

Echoes of Absence

Artifacts of love and loss.



Cleo Murphy
Senior Art Project

"Echoes of Absence: Artifacts of Love and Loss" is a deeply personal art series reflecting the grief and fear the artist experienced after losing their grandparents at 14. Creating these pieces helps them process emotions and serves as a form of healing therapy. Despite the difficulty of revisiting painful memories, the goal is to channel grief into a healthy outlet while also offering comfort to others coping with loss, reminding them they are not alone.



Artist Statement

"Echoes of Absence: Artifacts of Love and Loss" is a deeply personal series born from the grief of losing my grandparents at 14. Creating this work helps me process painful memories and channel emotion into healing. Each piece reflects my fear of loss, my journey through grief, and my hope to offer comfort to others facing similar experiences.

This series began as an exploration of the five stages of grief but evolved into a reflection on childhood memories with my grandparents and family. Each piece represents a meaningful moment from my past that shaped who I am today. Using air-dry clay, acrylic paint, yarn, and natural materials, I created textured, interactive works that invite touch. The variety of mediums reflects the complexity of grief and the personal growth that emerged through creating this art.

Each piece in this series holds deep personal meaning. *Where Heart Takes Root* began the collection, combining yarn, wire, and plants to represent my immediate family. *Keepsakes* honors my Nonni and Papa through symbolic objects like a motorcycle, seashells, and beach sand. *Golden Wigs* uses clay, gold paint, and feathers to reflect their legacy of love and the idea that true wealth lies in connection. The final piece, *A Portrait of Pain*, is a self-portrait capturing the heartbreak of their loss—dark yet colorful, symbolizing the beauty of memory within grief. Together, these works express who I am and how loss has shaped my identity as an artist.

Artist Biography

Cleo Murphy is an artist from Everett, Massachusetts, where her creative journey began. Recently, she earned her undergraduate degree in Studio Art from the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), with plans to further her education through a master's program in the future. Cleo's artistic practice is diverse, encompassing sculpture, painting, and abstract works, with a particular interest in nature and the expressive potential of form.

Alongside her studio work, Cleo has gained valuable experience by working in after-school programs for 3rd and 4th graders, both in Everett and at MCLA. These experiences have shaped her understanding of art education and community involvement, helping her develop essential skills in mentorship, collaboration, and fostering creativity in young students. Cleo is excited to continue exploring new artistic horizons and is eager to share her work with the world. You can follow her artistic journey on Instagram [@artwithcle](#) and Facebook at Cleo



Senior ART Project!!

Idea **hand** **wrist** **names** **clay** **medium?** **Heart Breaking** **clay** **painting** **4 years in** **Making**

Art I Love it

Gaggy

Lets Do it!!!

Saying Goodbye **hug painting** **Grief**

Nonni → brownies → Sick days
→ Lady like → gossip
→ Loved me
→ Christmas, Thanksgiving Superbowl

Papa → Soft spot for me
→ big chair, sports
→ Dad and him
→ Come back

Memories → 8th grade / Freshman
→ Makes me
→ Childhood Sad / happy
→ Dying

Clay + 3D Art

Flowers → Canvas → Saying goodbye Years later

Clay + 3D Art → Food = Love
Love lasted till end
→ Mom + Dad
→ Supportive → Strong
→ weekends → Powerful
→ holidays + Sunday dinner
→ Smells → Coffee, cream, adult table, kids table
→ held together like glue → Mom is like nonni → living room
→ Get along → never gave up on anyone → Dad is like papa
→ loved me more than anything
→ The last one, they smelled like home, felt like the world stopped
→ Sadness, last time } Grief - happy - sad
→ Crying → Talk → Touch → I love you → hug
→ Mad → Why?

