ACMA01 � Research Essay � Fall 2014
�What�s in a Name?� Text and Naming in lois andison�s relay
In the great Greek dialogue, the Phaedrus, Plato�s Socrates suggests that text �is inhuman,
pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind. Writing is
simply a thing, something to be manipulated, something inhuman, artificial, a manufactured
product.� (Ong 27) Text, according to this view, is dead, indifferent, static, and stagnant; once
the word is written, it becomes inflexible, its meaning solidified and made constant henceforth.
Highly textual in nature, lois andison�s relay, on display at the Doris McCarthy Gallery on the
UTSC campus from September 2, 2014 � November 8, 2014, challenges this view of text as
stable, constant, and unresponsive. Rather, �It is through wordplay that the artist provides a sense
of freedom and a myriad of alternatives, creating complexly layered, imaginative spaces.�
(MacDonald) 1,000 catastrophes flings textual accounts of the artist�s everyday anxieties at the
viewer, cued by the viewer�s presence and movement, displaying a flurry of anxieties in a
pedestaled bell jar, prompting reflection on our own thousands of catastrophes � real and
imagined. The work entitled fragmented self acts as a textual self-portrait in letterpress, where
�the layering of words within words is a metaphor for the self,� suggesting a variety of identities
and meanings composed and constructed within each individual person, word, and name.
(Andison) The video installment, What�s in a Name?, plays with nursery rhymes and idioms �
words often said, but not actively considered. Such terms are often used here in specifically
gendered ways that label a young woman based on the flowers in her box or basket.
heartbreaking acts as a clean and tidy textual representation of the messy reality of heartache and
loss, asserted in the familiar tiles of a Scrabble game, hinting at once at a kind of playfulness and
sorrow. In short, Andison�s use of text seems far from �inhuman, artificial, a manufactured
product;� rather, it is dynamic, provocative, with a sense of authenticity that seems all too
human.