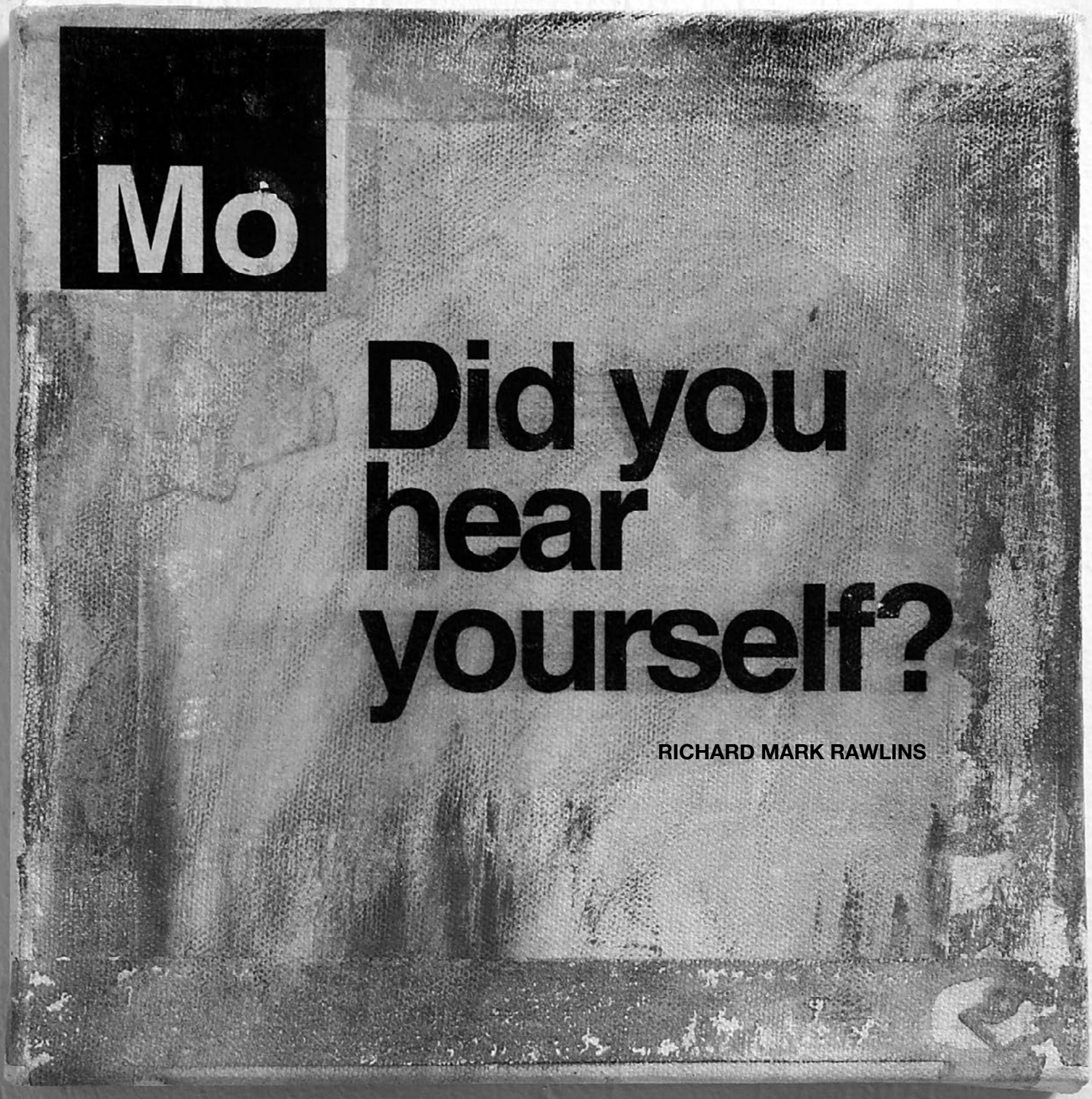

Mo
Did you hear yourself?
RICHARD MARK RAWLINS

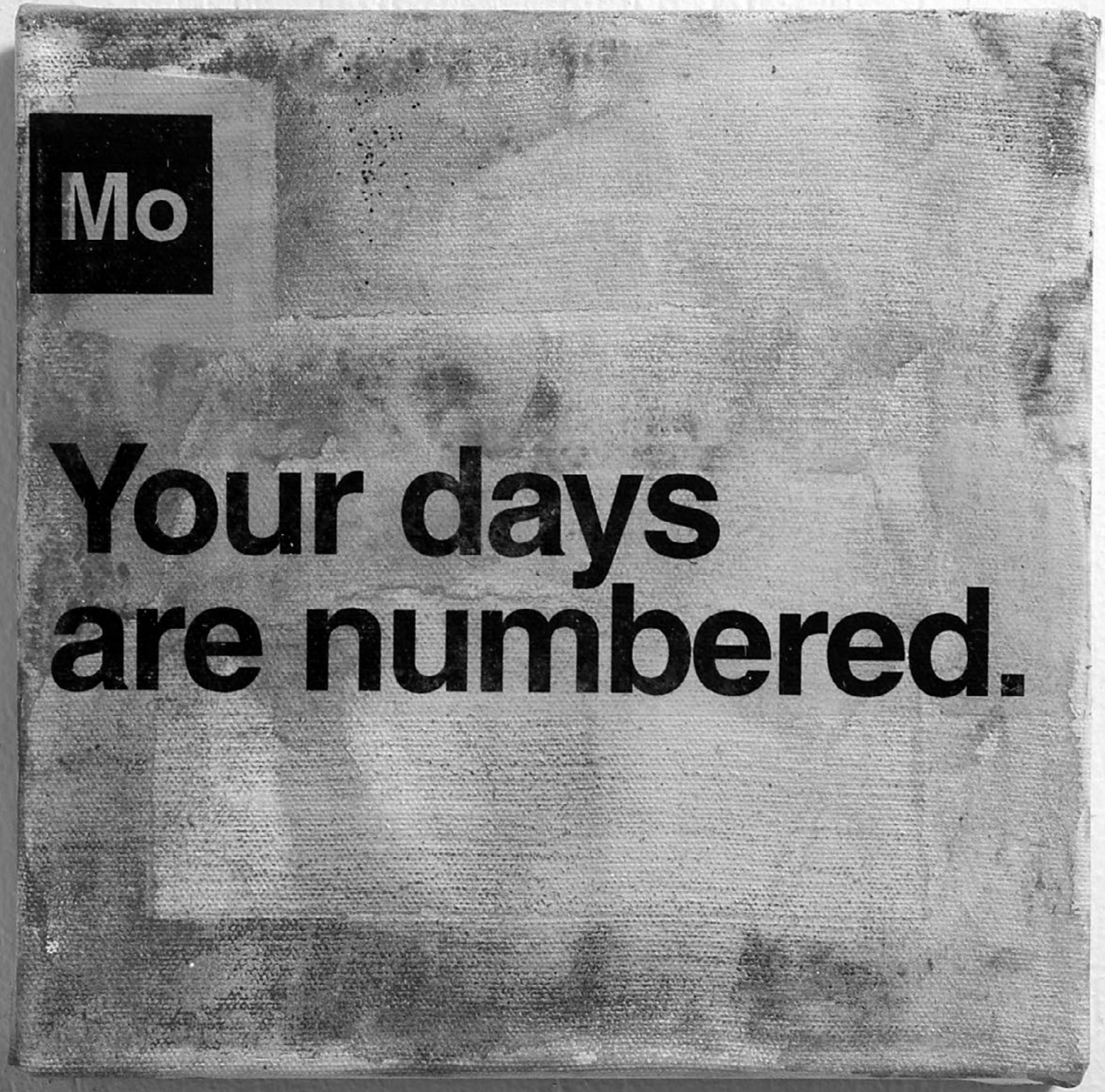
#didyouhearyuhself¶

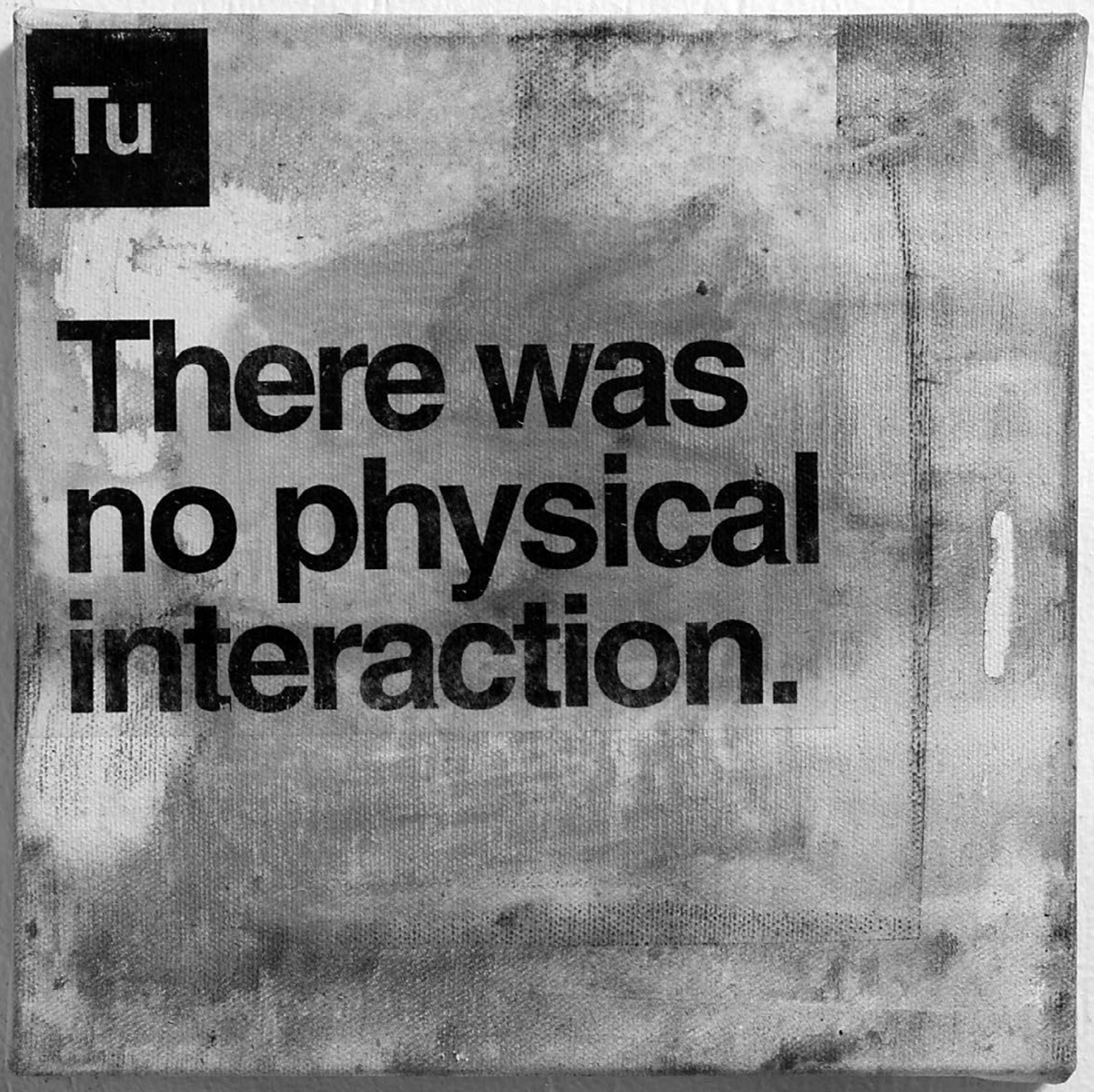
Inspired by a recent series of political soundbites, reportage and utterances of a number of Trinidad and Tobago's 'alleged' government representatives the installation by Richard Mark Rawlins titled #didyouhearyuhself¶ seeks to present, record, and investigate the notions of accountability, behaviour, disregard and contempt for the populace held by public officials in the course of their duties while in elected office, as well as the role of the media in said reportage. Through a series of thirty five text based works on canvas stained to represent the gutters and pavements of Port of Spain, (a nod to the concept of gutter politics), Rawlins hopes to hold a mirror to the holders of office and present the voting public with food for thought before they cast their ballot in the upcoming election. The content works all culled from the media, press, radio, television, twitter and facebook create a snapshot of one five-week month in the political life of the nation. Each piece is emblazoned with the abbreviation of the days Monday to Sunday, and the media bite representing just one of many of a series of unfortunate and 'alleged' comments by the aforementioned government ministers. These 'bites' include what should have been a private conversation about the country's prime minister's stewardship of the nation, responses and defenses to alleged sexual misconduct charges, sexual natured exposés and denials.

