

G.I. Jane Doe: Witnessing War in the Exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over*

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Abstract:

The 2012 exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over* at the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago presented the work of eight female veterans and provided an opportunity for viewers to bear witness to the trauma experienced by women in the United States Military as well as a place for the viewer to observe their trauma in ways that did not spectacularize the women's experience or the art itself. Through an analysis of the exhibition this paper explores how art practices can enact and facilitate new modes of testimony and witnessing, and argues that the works in this exhibit do so in relation to both the testimonies of the survivor and the role of the viewer as listener. To illustrate the survivor / listener framework this paper concentrates on two works in particular: the *Fatigues Clothesline* by Regina Vasquez and *Uncovering My Crime Scene* by Erica Slone. Art, as observed in this exhibition, creates a site to enable testimony and witnessing that exposes the trauma experienced by women in the United States Military.

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First and foremost I would like to acknowledge the women of *Overlooked / Looked Over* for their bravery in sharing their very intimate and often painful experiences and for inviting viewers to witness their testimony. Thank you Erica Slone for presenting this unique female perspective and for shining a light on MST.

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Dedication

To my husband and greatest supporter, Louis. "I am all gratitude and all pride...that my life has been so crowned by you."¹

¹ Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett on the morning of their wedding day (1846)

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At my 1st duty station, I learned a woman in the military was a whore, bitch, cunt or dyke. A whore because you gave it up too easily, a bitch because you didn't, a cunt because you stood your ground, a dyke because you joined a man's world.

(Anonymous, *Fatigues Clothesline*)

In the last year, a story in the North America media has been frontline news after a petition drive that gathered over 10,000 signatures led to a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee of the United States Congress. The review of sexual misconduct by basic training instructors at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas has shed light on potentially the worst sex scandal in U.S. military history.² The investigation has identified fifty-nine survivors of sexual assault, and thirty-two drill sergeants and training instructors have been charged with crimes or policy violations that include rape as well as inappropriate contact after graduation.³ The hearing had disappointingly low numbers of members of congress in attendance and only two survivors testified: Cindy McNally and Jennifer Norris. McNally, who was assaulted on more than one occasion, testified that after her first report of sexual assault went ignored, she did not report any further incidents.⁴ Norris testified that she “was chemically restrained and raped by [her] recruiter and sexually assaulted by [her] instructor at Keesler Air Force Base,” stating that

² In 1996 twelve male soldiers were charged with abusing female recruits and trainees at the Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Craig Whitlock, “Airforce investigates growing sex-abuse scandal,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 2012 http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-06-28/news/35461886_1_sexual-misconduct-sexual-assault-female-recruits (accessed January 24, 2013).

³ Michelle Bernard, “With women in combat, will military finally address epidemic of sexual assault?” *The People*, entry posted January 24, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2013/01/24/with-woman-in-combat-will-military-finally-address-epidemic-of-sexual-assault/> (accessed January 24, 2013).

⁴ Bernard, “With women in combat.”

she never reported it for fear of reprisal; she had “watched an airman ... get swiftly booted out simply because she reported that one of her instructors made derogatory remarks to her during class.”⁵ The House Armed Services Committee surprisingly invited no other survivors to testify; rather, they asked advocacy groups to suggest witnesses.⁶

The Air Force’s top commander General Mark A. Welsh III who testified at the hearing emphasized that one of the biggest problems is the reluctance of people to report assault and harassment because the fear of backlash is quite strong: “Why, on the worst day of their life, don’t they come forward?... That’s the heart of the problem. People don’t feel comfortable coming forward, and they do not routinely report either sexual assault or sexual harassment, and that is one of the biggest problems we have.”⁷ In addition to the issue of unreported assaults is the culture within the Air Force and the military in general, which allows and fosters this type of behaviour, the rapes at Lackland Air Force Base being one example of this wide-spread epidemic.

Preceding the Lackland hearing was the 2012 exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over* at the National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago, which presented the work of eight female veterans whose art illustrated the gender struggle in the United States Military. Where the Lackland hearing presented the legal testimony of survivors of sexual assault, *Overlooked / Looked Over* presented testimony through art production. U.S. Air Force veteran and curator of the exhibition Erica Slone pointed out that although there are 1.8 million female veterans and 14.5% of active duty military are women, there has been little

⁵ Both quotes are from Jennifer Norris’ testimony as cited in Bernard, “With women in combat.”

⁶ Bernard, “With women in combat.”

⁷ James Risen, “Airforce Leaders Testify on Culture That Led to Sexual Assaults of Recruits,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/us/air-force-leaders-testify-on-culture-that-led-to-sexual-assaults-of-recruits.html> (accessed January 23, 2013).

research done regarding the effects of war and military culture on women.⁸ Her intention with *Overlooked / Looked Over* was to shine a light on the experiences unique to women, during their service, while at war, and later as veterans.⁹ This exhibition provided an important opportunity for viewers to bear witness to the hidden and overlooked trauma experienced by women in the United States Military as well as a place for the viewer to observe their trauma in ways that did not spectacularize the women's experience or the art itself. Through an analysis of the exhibition this paper explores how art practices can enact and facilitate new modes of testimony and witnessing, and argues that the works in this exhibit do so in relation to both the testimonies of the survivor and the role of the viewer as listener.

The word "looked" in the title of the show points to the difference between looking and witnessing. Being *overlooked* implies an act of specifically ignoring; being *looked over* is an objectifying way of being looked at. In contrast to looking, witnessing in the context of this exhibition refers to the engagement between the artist's testimony (as the survivor-witness,¹⁰ the individual who experienced the trauma first hand) and the viewer's role of bearing witness (as the listener-witness,¹¹ the individual to whom the survivor addresses their testimony) and is the focus and purpose of the exhibition. As viewers of *Overlooked / Looked Over*, we enter into a testimonial exchange with the

⁸ John Bachtell, "Overlooked and looked over: women veterans tell their story," *People's World*, May 1, 2012 <http://peoplesworld.org/overlooked-and-looked-over-women-veterans-tell-their-story/> (accessed April 5, 2013).

⁹ Bachtell, "Overlooked and Looked Over."

¹⁰ Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas eds., *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

artists; we act as “the other”, the listener-witness to whom the artists are testifying.¹²

Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas explain that “[i]n the moment of testimony, the witness bears witness to the event by re-presenting it – in the sense of bringing it into presence – before his addressee.”¹³ Through the act of creating and displaying the art, the women of *Overlooked / Looked Over* are bringing their trauma into presence, before the “addressee”, the viewer. “The act of bearing witness, more importantly, also allows the witness to bring into presence, to externalize, for the very first time, the event that has persistently haunted them.”¹⁴

In this essay, I spotlight two artworks in particular that enact and facilitate these roles of witnessing: the *Fatigues Clothesline* by Regina Vasquez and *Uncovering My Crime Scene* by Erica Slone. I concentrate on the testimony on display in the *Fatigues Clothesline* and analyze how the artists witness their own experiences through words and images applied to military fatigues. In addition, I examine Slone’s discreet testimony in her installation *Uncovering My Crime Scene* and the viewer’s role of engaging in the act of bearing witness to it. Art, as observed in this exhibition, creates a site to enable testimony and witnessing that exposes the trauma experienced by women in the United States Military.

Overlooked / Looked Over was comprised of works of photography, poetry, video, print, papier-mâché and mixed-media installations. The first work of art the viewer encountered was by Iris M. Feliciano, U.S. Marine Corps veteran. Her work, *(un)clothed*

¹² Guerin and Hallas, *The Image and the Witness*, 10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

and in her right mind (Figure 2), is comprised of seven 12” x 16” digital prints on canvas arranged in three rows; each is a close-up shot of fragments of Feliciano’s body. The self-portraits begin with her fully clothed in her military uniform and end with her naked with an American flag at her feet. This series depicts Feliciano’s act of shedding the military uniform as a way for her to locate her identity. She describes the military uniform and her rank in the military as protection from weakness and states that, “In stripping away the symbols with which I identified, I found myself bare and vulnerable. But this same vulnerability allowed me to begin to see who I was outside the context of symbols without assuming defeat.”¹⁵ The military uniform as symbolic of protection, honour, courage, and strength and the consequent shedding of it is a recurring theme in this exhibition.

Other works of photography included in the exhibition are by U.S. Military veteran and Military Journalist Emily Yates, whose work provides an outward snapshot of war. Her series of photographs, *Self Portrait in Black Hawk, Tent City Rebar, Stop Loss, The Skeptic* (Figure 3), and the video of her performances, *Excerpts from the Eventual World Domination Tour*, reflect her experiences of war through the lens of a camera. She states that the camera “...showed me how the world could look through its lens, and that lens helped me show the world how it looked through my eyes.”¹⁶ Yates

¹⁵ *Overlooked / Looked Over* Exhibition hand-out (Chicago: National Veterans Art Museum and the Illinois Arts Council, 2011).

