
Senior Projects Spring 2020


Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2020

Good Grief

Madeleine Pearl Buzbee
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020

 Part of the [Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Interactive Arts Commons](#), [Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons](#), [Painting Commons](#), [Printmaking Commons](#), and the [Sculpture Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Buzbee, Madeleine Pearl, "Good Grief" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 337.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020/337

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Good Grief

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

By
Madeleine Pearl Buzbee

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May, 2020

Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to Camille “Kat” Sdao and her parents, Michael and Kara.

I would like to thank my project advisor, Julianne Swartz, and my academic advisor, Lisa Sanditz, for guiding me through this project with grace, curiosity, and rigor. Many thanks go to Daniella Dooling, Roman Hrab, Maggie Hazen, and Charlie Smith for helping adapt this project to a digital platform during the pandemic. Thank you to Alex Kitnick, Susan Aberth, Kenji Fujita, Ellen Driscoll, Medrie MacPhee, Laura Battle, Matthew Sargent, Danielle Dobkins, Josephine Shokrian, MJ Daines, Melanie Nicholson, Jennifer Triplett, Whitney Slaten, and many more for making my education at Bard so meaningful.

Lastly, I would not be here without the love and support of my family and friends: Thank you to Lewis Buzbee, Julie Bruck, Djimon Gibson, Mia Quinn, Charlotte Albert, Lucy Reiss, Sarah Goldberg, Bel Simek, James Chan, Olivia DiNapoli, Jones Bealum, and many more. Thank you for holding my hand through it all.

Artist Statement

“Good Grief” is a memorial project that began with the loss of my childhood best friend, Camille Sdao (1998-2019). She was a light.

Grief is a thing that is carried, compartmentalized, expanded, forgotten, and remembered. Grief is nothing and everything at the same time. Grief explodes, lingers, leaves and returns again. Grief is blue. I know this because Louise Bourgeois, Maggie Nelson, Taryn Simon, the Pacific Ocean, my tears, the sky, my mother, and my grandmother have taught me this. Loss means wading in deep waters for a long time and you must build a boat to stay afloat.

Consumed with an obsession to materialize loss, I began to paint, write, weave, and sculpt every memory I could access from this time in my life. Assembling an archive meant there was something to hold. Creating a memorial made a space to remember. I found pictures, videos, letters, emails, stolen lawn furniture, bad dreams, and I began to piece it together. Nothing could be forgotten.

I am petrified of burials. When my grandmother died, I skipped scattering her ashes and chose instead a trip to a museum in her honor. In my mind, as a child, I knew that continuing a life of curiosity and learning meant more to the deceased than seeing a loved one reduced to dust and washed away with the wind. Many contemporary death rituals imply an end to grief, as if it is something that can be buried in the ground and left behind. But those who live with grief know it cannot be settled for eternity by a simple solemn ritual. I discovered Ghanaian funerals, with their ornate, decorative coffins, and the Jazz funerals of New Orleans. I studied drive-thru casket viewings, the AIDS quilts, and the ancient Jewish tradition of Shiva. I read bibles and blog posts alike, leaning into the reality that loss exists amongst joy and death exists amongst youth.

When I began this project, my grief felt so incredibly singular that its isolation was all-consuming. I struggled with the question of how to universalize this loss and allow others to project their own missings onto the memorial I had constructed. At this project's completion, we are all immersed in universal grief. As COVID-19 spreads throughout the world, taking lives everywhere it goes, everyone is soaking in blue. Suddenly, my painting of an imaginary graveyard is now an image of Hart Island, where mass graves are being dug to bury the unclaimed bodies in the spring of 2020. The woven banner, reading “I Miss You”, carries an even heavier feeling, as we all are experiencing an absence of something, somewhere. On a drive through Kingston during lockdown, there were children playing in every yard I passed, harkening to the figures in the foreground of my graveyard painting. We are in our homes reasoning with death every day now, yet children still must play. The jubilation of youth and the presence of death do not stand in contrast, but rather in conversation.

The product and process of grief is a lifelong effort. The paintings, sculptures, weavings, and archives presented in *Good Grief* are the first in a series of many obituaries. The original

conception of this project was first imagined for the Fisher Studio Arts galleries, but was ultimately adapted to book form.

Good Grief by Madeleine Buzbee

"Good Grief" is a memorial project that began with the loss of my childhood best friend, Camille Sdao (1998-2019). She was a light.

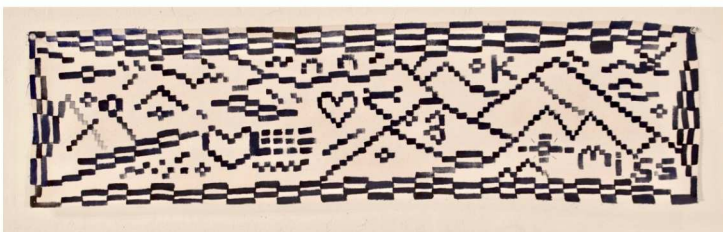
Grief is a thing that is carried, compartmentalized, expanded, forgotten, and remembered. Grief is nothing and everything at the same time. Grief explodes, lingers, leaves and returns again. Grief is blue. I know this because Louise Bourgeois, Maggie Nelson, Taryn Simon, the Pacific Ocean, my tears, the sky, my mother, and my grandmother have taught me this. Loss means wading in deep waters for a long time and you must build a boat to stay afloat.

Consumed with an obsession to materialize loss, I began to paint, write, weave, and sculpt every memory I could access from this time in my life. Assembling an archive meant there was something to hold. Creating a memorial made a space to remember. I found pictures, videos, letters, emails, stolen lawn furniture, bad dreams, and I began to piece it together. Nothing could be forgotten.

I am petrified of burials. When my grandmother died, I skipped scattering her ashes and chose instead a trip to a museum in her honor. In my mind, as a child, I knew that continuing a life of curiosity and learning meant more to the deceased than seeing a loved one reduced to dust and washed away with the wind. Many contemporary death rituals imply an end to grief, as if it is something that can be buried in the ground and left behind. But those who live with grief know it cannot be settled for eternity by a simple solemn ritual. I discovered Ghanaian funerals, with their ornate, decorative coffins, and the Jazz funerals of New Orleans. I studied drive-thru casket viewings, the AIDS quilts, and the ancient Jewish tradition of Shiva. I read bibles and blog posts alike, leaning into the reality that loss exists amongst joy and death exists amongst youth.

When I began this project, my grief felt so incredibly singular that its isolation was all-consuming. I struggled with the question of how to universalize this loss and allow others to project their own missings onto the memorial I had constructed. At this project's completion, we are all immersed in universal grief. As COVID-19 spreads throughout the world, taking lives everywhere it goes, everyone is soaking in blue. Suddenly, my painting of an imaginary graveyard is now an image of Hart Island, where mass graves are being dug to bury the unclaimed bodies in the spring of 2020. The woven banner, reading "I Miss You", carries an even heavier feeling, as we all are experiencing an absence of something, somewhere. On a drive through Kingston during lockdown, there were children playing in every yard I passed, harkening to the figures in the foreground of my graveyard painting.

We are in our homes reasoning with death every day now, yet children still must play. The jubilation of youth and the presence of death do not stand in contrast, but rather in conversation.



The product and process of grief is a lifelong effort. The paintings, sculptures, weavings, and archives presented in *Good Grief* are the first in a series of many obituaries.





