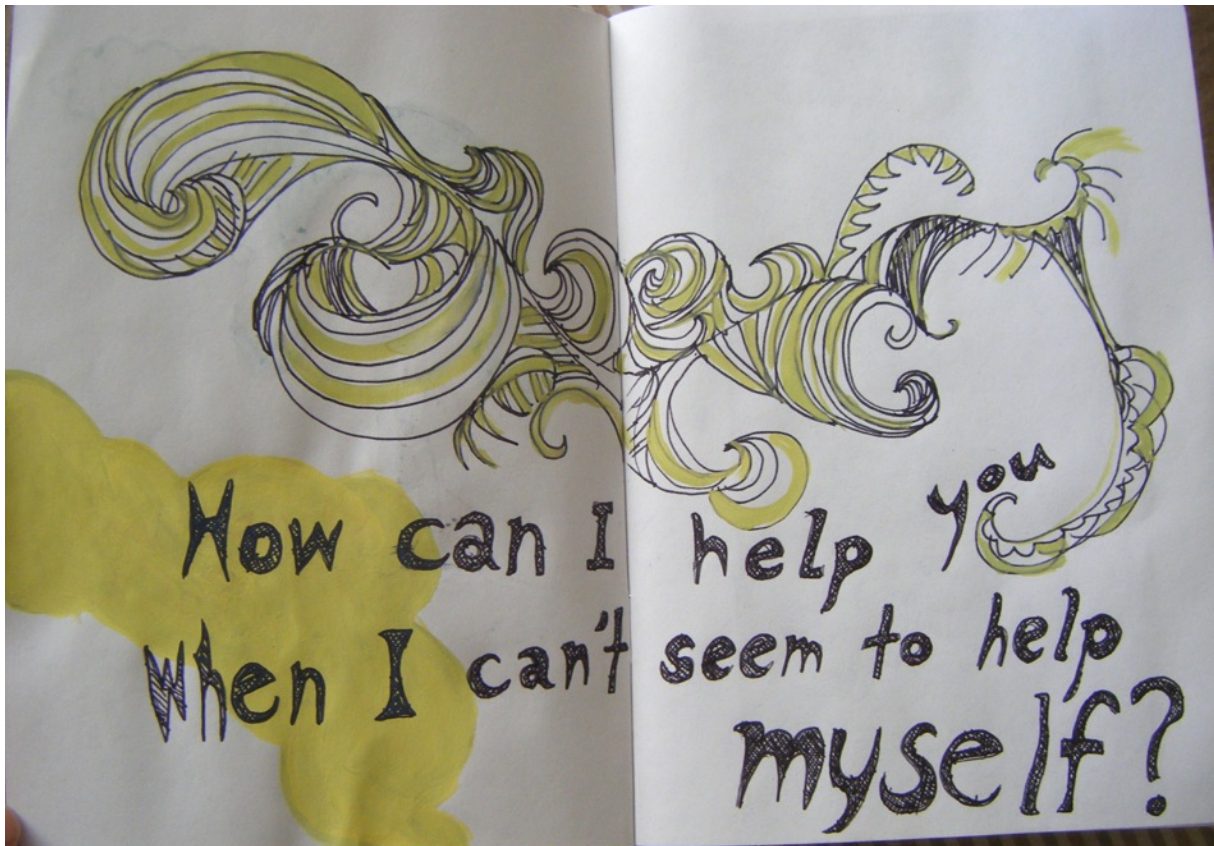


Figure 7 - Lindsay Joy, excerpt, *Ask Me How I Can Help*, artist book for the Sketchbook Project, 2011.

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<sup>29</sup> See Senior for more on the way our brains hold on to past shame: <http://nymag.com/news/features/high-school-2013-1/index5.html>



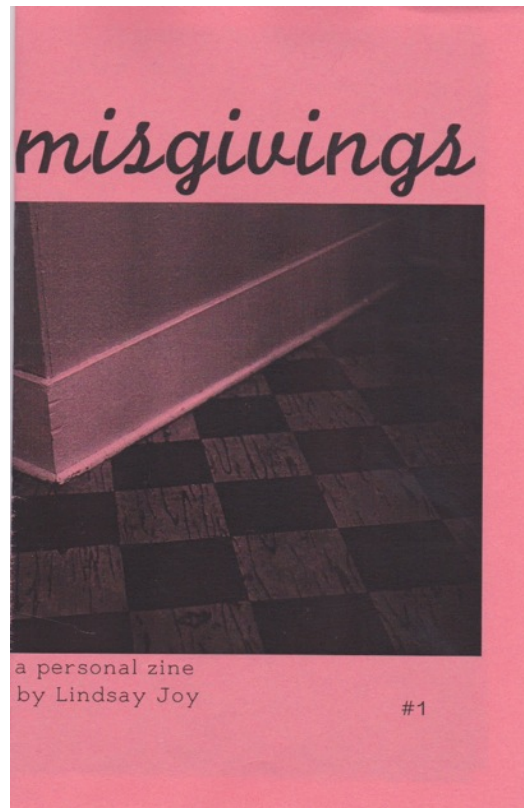


Figure 8 - Lindsay Joy, cover, *Misgivings*, Personal zine, 2013.