¹⁶ “Past Exhibit: *Overlooked / Looked Over*,” National Veterans Art Museum http://www.nvam.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=381:upcoming-exhibit-overlooked-looked-over&catid=109:upcoming-exhibits&Itemid=97 (accessed April 15, 2013).

further explains how being behind the camera is her way of gaining control over her situation:

When I was in the military I would write editorials. You see the name on the editorial but you don't see the face – it's the printed word. And nobody's looking me over because they can't see me, ha, ha, ha... I feel like art is a really amazing way to get out of that cycle, just step out of it and be like, "look at my art." They're looking at the lens I've chosen to use. Which is 35mm if anyone was wondering.¹⁷

Yates' use of her camera acts as a means of deflecting the gaze, thus protecting her from being looked over.

Running the length of the mid-section of the museum was a series of three prints by Retired U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Victoria Robillard Bryers, titled *And the Towers Fell (1, 2, & 3)* (Figure 4). These works reflect her emotions following the attack on the World Trade Center, as she describes, "My current work is about my own sense of loss both physical and emotional..."¹⁸ Serving as "a requiem piece,"¹⁹ Robillard's work emphasizes the impact of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and acts as a reminder of the event that sent many of the artists of *Overlooked / Looked Over* to war. Across from Robillard Bryers' work hangs U.S. Marine Corps veteran Regina Vasquez's installation, *Fatigues Clothesline* (Figure 5). The clothesline stretched through the museum's main space and exhibited army fatigues, hung inside out. Women, including Vasquez herself, had drawn, painted and written all over the garments; words written in paint and marker bled through

¹⁷ Emily Yates, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

¹⁸ *Overlooked / Looked Over* Exhibition hand-out.

¹⁹ Victoria Robillard Breyers, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

jackets and pants, revealing that secrets, fears and shame kept concealed by military uniforms have surfaced.

Further into the exhibition space was a pedestal, on which sat a pile of folded cards with Army Veteran Maggie Martin's poems, *Daydream Legacy*, *Paradelle of the Haunted*, and *Brio* which in combination with a rolled up, mixed-media American flag, *Title Unknown* (Figure 6), tell the story of a soldier's journey from enlistment to life after war. *Daydream Legacy* describes her reason for joining the military: "Generation who cares? I was looking for something more, than reality tv. A chance at redemption."²⁰ *Brio* reflects a sense of new-found hope after war: "I have engaged the power of spring, buzzing with life-force, ignorant of draught or death, resilient as meadow-grass and morning."²¹

Disillusionment can be witnessed in the work of Robynn Murray, U.S. Army veteran and subject of the documentary film *Poster Girl*, which follows Murray's two-year struggle with PTSD following service in Iraq.²² Murray speaks of the creation of her mixed media papier-mâché busts, *In doctrination*, *Baghdad*, and *Healing* (Figure 7), as a way of getting something off of her chest.²³ The works are a product of the artist's involvement with the Combat Paper Project,²⁴ a San Francisco-based organization that teaches war veterans, activists and artists to turn military uniforms into paper and then

²⁰ Maggie Martin, "Daydream Legacy," lines 16-18.

²¹ Martin, "Brio," lines 1-3.

²² *Poster Girl* is produced by Portrayal Films (2010) and directed by Sara Nesson. The film culminates in the exhibition of her artwork, made as a response to her experiences at war and upon returning home. Three of her pieces featured in this film were on display in the exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over*.

²³ Robynn Murray, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

²⁴ Combat Paper Project was founded in 2007 by Drew Matott a paper and book artist and Drew Cameron a soldier-turned-artist.

into paper-based art projects, in order to “reclaim their uniforms as art and express their experiences with the military.”²⁵ With her busts, made with torn-up pieces of training manuals and cut-up pieces of her military uniform, Murray expresses her discontent with the Iraq War, asking difficult questions such as, “is IRAQ about money or freedom?”²⁶ (Figure 8). Murray’s work narrates the development of her military experience from enlistment and deployment to her return from war and consequent turn towards activism.

Across from Murray’s work, projected onto the wall, was a series of films which played one after the other by U.S. Marine Corps veteran Joyce Wagner, titled *45 Second Self-Portrait*, *Storytelling*, *Letter to a Transient Friend*, and *Hearts*, depicting fragmented images that flash before the viewer’s eye, causing a degree of discomfort and anxiety. Like Murray’s work, Wagner’s is a response to her frustration of war and of being overlooked as a tool of war: “I got so mad because I was thinking, who’s responsible for sending me here? What are they doing right now? ...they’re probably playing golf and having dinner with their families and they never thought about me before as a person.”²⁷ Wagner’s sentiments echo many veterans who return from war disillusioned by the reality of it.

Built into the corner of the final room of this exhibition is the work of curator Erica Slone. *Uncovering My Crime Scene* (Figure 9) is a three-walled room, inside of which sits a bed. The silhouette of a person lying in the fetal position has been carved into

²⁵ “About Combat Paper,” Combat Paper Project <http://www.combatpaper.org/about.html> (accessed April March, 2013).

²⁶ See Figure 8.

²⁷ Joyce Wagner, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

the bare mattress. This installation confronts the other type of looking that this exhibition employs as its subject: the act of being looked over and the issue of Military Sexual Trauma (MST).²⁸ Each of the eight women of *Overlooked / Looked Over* represent different voices, different artistic styles and backgrounds, and each have had different experiences of being overlooked and looked over. Their artwork stands as a testimony to the trauma of war itself, the military and specifically, women's experiences of both.

²⁸ MST is defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs as, "psychological trauma which... resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the Veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training." <http://ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/military-sexual-trauma-general.asp>

Wounded

The term trauma comes from the ancient Greek word for “wound” and is typically defined as “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.”²⁹ In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud uses the Italian poet Torquato Tasso’s romantic epic *La Gerusalemme Liberata* as a parable for traumatic repetition. The hero, Tancred, unknowingly duels and kills his “beloved Clorinda” who is disguised in his enemy’s armour.³⁰ Upon her burial, he enters an enchanted forest that frightens his army of crusaders, and, out of fear, he lashes out at a tree, gashing it with his sword. The tree gushes blood and cries out in the voice of Clorinda, whose spirit is residing within, and who accuses him of wounding her again; thus the hero is haunted by the repetition of the original traumatic act.

Literary theorist Cathy Caruth’s approach to trauma theory focuses on Sigmund Freud’s idea of ‘belatedness’ which is inherently linked to traumatic repetition. In the introduction to her edited collection, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she explains that trauma fractures the experience of time;³¹ “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it.”³² Trauma happens after a latency period, the central Freudian insight into trauma being that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place

²⁹ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Trauma.”

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xiv.

³¹ Elissa Marder, “Trauma and Literary Studies: Some “Enabling” Questions,” 2.

³² Cathy Caruth, “Introduction,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

or time.”³³ Furthermore, the traumatic impact of the event lies more in the survival of the event than in the event itself. Caruth explains that the survival itself can be a crisis.³⁴ The temporal delay of trauma can be explained by both the instinctual fight or flight response and the need to persist through the initial shock; the after-effect is what is currently known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It was not until 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association officially prescribed the title Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the various trauma-related disorders otherwise known as shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis.³⁵ Understanding and acknowledging the notion of temporal delay in relation to the experience of traumatic events has helped in the treatment of PTSD.

While Caruth focuses her explorations on the temporal delay of trauma, Shoshana Felman’s work concentrates on theories of testimony. Her 1992 work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, co-authored with psychoanalyst and practicing psychiatrist Dori Laub, asserts that testimony, the act of bearing witness to traumatic events, “is a necessary and vital response to the ongoing consequences of traumatic history.”³⁶ The essays compiled in this text revolve around the Second World War and issues of remembering, and ask the questions: what is the relation between narrative and history, art and memory, speech and survival?³⁷ In her discussion of Felman and Laub’s work, Elissa Marder points out that “the most urgent and essential claim of

³³ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Marder, “Trauma and Literary Studies,” 3.

³⁷ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), xiii.

Testimony is to show that even though we do not ‘recover’ from our traumatic past, nor can we ‘cure’ it, ‘overcome’ it, or even fully understand it, we can and we must *listen* to it and *survive* it by listening to its effects as they are transmitted to us through the voices of its witnesses and survivors.”³⁸ According to these viewpoints, the artwork created and displayed in *Overlooked / Looked Over* is a mode of listening to the effects of trauma and responding to them.

Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman’s theories are important in understanding the psychic process of trauma and its effects, and the importance of witnessing for the artists of *Overlooked / Looked Over*. Both Regina Vasquez and Erica Slone were sexually assaulted while serving in the military and neither woman spoke of her abuse until much later. Through the process of creating and displaying their art they were able to work through and bear witness to their trauma. Experiencing Belatedness and PTSD is an accepted part bearing witness; in her website, Vasquez warns participants creating pieces of *Fatigues Clothesline* that generating the art can be a stressful process for which they should know their triggers and take precautions.³⁹ The exhibition of the finished fatigues speaks to Felman and Laub’s emphasis on testimony as a way of surviving trauma by sharing its burden with a listener-witness. The way in which Slone recreated the crime scene emphasizes the feelings of helplessness and loneliness that people suffering from PTSD can experience. Slone’s piece stands as both a testimony to her own trauma as well as a collective testimony for the many voiceless victims of MST.

³⁸ Marder, “Trauma and Literary Studies,” 4.

³⁹ Regina Vasquez, “Dear MST Survivor,” *Fatigues Clothesline* <http://www.fatiguesclothesline.com/Dear-MST-Survivor.html> (accessed October 23, 2012).

Dirty Laundry: Testimony in the *Fatigues Clothesline*

Fatigues Clothesline is a project begun by Regina Vasquez, who had been raped while serving in the United States Military and never spoke about it, but wanted to form a community with fellow Military Sexual Trauma survivors. As part of this exhibition, the museum held a workshop led by Vasquez on March 10, 2012, where women were invited to write, draw, and paint on a military uniform that had been turned inside-out, a process intended to empower survivors to express themselves freely.⁴⁰ The invitation to the *Fatigues Clothesline* project states: that it “aims to help women and men move past Military Sexual Trauma (MST) by telling their story in a discreet manner that will educate the public.”⁴¹ This project’s aims are derived from the *Clothesline Project*, which Vasquez was involved with prior to the exhibition and which served as her inspiration for the creation of the *Fatigues Clothesline*.

The *Clothesline Project* began on Cape Cod in 1990 with the purpose of educating, breaking the silence, and bearing witness to violence against women.⁴² The project consists of workshops during which women draw, paint, write, and appliqué on shirts. Different coloured shirts are used to represent different types of abuse; for example, white represents women who died; yellow or beige represents battered or assaulted women; red, pink, and orange are for survivors of rape and sexual assault; blue and green are for survivors of incest and sexual abuse; purple or lavender represents violence against women due to their sexual orientation; and black represents political

⁴⁰ “Fatigues Clothesline – Invitation to Attend”
https://www.nvam.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=363:fatigues-clothesline-invitation-to-attend&catid=115:museum-events&Itemid=106

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Clothesline Project, <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/> (accessed October 2, 2012).

violence against women.⁴³ After several publications about the project appeared in American periodicals, the *Clothesline Project* became a national campaign with workshops being held worldwide. The organization currently estimates the number of national and international projects to be over five hundred.⁴⁴

The project begun by Vasquez is similar to the *Clothesline Project*, but in this case, army fatigues that have been turned inside out are used instead of t-shirts. Vasquez explains that fatigues are used “...because it was what we were wearing while going through it all and after suffering for so long we feel fatigued.”⁴⁵ The military uniform is symbolic of “Honour, Courage, and Commitment,”⁴⁶ worn by those who swore a nationalistic oath to serve and protect their country. Abuse experienced during service is symbolically covered up by the uniform, creating the false appearance of strength and pride. By turning the uniforms inside out and using them to tell their stories, the participants are making the abuse public and thus altering the façade of the military. Involvement in a *Fatigues Clothesline* workshop is often the first time that survivors speak about and personally process their abuse. In reference to words and images seeping through the garments, Vasquez states that: “our suffering altered the way we dealt with the world after the trauma of rape... Even though we wore or still wear our uniforms proudly, our symptoms filter through.”⁴⁷

⁴³ “About Shirts,” Clothesline Project, <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/aboutshirts.htm> (accessed October 2, 2012).

⁴⁴ “History of the Clothesline Project,” Clothesline Project, <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/history.htm> (accessed October 2, 2012).

⁴⁵ Fatigues Clothesline, <http://www.fatiguesclothesline.com/> (accessed October 23, 2012).

⁴⁶ Regina Vasquez, “Why Inside Out?” Fatigues Clothesline, <http://www.fatiguesclothesline.com/Why-Inside-Out-.html> (accessed October 23, 2012).

⁴⁷ Ibid..

An important part of the *Fatigues Clothesline* is the exhibiting of the garments on the clothesline, a strategy borrowed from the *Clothesline Project*. This action has multiple meanings: the display of the shirts acts to educate the public and thus politicizes abuse by making it public; it symbolically provides women with a place to discard their abuse and walk away from it; and lastly, it allows women to visually understand that they are not alone.⁴⁸ Susan D. Rose, who writes about the *Clothesline Project* in her article, “Naming and Claiming: The integration of traumatic experience and the reconstruction of self in survivors’ stories of sexual abuse,” explains that, by talking about or presenting what happened to them in the form of a t-shirt (or, in the case of the *Fatigues Clothesline*, military uniforms), survivors break the rules about talking about abuse, incest and assault, and in turn recreate themselves.⁴⁹ Rose further points out that this act is both political and therapeutic and “is a claim to power. It involves risk as well as promise.”⁵⁰ By taking control of their abuse and making it public, the participants are redefining their experience.

Through her *Fatigues Clothesline* workshops and consequent exhibition of the garments, Regina Vasquez opens a previously impossible space for women to attest to the trauma they experienced while at war. Military Sexual Trauma is obviously in the forefront of their testimonies but also included are the horrific details of what it is like being at war; for example, the bottom of one jacket reads: “I was in charge of finding the

⁴⁸ “History of the Clothesline Project,” The Clothesline Project, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/history.htm>.

⁴⁹ Susan D. Rose, “Naming and Claiming: The integration of traumatic experience and the reconstruction of self in survivors’ stories of sexual abuse,” in Kim Lacy Rogers, et al. eds. *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 164.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

pieces and putting them in the right body bags,” and “Here! You keep it for me. It’s my killing knife. I shouldn’t have it around. I’m not safe with it.” Some statements speak to the aftermath of dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Phrases like, “I cry for no reason,” and “Guilt rules my life,” are strong testaments to the ongoing pain and suffering experienced by women in the military.

The gender discrimination and sexual harassment that many women experience while serving in the military is visualized in the writing on a jacket hanging in the *Fatigues Clothesline* which reads, “THE BOYS CLUB DOESN’T LIKE PINK” (Figure 10), and another which has, “BE A MAN” printed in block letters over the place where a soldier’s name would appear. This exhortation is further emphasized by the aggressive stream of phrases and words that appear beneath it. Statements such as, “Shut up. Suck it up. Don’t be a pussy. Fag. Bitch. Don’t be a girl. Sissy,” and “Be all that you can be in the army. Army strong. Army of one. Army of men not girls,”⁵¹ exemplify the attitude observed by many service women. This attitude utilizes homophobic and sexist slurs to emphasize a conviction: to be a part of the military, you have to be strong and tough, traits the military does not associate with the female gender.

Many of the artists spoke of the same types of discrimination and resulting frustration during a panel discussion at the opening reception of the exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over*. Each of the eight artists gave individual descriptions of their work in addition to taking part in an open discussion of the issues raised by the artwork and the curatorial endeavour. Victoria Robillard Bryers joined the Coast Guard the first

⁵¹ Regina Vasquez, *Fatigues Clothesline*, 2011, National Veterans Art Museum. Individual participants remain anonymous.

year it was mandated to take women and described her experience as difficult. “I don’t like women in my Coast Guard,”⁵² was something that she frequently heard. “Women had to be twice as good as men just to be considered half as good.”⁵³ Robynn Murray describes her experience similarly. As a machine gunner she felt she had to fight harder to prove herself: “...you have this feeling in the military that somebody’s either gonna call you a dyke or call you a slut and there’s nothing in between and there’s nothing you can do about it. So you better just run faster and be good at PT⁵⁴ so they leave you alone.”⁵⁵ Gender discrimination or being overlooked in the military is a repeated theme for each of the eight artists and exists as half of the two-part leitmotif of this exhibition.