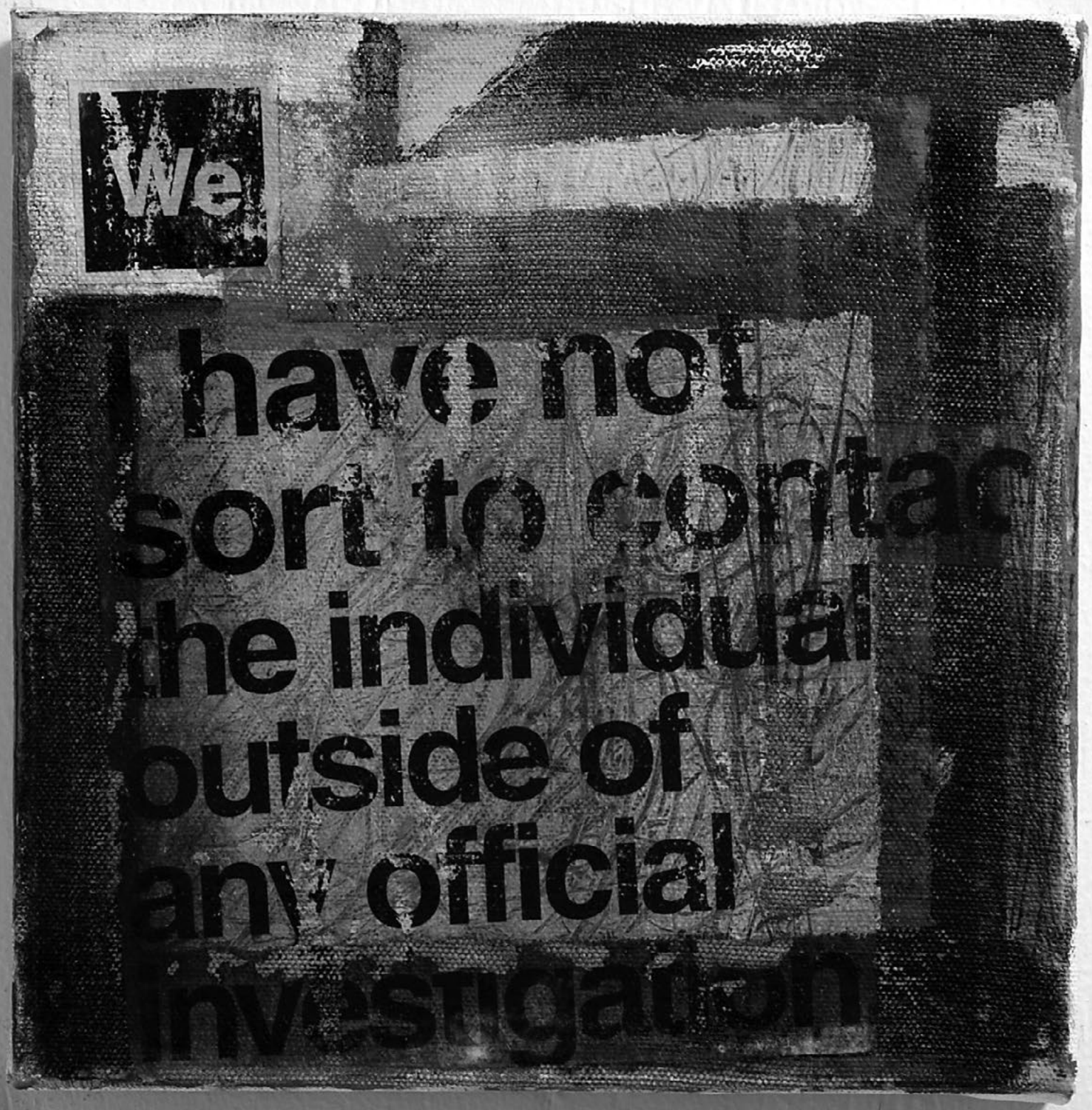
RICHARD MARK RAWLINS, is a graphic designer and contemporary artist. He is the publisher of the online magazine Draconian Switch (www.artzpub.com), a co-founder of Trinidad and Tobago's Erotic Art Week exhibition, and collaborator in the Alice Yard contemporary art-space initiative. Rawlins has designed a number of art catalogs, among them Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art (Real Art Ways, Hartford Connecticut, USA), Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions (The World Bank), and more recently Pictures From Paradise: A Survey of Caribbean Contemporary Photography, See Me Here: A Survey of Contemporary Self- Portraits from the Caribbean and 10: Alex Smailes Photography 2002-2012. Rawlins recently completed a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, Vermont and his work has been exhibited at the Museum of Art and Design (MAD, New York), in Kingston, Jamaica, and in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

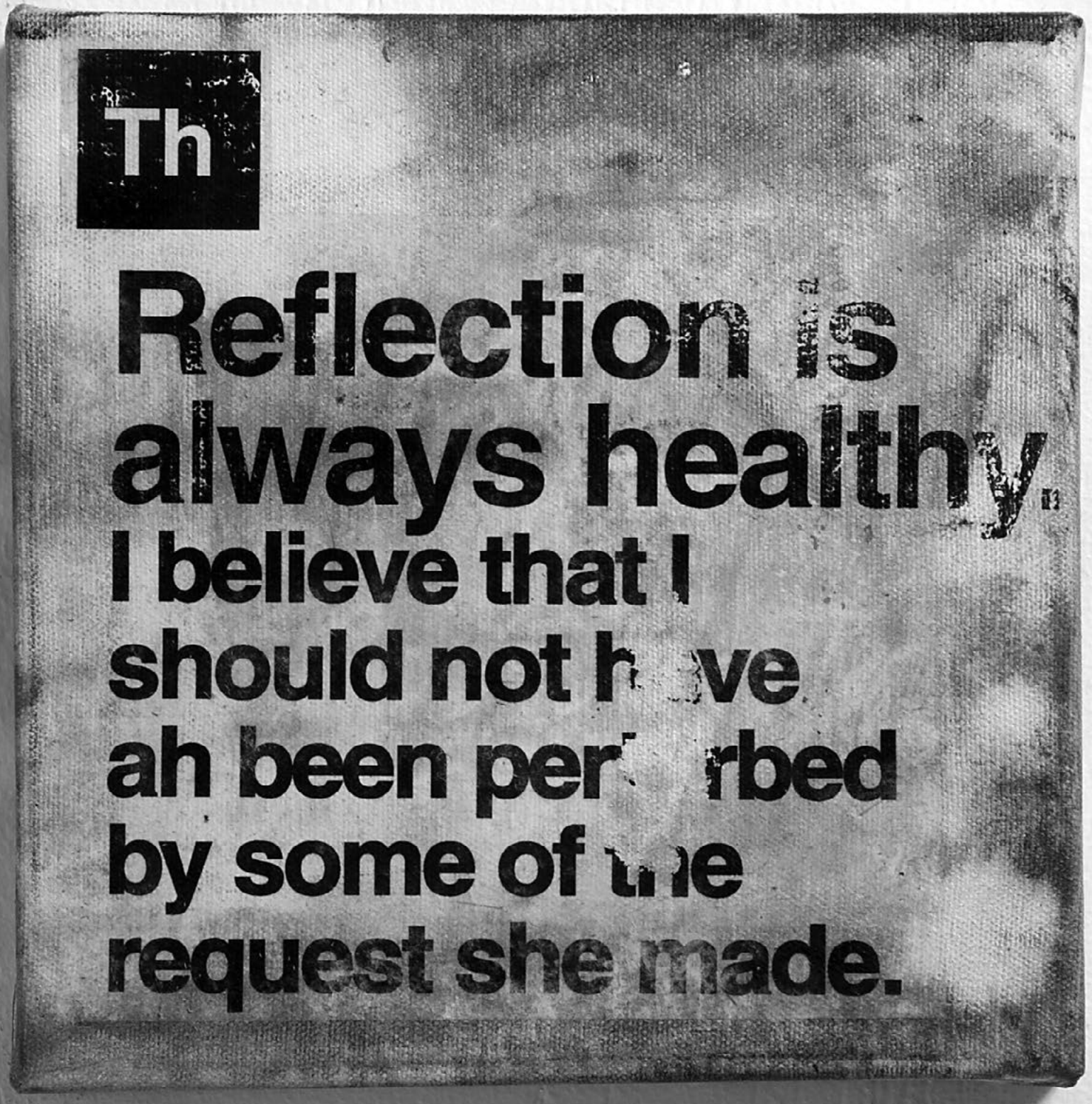
His work can be considered explorations of the 'communality' of the human condition. The reality of life in Trinidad and Tobago, like much of the Caribbean and the wider world, is that it is one peppered with the good the bad the ugly and the ambivalent. These tend to be the ideas that he explores through the use of a visual language that allows the viewer to engage the moment and perhaps re-create/re-mix their own considerations of the work in a manner that is as immediate as its delivery and as familiar as the territory of their own backyard.