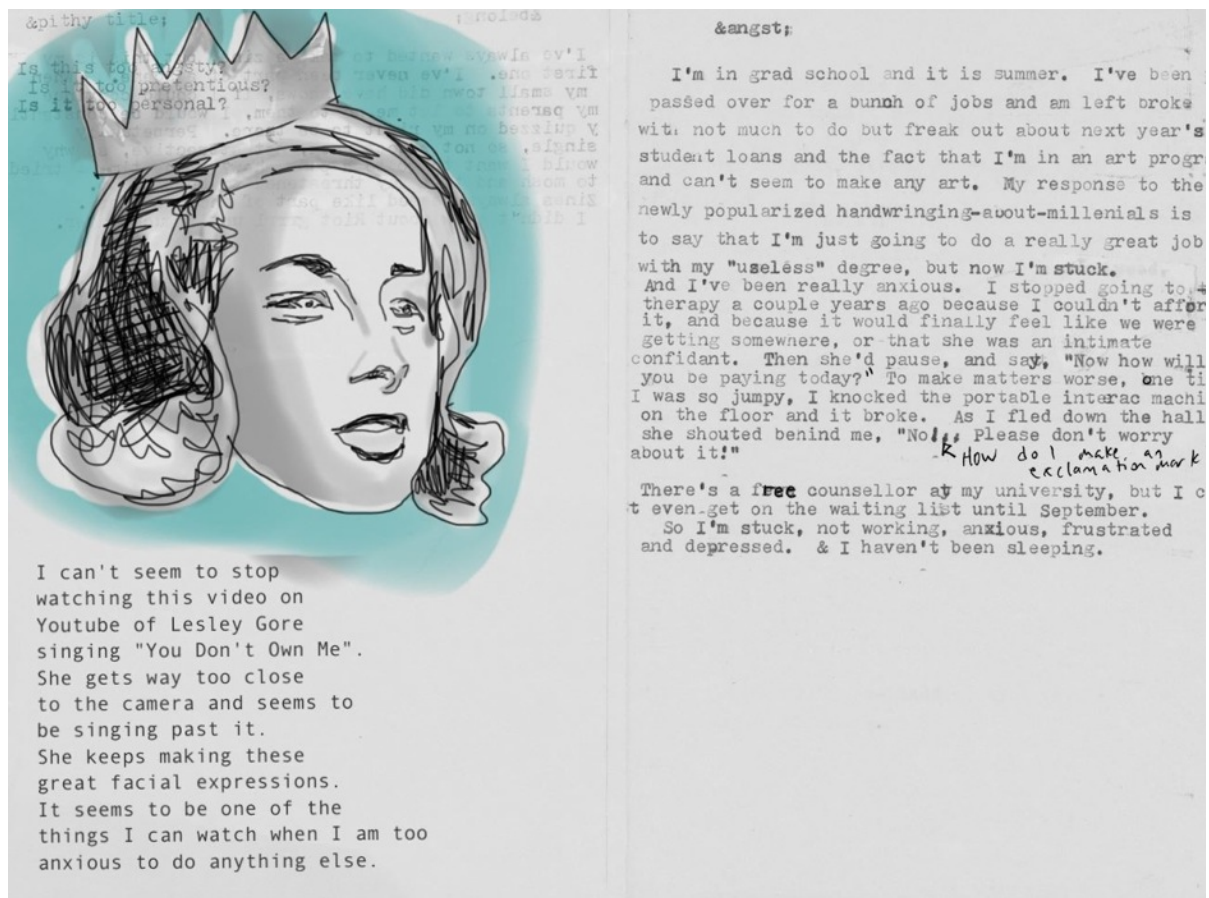


Figure 9 - Lindsay Joy, excerpt, *Misgivings*, Personal zine, 2013.

There has been a recent resurgence in the interest in zines as many 1980s and 1990s girl zines have been making their way into special collections and archives. For instance, Kathleen Hanna of the feminist punk band Bikini Kill donated her zine and ephemera collection to the Fales archive. Some of these were scanned and released in an anthology, *The Riot Grrrl Collection* in 2013.<sup>30</sup> While the Riot Grrrl movement had its issues with not including many women outside the white feminist perspective, the collection includes zines from diverse writers. My interest in zines was further expanded through Allison Piepmeier's vanguard book, *Girl Zines*, which discusses girl zine culture and third wave feminism in depth. Piepmeier describes the activism in zines as containing a 'pedagogy of hope', encouraging others to participate through the zine as object with 'all its seams showing', and zine culture as grounded in a community-minded gift economy where everyone can participate. She describes zines as 'complex literary artefacts' which are written by strategy rather than as a simple record of events.<sup>31</sup>

"Zines should be read for their radical generativity, for the way they combine and recombine rich repertoires of contradictory cultural fragments. They are experimental, multifarious performances, it seems to me, instantiations of multiple subject positions".<sup>32</sup>

Scholars including Piepmeier and Red Chidgey argue that zines should not be excluded from academic study, even though they often use colloquial language and can be made by anyone. Chidgey explains the impetus for much life story zine-writing as stemming

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<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Hanna is the founder of the bands Bikini Kill, Le Tigre, and The Julie Ruin. Bikini Kill distributed zines of the same name to concert attendees.

<sup>31</sup> See Piepmeier chapter three.

<sup>32</sup> See Piepmeier quoting Radway, 91.

from the authors' exclusion from the dominant narratives of history, as personal zine authors are often women, people of colour or part of the LGBTQIAP+ community, and are therefore 'resisting subjects'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in personally wanting to connect to a community of people who had experienced mental health issues through my struggles with anxiety and depression, one of the best places to find and connect with earnest, funny, snarky or angry, stories about others' personal experiences has been zines.<sup>34</sup> The physical qualities of a zine, the way that it functions as an almost-private confessional through its scale as well as usually limited (or even very limited) print runs make it possible to discuss very private and explicit information, but still retain control of the size and type of audience a zine reaches. In addition, though zines are often seen as thrown together or anti-aesthetic, zine-production can be extremely labour-intensive and hands-on, from the making of the 'flat' or the master copy, to copying and rudimentary book-binding, and even the construction and decoration of the envelopes in which they are mailed.<sup>35</sup> This dissonance between labour and value brings to mind the high-low divide in the crafts, which often devalues work associated with women or leisure.<sup>36</sup> While zines are not generally associated with art, a resurgence in zine-production by feminist art collectives is occurring, often in tandem with physical

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<sup>33</sup> See Chidgey 4.

<sup>34</sup> Two digitized examples:  
Brainscan by Alex Wreck:  
[http://issuu.com/alexwreckk/docs/brainscan\\_zine\\_21](http://issuu.com/alexwreckk/docs/brainscan_zine_21)  
*Let It Out!* by Michelle Macchio  
[http://issuu.com/letitoutzine/docs/let\\_it\\_out\\_mental\\_health\\_zine](http://issuu.com/letitoutzine/docs/let_it_out_mental_health_zine)

<sup>35</sup> See Piepmeier chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Lucy Lippard's 1978 essay, *Making Something From Nothing (Toward a Definition of Women's "Hobby Art")* exposes the hierarchies of the art/craft divide and 'good taste' vs 'bad taste' as perpetuating an exclusionary, patriarchal art world. In a 1995 introduction to an anthology containing this and other writings, Lippard writes that she is 'horrified' at its continued relevance. See Lippard 5.

exhibitions. Ongoing zines such as *Girls Get Busy*, *Illuminati Girl Gang*, and *The Le Sigh* can include artwork, poetry, fiction and photography, often operating both online and in physical forms.<sup>37</sup> Ideas surrounding the autobiographical narrative of the personal zine extend into my other autobiographical works, including video and object-based installation.

