

**Love, Marcia**

Reagan Austin

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements in the degree of

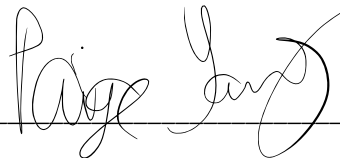
Bachelor of Science in Photography

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APPROVED

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paige J. Love", written over a horizontal line.

Advisor

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## **Introduction**

Love, Maricia is about the grieving process and the physicality of moving items from a home while emotionally processing that a person has passed. Grief is a human experience that everyone endures, however we differ in how we process it, and how we leave these spaces. Every item we come across and every space we enter, we are reminded of their absence. We feel the loss every time an item is removed and every time a room is emptied. We feel as though we are physically removing them from our life.

## **History**

### **Personal History**

Since I first started my photography career, I have always had an interest in capturing things around me as I have found them. I have always had an inkling to make found places and items look visually pleasing. This interest started as macro photography and through this project, it has evolved into environments as well. I began to realize that capturing details doesn't necessarily mean the photos need to be close up. Through the creation of this body of work, I found the balance between photographing the finer details while maintaining the wider shots necessary for giving my audience a more well-rounded look into who Aunt Marcia was.

However, the initial inspiration for this body of work didn't strike until August 29th at 2:44pm. This was when my family and I lost my Great-Aunt Marcia. I knew I wanted to do right by her and dedicate my senior work to her and my family in some way. I dedicated myself to documenting

items and rooms throughout her house. I wanted to capture how she left things before passing so my family and I would always have a clear image of how she lived and who she was.

## History of Photography

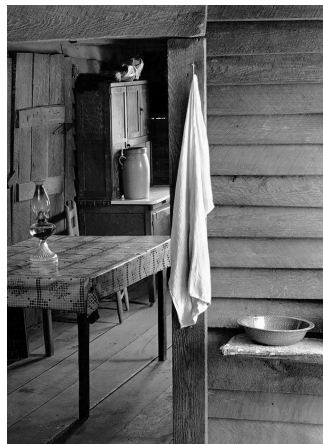


Figure 1

My body of work consists of still life, documentary style images. These are two styles that have been very prominent throughout the history of photography. We see these two styles combined in Walker Evans' Farmer's Kitchen, Hale County Alabama. This environment is illuminated by an unseen light source, and the items in this kitchen remain where Evans found them. Many of my images follow this same formula as my intention was to highlight the stillness of my environments and allow my audience to feel the emptiness.

Another artist, whose process behind her work has inspired me, is Joanne Leonard. She has talked about her work using the term "intimate documentary," meaning that she aimed to capture "intimate realities of life as they are lived and allow them to touch and be touched by the world at large," (Joanne Leonard, p. 4). I really connected this with the concept for my thesis. I placed my emphasis on taking my audience into these spaces that are very personal to my family and I open them to the public in order to immerse them into our grieving process.

I've pulled inspiration from a few more contemporary artists as well, one of those artists being a woman named Susan Mah. I took particular interest in her



Figure 2.

body of work titled *The Loss Project*. This project was dedicated to photographing subjects who had lost a loved one and gave them an outlet to share the story of their loved one and talk about their grief. The still life images Mah took for each story were so unique to the person but equally impactful, even



Figure 3.

before reading the personal excerpt from the subject. I took inspiration from this impact as it was something I wanted to capture in my own piece but shifted it to focus on just the items and environments, not human subjects.

Another contemporary artist I drew inspiration from was a woman named Inbal Abergil. Her work demonstrates a family's decisions on what to keep and what to let go of following the passing of a loved one. I

found myself connecting with these concepts that she worked with in her body of work titled *N.O.K.: Next of Kin*. Throughout my process for *Love, Marcia*, my family and I had to make these same decisions. I captured items and spaces that we felt should be kept with us. These items



Figure 4.

found new homes with all of my loved ones while others will be let go with the passage of time.

## The Images

The goal of this project is to document objects and the spaces they have inhabited even after their removal. I capture not just the object but also what the object leaves behind upon its immediate

removal. I placed emphasis on the impressions left behind from these objects, whether that's an imprint on the ground, a dirty outline from a frame, or the empty hooks that remain on the walls.

In the beginning stages of this project, before my family and I began removing anything from

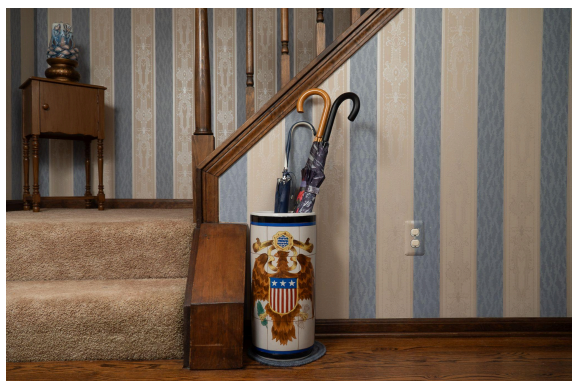


Figure 5.

my aunt Marcia's home, my focus was on photographing everything I saw because I knew my time to capture what I was seeing at that moment would be limited. As seen in *Figure 5*, I took photographs of the house, like this staircase and the umbrella, that were taken is after my aunt Marcia

passed. I kept the lighting simple and did not touch anything in the shot because my main priority was to document the scene without any alterations.