Clay + 3D Art → Miss You
→ Don't Talk in School → Cried so so much
→ missed Birthdays → Sudden no
→ Graduations college + high school → Ignored when happened
→ Missing hugs → Love
→ first time I prayed ever - mom cried
→ Note to them up with/without
→ hands wedding rings
→ Getting to Say Goodbye

Clay + 3D Art → Coffee cream
→ living room
→ Dining Room
→ house grew up in

Hands Wedding Rings

→ Always wearing
→ Candy draw
→ Snacks cabnit
→ Flowers, Shopping
→ Hard to right about!!

- Love
- Grandparents
- Dinners
- Family
- Hugs
- Lose

Death → Hospital cards
→ Nonni's Chair → Blue long Table
→ Papa's Chair → t.v across
→ Tea Set → China → Nonni's bedroom
→ Mom is like nonni → living room
→ Dad is like papa
→ Memorial → In Waves
→ Food
→ in new place
→ on beach Revere beach Park

Senior Art Project ^{Pt 2}

lose at a young age

← Happy
← Sad
← Joyful
← Love
← Anxiety

Emotions

Grief

← Showed me what love looked like
← Felt seen, loved me
← always proud

Love

Grandparents

↑ True love

↑ Family together

↑ ~~Love~~

→ Can't talk to them again
→ Miss you more with age
→ Miss The way house smelled
→ Missed grad, Birthdays, holidays