### *2.3. Selfies and Unexpected Activism*

*Your thoughts and your feelings are all yours, and you're the one to decide if you want to share them with anybody.*

-Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood

As mentioned earlier, I have been keeping a blog in some form since 2002 and have participated in online forums and lists since my family first got a computer.<sup>38</sup> This culture has always included self-portraiture, as it is the only way to give an idea of your life to people across the country. More recently, through Tumblr's body positive communities, I have discovered how empowering selfies can be for people who do not look like the average model to see themselves in media.<sup>39</sup> This became an even bigger issue in late 2013, when Erin Gloria Ryan wrote a piece for Jezebel, entitled *Selfies Aren't Empowering, They're A Cry For Help*, which spurred a wave of anger online, including a #feministselfie Twitter hashtag, which blew up for several days.<sup>40</sup> It was the

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<sup>37</sup> Fully readable version of Girls Get Busy issue 21 available on their site: [http://issuu.com/ggbzine/docs/ggb\\_21](http://issuu.com/ggbzine/docs/ggb_21)

<sup>38</sup> Fun aside: as a preteen, I was the youngest participant on discussion mailing lists for crochet and the television show *Red Dwarf*. My mother posted on a list called "Quilters' Funtalk" and has remained friends with many of those people seventeen years later.

<sup>39</sup> Favourite body positive blog at the moment is probably "Fuck Yeah, VBO!" VBO stands for "Visible Belly Outline."  
<http://fyeahvbo.tumblr.com>

<sup>40</sup> See Ryan.

site of many powerful tweets and photographs by and of fat people, trans people, disabled people, and people of colour especially.<sup>41</sup> The association of the selfie with narcissistic young girls is an irritating double standard, especially when self-portraiture has been a viable artistic mode for centuries.<sup>42</sup> Just because it is a medium that has been democratized does not reduce its merit, and selfies have specific use in online culture. I take selfies (tagged GPOY or “Gratuitous Picture of Yourself”) when I am feeling lonely, sick, bored, when I’m feeling fantastic, to connect to friends back home who haven’t seen me in a long time, or to friends I’ve never met in person. I often document what I wear (shortened to OOTD or “Outfit of the Day”) to remind myself that I don’t look the way I sometimes feel, or to remember clothes that made me feel great. These are archived on my personal blog so that I can go back and look at them for myself, but also so that other people can see what I’m like at a glance.<sup>43</sup> Jenna Wortham writes:

“Rather than dismissing the trend as a side effect of digital culture or a sad form of exhibitionism, maybe we’re better off seeing selfies for what they are at their best — a kind of visual diary, a way to mark our short existence and hold it up to others as proof that we were here. The rest, of course, is open to interpretation.”<sup>44</sup>

Online activism is often maligned, but is an excellent way to reach a broad audience and is a democratic place of education. Piepmeier echoes this sentiment by discussing how young women’s activities are often not taken seriously as ‘real activism’ because they do

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<sup>41</sup> See The Feminist Griote and Shakesville for more:  
<http://thefeministgriote.com/the-radical-politics-of-selfies/>  
<http://www.shakesville.com/2013/11/on-visibility.html>

<sup>42</sup> What is more narcissistic than painting yourself as Jesus Christ, like Albrecht Dürer?

<sup>43</sup> This is the one thing I will not provide a link to, as my tumblr is my safe space full of chancy personal information, differing from my more public blog. However, many tumblr users provide links to both “GPOY” and “OOTD” archives on their pages which would be easy to find through a cursory search of the site.

<sup>44</sup> See Wortham.

not follow the expected mode of political intervention.<sup>45</sup> Critiques of online culture similarly denounce the way women's sites employ language and frivolity.<sup>46</sup> Having a sense of humour or a kitschy aesthetic appears to be incoherent with feminist ideals.

Lisa Jervis of *Bitch* magazine echoes this frustration:

"I am so sick of being told that young women aren't active enough or aren't active in the right ways or active around the right issues. You know, if you want us to be engaged in feminism, let us be engaged in feminism in ways that engage us, and appreciate that, and I mean 'appreciate it' not in the sense of 'be grateful' but almost in the medical sense of feel it, see that it exists."<sup>47</sup>

Piepmeyer calls for "an altered understanding of what counts as political," and for zines to be considered a type of 'citizens' media'. She argues that even non-specifically activist zines challenge the 'symbolic realm'.<sup>48</sup> *Mend My Dress* is a zine that also combines friendly aesthetics with difficult material, to create distance from topics that are challenging to read and to write about, including mental illness and sexual abuse. The author, Neely Bat Chestnut, plays with the way she depicts her own identity, and it is often not clear whether she is being sincere or ironic in some of the writing and in the use of familiar imagery from Disney films and other fairy tales.<sup>49</sup> In *The Anxiety Series*, I consciously combined kitschy, 'twee' or friendly aesthetics and colours with confessions of my personal experience with social anxiety disorder. The aesthetic allowed an easy access point for hesitant viewers, as well as making it easier work for

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<sup>45</sup> Piepmeyer 161.

<sup>46</sup> See a rebuttal to one of those articles: <http://www.autostraddle.com/in-which-we-are-accused-of-being-cosmo-for-queers-236856/>

<sup>47</sup> See Piepmeyer quoting Jervis, 161.

<sup>48</sup> See Piepmeyer 122, 162.

<sup>49</sup> See Piepmeyer 102.

myself to make, without it turning into a miserable teen angst showcase. There is an activism in making a stigmatized illness visible and taking back my own narrative. I continue to strive for this balance in my ongoing practice.

