

"Per Artem vitae post mortem" - Life after death through art

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After death, there is no more. No more happiness, no more life and no more love. But what if we could change this? What if through art, we could bring the dead back to life. If we could change something primarily associated with sadness, to something of freedom and celebration.

My main inspiration was "Finnabair," a mixed-media and collage artist. Finnabair uses photographs of herself and collages with mixed media around them (A, Dabrowska, 2019).. I wanted to create pieces to help shed a light on a taboo topic in Western culture, death. By following Finnabair's techniques and style, I created pieces using post-mortem photography from the 1800's-1900's. Post-mortem photography was at the peak of its popularity at this time because of the high rates of death and disease that were occurring in Victorian England society. This once normal practice has turned into something taboo as people are now scared to have anything to do with death. But really death can be quite beautiful as it can bring life to new things.

A phrase was often used that was associated with post mortem photography "memento mori," a phrase derived from Latin, meaning "Remember you will die". I feel as though this phrase brings sadness and fear to death, this is why I have named the series "Per Artem vitae post mortem" (Life after death through art). I feel this connects death to creativity, celebration and immortality. I wanted viewers to be exposed to a new perspective on the topic and for people to think twice. I wanted my vision of death to be heard in a way that was beautiful.

There are five main stages of grief, denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, each piece represents a single stage of grief. The pieces are displayed in a progressive order to encourage viewers to follow and experience the changes in emotion. To express the particular emotions I wanted, I used the basic elements of art, particularly texture and colour. I also used the principles of art themselves to change the piece further by using, balance, emphasis, movement, proportion, rhythm, unity and variety. This helped make the emotions and concept of the piece even stronger, and helped unify the individual pieces of work to become a cohesive, aesthetically pleasing, emotional and organised body of work. By using art elements and principles, life was brought to the deceased through art.

Denial and isolation is essentially the brains way of protecting the body, helping you survive the loss. It's like a band aid for shock. We try to tell ourselves what is happening isn't real and we isolate ourselves from the ones we love. You are living in a preferable reality. I used a strong geometric, repetitive pattern for the background that had a large amount of negative space. This helped create a sense of loneliness in the piece. The objects helped to symbolise denial and isolation as they had meaning behind them. For example, buttons where a component of the piece as they hold things together, just like how the brain works during this first stage of grief. Another example is the colours used, white symbolises isolation and silver represents the unknown, symbolising denial.

In the anger stage, the individual feels frustrated, trapped and hurt. Anger is a way of releasing energy and often this energy is directed at others. Anger is the most extreme stage of grief. This is because the brains natural reaction at this point in the grieving process is to overreact. The pattern in the background

helped tie the piece together as the lines were jagged, strong, geometric and the visual weight of them was heavy. The objects used in this piece were primarily cogs and gears. These mechanical objects tend to grind and scrape against each other, much how like the individual is feeling inside. The warm colours also play a strong part as they are typically associated with strong and extreme emotions.

Bargaining is typically a forgotten stage of grief and possibly the most complex. Put simply, bargaining is making a deal with god. Wishing you could turn back the clock. The endless "what if" scenarios played out in one's mind. In a way, this stage is false hope. You falsely make yourself believe the pain can be avoided by a type of negotiation. The chosen pattern for this piece was rich and full of intricate lines. When we think of bargaining our minds tend to turn to wealthiness, which is why this pattern was chosen. Objects in this piece included items such as, jewellery, beads, watches and arrows, or "clock hands". This symbolises bargaining as we wish we could turn back time and make deals by trade. Purple was the primary colour in this piece as it symbolises both wealth, royalty and analgesia, a pain relief drug.

Depression represents the emptiness we feel, living in the reality that the person is gone. Depression is a necessary step that begins to allow one to emotionally detach from the situation. Depression is the phase to prepare one for acceptance. This piece was very different from the rest as the objects used were all the same, broken and cracked records and glass. The pattern for this piece, similar to the first stage was very spaced out, symbolising emptiness. Blues and grey were used to symbolise sadness and emptiness.

The last stage of grief is acceptance. Emotions begin to stabilise and the individual re-enters reality. You come to terms with the fact it's going to be okay. You understand your loved one can never be replaced, but you move, grow and evolve into your new reality. In this piece greens were heavily used. This is because green represents growth and new beginnings. Objects for this piece were primarily flowers and butterflies as they represent growth, endurance and a new story. The background pattern was chosen for its flowing lines and movement, it also has a floral feel, further connecting back to the concept of life.##

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