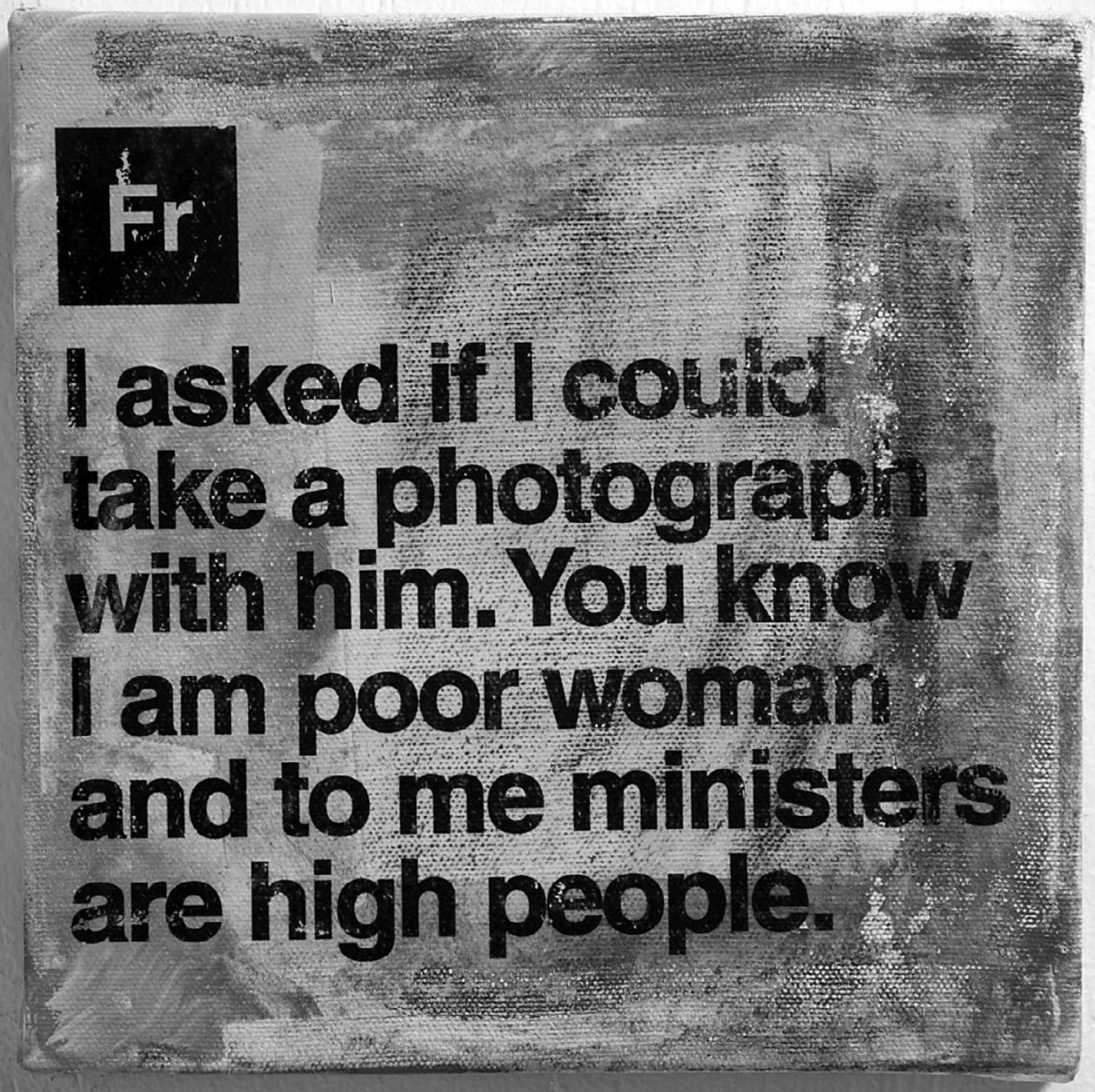
richardmarkrawlins.com


Mo
Your days
are numbered.

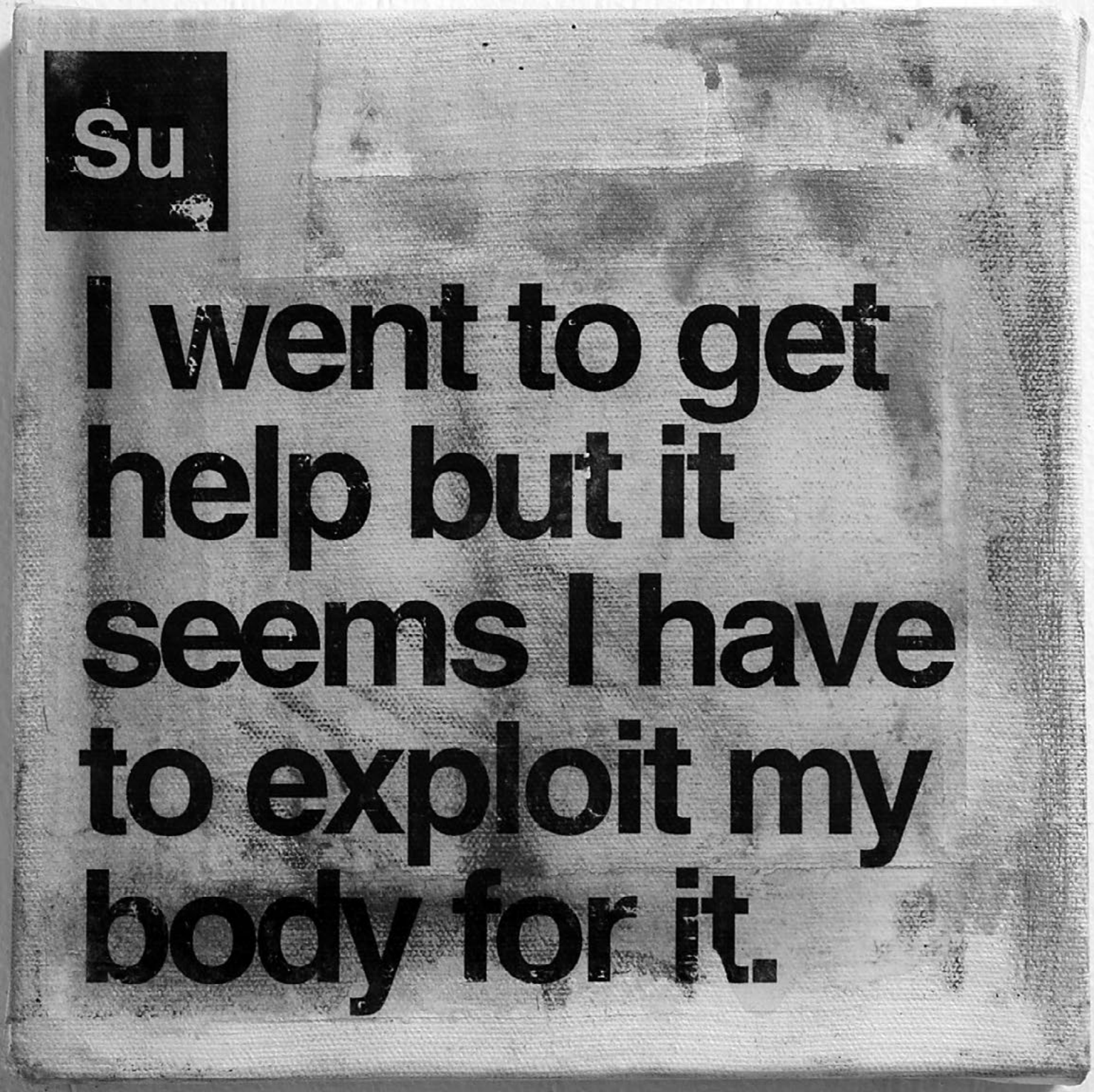

Tu
There was
no physical
interaction.


We
have not
sort to contact
the individual
outside of
any official
investigation


Th
Reflection is
always healthy.
I believe that I
should not h ve
ah been per rbed
by some of he
request she made.