## 2.4. *Phantom Wing*

*Phantom Wing* was a pre-demolition project in Calgary, Alberta, during September of 2013, and taking place at the century-old King Edward School, which was to be turned into an arts incubator space. The main building is the iconic sandstone of Calgary's oldest buildings, but as the student population grew, additional wings were built onto the structure. One of these wings, built in the 1960s, was slated for demolition, so the organization behind its new purpose, C-Space, asked the curators of a previous pre-demolition project, *Wreck City*, to organize a similar event.<sup>50</sup> I had greatly admired *Wreck City*, especially for its feminist throwback installation curated by Jennifer Crighton, *We're Hysterical*.<sup>51</sup>

For *Phantom Wing*, melinda topilko and I proposed a *Girl Gang Dance Party* in the girls' washroom (*figures 10 - 15*), to remediate the unpleasant experiences of adolescent girls who were often excluded, from the in crowd, including ourselves.<sup>52</sup> Our proposal was accepted and we were assigned to Crighton, who would act as our curator, and spent two weeks in Calgary in September while we frantically set up the work to be

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<sup>50</sup> *Wreck City* was a project spanning the houses of an entire city block, each house comprising several artists under a different curator.

<sup>51</sup> 'Throwback' as it was a feminist-house installation in the spirit of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's *Womanhouse*.

More on *Wreck City*: <http://wreckcityproject.wordpress.com>

<sup>52</sup> melinda doesn't capitalize her name.

on display for one week.<sup>53</sup> We decided to transform the six stalls according to several themes, but also festooned the more public area with decorations, lights, kitschy collected objects, collages, and several disco balls. The entrance was covered with a mylar curtain, which reflected a number of pink string lights in the entryway. Spinning from a tiny disco ball were both the Girls Washroom and Girls Change room signs from the institution, signalling a transformative space (*figure 10*). We collected old records ranging in era, which we played during the course of the exhibition. Materials collected ranged in age from the 1960s, when the wing opened, to 2001, the closure of the school. Three of the six stalls were based on periods in a girl's life – Tween, teen and adulthood. The other three were based on things people do in bathrooms: the first stall for crying, the second for placing a confession into the toilet 'oracle', and the third for taking selfies with provided disposable cameras, while surrounded by body positive graffiti. We have been slowly posting the confessions and selfies on an accompanying blog, so that *Girl Gang Dance Party* can live on well after the event.<sup>54</sup>

We made the space purposely welcoming, and insisted that anyone was welcome to dance (or not dance), to do whatever made them feel comfortable. The washroom became the hang-out space for other artist-participants and curators, but more importantly, the event's visitors, who often returned multiple times to show their friends. Much of the self-protective cynicism of my previous work dropped away, and we

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<sup>53</sup> Other Phantom Wing projects included classrooms completely transformed with poltergeists, black lights, text installations, and several performances. Some installations were created with the building's own infrastructure, including ceiling tiles, fire bells and locker doors. In one project, the PA system was re-connected and announcements reverberated throughout the building for the duration. Local bands were also invited to play nightly.

More on Phantom Wing: <http://phantomwing.wordpress.com>

<sup>54</sup> See <http://girlgangdanceparty.tumblr.com>



created one of the most earnest artworks I have ever been involved in. Participatory elements allowed viewers to interact and experience the installation and the bodily scale of bathroom stalls as discrete installation spaces proved to be extremely successful in creating a private experience. Viewers could (and did) enter each stall and would often habitually lock the door behind them, allowing a personal and quiet moment to view everything we had hidden there. We extended the sense of wonder that I longed to achieve in my earlier work, where the experience of placing my head on the cool back wall of the tunnel generated a feeling a childlike glee in knowing that nobody would know I was hiding there.

Two reviews of this exhibition changed the way that I felt about my own practice. The first was an entry on Phantom Wing's website written by one of the other artist participants, Steven Cottingham, who mused on the democratic potentialities of some of the projects:

"I am thinking about their appropriated bathroom site as something truly democratic: a representation of that which we all hold in common. I am thinking about the processing of waste as the commonest denominator of humanity. I am thinking of accumulation and disposal, intake and excrement, burdening and shedding, inhaling and exhaling, gain and loss. topilko, Britton, and Joy focus on the latter half of this binary, manifested physically in the bathroom site, but further elaborated as they provide a venue for unleashing and baring.<sup>55</sup> A safe place."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> melinda's offspring, Misery Fields (attributed as Peter) Britton, agreed to assist us with the project, as I was unable to be there for the full installation time. However, in the course of creating the work, they became a full-fledged collaborator, which explains the inconsistency in attribution between reviews. In addition, their experimental, trans, queer, gender non-conforming noise group, SPIIVAK, performed in the boys' washroom during the course of *Phantom Wing* and provided a dark, spooky, witchy counterpoint to GGDP.

More at: <http://spiivakcult.tumblr.com>

<sup>56</sup> Steven Cottingham, A Plea For Salvation: <http://phantomwing.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/a-plea-for-salvation/>

This unleashing and baring was true of the experience of the piece. We were able to see this first hand during the slower days, such as the Sunday morning after the main reception. Where hundreds of people had crammed into the space the night before, on Sunday, people trickled in and we were able to speak to them personally. Many of these were mothers and daughters. One teen girl said the show was ‘cool’, but after she left, her mother stayed behind to tell us how much it had touched her. She started to cry and said she wanted to wait, lest she embarrass her daughter, but that she hoped it had touched her as well. Another pre-teen girl walked into the tween stall and exclaimed, “It’s like a girls’ Paradise Island!”

Sheri Nault of Portage Press, wrote a review of a subsequent show, prefaced with her reasons for coming back to see new work advertised as “by melinda of *Girl Gang Dance Party*”:

“located in a washroom and referential to the challenges and struggles of adolescence, girlhood, and qualities considered ‘feminine’ – I had unknowingly walked into a stall full of glittering images of tears, tissue boxes, and an incredibly comforting pamphlet which read, “So you’re crying in the bathroom;” and in that space, in that project – I cried.”<sup>57</sup>

The goal of the work was to be inclusive, democratic and to create a safe space for ourselves and our viewers. It was received better and by far more people than we had anticipated. We decided that *Girl Gang Dance Party* would live on as a collaborative umbrella for further exploits, leaving me with two simultaneous threads of work: the collaborative and the solitary.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Sheri Nault, Dark and Spooky, Bright and Magical: <http://portagepress.ca/2014/03/24/dark-and-spooky-bright-and-magical/>

<sup>58</sup> In a continuation of *GGDP*, melinda and I will be participating in Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art’s Summer Institute of 2014, hosted by Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue, and focusing on the many ways we can make and describe feminist art.



