“Magic and Loss”

by

Anna Proctor

Submitted to the Painting and Drawing Department

School of Art +Design

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

December 2021

Sponsor: Wells Chandler

Second Reader: Julian Kreimer

Under the full moon, the tide rises and I grow one thousand times my size. My hands became bulldozers plowing through the mountains, uprooting trees and overturning boulders to find where the keys were buried. I asked the bears, but they couldn't understand me. I was too out of range. My words just fell like a blanket over the mountain and then turned to mist and disappeared. I asked the wolves, but they just howled at my shimmering face, mistaking it for the moon. For hours I searched the forest floor, clumsy, unable to see through the dark velvet folds of night. I tripped and fell and came crashing down, the colossal impact of my collapse nearly split the earth in two. Where I fell, I left behind a glowing chasm. In disbelief I clawed and clamored my way into the glittering bedrock and revealed hundreds of floating keys. For hours I tried key after key, turning and turning until the sun started spilling through the fog. Such a huge awful loss I felt as each key failed to open the lock, and the sunlight returned me to my size.

With this drawing, "Such a Huge Awful Loss I Felt" I wanted to create a kind of epic quest to communicate trying, failing and starting from zero, and the unexplainable feeling of loss that comes as each day resets. I was inspired by the romantic landscape paintings of art history, as well as the ornamentation of Renaissance paintings. I wanted to distort the landscape and disrupt it with a giant Hello Kitty reaching over and alluding to ornamental aspects of the drawing, such as antique locks, keys and jewel encrusted ooze. The plush, neon frame I created as a cushion for the protagonist, to soften the blow of her seemingly endless search, as well as a contrast to the graphite.

I am four years old, standing in front of clouds painted on a window, wearing a petal pink dress handmade by my mother. I clasp my hands and avert my eyes somewhere off camera. I'm trying to be aloof and mysterious. I am trying to make you think that I leave a trail of fairy dust wherever I go and can communicate with woodland creatures. I am holding a teddy bear that wears his heart like a badge. He is dangling above the carpet between my chubby index finger and my chubby thumb. I am twirling my dress. I am doing a curtsy. I am quietly leaving the room and dropping my bear on my way out.... *"As you pass through the fire, your right hand waving there are things you have to throw out"*....I am eight years old. I am in the lunchroom at school. I wish I was somewhere else. I am drawing "somewhere else" on the back of an old permission slip in purple mountain's majesty, my favorite crayon. I am drawing the sky. I am peeling back the paper. I am getting frustrated trying to fill the space. One false move is all that it takes for my favorite crayon to snap .... "*They say no one person can do it all but you want to in your head, But you can't be Shakespeare and you can't be Joyce so what is left instead"....* I am nineteen years old. I am in the hospital. I am wearing those stupid socks with the dots on the bottom. I am not allowed to have my stuff and I am not allowed to use a fork. I am trying to figure out where things went wrong. The nurse hands me a cup of apple juice, the kind in the weird smelling plastic. "If you need anything else, just

press the button," she says. How do I tell her that I want a crayon called purple mountain's majesty and my socks back?..... "*You're stuck with yourself and a rage that can hurt you, you have to start at the beginning again"....* I am twenty-four years old. I am pouring myself a glass of cheap merlot from a box. I am trying not to think about the knobs on the stove or the possibility of reincarnation, or how many times I flipped the light switch; off, on, off, on. I am trying to make you think that I can still hold a conversation and that I will remember it all in the morning. My body feels so light, it all feels so easy now. I pour myself another. I wake up with a pain that persists. I wonder what ever happened to that teddy bear .... "*There's a bit of magic in everything and then some loss to even things out"....*

When making the piece "Magic and Loss," named after the Lou Reed song of the same name, I was thinking about the ways we find comfort as children, and the ways that we find comfort as adults, and at a certain point, what is the cost of comfort? When does it become excessive? When do these comfort rituals start to cause us harm, cause us to create situations where comfort is necessary? I think about the love hours accumulating in Mike Kelley's piece, "More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages of Sin." When does an act of love become an impossible debt to be paid? When does the act of comfort become an endless cycle of mitigating anxiety? The magic wears off and there is always a catch, and reality is inevitable.