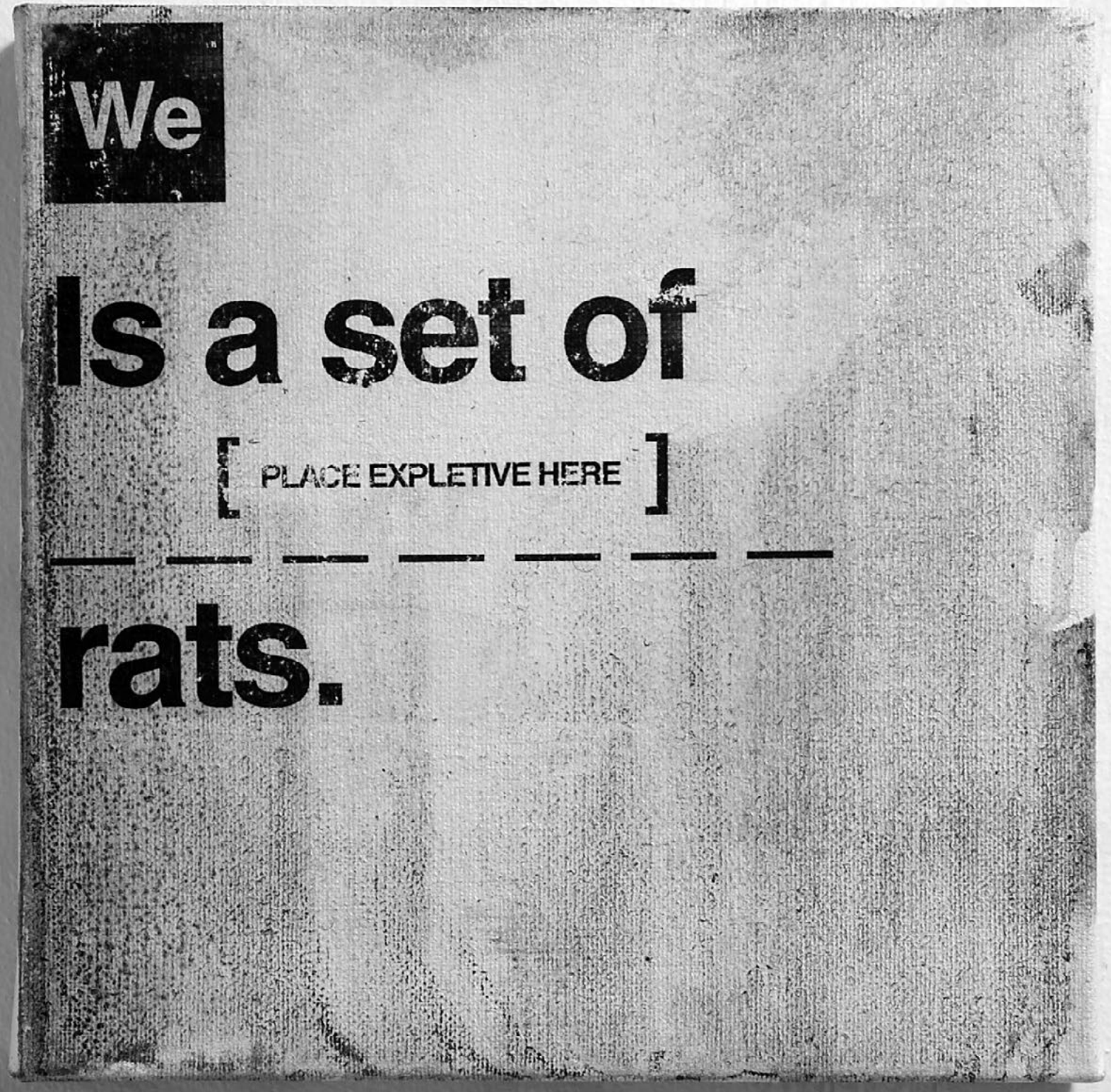

Fr
I asked if I could take a photograph with him. You know I am poor woman and to me ministers are high people.

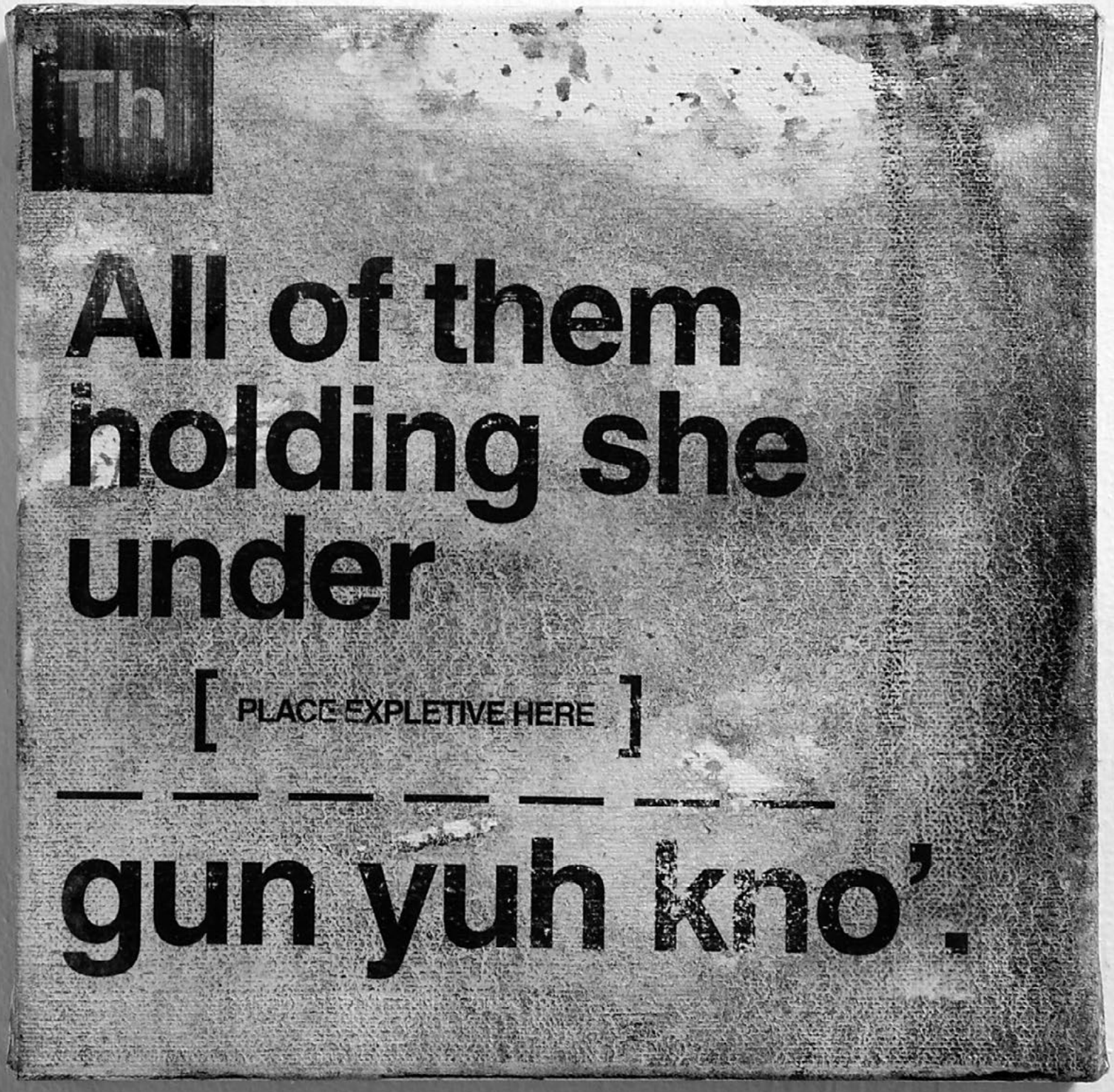
Sa
The minister then pushed his hands down my body suit and began touching my breast.


Su
I went to get help but it seems I have to exploit my body for it.

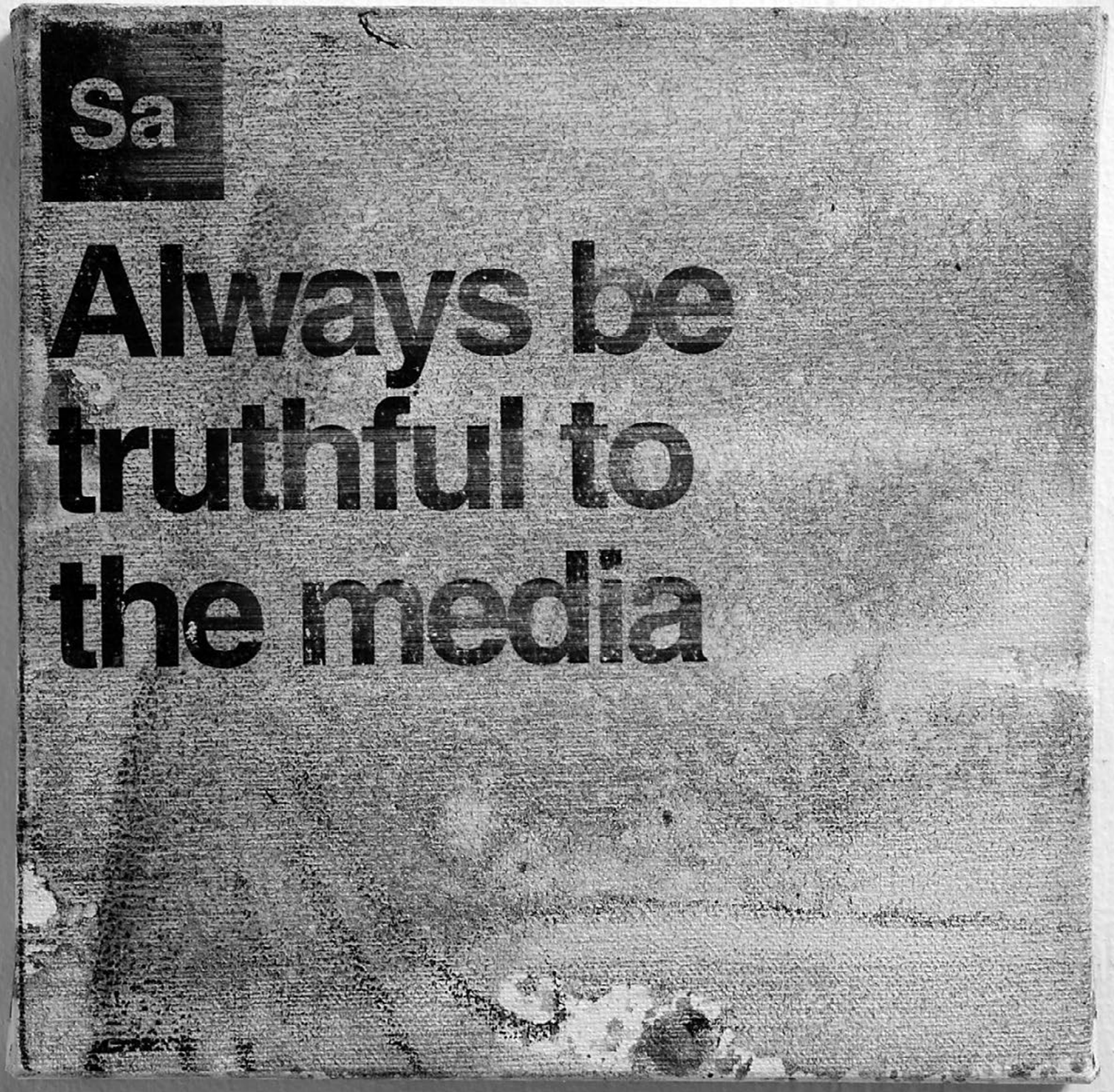
Mo
The woman is not a bad woman eh...

Tu
She not
listening
boy.


We
Is a set of
[PLACE EXPLETIVE HERE]
rats.