Figure 10 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, entranceway to *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.



Figure 11 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, installation view, *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.

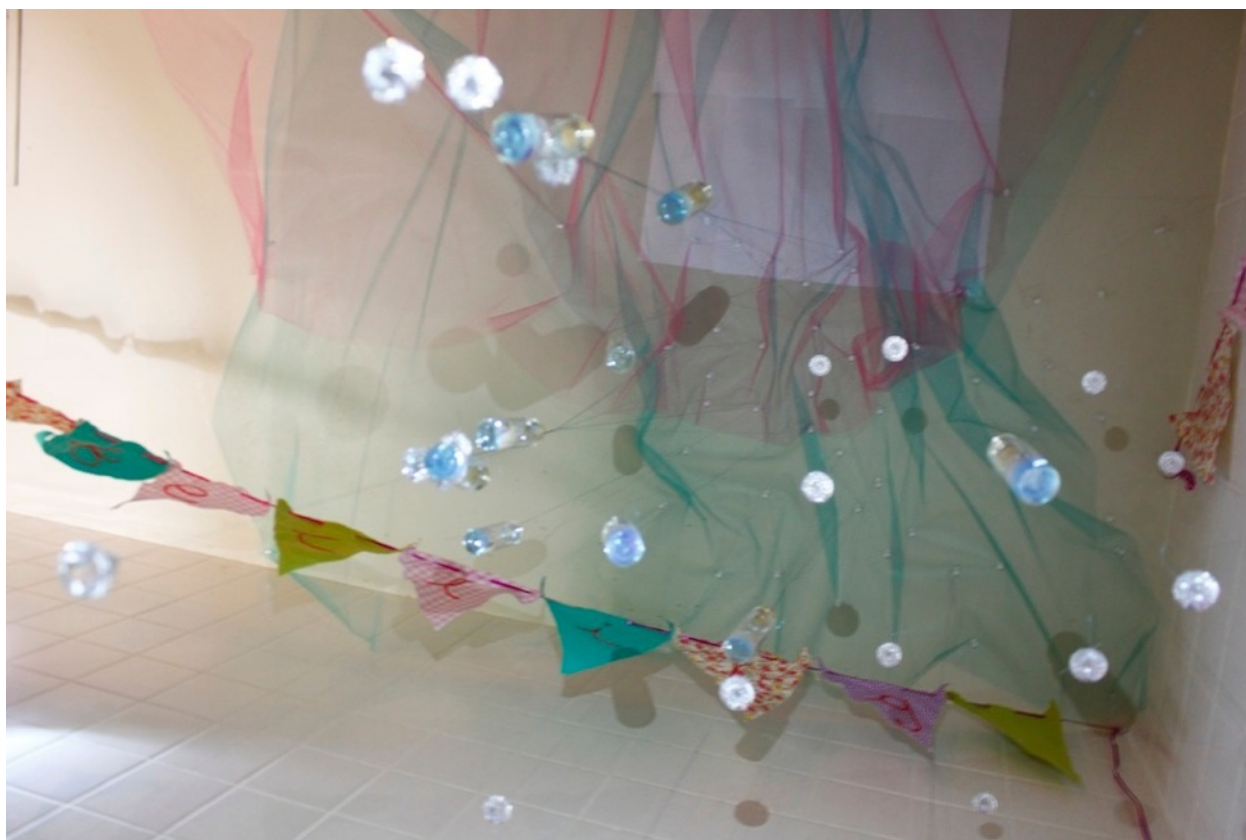


Figure 12 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, installation view of the crying stall, *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.

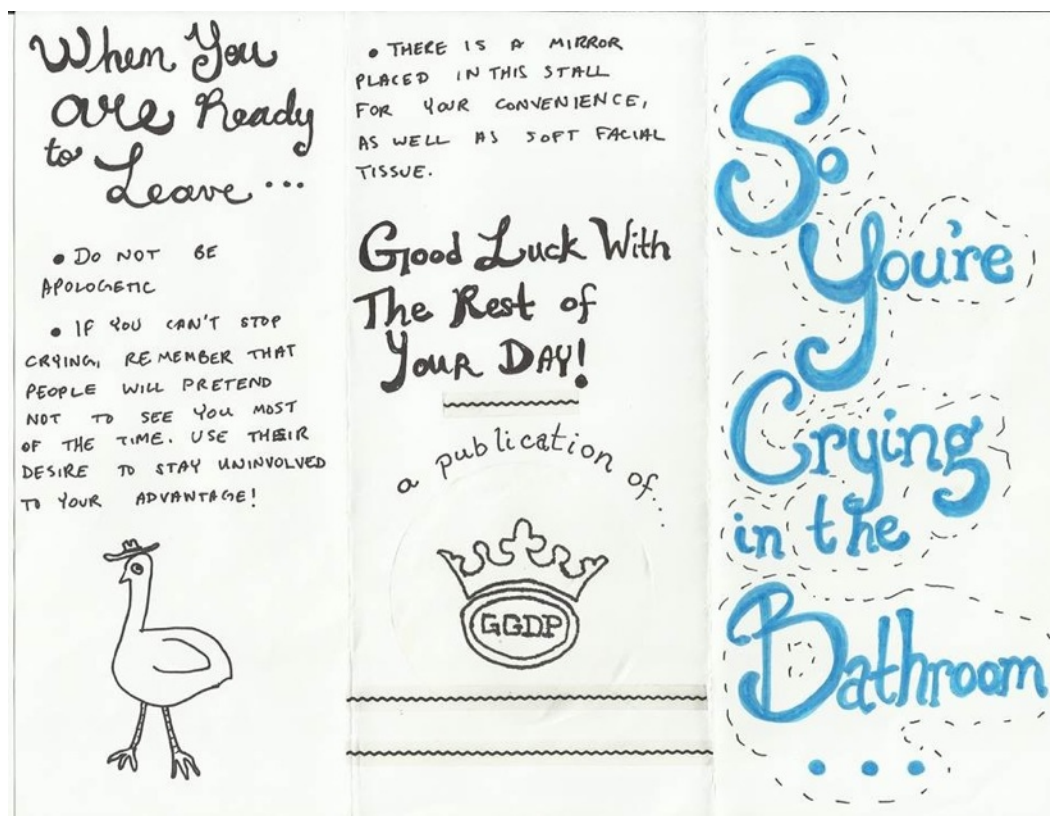


Figure 13 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, crying stall brochure, *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.