Intimately linked with the concept of gender discrimination and the tendency for military women to be overlooked is the objectification of these women by their male colleagues, the experience of being looked over. Women are often objectified, presumed to exist within the military only to fulfill the sexual needs of men who are miles away from their wives, girlfriends and any other female contact. The book, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (2009) by Helen Benedict, follows the stories of several women from the time they enlisted in the army to their return from war. The women in this book discuss the difficulty of being a woman at war and their stories clearly define the different types of “looking” in the military. Mickiela Montoya describes her experience in Iraq and asserts that, “...a lot of the men didn’t want us there. One guy

⁵² Victoria Robillard Breyers, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception – Artist Talk*, National Veterans Art Museum. March 10, 2012.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Physical Training

⁵⁵ Robynn Murray, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception – Artist Talk*, National Veterans Art Museum. March 10, 2012.

told me he thinks the military sends women over to give the guys eye candy to keep them sane. He told me in Vietnam they had prostitutes, but they don't have those in Iraq, so they have female soldiers instead.”⁵⁶ Upon arrival on base, women are cautioned to find a battle buddy, someone with whom they can travel the base safely with after dark. Fulfilling basic needs like eating, showering, and going to the washroom are things women are warned against doing alone. Camp Arifjan in Kuwait is referred to as “generator city” because it is said that the generators are so loud a woman’s screams cannot be heard.⁵⁷ The practice of a battle buddy system is wrought with contradictions and emphasizes the attitude that sexual assault is a well-known and accepted practice, that looking over women (while overlooking their rights) is commonplace.

The professional consequences of being both overlooked and looked over are appalling. For example, in 2006, army specialist Susanne Swift was court-martialed for desertion, demoted, and put in prison for a month for refusing to redeploy under a sergeant whom she had reported for repeatedly raping her.⁵⁸ That same year, Cassandra Hernandez, who was serving in the Air Force, was charged with indecent behaviour after she reported being gang-raped by three fellow soldiers, essentially accusing her of her own assault.⁵⁹ Again that year, army specialist Chantelle Henneberry was denied a promotion after reporting a sergeant for sexually assaulting her; he was promoted immediately.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 167.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

A woman who reports harassment or assault is further overlooked and ignored by both her male and female counterparts. Helen Benedict explains: “The prevailing attitude in the military, from women as well as men, is to regard a woman who reports sexual assault as a traitor, a weakling, a slut, or a liar, and soldiers often punish such a woman by ostracizing her: turning their backs when she walks into a room or refusing to speak or listen to her.”⁶¹ The pocket of a jacket hanging in the *Fatigues Clothesline* reads: “After I was raped I was isolated and blamed and shunned. I stayed in my room day and night. My world and concept of good and bad, right and wrong, was shattered.”⁶² Stigmatization like this forces women to keep the assault hidden. Both Regina Vasquez and Erica Slone kept their secrets for years; Slone only spoke about hers weeks before the opening of this exhibition. She had the added fear of serving as a gay woman under the American Military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy which was recently repealed by President Obama on December 22nd, 2010.⁶³ The policy allowed homosexual men and women to serve in the military as long as they did not reveal their sexual orientation. She feared that speaking out about her rape would invite inquiry into her personal life, thus possibly leading to her being discharged. These accounts and the fear involved in coming forward further speak to the burden of the witness.

The testimony of survivor-witnesses plays an important social and political role in Kali Tal’s theoretical writings on psychic trauma. Her inquiry involves the oscillation

⁶¹ Helen Benedict, *The Lonely Soldier*, 81.

⁶² Regina Vasquez, *Fatigues Clothesline*, 2011, National Veterans Art Museum. Individual participants remain anonymous.

⁶³ “Obama Signs Repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’” *Associated Press* http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40777922/ns/politics-white_house/t/obama-signs-repeal-dont-ask-dont-tell/#.UEUVxdaPV Ao (accessed October 10, 2012).

between the individual effects of trauma and the way it becomes reflected and changes politically and culturally.⁶⁴ Her approach, which focuses on the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and sexual abuse of women and children, juxtaposes the individual experience of trauma with the collective response and interpretation of it. An important aspect of her work explores the role of dominant social, cultural and political structures in survivor testimony and how survivor testimony can change these structures. Tal's discussion of the testimony of abused women and children resonates with the testimony of the survivors of MST within the exhibition *Overlooked / Looked Over*.

The artists of *Overlooked / Looked Over* form part of a larger movement of witnessing sexual abuse and violence against women that has its roots in feminist movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In her chapter on opening the discourses on sexual abuse, "We Didn't Know What Would Happen," Kali Tal explains that women who spoke out at this time were determined to reveal the abuses that were happening behind closed doors across America.⁶⁵ "...they believed that if they spoke out, women all over the country would become enraged and empowered, and would move to challenge the laws and social conditions that protected sexually abusive men."⁶⁶ Nearly forty years later, women in the United States Military are taking up the same fight, and like the women of the movements that came before them who spoke out against their husbands, fathers, family members, friends and acquaintances, they too are fighting those closest to them. The perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment against women in the military

⁶⁴ Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

are fellow soldiers: those with whom the victims are closest, rather than the unknown foreign “enemy” against whom they are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Kirby Dick, director of the film *The Invisible War*, points out that “female soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan are more likely to be raped than killed by the enemy.”⁶⁷ Dick’s assertion exposes the private war women are fighting within the military.

Kali Tal asserts that women who testify about sexual abuse are unlike many other survivors of trauma, because the women who bear witness remain at risk.⁶⁸ Sociologist Anthony Wilden discusses, “[t]he ever-present threat of male violence against women is a ruthless assault on women’s freedom to think and do and be as they are and run their own lives. The threat of rape makes growing up a recognition of subordination and life a state of siege.”⁶⁹ The female vulnerability and subordination that Wilden discusses is further amplified by the ultra masculine mentality of the military. The risk and cost of bearing witness for these women is also amplified by standards of honour, courage and strength that the United States Military projects. Many of the women involved in *Overlooked / Looked Over* describe both a fear of being dishonoured as well as a fear of reprisal; testimony can be as traumatizing as the abuse itself.

As viewers of the work exhibited in the *Fatigues Clothesline*, we participate in the act of testifying with the artists as the listener-witness. “For a witness to perform an act of bearing witness, she [or he] must address an other, a listener who consequently functions

⁶⁷ “‘The Invisible War’: Women in the military and the realities about sexual assault,” The Cycle <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/the-cycle/50826073#50826073> (aired Feb. 15, 2013).

⁶⁸ Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, 155.

⁶⁹ Anthony Wilden in Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, 155.

as a witness to the original witness.”⁷⁰ Not only does the viewer act as an observer to the testimony of trauma, but also as a vindication of it: “the performative act of bearing witness affirms the reality of the event witnessed.”⁷¹ The *Fatigues Clothesline* has provided these women with the opportunity to engage in an act of witnessing as survivor-witnesses and to take an active role in narrating their own stories, which they often have not done before. The act of writing out their testimonies combined with the creation of often visceral imagery, such as two red handprints on the breast of a jacket symbolizing the blood that they themselves have on their hands after taking part in war, allows these women to create a dialogue and thus an awareness of women at war.⁷² Furthermore, they are afforded ownership of their experience, validation for coming forward and a release from the memories that have continued to privately haunt them.

⁷⁰ Guerin and Hallas, *The Image and the Witness*, 10.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Parallel to the discussion of MST and violence against women in the military is that of violence done by women in the military. Coco Fusco focuses specifically on women’s role in the torture of prison inmates as revealed through the photographs from Abu Ghraib. For more information see her published lecture: Coco Fusco “*Operation Atropos*,” *Journal of Media Practice* 11:1, pp. 81-93, doi:10.1386/jmpr.11.1.81/1

Witnessing Stripped Bare

While Regina Vasquez's installation emphasizes the role of the survivor-witness in testifying to the trauma experienced in the military, Erica Slone's work emphasizes the role of the listener-witness in interpreting and experiencing the trauma of another. Slone's installation, *Uncovering My Crime Scene*, is a claustrophobic three-walled room inside of which sits a bed, stripped bare, in places to the mattress springs. The outline of a figure lying in the fetal position has been cut into the mattress; the multiple layers of cloth and padding are visible down to the core of springs that poke through. Experienced directly, the viewer encounters a door that leads into the room. It has been left ajar but cannot be opened further as the bed is in the way, thus preventing any access into or out of the room. The interior of the room is made entirely visible by a missing wall, which acts as a frame for the scene. The viewer is struck by the chipped paint, discoloured wallpaper and splintered and broken floorboards, the details of which contribute to the unsettling feeling of the room. Something bad happened here.

Erica Slone was on active duty in the U.S. Air Force for six years, and is currently a Fine Arts Sculpture major at Ohio State University.⁷³ While researching women's experiences in the military for this exhibition, Slone describes her shock at discovering the prevalence of MST. She explains, "I had no idea. And I was a victim."⁷⁴ She was drugged and assaulted two months after enlisting and, like many other women, never reported it due to embarrassment and shame, in addition to her fear of being discharged

⁷³ NVAM Collection Online, "Erica Slone," <https://www.nvam.org/collection-online/index.php?artist=Slone%2C+Erica> (accessed October 23, 2012).