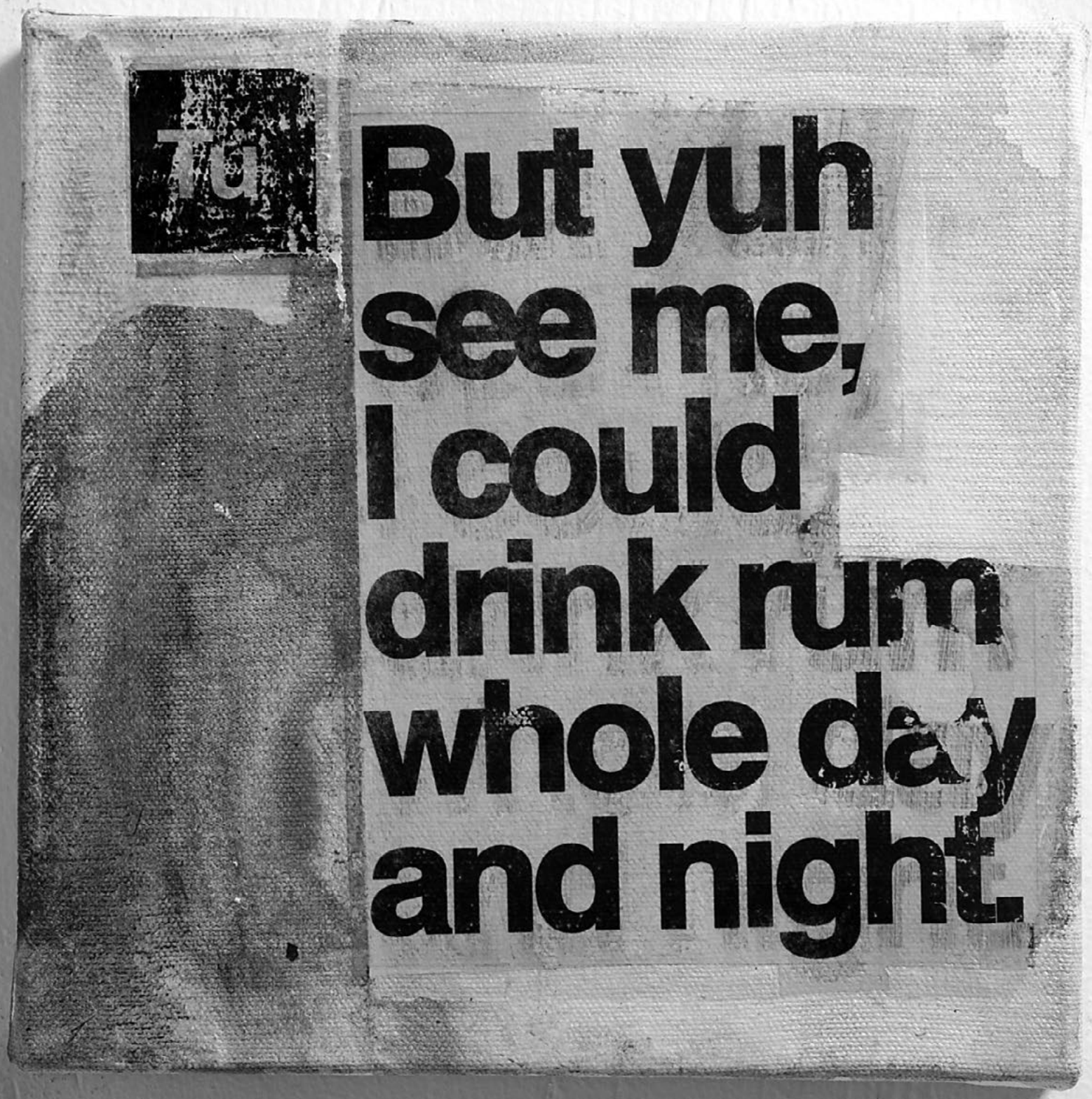

Th
All of them holding she under
[PLACE EXPLETIVE HERE]
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
gun yuh kno'.

Fr
No I can't make no comments on the phone.


Sa
Always be
truthful to
the media

Su
Always be accessible to the media.

They does
call me the
two pull
man.

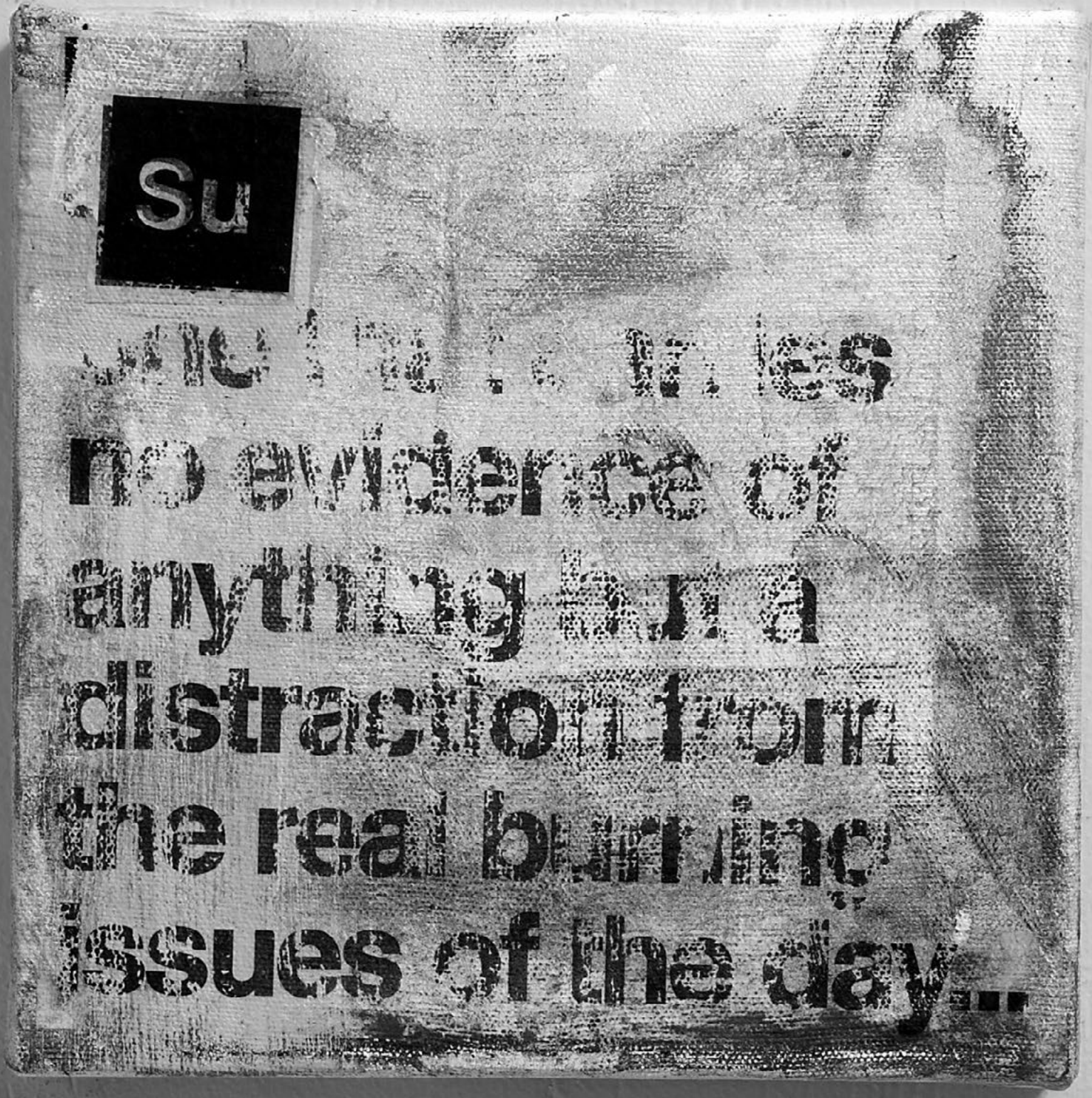

Tu
But yuh
see me,
I could
drink rum
whole day
and night.

We
If I take two pull...gone thru yuh kno'...

Th
It wasn't me.

Fr
No video, no music video, no video game, no voodoo could stop me.

Sa
She can't
fire me.


Su
no evidence of
anything but a
distraction from
the real burning
issues of the day...

CANVASSING IN INK AND PAINT: Richard Mark Rawlins' Cut-up Campaign

By Marsha Pearce

In the run-up to another General Election in Trinidad and Tobago, numerous revelations in the media about governing body The People's Partnership – led by Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar – have underscored a need to return to definitions of leadership, accountability and transparency. The ruling party seems to remain tethered to scathing allegations of impropriety, from a Minister's refusal to take a breathalyzer test and charges of conflicts of interest in the awarding of contracts to the unsolicited touching of a flight attendant, sex acts for an approved housing application and a youth sports programme found mired in fraud. News of transgressions has come like an avalanche. In late May 2014, for example, a man resembling a government Minister was caught on tape in a hotel room with what looked like an illegal narcotic; two months later, the LifeSport programme, conceived by the Minister in question, was terminated in the wake of a damning audit. Reports have come in such rapid succession that one might say, if only in an exaggerated, generalised fashion: Every day seems to be some infraction.

Artist Richard Mark Rawlins picks up this idea of a sense of daily exposés in his 35-piece installation entitled #didyouhearyourself. The hashtagged work invites personal and collective contemplation. It constitutes a sampling of phrases from newspapers, radio and television, which are presented in repeating cycles of Monday to Sunday in a five-week month. Like the snippets of text, which are pulled from whole articles or entire audio clips, Rawlins' installation is a symbolic, temporal extract of a broader time period – with time stretching beyond the first Monday in his artwork and extending past the last Sunday. This gives a feeling of continuity to the concerns he raises, allowing the viewer to remain conscious of a past and future Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) and to connect those moments to the present. What is the history of governance and the power of the people in T&T? How does that history inform – or fail to impact – today's political landscape? And, what will a government by the people look like tomorrow?