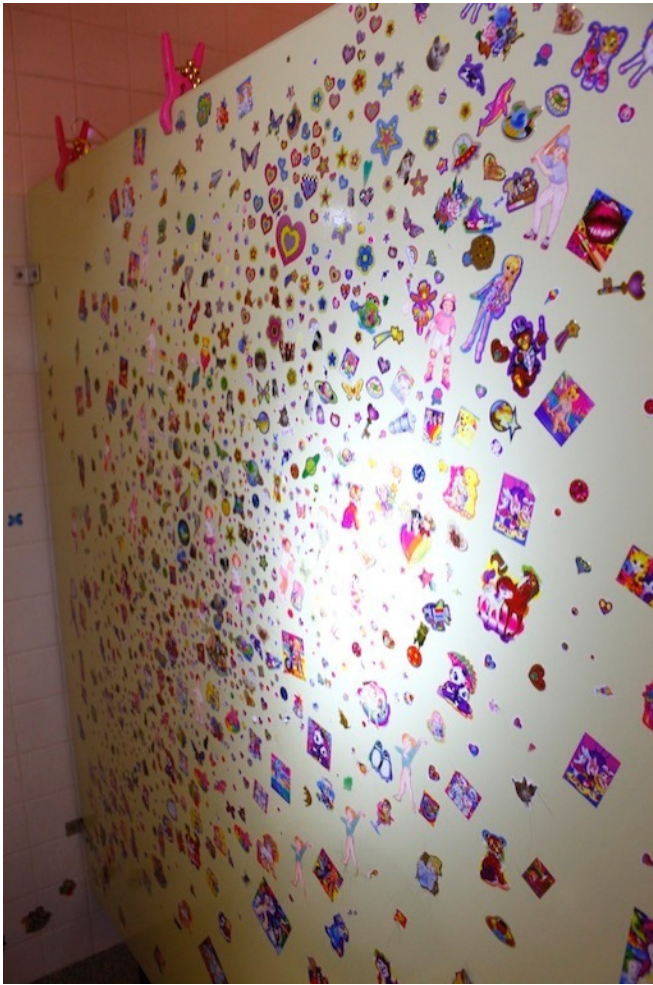


Figure 14 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, tween stall, *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.



Figure 15 - Lindsay Joy and melinda topilko, installation view, *Girl Gang Dance Party for Phantom Wing: A Predemolition Project* at King Edward School, 2013.

## 2.5. *The Gallery of* \_\_\_\_\_

Upon my return to Winnipeg, I moved into a new and larger studio. I knew that my work needed to change but wasn't sure how to go about this. I am socially anxious, and not the kind of person who can arrange (or even attend!) many social events in any calendar year. I knew that I needed to find ways to combine my personal narratives (writing, zine-production, etc.) with my stitched and collected works to create a more

immersive experience, rather than discrete objects free of context. In *The Aesthetics of Affect*, Simon O’Sullivan suggests that art can act as an event rather than an object, “a point of exile where it is possible that something, finally, might happen.”<sup>59</sup> He continues to elaborate on art’s function, to “transform our sense of our ‘selves’ and our notion of our world.”<sup>60</sup> This connects with what Griselda Pollock calls the ‘shared encounter’ created by an artwork that attempts to represent an unrepresentable event.<sup>61</sup> Louise Bourgeois’ self-contained works such as *Red Room* and *Precious Liquids* enact this kind of encounter with the viewer, even though the subject matter might not be immediately obvious.<sup>62</sup> In my own experience with *The Anxiety Series*, I found that people often didn’t want to be confronted with vulnerable narratives, but *GGDP* approached this in a way that was accessible to many types of viewers, who were also invited to share their own vulnerabilities.<sup>63</sup> Those who didn’t want to delve further into the individual stall installations didn’t have to, but still had a point of entry in the richly decorated and transformed bathroom. One of the best parts of the process of creating *GGDP* was the fact that we were so short on time and were not able to second-guess ourselves, the unofficial slogan of that project being, “No critiques!” Now moved into a new and larger

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<sup>59</sup> See O’Sullivan quoting Badiou, 126.

<sup>60</sup> See O’Sullivan 128.

<sup>61</sup> I have only recently become familiar with affect and trauma theory but what I have only begun to understand is so excitingly appropriate that I had to include it. When a viewer connects with my work it does indeed feel like a shared encounter that is difficult to explain. See Pollock 41.

<sup>62</sup> In 2011, I saw one of these works in person at the Musée D’art Contemporain de Montréal. The experience of the work was riveting but impossible to describe.

<sup>63</sup> In addition to the incredibly positive response, responses to *The Anxiety Series* also included, “I’m so sorry,” “But you shouldn’t feel that way,” “Have you tried \_\_\_\_\_?” and outright dismissal such as, “This looks like something a 14 year-old girl would write in her diary.” I embraced that last comment with no apologies in later work.

studio space, I made a glittery banner for the occasion that read, “Get Out Of Your Own Way”, both the name of a 1990s self-help book and a personal proclamation about how to proceed. I decided to experiment and to make as many things as possible or necessary, trying not to self-censor until I had given the idea a chance – learning new techniques, making things I thought should exist, doing things I knew people didn’t like, and trying to stop being so hard on myself. In this larger studio, I was able to bring my collected made and found objects to arrange and rearrange. I brought objects into the space, put them up, took them down, put them back up, in a constant morphing installation. I dubbed this new studio, *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_* (figures 16 - 22), I considered it to be a flex-gallery space, a continually morphing installation of small objects and artworks.<sup>64</sup> Similar but different from *GGDP*, my studio installation has included excerpts torn from adolescent diaries, handmade journalistic embroideries, drawings, miniature sculptures, and other pieces of ephemera that are specific to my particular experience. The space is intimate and quiet, unlike the party atmosphere of *GGDP*. While aesthetically similar, it is most definitely *my* space, as opposed to what we hoped would incite nostalgia in as many attendees as possible in *GGDP*. Here, I hope to connect with viewers but not to speak for them.