⁷⁴ Erica Slone, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

from the military. “Once I realized how prevalent it was and learned of the reprisal that victims tend to suffer after reporting [assault], I wanted to learn more and investigate; imagine how my life could have been different if I had come forward. So for me, my piece is about that and about investigating, understanding and trying to reconcile my decision not to come forward.”⁷⁵

Jill Bennett’s book, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005), is important in understanding how Slone’s installation operates within the context of trauma and witnessing. Bennett’s approach to trauma and art is to look at “art as a kind of visual language of trauma and of the experiences of conflict and loss.”⁷⁶ She addresses the question of what art tells us about trauma and “focus[es] on the specifics of the visual art medium and to identify what it is that art itself *does* that gives rise to a way of thinking and feeling about this subject.”⁷⁷ Bennett’s focus—“not on trauma itself, but on the affective operations of art and on the ways in which these situate art in a certain relation to trauma and to the kind of conflict that may engender trauma”⁷⁸—is relevant to Slone’s work, *Uncovering My Crime Scene*, which itself does not make the trauma apparent, but rather provokes an affective response by situating the installation in relation to trauma. Slone’s trauma is not present inside of the room; rather the feelings and memory of the trauma reside there. She has created a place that exudes a sense of anxiety and secrecy, which can be felt rather than fully understood by the viewer; through this *feeling*, the

⁷⁵ Erica Slone, *Overlooked / Looked Over: Opening Reception* (artist talk, National Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL, March 10, 2012).

⁷⁶ Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

viewer enters into a testimonial exchange with the work and is thus invited to *uncover* Slone's crime scene.

Bennett describes the creation of space and traces of trauma in the work of Doris Salcedo. Salcedo's work regarding victims of violence in Columbia uses furniture and articles of clothing interwoven with biological traces; human hair and bone act as the traces of lost human lives while the furniture recreates homes that have been destroyed by the violent loss of loved ones. Her work operates obliquely, providing the viewer with a gradual understanding of the trauma they are witnessing. The visceral response that comes upon recognition of fragments of bone and hair woven into silk heightens the viewer's feelings toward the piece and generates an awareness of a human presence.⁷⁹

Slone's work operates in a similar fashion to Salcedo's: the creation of the place of trauma, in addition to the viewer's recognition of traces of trauma, heightens their understanding of the work and thus the testimonial exchange. Slone's room is a reconstruction not necessarily of the exact place of trauma, but a metaphorical place of both the assault and the entrapped psychological state of the victim: a victim who was living in silence, fear, and guilt. The creation of this place allows the viewer to witness this trauma without Slone having to reveal any specific details of her assault; the trauma is felt rather than instantly recognized. The figure lying in the fetal position carved into the mattress acts as a trace of the trauma (Figure 11). It is an imprint of an isolated, abused figure, not immediately identified or fully understood. Both Slone and Salcedo

⁷⁹ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 61.

convey psychic trauma, often invisible, rather than the moment of trauma. Bennett explains that,

In refusing us sight of the atrocity or the murder victim, Salcedo shifts her focus away from the traumatic confrontation and toward a more enduring experience of traumatic memory and grief... Salcedo seems to argue for an imagery that evokes a place transformed by pain. Our bodies take us into this place, not as witnesses shadowing the primary subjects of this pain, but in a manner that demonstrates, at the same time, the limited possibilities of either containing or translating pain.⁸⁰

The viewer, of either Salcedo or Slone's work, does not bear witness to the actual trauma but to the testimony of the survivor through subtle reconstructions of place and traces of trauma.

Bennett asserts that "trauma-related art is best understood as *transactive* rather than *communicative*. It often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the 'secret' of personal experience."⁸¹ Through her use of decaying materials, Slone has created a visceral experience for the viewer that evokes an affective response to her work. The viewer is drawn into a transaction with the work that touches him/her without providing any detailed description of the events that transpired in the room. Bennett emphasizes that this transaction between the art and the viewer, though not outright revealing the trauma, engages the viewer conceptually. This conceptual engagement is achieved through the use of the encountered sign, a term coined by Deleuze in his work *Proust and Signs*. The *encountered sign* is, as Bennett suggests, "the sign that is felt, rather than recognized or perceived through cognition."⁸² Furthermore, the sensation "is a

⁸⁰ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 65.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*

catalyst for critical inquiry”;⁸³ if we critically approach the signs presented to us in Slone’s work we are capable of understanding the trauma without it having to be explicitly described to us. The cramped space and blocked door evoke feelings of helplessness; there is no escape. The bed has no pillows, sheets, or blanket; it is stripped bare, emphasizing the absence of the usual comforts associated with a bed. The exposed mattress with its protruding springs sits as a metaphor for the person whose dignity has been stripped by the traumatic incident. The various elements in this installation act as the catalysts for critical inquiry into the issue of MST, rather than a scene where Slone is instead looked over.

In the manner that Vasquez’s installation functions as a platform for the survivor-witness to testify, Erica Slone’s provides an opportunity for the listener-witness to observe her personal trauma of sexual assault as well as the larger phenomenon of Military Sexual Trauma. Viewing only the sliver visible through the door, the engagement with the piece would be as a voyeur peeking into this bedroom and trying to get a better view of what happened inside: a tantalizing, objectifying way of looking. By opening up the side of the installation to frame the scene, her installation invites the viewer to witness rather than look at her crime scene as a spectacle. Leaving one wall open to frame the scene has accomplished two feats. Firstly, it has provided an open view into this room, baring the evidence and traces of the trauma she experienced and engaging the viewer as a witness to her trauma. Secondly, it has provided an experience of what Dominick LaCapra terms “*empathetic unsettlement*, [used] to describe the aesthetic

⁸³ Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 7.

experience of simultaneously *feeling for* another and becoming aware of a distinction between one's own perceptions and the experience of the other."⁸⁴ We can never fully witness in a way that makes the experience our own; we can only take on knowledge and acknowledge the distance that exists between us and the other's lived experience of trauma. By keeping the viewer outside of the installation and experiencing it through a framed perspective, he or she is aware that this trauma is not their own; it is an other's experience that we have been invited to witness rather than assimilate into our own experience.

Griselda Pollock writes of a related experience of witnessing in her work "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma." Coined by Israeli/French artist and theoretician Bracha L. Ettinger, aesthetic wit(h)nessing is "a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter."⁸⁵ The addition of the letter 'h' changes the definition and role of witnessing to imply a sense of being *with* the individual who is testifying; this is a process of deeper involvement than simple observation.⁸⁶ Ettinger broadens the word's definition "from the legal and testimonial meaning of bearing witness to the crime against the other, to being with, but not assimilated to, and to being beside the other in a gesture that is much more than mere ethical solidarity. There is risk; but there is also a sharing."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), in Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 17.

⁸⁵ Griselda Pollock, "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma," *EurAmerica* 40 (2010), 831.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Slone's work invites the viewer to witness an intimate, traumatic event without ever seeing the crime itself and with the constant awareness that the trauma of this event is unassimilable. The *risk* lies both in the possible spectacularization and assimilation of Slone's trauma. As discussed, her work avoids becoming spectacle through the opening of the side wall of the installation so that the viewer may take in the entire scene rather than peer through the crack of the open door attempting to catch a glimpse of a crime scene. The opening also functions to frame the scene, setting the viewer apart from the trauma thus making them distinctly aware that this is not their own trauma, but another's. But as Pollock suggests, there is also sharing: the missing wall, while opening the room up, is also an invitation to witness with Slone.

Conclusion

At the entrance to *Overlooked / Looked Over* was a display comprised of a folded military uniform with a small paper heart tucked into the collar of a jacket inscribed with the name Carri Goodwin and the dates of her birth and death respectively (Figure 12). A hand-written letter was framed on the wall above, and beside that, a newspaper article describing Carri's story and her father's quest to raise awareness of abuse in the military. Twenty year old Carri Goodwin was raped and beaten while serving in the United States Marine Corps.⁸⁸ After reporting the abuse, she was blamed and bullied until finally being discharged, with the reasons stated as Personality Disorder.⁸⁹ On February 28, 2009, five days after returning home, Carri Goodwin drank herself to death. Carri's father Gary Noling describes that: "She ha[d] signed up with wishes to be deployed, go to combat and defend her country. Instead she was raped, blamed for being raped and betrayed by her command."⁹⁰ The uniform, letter, and newspaper article were sent to the National Veterans Art Museum by Carri's father and became an unexpected, last-minute addition to the exhibition. The three objects set the tone for what the visitor was about to witness: the struggle and trauma of what it is like to be a woman at war.

Shoshana Felman addresses the lonely burden of bearing witness, quoting Elie Wiesel who states, "If someone else could have written my stories... I would not have written them. I have written in order to testify. And this is the origin of loneliness that can

⁸⁸ Gary Noling, Letter to the National Veteran's Art Museum, Appendix C.