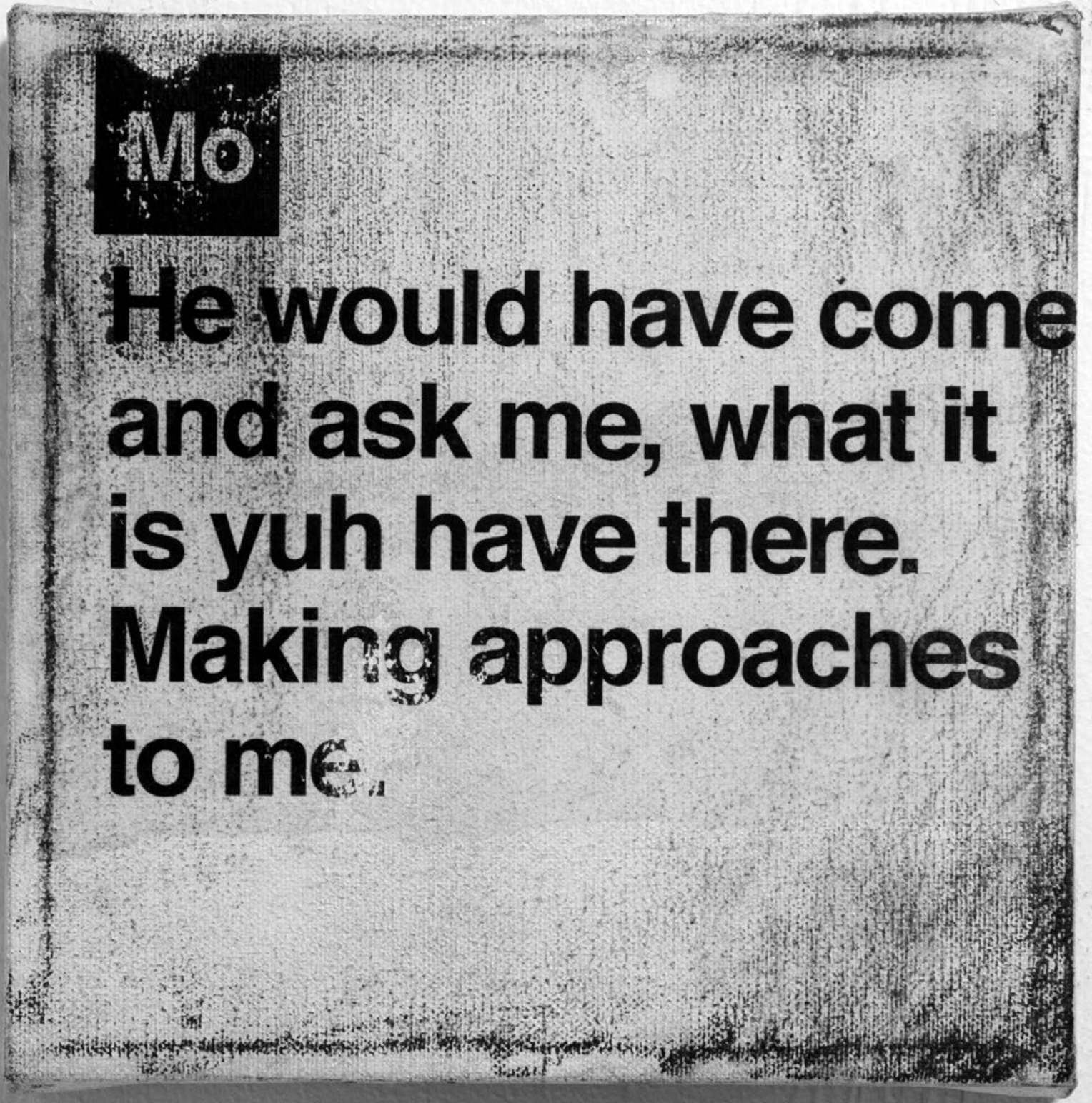
Rawlins uses ink, paint and canvas to canvass or examine T&T's politics/politricks. He takes inspiration from the sullied, scuffed surfaces of the streets, using their textures and marks as signifiers of a dirty political terrain and as a visual means of expressing the way private dealings by appointed government Ministers have become public, or put another way, how we can find their "business in the road" (an idiom that is the equivalent of airing one's dirty linen). In some instances he scratches into the text, making letters and words hard to discern in a manner that plays with notions of hiding and disclosure.

This artist uses his work to enter a discourse on state administration, public voice and citizen agency through his own creative campaign or strategy: the cut-up technique. It is a literary approach that was developed by English writer, poet and painter Brion Gysin and North American novelist and painter William S. Burroughs. Texts are cut into pieces and reassembled in a different order to produce new narratives. By seizing word segments from the media and marshalling them in his own way, Rawlins authors a work of trenchant poetry with an edge that is sharp enough to penetrate our awareness. Each week in his installation is a cutting verse. Burroughs once said of the cut-up technique: "When you cut into the present the future leaks out." Richard Mark Rawlins creates a work of art with the potential to lacerate "what is" and transform it into fresh possibilities; a work with the capacity to cut into the present politics and participate in the release of an altered – perhaps more promising – future for T&T.

Marsha Pearce is a scholar and writer, whose work focuses on visual culture.

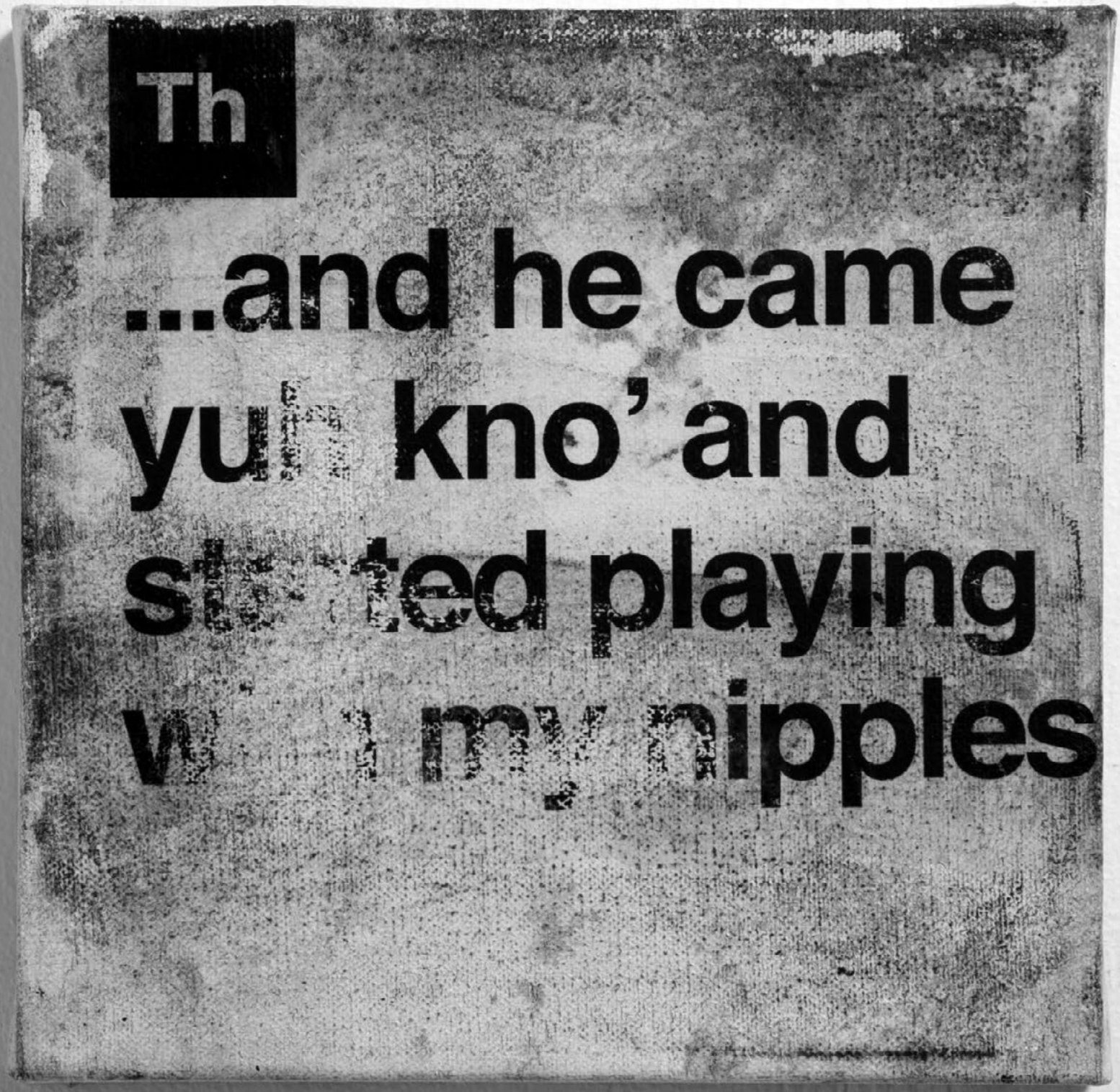
She holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus, Trinidad.

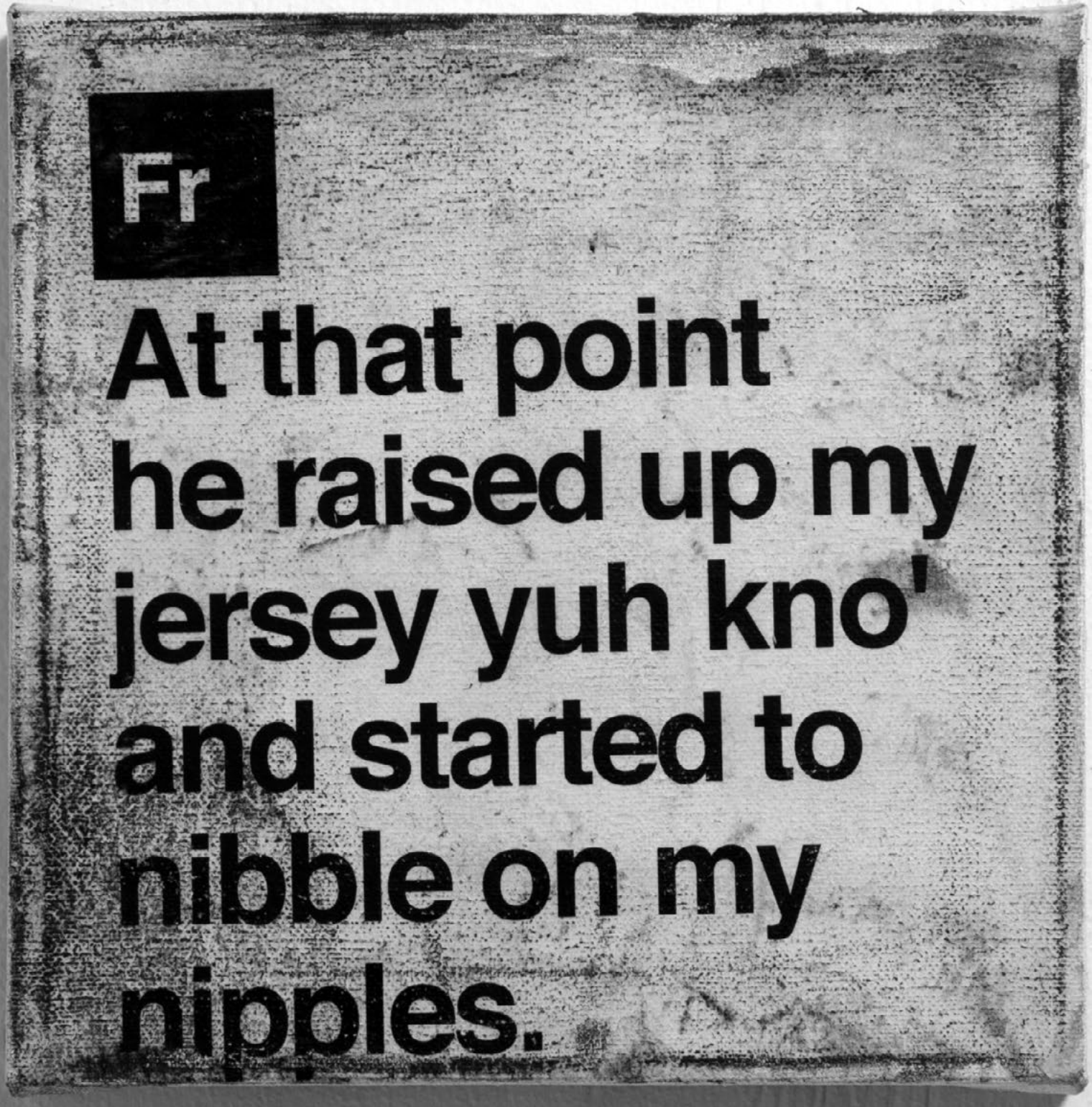
Her writings appear in several publications.