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<sup>64</sup> Pronounced “The Gallery of Blank Blank”.

## 2.6. In My Room

*I don't care if forever never comes, 'cause I'm holding out for that teenage feeling.*

-Neko Case

In the spirit of the 'safe space' and the bedroom-based media production of young girls, I began with the idea that *The Gallery of* \_\_\_\_\_ was a kind of bedroom outside the home. My current apartment is so small that the only thing that fits in my room is the bed, not to mention the fact I share this room with my partner, Nelson. When thinking about when I have ever had a room that was mine and only mine, it was the bedroom and later the artist's studio. In this spirit, the first iterations of the flex space included a sort-of-bed and many tear-outs from *Bop* and *Teen Beat* magazines (*figure 16*), rummaged from a pile of boxes at my dad's house. I collected publicly-posted images of teen bedrooms, posted on the blogging platform Tumblr.<sup>65</sup> I found that many of these rooms look just like mine did, but with different faces on the posters or better fairy lights. Lots of posts announce that they have just rearranged their space, and include before-and-after shots, or selfies in their safe spaces. As I worked on this project, memories started flooding back, for instance, being confused about getting in trouble for printing out pictures on the family computer of one of the Spice Girls in a bikini, later overcompensating by covering the walls in pictures of boys; or shouting "Hey, look at this!" to my best friend before doing a somersault off my bed and hurting myself. While it was a place to hang out with friends, as a socially awkward only child, I spent most of my time there alone, amassing a fairly large collection of unicorn

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<sup>65</sup> Collected images and links back to their sources can be found here:  
<http://www.pinterest.com/forestine/in-my-room/>



figurines, and putting up so many posters, drawings and collages that no speck of wall remained. Sometimes I would get up on the bed and take everything down to start over. For my birthday one year, all my relatives went in together to buy me a television, because they thought I must be bored and lonely. The screen would glow eerily in the night and I would panic and unplug it. Later, the wood-paneled t.v. in our living room finally bit the dust, so mine ended up there in its place. The bedroom reference and feeling remains in the final installation, albeit less directly.



Figure 16 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.



Figure 17 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.



Figure 18 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.



Figure 19 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.





Figure 20 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.



Figure 21 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.



Figure 22 - Lindsay Joy various iterations of *The Gallery of \_\_\_\_\_*, 2013 - 2014.

## 2.7. Video

I have been making videos of myself ever since I had a computer capable of making video, almost 10 years ago. When I first got a webcam, I was excited about the prospect of participating in the digital world as I had seen others do, through Youtube and online forums. I was quickly ridiculed off the stage, deemed to be not conventionally attractive enough (read, 'thin') to be a visible woman online. I continued to make video for myself, turning it increasingly inward. I make webcam videos for similar reasons to taking selfies: to see myself as if from an outside perspective, for self-care, to slow down, to realize I am just one person rather than a nebulous ball of doubt, and for more mundane reasons. I make them by accident, with my camera on the wrong setting, as a mirror, to practice my guitar, practice job interviews with myself, to document labour-intensive

processes, or to just goof off. During the first semester of my second year, I decided to see what I could do with these videos, which were on my computer and various private and semi-private online spaces. I took some videos from various dates and added an audio commentary to them, to turn them into something else, and to connect my written narratives to a larger or different audience than my zine and book works.<sup>66</sup> I decided, as I often do when drawing or typing – using a typewriter or a non-erasable marker or pen – to use a form that could not be overly planned and thus sabotaged by self-doubt. I watched the video and spoke over it as things popped into my head: first to describe what was happening and why I may have hit record, and then to talk about other things that came to mind. In newer works, I continue to document mostly self-care practices, or the things that I can do when I can't do anything else.<sup>67</sup> The webcam quality is important because of the immediacy of the action taking place. The moment would be gone if I had to fidget with unfamiliar technology, and the video would not be made. Until now, I have shown the videos to trusted friends, but a selection of these are included in the thesis exhibition.

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<sup>66</sup> My original impetus for the audio voiceover came from the commentary videos regular Youtube personalities sometimes make when they don't have an idea for that week's video, obviously inspired by DVD commentaries. These videos are often more interesting than the originals, as they add a personal component. Two examples include Nostalgia Chick: <http://blip.tv/nostalgia-chick/commentary-pocahontas-three-years-later-5551413> and Oddity Archive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSB1nOa0s4M>

<sup>67</sup> For more on self care, see this lovely online zine by EJ Landsman: <http://ejlandsman.tumblr.com/post/78694983788/i-compiled-some-personal-tactics-and-crowd-sourced>

### 3. *Stitching It All Together*

The thesis exhibition, *I'll Cry If I Want To*, is a farewell to my own girlhood. Being stuck in the past makes me feel like I'm still not an adult, and I am always sure my imposter-hood will be caught. I confront imaginary bullies – the feeling surrounding things people said to me over the years – things I am sure have been long forgotten by everyone but me. I think about a lot of this stuff as embodying an ambivalent nostalgia. What I mean by this is that according to Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is a longing for a home that never existed.<sup>68</sup> I begin by longing for a time when things seemed easier, but quickly remember why I'm glad it's over - it wasn't easier after all. Anxiety means I seem to remember everything, especially those things that hurt me. In looking back at my family, and myself, nostalgia has been a digging for a clue. Digging for clues about my family through photographs I have been commanded to scan, even though the living don't remember who is who, digging for clues about why I think the way I do and why I can't seem to get past girlhood. This work is that nostalgia made manifest. If perpetual girlhood comes from the infantilization of these activities and aesthetics, as well as my own brain's self-sabotage, then *I'll Cry If I Want To* is a farewell to that girlhood.

