

SCRIPT FROM WITHIN

ARTIST STATEMENT AND PROCESS

Script from Within is a collaborative visual art project that, among other things, incorporates authentic handwritings of women who are incarcerated in Minnesota to confront viewers with the humanity behind the crisis of mass incarceration of women. The rate of incarceration of women in our state has increased over 900% in the past three decades.

I obtained the handwritings for *Script from Within* through a “Call for Your Handwriting”. That was not as simple as it may sound. How does an outsider gain access to women who are locked up in our correctional facilities? The prisons in MN (state and federal) denied me access.

When I was finally able to gain entrance into the Ramsey, Goodhue, Hennepin and Wright County correctional facilities (jails), I explained the *Script from Within* project to interested women residents. I emphasized that one doesn't have to be a writer to write, and that to me *Hand Writing* shows an individual's artistic expression and humanity. The “Call for Your Handwriting” has optional prompts such as “I miss...” and many more. It invites participants to write about what is important to them that they want to share with the outside.

To amplify the women's voices, I traced fragments of the original, penciled graphics of their handwritings through hand stitching, i.e. with needle and thread. To date, there have been more than 200 participants and *Script from Within* keeps unfolding as we continue the collaboration through a visual arts dialogue and exchange. We have been able to expand the art making by the women locked up at the jail in Buffalo with print-making, drawing, doodling, stitching (without using needles), painting, collaging and much, much more.

An original artwork created with some of the authentic handwritings is exhibited in the program room at the Ramsey County jail. There was an artist talk and reception within that jail in 2017; emotions were triggered and shared. The libraries of participating jails received a book of the art as part of MN State Arts Board funding. This book is also part of the special collections (Minneapolis History) at the Hennepin County Central Library (fourth floor) in downtown Minneapolis and of the US Library of Congress.

Although the women who handwrote needed to remain anonymous to get this project off the ground, I hope that their individual humanity, resilience and beauty will speak to viewers. It is my hope that the work will spark conversation and action towards reversing mass incarceration of women.

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