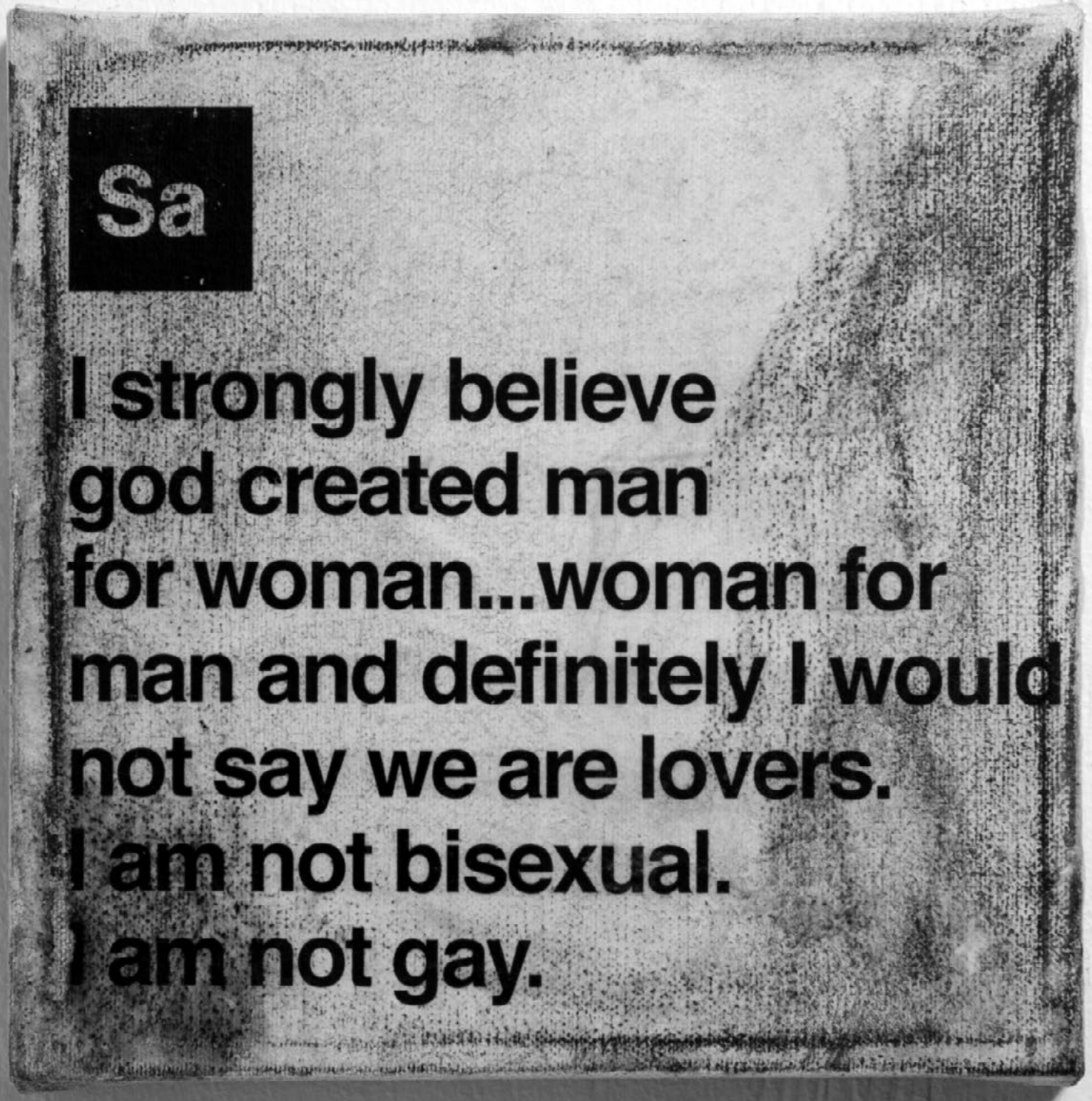

Mo
He would have come
and ask me, what it
is yuh have there.
Making approaches
to me.

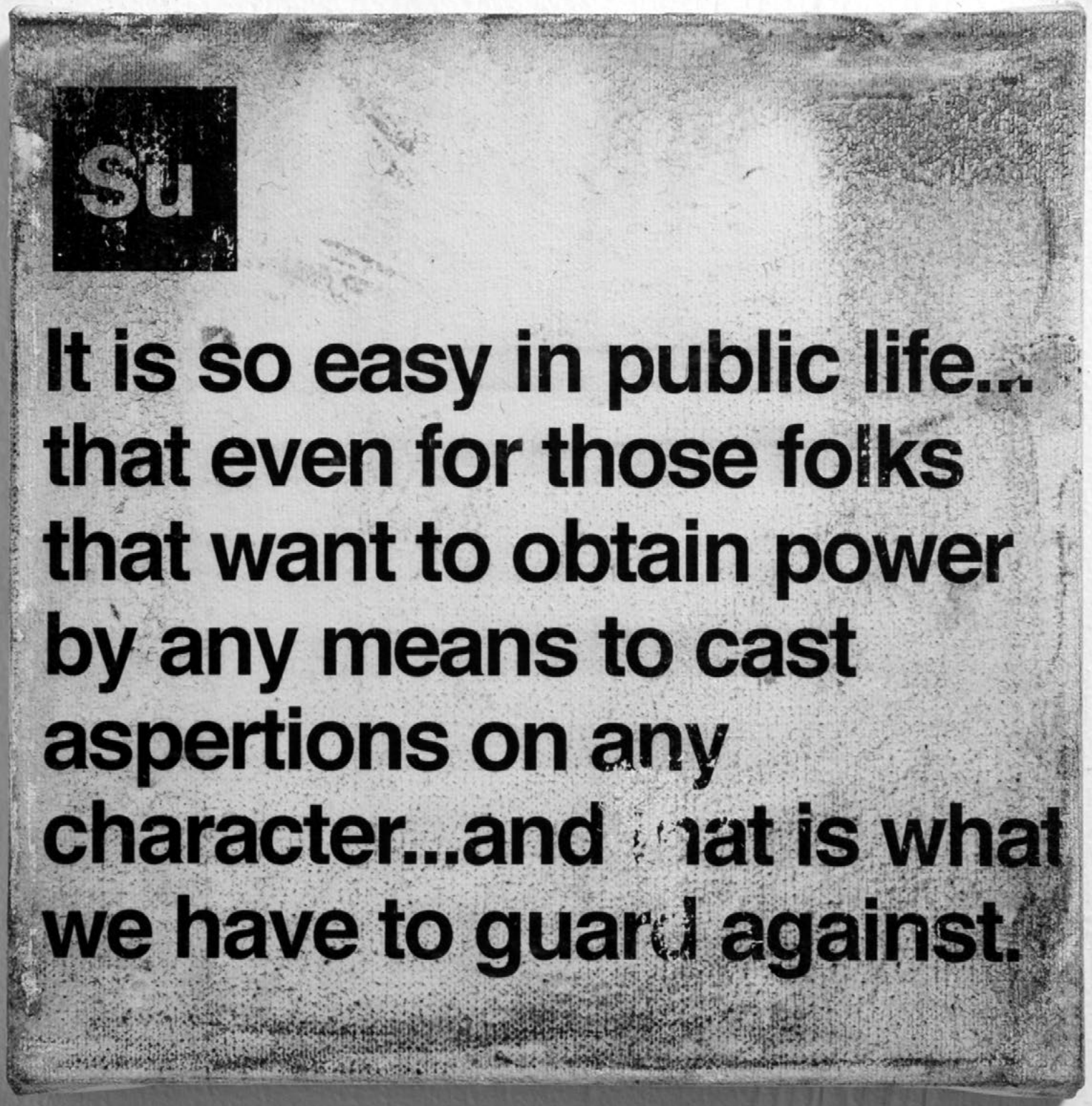
He would have stretched forth and pulled my penis.

