

Everything inside me

Lu Adami

School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

Thank you to...

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The following document contains Lu Adami's Master of Fine Arts thesis statement.

Lu Adami b. 1997 in Chicago, IL

My art is my salvation. My art answers questions. My art is made through me but is not defined by me. My art told me it thinks you're hot. My art is friends with my childhood quilting teacher. My art eats my sadness. My art pulled the tower card. My art wants to hold you. My art third-wheels when I go out to dinner. My art is soft like the body I have. My art goes swimming in Onset. My art has two favorite songs: Come a Little Bit Closer and Suck My Left One. My art had gender affirming surgery. My art knows my end. My art craves Italian beef with extra au jus. My art reads coffee grounds with my ancestors. My art touches you tenderly. My art will not save me.

Lu Adami (b. 1997, Chicago, IL) lives and works in Boston, MA. Adami is expecting to receive their MFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University in May 2025 and previously received a BA from Brown University and a MEd from University of Pennsylvania.

Contact Information

Email: olu0ada0@gmail.com

Website: luadami.com

My thesis body of work intertwines research threads of feminism and institutional disruption. I will reference works of art and writing made by myself as I share what I have learned in my qualitative research on these subjects and the many sub-subjects I also encountered

I. Collection / Connection

While much of the work presented is related specifically to my mother and my relationship with her (fig. 1), my practice and relationships in general are informed by the concept of feminine interconnectedness. I use the word feminine loosely and to denote an affiliation with feminism, as opposed to an identification with a female gender or sex.

* * *

In the morning I wake up and find her there, same as she was yesterday. The room is still dark though the sun is long risen. When I struggle to get out of bed, their soft, tattooed hands guide me to my feet. Standing, we regard each other. I do not need to ask her to know that she cannot heal me. The comfort they bring is the knowing, the being known.

* * *

Anahit, a goddess of Armenian Zoroastrianism linked to a number of elements including war, fertility, and water, was the embodiment of my developing ideas. Growing up in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church I felt limited in the ways I could express myself and my identities for fear of being ostracized. My discovery of Armenian Zoroastrianism came at a time when I was trying to connect with my Armenian heritage while also exploring different ways of expressing my LGBT identities. Anahit became a frame of mind through which I could access both an expanse of feminine knowledge and the qualities of femininity free of the limitations of patriarchy. I created several works of art (fig. 2) that explored feminine power, influenced by scholarly research, "...recognizing feminine ways of being as powerful rather than natural is personally transformative, deprograms patriarchal conditioning, destabilizes systems of domination, advances social justice goals, and diminishes femmephobia," (Barton and Huebner 2022, 31). The words I choose to feature on 2-dimensional works of art and in performances are at

times delivered as directly from Anahit, results of reckoning with my own feminine qualities, or earnest messages to loved ones I am empowered to share unabashedly.

* * *

I remember the moment I saw you rise from the pile of concrete a cat had just pissed on. The clouds overhead churned fluffy white and unawares: you were terrifying. Brown tendrils floating against the gravity that keeps me down and red-raw scratches moving up and down your body. I can still picture the bruises under your eyes, on your back, arms, legs, and buttocks. Was it as hard to get there for you as it was for me? When I fell at your feet you laughed at me — not with malice but as a sister would.

* * *

My interest in exploring interconnectedness and impact through femininity began in earnest while chronicling the lineages of quiltmakers from Gee's Bend in Boykin, Alabama (fig. 3). The overlaps in color, form, and technique amongst several generations inspired me artistically (fig. 4) but also sparked something ideological — the belief that I am connected to all who came before me through a shared, feminine connection and that the actions I take and feelings I have will impact others in the future, as actions and feelings from my ancestors have impacted me.

II. Failure to Conform

The process of institutional disruption was first demonstrated to me by my mother while my siblings and I were growing up. This lived experience has provided me with the knowledge and agency to critically view the places I have existed in since adolescence. Watching my mom challenge school administrators and petition our school boards against the decisions they were making is tantamount to her contributions to co-curricular offerings and extracurricular activities. The experience of watching my mom critically judge something that matters to her, take the time to envision a different path forward, and take action towards positive change inspires me to do the same.

* * *

I want your God to watch me mutilate you. I want you to be so afraid of me you piss yourself. I want my touch to paralyze you. I want you to beg for me to keep going. I want you to be afraid to speak with me. I want to kick you in the stomach until you vomit. I want you to thank me as I leave. I want you to never speak to me again.

* * *

Supporting that which I have learned from my mom are scholars Sara Ahmed and Audre Lorde who have written academic, narrative, and poetic works about asserting oneself in opposition with a dominant narrative of an institution. Much of their work deals directly with the possibilities that come from speaking up and that which might be lost when the decision is made to stay silent.

You might have to fight for room, room to be, room to do, room to do your work without being questioned or being put under surveillance.

You might have to fight to find a safe path through life, a way of

progressing, of getting through, without having to give up yourself or your desires. A fight can be how we acquire wisdom: we know so much from trying to transform the worlds that do not accommodate us. But that fight can also be just damn hard; when you have to fight for an existence you can end up feeling fighting is your existence. And so, we need each other: we need to become each other's resources.

(feministkilljoys 2022)

The institutional disruption that I partake in has many forms. I utilize the intersections between complaining, community, and queerness in order to speak up, take action, and make art. My presence itself is one such form: to be out as queer and transgender is to embody institutional disruption (fig. 5). Navigating spaces and places that are hostile to me and my identities has not dampened my drive; I am invigorated in thinking about a different, more inclusive experience for everyone and invigorated by the artwork that is derived from that work.

* * *

Your bed is soft and flowery sheets repulse you. You will pretend the color yellow has not changed. The dress he touched you through is in the garbage can in the alley. You eat McDonalds and smile in the sunshine and cry when you hear the chorus of your favorite song. You wear the North Face puffer your mom bought you last Christmas even though you wish you could toss it along with the dress. The night comes and it is bright. Moon beams still hit your face when you sleep on the couch.

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Figures:



Figure 1, *Message To My Mother* (2025), documented by Michelle Schapiro (@michelleschapiro.jpg), artist and their mother, Martha Carlson



Figure 2, *Anahit's Rapture*, 2024, 17" x 23", cyanotype on fabric, cotton fabric, glass beads, plastic embellishments



Figure 3, *Blocks*, Irene Williams, 1975, 80" x 59", polyester knit, wool-blend knit, wool,





Figure 5, *I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive*, video documentation still, 2025, artist in object of bra pads and dye