

# AGENT 355

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We're living in a time when the power of storytelling is evident, particularly to the women's movement. We see this represented in the growing influence of the "Me Too" and "Time's Up" communities which are founded on the belief that the vulnerability of shared experience is the key to change. I have always been drawn to portraiture for its ability to create an intimate and personal connection to an individual's story, and when I began this project I was motivated to find new stories to elevate through portraiture. My research for Agent 355 (named after the only unidentified and female member of George Washington's Culper spy ring) looked at the New York Times "Overlooked Obituary Project," which prints the death notices of forgotten extraordinary women in an attempt to rectify the fact that only 15% of NYT's obituaries have honored women in the past 167 years. This is indicative of a larger problem in our society: a culture of dismissing women and their stories.

As a result, female authors, artists, and revolutionaries alike were excluded from having their lifetime of work recapped in the most widely read publication in America. Among these women are: Charlotte Brontë and Sylvia Plath, world renowned authors; brilliant artists like the Cuban printmaker Belkis Ayón; and Qui Jin, a martyr for women's rights during the restrictive Qing Dynasty of China. All have had their lives go unrecognized as a consequence of their gender. Agnes Ritcher observed this, and inspired a trend when she embroidered her memoir into a jacket made from a hospital gown of the insane asylum she was confined to in the 1890's. Turning to the traditionally feminine task of needlework for some degree of permanence in female storytelling has remained a common, yet largely ignored expression in fashion since. The way that women altered clothes that were fundamentally grounded in women's stereotypes to express what was silenced elsewhere is a compelling parallel to women finding ways to make an impact on a history that is grounded in its ostracism of women and minorities. By creating portraits of some of the most impactful women from the Overlooked Project and using them to create a dress, I am not only honoring their unpublished efforts, but the persistence these women had to create change.

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