

Madeleine Boies
Artist Statement and Research
SMP in Studio Art, 2018

Sometimes our emotional state is immediately apparent, revealed to others by the expressions on our face. Other times our emotions are invisible to the people around us despite the intense reactions we feel from within. When thinking about the type of work I wanted to create, I kept coming back to this idea. What if there was a way to make the invisible visible, to give form to something that is only felt? When we attempt to see the emotions of others in our daily lives, we look for physical cues such as facial expression and body language. Are we also able to recognize emotion in the absence of these cues? My work this semester explores this idea. My goal is to take emotion out of the recognizable context of the face and instead use objects to express the emotions. In particular, I am exploring the physical sensation of emotion through objects and the body's reactions to them. I use charcoal animation to represent this idea and I animate in an expressionist style through the use of form and the medium, which allow me to express strong feelings in a physical way.

I became intrigued with the phenomenon of physical reactions to intense emotions through personal experience. When I experienced feelings of sadness and love in particular, I was always struck by the tight, painful sensation in my chest that appeared simultaneously with the build of the feeling. The sensation is not a sharp pain but rather like a deep ache, like a sore muscle after a day of intense use. It comes in waves, ebbing when thoughts get distracted and becoming more intense at the remembrance of the moment causing the emotion. It feels like something squeezing on my heart--this is the image I picture when experiencing these reactions to feelings of love and sadness, and what I decided to work on creating for my animation. I decided to depict representations of both love and sadness in my animations as well. I am

interested in the way that, physically, they feel incredibly similar. When removed from the emotion, the body reacts in the same way for these two very different feelings. Additionally, these two feelings are often linked. Often when I'm sad to the point of physical reaction it's because I am passionate about something. When I feel the physical reaction due to love, it's often linked with thoughts of potential loss.

In order to represent these abstract ideas, I decided to use icons. The icons I chose to represent the emotions and their effects on the body are symbolic and obviously not realistic representations. I chose to have a ribbon representing love because of the way it moves and its materiality. When the ribbon descends from the top of the frame, it doesn't fall in a straight line or in a uniform way. It flutters, is lifted up at points in its descent as if by wind, and floats airily from the top of the frame to the bottom, towards the heart. The ribbon is gentle but not fragile; it is made of a solid material. Ribbons are used to bind, but not in a harmful way, more in a decorative way, such as when wrapping a present or when tying up a ponytail. As the ribbon floats down, in a purposeful but gentle, dancing way, the heart beats below it. The ribbon dances around the heart before finally settling around it in a familiar way, curving around the muscles of the heart and entwining its arteries in its form. The heart is squeezed softly, like an embrace, and warmth is emitted. When the ribbon detangles itself from the heart, it dances around it for a few more moments before exiting from the bottom of the frame in the same fluttery, gentle way.

In a similar way, sadness is also represented by a flowing substance, but while the heart is solid, gentle, and airy, sadness is represented by a heavy, viscous liquid that drops forcefully onto the heart from above. Sadness moves in a thick, straight line from the top of the frame. It doesn't dance or take its time floating down the way love does. There is a clear path from its origin to the heart. There are multiple droplets of the liquid falling, all in uniform straight lines.

The liquid is supposed to look unappetizing, something one wouldn't want to drink. It resembles a dark syrup. When the drops hit the heart, they ooze around it until they have it caged in thin, stringy lines that squeeze the heart painfully. The muscles bulge between the lines of the liquid where it is biting into the surface. The heart turns red with pain at these points of contact, and the previous paths of the liquid turn cold and blue. When the liquid finally begins to release the heart, the droplets slide off and drop through to the bottom of the frame, hitting arteries briefly on the way down as a final reminder that it was there.

The heart in both animations is anatomical in a recognizable way—there are portions missing, and some added to connect it to the background, but it is recognizably a heart. Being completely realistic in drawing the heart isn't important to the meaning of the work. The work isn't depicting what literally happens when I experience love or sadness, it only represents the physical sensation I associate with it. The heart is a placeholder for the physical reaction of the body, or at least how it feels. We associate the heart with love and emotion—seen in phrases like “I have a broken heart” and “my heart is full of love.” This is possibly due to the rush of adrenalin that gets pumped to the heart in cases of extreme emotion, causing the heart to beat faster, in addition to the physical sensation of the chest pain associated with other emotions. Because of this association, I chose to use a recognizable heart to demonstrate how feelings affect the body. This is what I picture when feeling this physical sensation and it is something that viewers can likely connect with as well. By having the heart beating and attached to veins and arteries in the background, I am showing that there is a connection to something larger that the heart is a part of, that it is part of a living organism. This is so the heart is not floating in space and seemingly alone, but we don't need to see the rest of the body to know it is there.