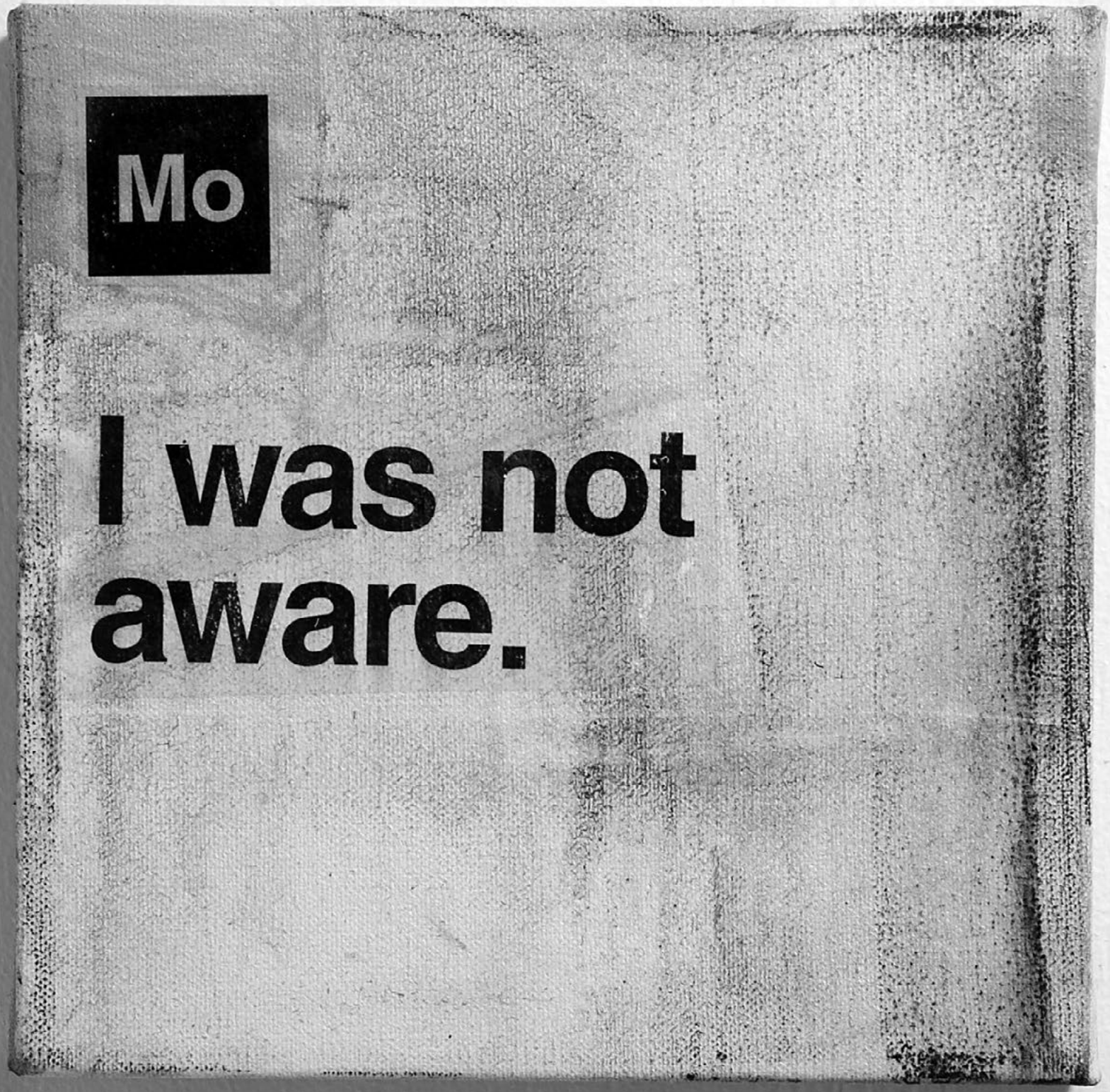
We
Very good
brotherly type
of relationship...
as a friend and
a brother.


Th
...and he came
yu kno' and
st ted playing
w my nipples


Fr
At that point
he raised up my
jersey yuh kno'
and started to
nibble on my
nipples.


Sa
I strongly believe
god created man
for woman...woman for
man and definitely I would
not say we are lovers.
I am not bisexual.
I am not gay.


su
It is so easy in public life...
that even for those folks
that want to obtain power
by any means to cast
aspertions on any
character...and that is what
we have to guard against.

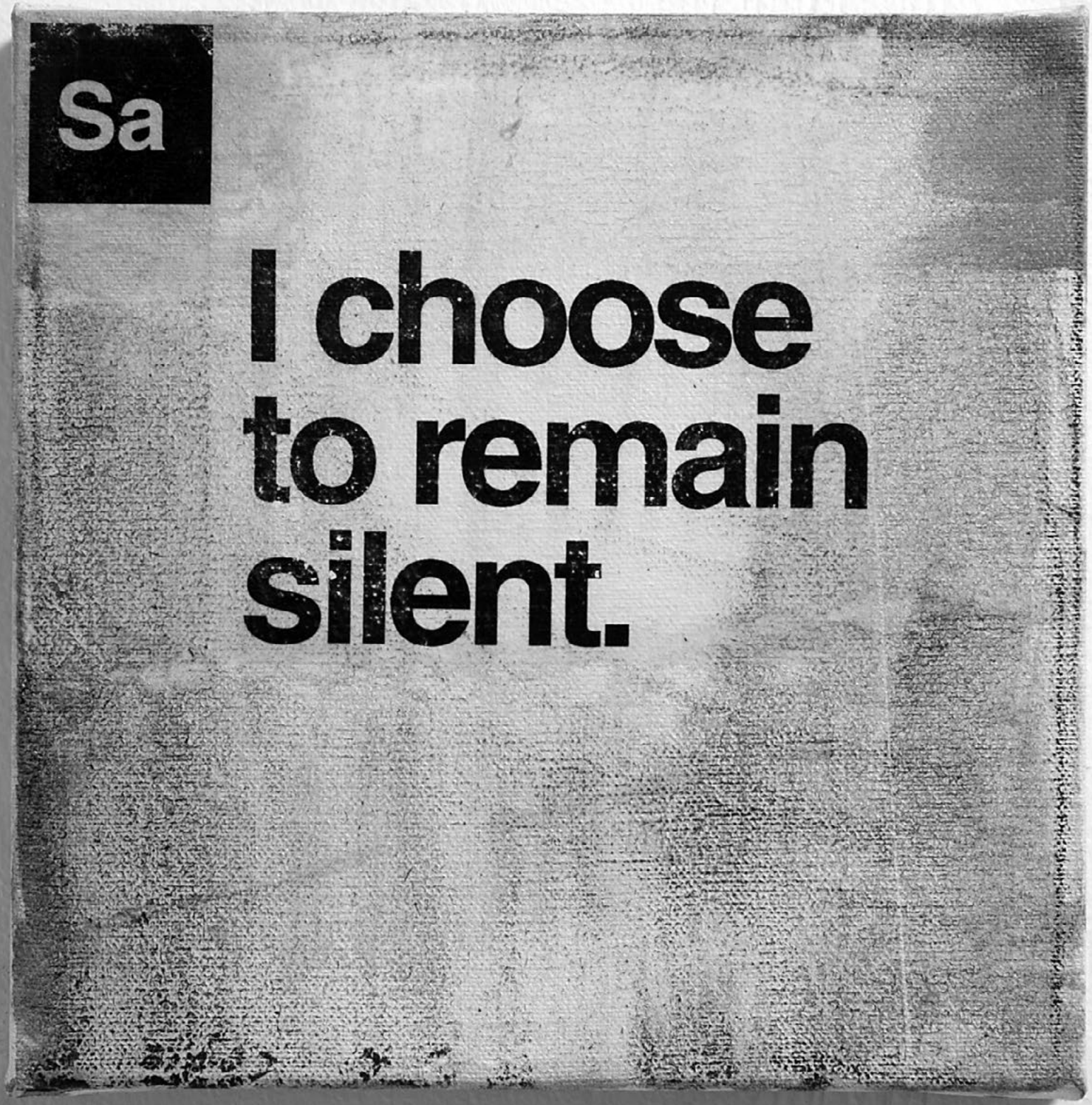

Mo
I was not aware.

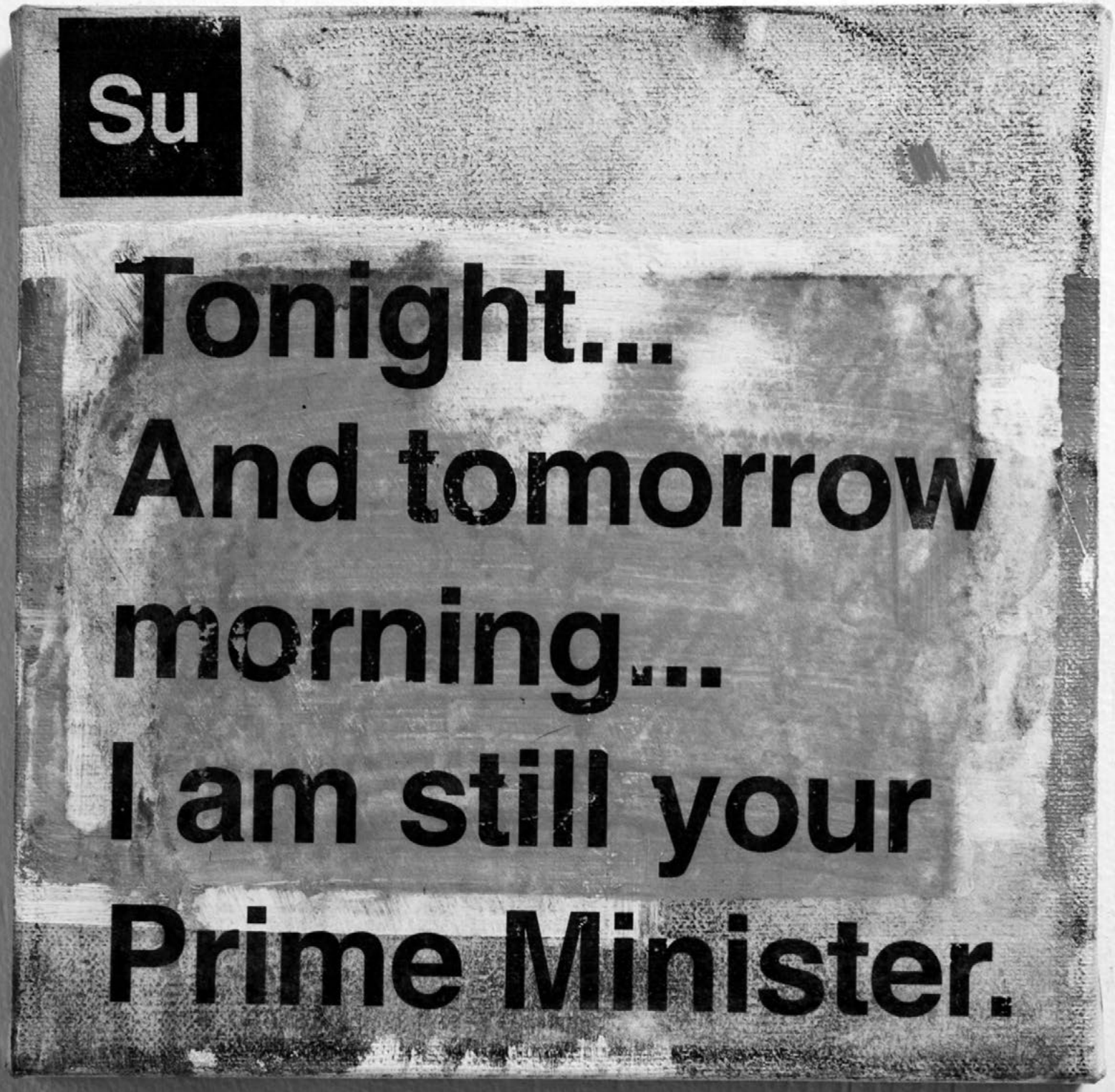
Tu
I have not
seen it.

We
It may not be appropriate to comment.

Th
I don't know
anything.

Fr
I have
been so
advised.


Sa
I choose
to remain
silent.


Su
Tonight...
And tomorrow
morning...
I am still your
Prime Minister.

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Photography: Michele Jorsling

richardmarkrawlins.com
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#didyouhearyuhself, 2014 (acrylic, graphite, chalk and ink on canvas)