⁸⁹ Melissa O'Brien, "Carri Leigh Goodwin, United States Marine Corps," My Duty to Speak Blog, entry posted January 21, 2011, <http://mydutytospeak.com/2011/01/21/carri-leigh-goodwin-1-5-89-to-2-28-09-united-states-marine-corps/>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

be glimpsed in each of my sentences.”⁹¹ Testimony can only be made by the witness and thus Felman states, “the burden of the witness – in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses – is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden.”⁹² The artists of *Overlooked / Looked Over* carry the burden of testifying to their experiences of war, of its after-effects and of Military Sexual Trauma. Their testimonies are individual, first-hand experiences expressed in very different ways, and as survivor-witness each of them carries their own solitary burden. The collective grouping of these women in this exhibition provided the artists with a platform and a supportive environment to lessen the solitude of witnessing while presenting the viewer with their different perspectives, thus placing the viewer in the role of listener-witness.

Regina Vasquez’s installation, *Fatigues Clothesline*, provided the viewer with first-hand testimony to various women’s experiences of war and is an example of the testimony of the survivor-witness. The fatigues are the manifestation of the lived trauma and are visual testimonies that can be quite literally read by the viewer. The reading of the testimonies written on the garments involves interacting with the installation and taking the time to read the intimate and often disturbing accounts of war. The viewer moves through the clothesline, actively engaging with the work and witnessing the testimony of the artists, rather than merely looking at the clothesline as a spectacle of the horrors of war and MST. Similarly, Erica Slone’s installation, *Uncovering My Crime Scene*, demonstrates the viewer’s role of listening closely to testimony that does not make the trauma immediately apparent. Through the recreation of the place of trauma and

⁹¹ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*

psychological anguish and the subtle use of trace and signs that carry the weight of her trauma, Slone's work creates a context for a more receptive and engaged role of the listener-witness. This exhibition is an example of how art practices can enact and facilitate new modes of testimony and witnessing, and the works displayed do so according to the survivor / listener framework.

Kali Tal emphasizes that witnessing "is an aggressive act... [b]orn out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity... Its goal is change... The outcome of this battle shapes the rhetoric of the dominant culture and influences political action."⁹³ Witnessing within this exhibition speaks to Tal's assertion that bearing witness is an aggressive act with the goal of change. The Freudian parable for traumatic repetition through the recounting of the tragedy of Tancred and Clorinda leaves a fitting message for the cause of the artists whose works are presented in *Overlooked / Looked Over*, as well as for all women in the military. Tancred, a Christian Knight, slays Clorinda, a warrior maiden and his "beloved." The military reference and act of violence against a woman ironically echo the theme of this paper. As the story goes, Tancred pursues Clorinda as she attempts to escape disguised in the armour of the enemy. "He wished to fight – he thought she was a man worthy to put his mettle to the test..."⁹⁴ She engages in a duel, proving that even a woman, his "beloved", is worthy of a battle in which he must exercise his full strength. The violent themes in the story of Tancred and Clorinda are too obvious to ignore, and this

⁹³ Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, 7.

⁹⁴ Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered Gerusalemme liberate*, ed. and trans. Anthony M. Esolen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 241.

tale presents a compelling female perspective. In most considerations of the poem, Tancred's experience of traumatic repetition is the focus of discussion, rather than the violence directed towards Clorinda or her role as a warrior. Her death represents his trauma and the story focuses on his personal loss and inner turmoil rather than the violent act he committed. "What are you bringing me,' she cried, 'riding so fast?' 'War and death,' he replied. 'War and death you shall have then, if you like. I won't refuse you.' And she stood in wait."⁹⁵

The wait for justice for victims of abuse and gender inequality in the United States Military may be close to over. The hearing regarding Lackland and the lifting of the combat ban for female soldiers⁹⁶ are two examples of the changes taking place. General Welsh testified that U.S. Air Force reforms will include a designation of sixty Air Force attorneys to handle the complaints of sexual abuse and one Victim's Advocate to be stationed at every base.⁹⁷ California Congress Woman Jackie Speier is advocating for sexual assault investigations to be taken out of the military chain of command and into the public sphere where reports of abuse can no longer be ignored or kept hidden.⁹⁸ On April 17, 2013 Speier announced the reintroduction of the Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention (STOP) Act, a bill that aims to create "an independent office

⁹⁵ Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, 241.

⁹⁶ January 24, 2013, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the elimination of the direct ground combat exclusion rule for women. In addition to this they announced a plan to eliminate all unnecessary gender-based barriers to service. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/panetta-announces-end-of-ban-on-women-in-combat/2013/01/24/90cd6876-6655-11e2-93e1-475791032daf_video.html The lifting of this ban opens up opportunities for promotions and career advancement for women that were not previously possible.

⁹⁷ Magalie Laguerre-Wilkinson and Phil Hirschorn, "Pentagon battling military rape 'epidemic'," January 27, 2012 http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57566084/pentagon-battling-military-rape-epidemic/ (accessed January 28, 2013).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

within the military to handle investigations, medical services... and prosecutions [thus] removing the ability of a senior officer to overturn cases of sexual assault.”⁹⁹ Speier advocates that, “Our servicemembers deserve a judicial system that relies on the facts of the case... not the whims of the commanders.”¹⁰⁰ If the bill is passed it will change the way abuse is both handled and viewed in the military and will play an important role in ending the epidemic of MST.

⁹⁹ Paul Szoldra, “Congresswoman Reintroduces Bill To Combat Military Sexual Assault Epidemic,” Business Insider, April 17, 2013 <http://www.businessinsider.com/congresswoman-reintroduces-bill-to-combat-military-sexual-assault-epidemic-2013-4#ixzz2QjqRzKBu> (accessed April 20, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

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Appendix A: Figures

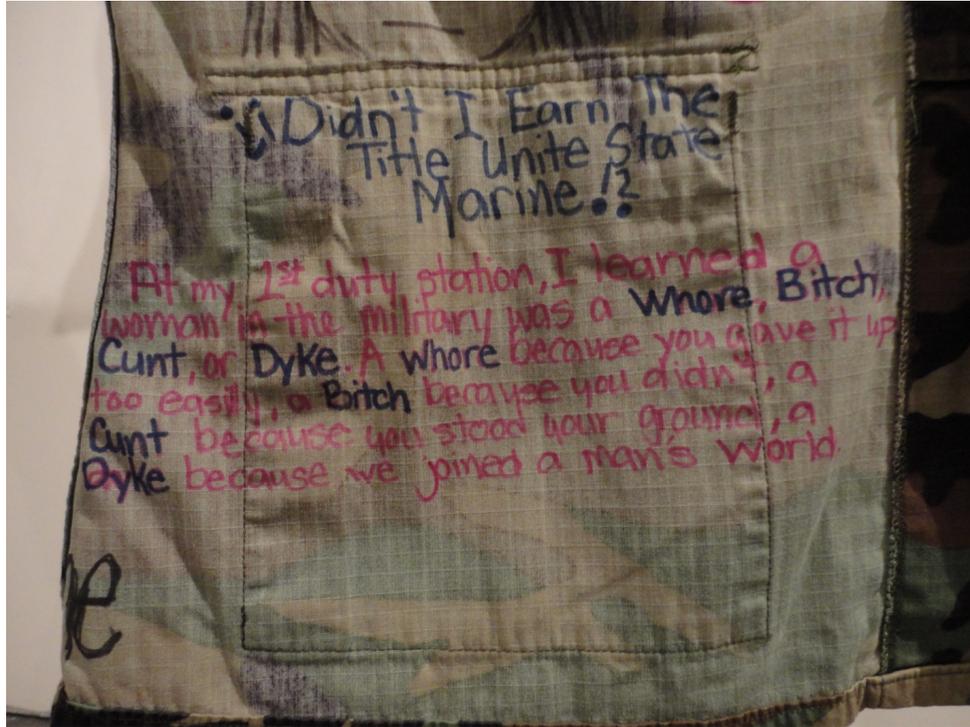


Figure 1. Anonymous, *Fatigues Clothesline*, 2012, mixed media.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 2. Iris M. Feliciano, *(un)clothed and in her right mind*, 2012, digital print on canvas 12" x 16" (each).
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 3. Emily Yates, (from left to right) *Self Portrait in Black Hawk*, glossy print photograph 12" x 16", *Tent City Rebar*, glossy print photograph 10 1/4" x 8 3/4", *Stop Loss*, glossy print photograph 20 1/4" x 16 1/4", *The Skeptic*, glossy print photograph 20 1/4" x 16 1/4". Date unknown.

Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 4. Victoria Robillard Bryers, *And the Towers Fell (1, 2, & 3)*, lithography/intaglio/monotype on paper, 22" x 9" (each). Date unknown. Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 5. *Fatigues Clothesline*, 2012, mixed media.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.

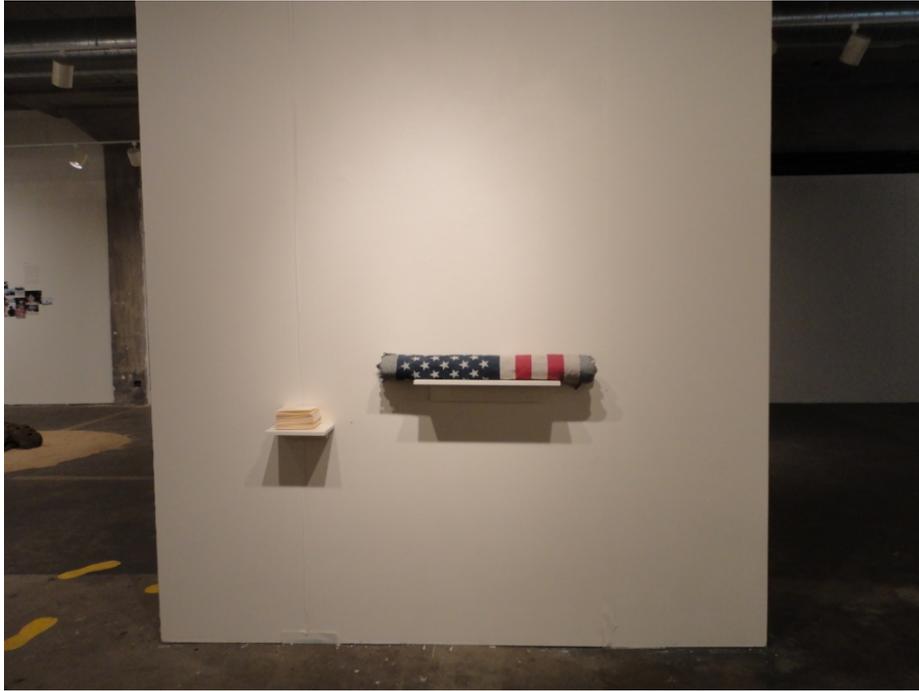


Figure 6. Maggie Martin, *Title Unknown*, mixed media 32 1/2" x 4 1/2" x 4 3/4". Date unknown.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 7. Robynn Murray, *In doctri nation*, mixed media 12" x 17 1/2" x 4"; *Baghdad*, mixed media 12 1/4" x 18" x 4 1/4"; *Healing*, mixed media 11 1/4" x 17 1/2" x 4". Dates unknown.

Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 8. Robynn Murray, (detail) *Healing*, mixed media 11 1/4" x 17 1/2" x 4". Date unknown.

Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 9. Erica Slone, *Uncovering My Crime Scene*, 2011, mixed media.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 10. Anonymous, *Fatigues Clothesline*, 2012, mixed media.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 11. (Detail) Erica Slone, *Uncovering My Crime Scene*, 2011, mixed media. Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.



Figure 12. Carri Goodwin's Military Uniform.
Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.

Appendix B: *Overlooked / Looked Over* Opening Reception - Artist Talk

Video published on Apr 2, 2012 by NVAM

Transcribed by: Jessica Cappuccitti, December 2012

0:00 Iris M. Feliciano

1:14 Emily Yates

2:36 Victoria Robillard Bryers

4:06 Robynn Murray

5:03 Joyce Wagner

5:46 Regina Vasquez

6:56 Erica Slone

9:14 More thoughts/Q&A

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ll0-K5hsxR0&list=UUveRPKx3DOILPeoSHDDrIHQ&index=2>

Iris M. Feliciano: The title for this piece came from a New Testament verse from the bible, where there's a man - there's a story of a man that was possessed by demons, and as the story goes, Jesus came into town and healed this man, but community members were shocked and surprised and they needed to come and see him for themselves, to be sure that he was actually healed. And the way they described him was: "Yes, he's been healed, it's a miracle, he's clothed and in his right mind." And to me that stuck out because it kind of indicates the ongoing belief that we are sane when we are properly clothed, when we are properly uniformed, when we are properly garmented. Being a woman and being in the military - being in the Marine Corps especially - to be out of uniform meant something other than sanity, meant something other than clear of demons. Those indicators, those insignias, those symbols, those garments that supposedly identified me; it wasn't until I could strip myself of those that I finally felt freed of my own demons.

Emily Yates: As a creative person who felt kind of, stifled - very stifled, in the military, I really get a lot out of being able to use that energy to sort of say the things that I was never able to say without getting into a lot of trouble when I was in the military. I mean, I still said them because I was like, 'well you've stop-lossed me, you've sent me to Iraq, so what are you gonna do? I'll just say that stuff.' I think it's interesting that public affairs and journalism were looked at as synonyms in the military, which is a little bit scary. And so I spent a lot of time trying to do journalism instead of public affairs. And I got in trouble for that, of course. I kept a blog - an anonymous blog. Art has been such a source of improvement - of life improvement for me - a path to that I guess. I haven't met many Iraq and Afghanistan vets, or even any other vets that are somewhat creative-minded, or artistic-minded who haven't just been really, really helpful for me to connect with and talk about my experience and so...

Victoria Robillard Bryers: As a Coast Guardman and Retired Chief Petty Officer, I lived basically looking at the towers for a number of years on Governor's Island, which is an island in the middle of New York Harbour. So it's very emotional to me because I used to work right near there, and I was part of the World Trade Centre and I didn't know anybody that was killed in the towers because I wasn't stationed in New York at that time – I was in DC. And I did have some friends that just missed getting killed in the Pentagon. But to me this is a requiem piece. I'm hoping this is the first of a series of requiem pieces that I have planned. And as my generation had to plough the way, since I came in the Coast Guard the first year that the Coast Guard was mandated to take women – so I had a lot of those discriminations – 'I don't like women in my Coast Guard.' Which was the kind of crap that you would hear constantly. Where women had to be twice as good as men just to be considered half as good. And I could do my job as good as anyone else, but I would make a mistake and I was just completely screwed up. I refused to quit and I was going to quit when I was ready to go. And I left at thirty years as a Chief Petty Officer and I got a lot of bruises to go with it, but it was worth it in the end, and I finished on my terms.

Robynn Murray: My art works are the molds of my torso that are in the back room. I started making them not really even having any idea that I was making art, I just have always drawn, I've always sketched - I was always really into art and then you know – art isn't always practical for parents to tell you what to do so I joined the army. And you know – join the army, pay for college, become a lawyer. And I'm not a lawyer, in case you can't tell. But when I started to make these molds of my body, it was more of a healing process for me than it was making art, and honestly, I never through anyone would see them, – it was something I had to get off my chest – figuratively and literally if you look at them. I am so happy to be here with other women vets, I think this is the most I've ever been in a room with at the same time - not just the ladies up here, but some ladies in the audience.

Joyce Wagner: I had this sort of light bulb moment after getting word – waking up to getting orders. Thinking it was the last time I wrote in my journal because I got so mad because I was thinking: who's responsible for sending me here? What are they doing right now? I was like, they're probably playing golf and like having dinner with their families and they never thought about me before as a person – I've been waiting for twenty-two months for the VA to make a determination on my disability claim and Dick Cheney's heart's powered by batteries... I get really, really frustrated, so that's where that one kind of came from.

Regina Vasquez: My piece here is the Fatigues Clothesline; the reason why I created the idea was because I too was assaulted. I was raped by two Marines and then I was threatened for my life. It took me about ten... eleven years to finally tell my husband, and.. it was really hard, but I had to get it off my chest. I wanted to bring this out to other women. Other women who may have experienced what I had experienced - not only because I didn't want to feel alone anymore, but I wasn't alone. The reason behind the

clothesline being turned inside out is because when we wear that uniform, we're proud. But what you don't see is what's on the inside. When you see inside-out the blouses - when they turn it inside out, you see that the artwork is bleeding through? That's our disability showing. That's our emotions from holding it in for so long.

Erica Slone: When I began curating the show, I began researching everything I could – everything about women's experience in the military, and I was just shocked to realize how prevalent Military Sexual Trauma is. I had no idea. And I was a victim. And it took me a long time to come forward - I didn't report it actually... maybe a month ago was the first time I ever actually discussed it. When I was creating the work, I would tell my peers it's about Military Sexual Trauma, I wouldn't go into depth. I don't know why but there is an embarrassment, a shame that I think victims often feel. And it doesn't make sense, really – I had no control over what happened to me, but it's still there, it's still embarrassing to talk about. I was newly enlisted, Active Duty Air Force, stationed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base - had been maybe two months, and I was drugged... and... I'm gay. And I've know I've been gay since I was fifteen. I've been out of the closet. But I was serving under Don't Ask Don't Tell and there was no way that I was going to report this and invite someone else to look into my personal life and that was fear of getting kicked out of Don't Ask Don't Tell, and just in general – the embarrassment and the shame. Once I realized how prevalent it was and learned of the reprisal that victims tend to suffer after reporting it, I wanted to learn more and investigate, imagine how my life could have been different if I had come forward. So for me my piece is about that and about investigating, understanding, and trying to reconcile my decision not to come forward.