Because I needed an erasable medium for this animation process, I decided to continue using charcoal for this semester's animation, taking into consideration the properties of the medium as a way to further express the meaning of the work. I was inspired to do this by looking at the work of William Kentridge, a South African artist who specializes in charcoal animation. Kentridge, whose work frequently has to do with South African history and present, uses charcoal animation as a way to comment on memory and the passing of time. Traditional hand-drawn animation involves drawing each change between the previous frame and the next frame on a separate piece of paper as an entirely new drawing. Kentridge does not follow this method—instead, he draws the changes between frames directly on the same paper, smudging and erasing any lines getting in the way of the newly drawn section of the image. There are still remnants of past frames on the current one, which allows Kentridge to better express this idea of time passing. This idea of memory and change is particularly present in his 1994 film *Felix in Exile*, specifically in the transformation of the bodies of people who had been wounded and bleeding transforming into the surrounding landscape. The focus of this film is finding a way to remember those who fought and died in order to improve South African society, and their importance to society shown through their becoming the actual landscape of South Africa.¹



Kentridge, William. Still from *Felix in Exile*. 1994, 8:46.
<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/Timeandphotography/vancaelenberghe.html>

¹ Cameron, Dan, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and John Maxwell Coetzee. *William Kentridge*. London: Phaidon, 1999.

In my animation about the physical sensation of love, I fully erase the lines of the previous frames in the animation of the ribbon. I want the ribbon to feel light and fluttery, and dragging the dark smudges of past frames behind it would weigh it down more. The liquid in the sadness animation, however, is supposed to feel heavy, and therefore leaves a stain or tear on the page as it trails down towards the heart. The viewer is clearly able to see the journey of the liquid and where it is going to end up, as opposed to the quicker and more unpredictable movement of the ribbon. In the animation of the heart beat and the colors left behind by the ribbon and liquid, there are remnants of the past frames. Having the heart expand in a predictable way and into a predictable shape gives a sense of rhythm, even when it slows down or speeds up, and having the outline of the way it was beating before will make it more obvious when the pattern changes in response to the movements of the emotions around it.



Boies, Madeleine. Stills from *Love/Sadness*. 2018, 2:38.

Beyond the medium and process of animation, I used an expressionist style in the drawings themselves to better express the emotions I depicted. Particularly, I looked at the work of Kathe Kollwitz, a German expressionist artist whose work is primarily about human suffering, particularly that of the working class in times of war and poverty. Through her use of shadow

and line she expresses intense emotion on the faces and in the bodies of her subjects. She also leaves faces and figures half obscured by darkness or their lines trailing into the background, only illustrating the parts of the body that express the emotion in their gesture.² In her 1903 work *Woman with Dead Child*, Kollwitz conveys a particularly powerful emotion in the way that she drew the mother embracing her dead son. The mother's face and body are half hidden in shadow, centering her arms wrapped around her son in thick, harsher lines that convey an extreme sense of loss along with the tightness of the embrace. The son's face is in the light and drawn delicately, as opposed to the mother's which is half hidden but the viewer is able to see her eyebrows conveying her pain. Kollwitz didn't need to draw the mother's expression to show how intensely she was feeling the loss of her son--the emotion is felt in the embrace.



Kollwitz, Kathe. *Woman with Dead Child*. 1903, print.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=684802&partId=1

While my work is not about human suffering to the degree that Kollwitz's is, I also deal with illustrating emotion through means other than purely facial expression. I had previously

² Kollwitz, Kathe, and Renate Hinz. *Kathe Kollwitz: Graphics, Posters, Drawings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

worked with expressing emotion on the face last semester, but decided to explore showing emotions through objects this semester instead. In drawing the representations of the emotions of love and sadness, I also thought about the thickness of the line and the shadows in the objects. For example, the ribbon representing love is drawn very lightly and smoothly, without any thick or dark lines. The liquid representing sadness, on the other hand, is dark and drawn with a heavy hand on the paper. I also thought about what could be left out in the drawings, which came into play in the drawings of the heart in particular. Some parts of the heart were left out or drawn in a different way to better integrate them into surrounding background, showing that the heart is part of something larger but that its surroundings weren't important to the understanding of the work.



Boies, Madeleine. Still from *Love/Sadness*. 2018, 2:38.

The overall goal for my work this semester was to answer the question of whether emotions could be represented using objects rather than facial expression or body language in a recognizable way, and whether the invisible could be made visible. A secondary goal was to accurately as possible express my own experience of these emotions. Through the use of icons,

expressionism, and the properties of the medium I created a work to meet these goals and capture abstract feelings in a physical way.

Bibliography

Cameron, Dan, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and John Maxwell Coetze. *William Kentridge*. London: Phaidon, 1999.

Kollwitz, Kathe, and Renate Hinz. *Kathe Kollwitz: Graphics, Posters, Drawings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.