I have chosen the School of Art Gallery's collection wing, which is intended to exhibit the gallery's permanent collection. The large display case instead contains a collection of thrifted and saved unicorn figurines, some industrially produced, but most of which have been painted by hobbyists, the figures' facial features in all the wrong places. The unicorns combine women's craftiness with the girlhood pursuit of collecting cutesy figurines. The gallery installation greets the viewer with the push-pull of

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<sup>68</sup> See Boym 8.

friendliness, angst and vulnerability. One wall is covered in wallpaper which I designed in a repeat pattern of Lesley Gore's head, hearts and ice cream cones.<sup>69</sup> Diaristic embroidered works adorn the walls, some more straightforward than others, displayed alongside a series of 'slow selfies' – stitched doodles of myself in different styles and ages. I consider these to be 'selfies' to connect to their importance for self-care and identity. Though some have suggested that I am lowering these carefully stitched works by associating them with a debased medium, I purposefully connect them, as selfies need to be reconsidered. In my old diaries, I found several disturbing self-portraits I created as a teen. With these stitched selfies, I remediate this by creating many iterations, some aspirational, some more realistic. The largest of these is a nude exploding in colourful stars. Little drawings in colourful frames sit on the ledge, originally intended to rest paintings on for study. Numerous pastel night lights and a bank of old televisions, covered in glittery motivational stickers, bask the gallery in a warm glow, and viewers are invited to watch my video works semi-privately, using bedazzled headphones and sitting on cushions and quilts in a configuration echoing sleepover movie nights. The video display echoes the act of reading a zine or diary – the viewers can sit side by side, each having a personal and quiet experience with the very personal work. This video work is different from anything I've made. Most segments are approximately five minutes long and depict my head and shoulders with me facing the

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<sup>69</sup> 1960s girl singer, Lesley Gore, is famous for the song *It's My Party (and I'll Cry if I want to)*, but also *You Don't Own Me*, which has been adopted as a feminist and queer anthem, covered by Klaus Nomi in the 1980s. Gore has become sort of a mascot for me after reading Meryl Trussler's exceedingly annoying 2012 article, "Half Baked: The Trouble With Cupcake Feminism," where Trussler laments feminism's 'branding problem' and says, "Twee and retro have been seeping into feminism for a couple decades now, gaining potency. It's all about cute dresses, felted rosettes from Etsy, knitting, kittens, vintage lamps shaped like owls, Lesley Gore. And yes - a lot of cupcakes." I argue that this aesthetic, girlishness and hand-craftedness are not mutually exclusive from activism and 'serious feminism' and often allow us a respite from difficult topics.

camera. In an audio voiceover, I discuss the impetus for filming, and sometimes veer into stories or random memories. In *Being Happy*, the most difficult to make and to watch, I had turned the camera on after I'd started crying in my studio. I decided to attempt to force a smile as an experimental way to stop crying, following questionable advice often dispensed by my father, "Being happy makes you happy." The partner of this piece is *Onions*, where I film myself tearing up after chopping onions, but gradually become actually upset. In other works, I practice self care techniques, such as painting my nails, while discussing an incident where I slammed my thumb in a car door as a child, or meditation, attempted relaxation with a shrill and keyed up voiceover. The CRT televisions connect to the memory of the small t.v. I had in my bedroom, which, while exciting to receive, often made me feel lonelier and creeped me out at night. If I could have had any programming in that room, it would have been something more comforting than what basic cable could offer. While we scrimped and saved for this coveted object, it is now available for around six dollars at Value Village.

I have attempted to subvert the institutional structure of the gallery by covering it in soft textiles and colours. The space is the subject of attempted domestication, but under those cushions, decorations and bunting are the gallery's original infrastructure, not quite convincing you that you're in a new place, transforming the austere gallery into a kind of liminal bedroom institution. Upon entry into the gallery, viewers will be invited to pick up a small zine-like guidebook to the show, in lieu of a didactic panel. This work is a self-made catalogue with titles of displayed works, as well as additional drawings and narratives pertaining to objects and images found within. This serves as a take-home portion, to be shared and read in safe spaces. I intend the show to have levels



of interaction. Viewers who dislike vulnerability can admire the surface aesthetic of the transformed gallery. Those who wish to delve further can watch the video works, and to delve further still, can read the additional narratives contained in the guidebook. In a way, the exhibition embodies ‘too much information’, but I intend it to still contain entry points of connection to keep the work from being purely about myself with no room for interpretation.

#### *4. Conclusion*

The exhibition, *I'll Cry If I Want To*, is a step towards a resolved multimodal practice that combines vulnerable narratives with humour, kitsch, and nostalgia. I combine autobiographical video work, zines, handicraft, drawings and a collection practice to comprise the whole work. I look to pop culture for much of my inspiration to both make it fun for me to make and more accessible to viewers. The work is process-based because of its roots in craft, but also because of the way it involves assembly and emotional processing. The vulnerable narratives contained in the work may invoke a knee-jerk reaction of labels of narcissism in some people, but they are meant to connect to a viewer and often do so in a way that is meaningful and encourages others to do the same.

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## *Appendix 9 - List of Works*

I'll Cry If I Want To, installation consisting of found, collected and made objects, video and zine.

## *Appendix 99 - Images From Thesis Exhibition*

I'll Cry If I Want To

June 5 - 13, 2014

School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba

All photos by the artist.



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail







I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail





I'll Cry If I Want To, 2014; installation view; detail



# MAITREES EXHIBITIONS

**RYAN A MADORE**

**OPEN STUDIO:**

**A PHASE IN SIX YEARS OF MY ART EDUCATION**

**ORAL EXAM THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 1-3 PM**

**GALLERY OPENS AT 9 AM**

**ANDREW HARWOOD**

**FUNERAL CAMP**

**PREVIEW PERFORMANCE THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 5 PM**

**ORAL EXAM SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 1-3 PM**

**GALLERY OPENS AT 12 PM**

**LINDSAY JOY**

**I'LL CRY IF I WANT TO**

**ORAL EXAM TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 1-3 PM**

**GALLERY OPENS AT 9 AM (THIS EXHIBITION ONLY)**

**JUNE 5 - 13, 2014**

**SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY**

**255 ARTLAB, 180 DAFOE ROAD, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA**

**RECEPTION JUNE 13, 6-8 PM**

**GALLERY HOURS: MON-FRI 9AM-4PM**

**JUNE 7, 12-4PM JUNE 17, 9AM-4PM**