



# Window Space

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Danielle Coleman

## **I Hope You're Doing Well**

February 28 – April 4, 2020

In the same way a musician would write a break up album, Danielle Coleman uses her art practice to explore the experience of a partner ending their five year long relationship. Through academic research, intuitive mark making, and the transformation of letters written by her former partner, *I Hope You're Doing Well* incorporates craft elements and kitsch aesthetics, to create a final love letter. In the process of making this work, Coleman validated her own experiences exploring what to do with all that former love, and found space to sit comfortably with the idea that the person who she was romantically entangled with doesn't exist anymore; that version of him ended along with their relationship.

Drawing influence from a maternal relationship with her grandmother, and the oversaturated sticky sweetness of the dollar store around Valentine's Day, Coleman strategically utilizes a range of symbols that express love to grab the viewer's attention. Through imagery from décor found in her Grandmother's home, she explores how nostalgia, items designed for care, and personal experiences can influence our needs of romantic love. Juxtaposing nostalgia with the language of kitsch through sculptural materials like glitter and pipe cleaners, and carefully selected colour choices of red,

purple, pink, yellow, silver and golds, Coleman brings an idealized version of romantic love into her installation; often represented as the perfectly sweet heart-shaped idea of 'forever'. Using kitsch aesthetics to create an overly sentimental, garish, and excessive visual artwork, Coleman reclaims a space for herself and her understanding of the lovers' discourse within academia. By leaning into the notion of cliché and including materials that represent idealized romantic love ironically, her work aims to recontextualize what it means to create visual representations of romance and heartbreak within art.<sup>1</sup>

Against a bright pink background are sheets of watercolour paper covered in floral patterns, quilted together by organically shaped letters that move beyond the page breaks. The floral motif invokes memories of tea towels and bedding in Coleman's Grandparents home, and the shapes were taken directly from the pages of love letters written by her ex-partner. Together, these elements explore the impact of memory; the flowers representing the feeling of being comforted by someone you love, with the letters directly involving her former partner in the installation. The bleeding pigment of watercolour paint is reminiscent of tears, but also becomes an avenue for transformation. By tracing over the shapes again and again, defining sections with pen and ink, Coleman creates new forms from the language of those love letters, visually communicating to her audience that while traces of this relationship will always be a part of her, Coleman is no longer the person her ex-partner was in love with.

The letters are also incorporated as three-dimensional wooden shapes that hang off the wall. Despite being the same marks, the softness of the watercolour letters changes when recreated in wood. Originally a dresser, Coleman cut and sanded each piece into its specific shape and while these letter shapes appear weightless when hanging off the wall, they are in fact very heavy. Different on either side, the wood letters split the installation into two languages. On the left side, the sculptures are full of hearts, created from red pipe cleaners and piping paint through an icing bag,

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman, Danielle, "I Hope You're Doing Well: Fragments," OCAD University thesis paper, April 2nd, 2019, p. 5

reflective of nostalgia. On the right side, the sculptures are wrapped in stripes of glitter ribbon, representing Coleman's constant state of growing through this process.<sup>2</sup> These juxtaposing materials reflect the dual impact of the love letters; a soft and sweet comfort when received during the relationship, but being re-read in the aftermath of the breakup, those same words instead hit hard like a punch to the gut. Hanging from the watercolour pages and wood pieces on the wall are braided chains. Created through the process of finger knitting, these chains give weight to the work, despite the inherent softness of the yarn. Including the sensual aspect of touch recontextualizes the work within a history of craft, and the act of literally weaving multiple pieces of yarn together into something stronger symbolizes Coleman's emotional processing of the relationship; a representation of her ultimate transformative healing.<sup>3</sup>

At the base of the smooth, pastel-toned wall, abstract floral shaped sculptures create a sharp contrast with their rugged edges and heavy opaque colours. These sculptures are made from the offcut wood from the wall pieces and are painted with bold synthetic reds and purples; a nod to shiny foil wrapped heart shaped chocolates often gifted on Valentine's Day. Glitter and gold painted edges highlight their rugged shape, and the floral and letter imagery is continued on the body of the sculptures. Here her marks are much more heavy handed than the watercolour pages of the wall.<sup>4</sup> While the softness of the wall work is a necessary nostalgia of Coleman's past partnership, these wooden floor sculptures remind the viewer that this relationship did indeed end harshly, in heartbreak.

*I Hope You're Doing Well* is a final love letter, the last thing Coleman needed to say two years later. Despite the negative ending of that 5 year relationship, the installation does not seek to vilify her former partner, but rather arrive at some sort of conclusion. Through a long process of self validation, research, exploration, and experimentation, Danielle Coleman invites the viewer into her personal healing, and

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<sup>2</sup> Coleman, p.7

<sup>3</sup> Coleman, p.8

<sup>4</sup> Coleman, p.6

reminds us that the act of processing emotional trauma through her art practice is ultimately a compliment. While traces of a former love are woven into the installation, the process and ultimate closure was never about him. His letters become simply another material choice, an element to further her understanding of their lovers discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Looking at the installation, I'm reminded of Coleman's own words about her work:

"this is what feeling feels like".<sup>6</sup>

- Emily Condie

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<sup>5</sup> Coleman, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Danielle Coleman, in conversation with the author, January 30th, 2020