More Thoughts / Q & A

On the title *Overlooked/Looked Over*

VRB: Even artists as famous as Judy Chicago – women artists themselves - we may get into a show somewhere, but our art would be relegated to the basement. Judy Chicago's work got relegated to a basement. And that's where it was stored. But it was the men's art... We're fighting the male dominated veteran world and also fighting the male dominated art world.

RM: I couldn't separate out having been a woman from having been in the military. And having been a machine gunner, I was always kind of harassed. I was second guessed more than the average person would have been, even though I was a weapons instructor. But I just felt it was so important for me to make the moulds of my body because everywhere I went being a woman seemed so important to everybody else. When I went and told I felt kind of re-victimized, but then for years I had it in my head that I wasn't sexually assaulted because nobody else treated it like I was. You know, that happened in 2004 and it's 2012 and I've just started to get counselling for that because even now it affects my own personal relationships and you know – my feelings of personal safety. You know –

you have this feeling in the military that somebody's either gonna call you a dyke, or call you a slut and there's nothing in between and there's nothing you can do about it, so you better just run faster and be good at PT so they leave you alone. So I was kind of a chronic over achiever. I was made Sergeant at 20, which in my unit was pretty much unheard of. And now that I'm an anti-war activist and I was the subject of a documentary, *Poster Girl*, everybody's quick to throw me under the bus and say: 'well she wasn't that good of a soldier anyway, she was kind of a shit bag.' You know...

VRB: I wish they could see me as the Marine, as the Army, you know – the Air Force, the Coast Guard, the Navy. I wish we could just be seen as that instead of, 'oh, she's just a woman, forget her.'

IF: When I'm talking, or working or being the professional, or being the councillor, the case manager, whatever it is I'm doing – interacting with people and feeling looked over, like they're not really listening to me, they're just kind of checking me out. And in those cases do I- Is that okay as long as my message kind of gets across to them? Or is that unacceptable and I'd rather not be heard at all, because they're not making eye contact. I had to think about it for a really long time and I still don't know where I - how I feel about that. I really appreciate the depth of that title and where it came from. It wasn't until I started taking some of the images where there was some skin showing that I felt like, oh shit - someone's going to look at that and they're going to look me over and how do I feel about that.

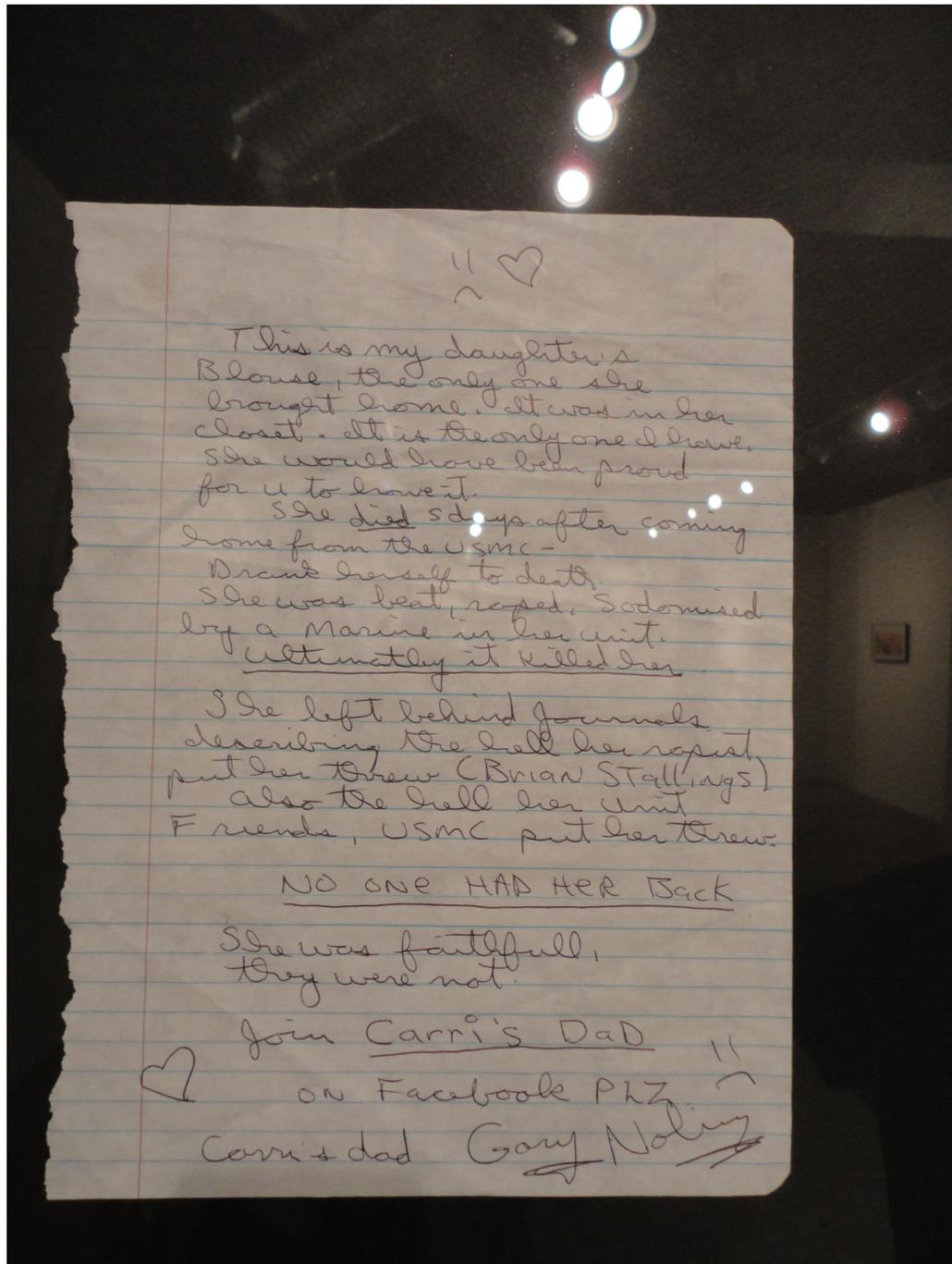
EY: You're not looked at as a person trying to express themselves but a woman expressing herself and that's like the lens that everybody sees all the things we're doing. It can be kind of frightening... be very angry and depressing, etc. - all of the scary 'ing' words. When I was in the military I would write editorials. You see the name on the editorial but you don't see the face – it's the printed word. And nobody's looking me over because they can't see me, ha, ha, ha... I feel like art is a really amazing way to get out of that cycle - just step out of it and be like: 'look at my art.' They're looking at the lens I've chosen to use. Which is 35mm if anyone was wondering.

RM: It's funny because we're taught even to doubt ourselves and at first I was the only female machine gunner on my team and then we got another one and I was so pissed off that people made me prove myself to them and then I realized that I was trying to make her prove herself to me. I had a young girl ask me at the shoe store cause I have a tattoo across my knuckles that says 'vet' and she like, 'well 'vet' like what? Like veterinarian?' and I'm like, combat veteran, and she's like 'oh, do they give women guns too?' And I was just like... (exasperated facial expression)

I was telling someone about how I was a machine gunner in Iraq and they said, 'they don't let women do that!' and I was like, 'oh really?!'

JW: I think that absence is sort of a consistent pattern with women veterans and women artists. But it might be hard to notice if you're not one of those people. I mean, I also chair the board of Iraq Veterans Against the War... This has happened several times in the recent past where I've been with some male board members and somebody will walk up and say, 'oh, this guy over here wants to interview you, a veteran. Can you or you come over and do it?' And I'm basically just sort of not there, regardless of what position or title I might hold. I really meant to be more involved in the process and wish that I could have been more supportive, but I mean, I think at that time it was like, 'well you weren't there so they talked to the people that were there.' It's logical - the reason I wasn't there is because I was a single parent so I think that other gendered things sort of impact human – you're ability to be present. I think it was just important to me to bring a group of people who were often overlooked and/or looked over or a variety of things in between in reality, together when those are the only people in the show.

Appendix C: *Overlooked / Looked Over* – Letter from Carri Goodwin's Father



Gary Noling, Letter to NVAM, 2012.

Image courtesy of the author with permission to use from the National Veterans Art Museum.