↓

Memory

→ Food = Love
→ Sadness

Favorite childhood Photo

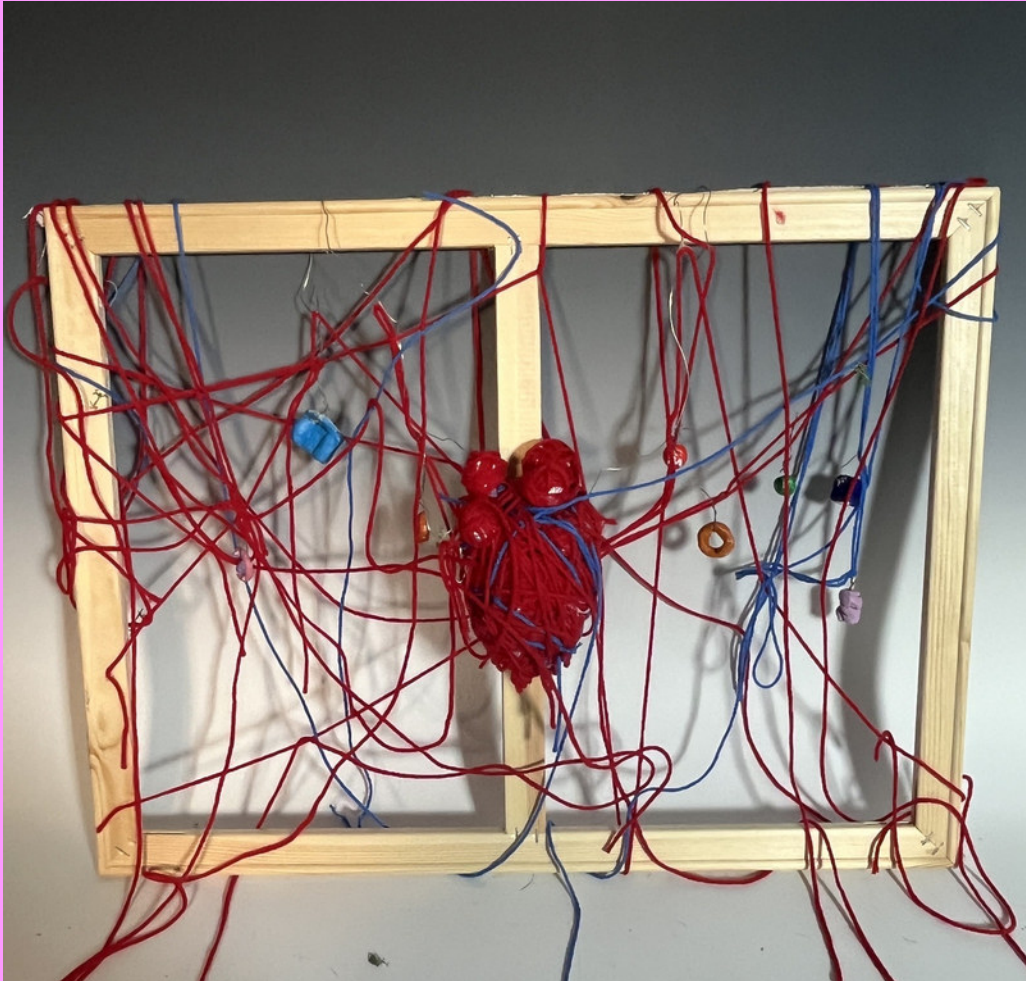


Material's Used

The materials I used were air-dry clay, acrylic paint, and unconventional materials like yarn and plants (moss, flowers, and branches). I also used paper mâché, sand, and personal materials like sand, seashells and marbles.

I wanted my collection to be textured and interactive so the audience could touch it. When choosing my mediums, I struggled to settle on just one, so I decided to use a variety. As a result, each piece is unique and feels almost odd.

