



UNDERSTANDING LOSS IN ART

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Art is often used as a means to discuss difficult subjects, and the poems created by Kaye and Kay are no exception. They write of many types of loss: falling out of love, growing up, divorce. This artifact puts Kaye and Kay side by side with two visual artists—painter Vincent Van Gogh and photographer Simon Bray—to consider how meditations on loss can be beautiful.

Kaye and Kay

Art is often used as a means to discuss difficult subjects. Kaye and Kay often focus on the idea of loss in their poetry. And while many artists would choose to talk about how bleak the experiences of falling out of love or abandoning family when things become too difficult can be, the imagery used by Kaye and Kay is able to evoke both this sense of loss and also the beauty in these experiences.

When Love arrives, say, “Welcome.
Make yourself comfortable.”
When Love leaves, ask her to leave the
door open behind her.
Turn off the music. Listen to the quiet.
Whisper, “Thank you for stopping by.”

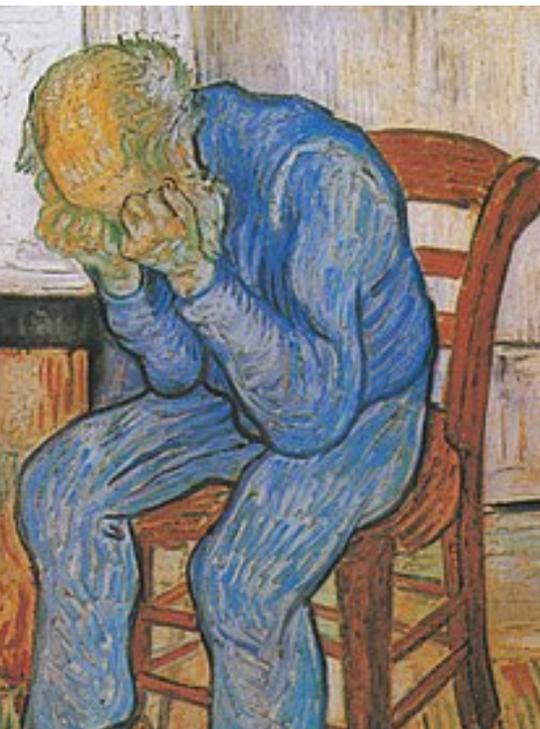
When Love Arrives, Sarah Kay and Phil Kay

My parents left each other even I was 7
years old [...] They whispered “I love you” so
many times over that they forget what it meant

Repetition, Phil Kay

Vincent Van Gogh

Vincent Van Gogh, “arguably one of the most well-known painters, approached his art in a similar manner. Van Gogh experienced a large amount of loss in his life because of his poor mental health, and his art reflects that loss in a unique way (Abruzzo, 2020).



Many of Van Gogh’s paintings expressed an almost dream-like quality to his art, oftentimes being paired with a warm color palette that evokes positive emotions. Even during moments of intense stress in his life, such as after his hospitalization, these elements of beauty are still present in his paintings as demonstrated in his paintings *Iris* and *At Eternity’s Gate*. Van Gogh’s art certainly displayed themes of melancholy and ideas of loss that mirror the view he had of his own life, but even with those emotions present, he is still able to incorporate ideas of wonderment and utter beauty into his art.

Simon Bray

A photography series entitled *Loved&Lost* by Simon Bray uses photographs to portray loss. Bray pairs photographs taken in the same location side by side, one containing a picture of friends or family together while the other contains only one person, the other now passed on. Grief is evident in these pictures. The love that was once existed between two people is gone because one person is no longer present. And while saddening, the fact Bray chooses to photograph loved ones in places the deceased person once stood allows for an element of celebration, or remembering, to be present as well.

Not one life is the same as another. But we are all connected by similar experiences that define what it is to be human. Loss is one of these experiences. Perhaps because of its universality, loss is a topic explored by many artists, including Kaye and Kay

Citations

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