

**Making A Record: Preserving & Celebrating the Lives of Women
Through Experimental Documentary Portraiture.**

by

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ABSTRACT

For the past 13 years the documentary portrait has been my passion, and I see my role as a media maker much like a scavenger or gleaner as I strive to collect subject matter that others may deem as useless or uninteresting. This paper defines my approach and methodology as I use the form to share and preserve stories about the elderly women living in the margins of society. My work attempts to reject the traditional documentary structure that relies on drama, climax, and resolution, and places emphasis on the subject/filmmaker relationship. I will discuss the experimental and feminist filmmakers who have influenced my work as well as the fields of community media and participatory arts practice that have led me to a rejection of the separation between subject and filmmaker that often occurs in traditional patriarchal documentary film. I approach the narrative in my documentary work in creative stages that experiment with various mediums. For example instead of writing a script I spend time not only having conversations with my subject, but with the materials and artifacts from her life.

Throughout the past two years in the Integrated Electronic Arts program at Rensselaer I have experimented with video, sound, photography, bookmaking, and installation to create three final documentary video portraits of: 1) my grandmother Eloyse, 2) Bernice Perry, and 3) Glendora Folsom Buell. The creative journey I have taken with each of these characters to tell their stories begins with my personal childhood story growing up as a working class female, and recovering from the traumatic suicide of my uncle. In my future path I will continue to creatively use interdisciplinary media arts and documentary portraiture to make community media with underrepresented women and girls, curate women's film nights, and tell elderly women's stories. My goal as an artist is to highlight the importance of the practice of women doing both ordinary and extraordinary things and adding that history to a larger societal narrative.