Similarly, as you can see in *Figure 6*, I've created a complex still life as there are many items in display, but still capturing the bookshelf as she left it before her passing. Many of the items in this photo represent a part of her personality and her interests. In this image, we can already see a symbol that is repeated from *Figure 5*.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

*Figure 7* was the first image where I introduced boxes to the scene. While this was how this room was left, the imagery of the boxes gives viewers a sense of belongings being packed up. This image was how I decided to

begin the transition into the emptier space and ease my viewers into my grieving process, giving them an inkling of what is to come later in my sequencing. The viewer does not see the disappearance of the items within the sequence in the beginning, but the preparations being made become evident.

The removal of the objects and the absence they leave is evident in *Figure 8*. The lighting casts a shadow on the indent of where this item used to reside. The viewers start to get a visual sense of what is happening and we start to really see the physicality aspect of my grieving process. I look at this knowing that the object will never exist in this outline ever again.



Figure 8.

### **The Body of Work**

The images in my thesis are tied together not only by meaning but by their visual elements as well. There are multiple symbols that appear in my images at different points in the series tying them all together. All of the images are also taken in the same home so the colors we see in the photos are all designed to work well together. The dark stained wood of the trim and banister make appearances



Figure 9.

throughout my body of work, making the series visually appealing as the tone remains the same from beginning to end. The frames I have my images displayed in were also chosen to match the tone of this

wood and make it all seem very cohesive. I wanted to highlight these muted tones and bring out those darker wood tones to make viewing my project more of an immersive experience and to make my audience feel like they are there.

My work is meant to show the physicality of grieving while emptying a home but, my sequencing is also meant to show my audience time passing in the house, creating a narrative for viewers to follow. When following my sequencing, you get a feel for what the house looked like before Marcia's passing and how she kept the environments that she lived in. You then see things slowly start to get packed up into boxes, meaning something has disrupted the peace of the home. Then when you move to the second half of my series, you are met with emptiness, some you will recognize from a previous image and some you won't.

My photos of the items still in their places and space before they were emptied are all taken straight on, directly in front of what I was capturing, most of them being roughly eye-level as well. I wanted to maintain that documentary feel and show these spaces for what they were. Most of the later shots are taken with this same thought in mind. However, there are a couple of photos of emptied-out spaces that are captured at differing angles and this was for two reasons. The first reason being so I could capture more of the emptiness and the angles felt right as a way to emphasize what was remaining of the spaces. The other reason was to make my audience think. I did not want every before image to have a clear-cut after image that paired with it. I wanted some of them to seem less obvious and some of them to not have after images at all.



## Assessment

### Personal Direction

This project has been a way to capture my grieving process as well as the grieving process of my family. Through creating this project, I was forced to slow down and take in the loss I was experiencing and allow myself to process what was happening around me and feel the finality of it. This has helped me realize that taking the time to go through the motions of grieving and allowing myself to exist and feel is what will help me the most. Through this experience I have learned how to use my art as an outlet. I will continue this body of work as more progress is made in this house and my family and I will forever have these images to remember the life of Aunt Marcia.

### Contemporary Trends

A noticeable trend we've seen in contemporary photography is a move towards more true-to-color imagery that avoids the overly stylized feel. There seems to be a shift towards more authentic images that portray emotional transparency through art, leaning into the imperfections that come with the lighting found in an environment. This was a trend I contributed to in the creation of my images. I used the natural lighting around the house every chance I could to give a feeling of



Figure 10.

sincerity. I let go of the idea that every image had to perfectly match because having completely uniform looks was not part of my body of work. I didn't want to remove the imperfections because that would also impact the realism of my work. Artists such as Alec Soth follow this

trend as well. He tends to honor the visual integrity of the environment he is shooting and often uses their natural lighting to invite his viewers into these intimate spaces. I created this same inviting feeling using these strategies in my work.

My work also contributes to the conversation about telling a story through images and having a narrative to follow. My pieces go beyond the visual documentation of these rooms as there is a story behind them and their sequencing. You begin with the presence of these items in these spaces, you begin to feel the disruption of the loss as we see boxes make an appearance in the sequence, and I end with the absence. This is meant to mirror my grieving in real-time and the slow emptying of the house that followed the passing of my loved one.

### **Meta-Analysis**

This body of work as a whole is to examine grief through the transformation of these once lived in spaces that within the weeks following a loss, became emptied. Using still life images, I am documenting the home of my loved one as they left it when they passed, capturing the disappearance of items and the emptying of rooms as time passes. I portray how mourning is not just an emotional process but a physical one as well. Every trip back to the house was a unique photographing experience, as I never knew what items remained or what spaces had already been cleared out. I kept my camera on me during every trip back. Even when my family members would tell me nothing had changed since my last visit, I always found a new set of empty hooks on the wall or a new box that was filled with cleared out items. Grief is amplified by this absence. When items are taken from their original spaces



within a home, the impressions of where they were originally placed remain upon their immediate removal.

## **Appendix**

### **Technical Notes**

- Sony A7 IV
- Sony 18-105mm f/4
- NEEWER CB60B LED Video Light w/ softbox and light stand
- Adobe Light Classic

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## All Project Images