Where Heart Takes Root,

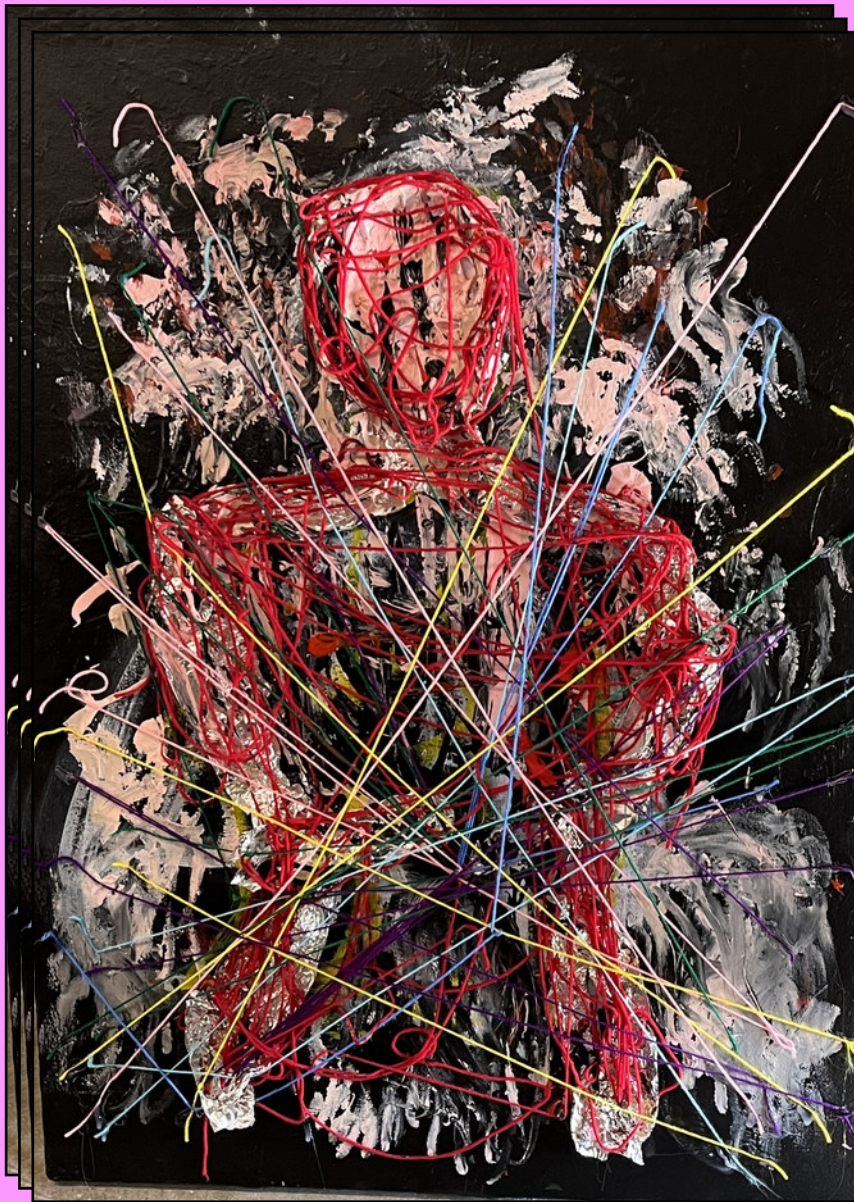


Where Heart Takes Root,



Golden Wings
40x25





Portrait of Pain

40x25

My World

My immediate family has played a huge role in shaping my art career by offering unwavering support and constantly encouraging me to pursue anything related to the art world. Beyond that, they've taught me life lessons that I will forever cherish and filled my life with memories that have become the foundation of so many stories and moments of happiness. As I reflect on where I am with this project, I can't imagine not including them—my sister, my two brothers, and my parents are truly my whole world. I wouldn't be where I am today without them, and I can't envision my life without their love and guidance.



Dear Nonni and Papa

I'm writing this letter to update you on my life. Even if it's never read or sent, I needed to prove that I could do this and honestly, you both deserve that from me. These past few years since you've been gone have been the hardest of my life. I've felt lost, alone, and completely broken at times and I feel that most times. I hated how suddenly you left and how I can never forget that night when we all went downstairs and were told the news. I hated not being able to say goodbye, and running to you wishing you could hold me one last time. I wish I had the chance to say everything. But that's not how that went.

I wanted to share where I'm at now, and how the family you built is doing. I'm 22 now, turning 23 soon, yes, I turned 21 and had an amazing birthday with Zack and Tyler of course. Being in my 20s feels wild even to say it out loud. It's been a rollercoaster but also so incredibly wonderful. I'm about to graduate college as an

Art major and will be pursuing art education. Something we used to talk about all the time when I was younger. I'm doing it still feels surreal. I've also found the love of my life. You would love them. They're kind, gracious, and loving, and they make me so happy, hopefully will pop that question in the future. Of course,

I've gone through heartbreaks and friendship hardships too, and those have been painful, but they've helped me grow and become the woman I am today. Graduating college feels bittersweet. When I graduated high school, it was the year before Papa passed — and soon after, both of you were gone. I wanted to cry through that whole ceremony, and I was even looking for in the crowd, and I know this graduation will feel the same even if time has passed since then. I want so badly for you to be there, watching from afar, hugging me, cheering me on, and reminding me that everything will be okay. But that's not my reality anymore. You've been gone for years now, and since then, our family has changed. Honestly, we broke a little. Everyone felt so lost. But we've been trying to find our way back to each other with holidays and family dinners. We've also had new additions to the family little munchkins running around. I just wish you were still here to talk to me, to give me advice, to listen.

Zach, Tyler, and Zoe are doing great. Zoe lives in the city now, which is amazing — I'm so proud of her. Zach and Tyler both have jobs and are in loving relationships. It's beautiful to see. Mom and Dad are doing well too, but I worry about them all the time. I've never seen pain in anyone like I saw in Mom after you passed. And Dad still carries that sadness with him. Looking back, I regret how I acted. I was so unaware and was playing pretend, so caught up in my world that I didn't fully grasp what was happening until years later.

Maybe that's why I'm writing this now.

It's part of the reason I'm making my senior art show about you about your absence, about how deeply I miss you, and about the promise that you will never be forgotten. I won't let you be. When I walk across that stage in May, I'll be thinking about you. I hope you're proud of me for all that I've overcome and accomplished, even with the ups and downs. I miss you both so much. It hurts to go through another milestone without you. I wish it didn't have to be this way. But I hope wherever you are, you're at peace — maybe on a beach somewhere, drinking coladas, listening to music, eating grapes, laughing, and waiting for the day when we'll all be together again. Don't for I love you both and always will.



Thank you!