Sometimes I lie awake at night and wonder what happened to all the little toys and knick knacks I used to carry around with me in my raincoat pocket. When did the magic wear off? I think I asked you the same question the other night when we were watching HBO. It is in the way that you do not laugh at my jokes or wait for me to catch up with you in the Target parking lot. Don't you think I am funny anymore? I think I am starting to understand how my Polly Pocket or my Betty Spaghetti doll felt when they started to lose their shine, started to lose that new plastic toy smell, when I stopped casting them in my elaborate story lines and showering them with purple plastic tokens of love. I wish I could go back in time and tell myself "you are gonna miss it all one day." I feel the forcefield falling. I feel like Tony Soprano watching the ducks fly away from his swimming pool. I feel the candles burning and the wax dripping. I do not know exactly when it happened, but we have been stepping in hot wax for quite some time.

This piece is made with Model Magic, paint, candles, stones, stickers and pearls. I wanted the piece to be small, to represent the small and gradual changes that occur over time. The candles represent time passing, but also honor the things that remain in our past. They are Shabbat candles, so they also represent a tradition in my family, of lighting the candles every Friday night, something we do not do as often now. As we grow, we go through many phases, we neglect things we once loved, we cling onto new interests, and the people in our lives go through phases of their own. At some point in our lives we will

be heartbroken, and at some point we will be the heartbreaker. For this piece, and many of my other clay pieces, I was inspired by medieval relics and reliquaries, and symbols of love.

Sometimes I think about Dennis Wilson and wonder how far I would dive down, desperate and drunk, to try and recover the things I lost. I know you do not like how I get when I have had a few. You know I get embarrassed about these kinds of things, spilling my guts, but I am trying to be honest. We are sitting in your car and the sun is setting over the strip mall. You say “I am serious, stop trying to make me laugh.” But this entire situation is dying for a bit of comic relief. I am trying to be the bicycle horn that honks after Brian Wilson sings “I wanna cry" in “You Still Believe in Me.” You are a mountain that I cannot move. My arms are tired. My stomach is a sleeping dragon, and when it wakes up and this all burns down. Just know that I won’t regret a single fight, or “fuck you.” Love can be a loaded potato skin from TGI Fridays, so rich and cheesy that it makes your stomach ache, or a “call me when u get home” or “i miss you” that comes out of the blue. It can also be a long night, a scolding cup of black coffee from a rest stop in south Jersey, and “I wish you would get your shit together.” In my dream world I am a cold gooey mass, melting beneath the sun until I form a glistening pool with treasures at the bottom, I try to congeal, and reform, and pull myself up by a rainbow Lisa Frank unicorn’s braid. Melt, reform, pull, over and over again. I know it is a dream because I just do not have that kind of upper body strength. Thank God it’s Friday is all I’ve got to say.

“I’m an Iceberg and I’ll Melt and Out I’ll Run” is about lacking control; control of time, emotions, other people's emotions. I made a bodily landscape for this painting and juxtaposed it with a Lisa Frank inspired horse. In this painting the horse is an icon painting, a holy and nurturing figure. She is the sun, something constant and grounding above perpetual movement, chaos and change. The title comes from another one of my favorite songs, “The Water is Wide” by The Microphones. My studio practice is very connected to music. The Painting itself was influenced by artists such as Alake Shilling and Irena Jurek for their use of cartoon figures and bright colors.

I love my best friend but I hate the way she tries to talk to me while I am trying to listen to the same three RuPaul songs on repeat on the treadmill at the gym. I love my mom but I hate navigating her emotional minefield. *“This is the beginning of the rest of your life.”* I am trying to get healthy these days. I just want them to understand that I’m not mean for the sake of being mean. *“You better get it get it, get - get -get, get it get it, right, right.”* I am just trying to get it right this time. I am trying not to fall off the wagon or make a fool of myself. When I get home from the gym I make a smoothie. I am trying to meal prep because that is what healthy, put together people do, I think. Outside my kitchen window all the neighborhood cats are gathered in a perfect circle in my yard. I smile. They must

be witches, and there must be magic. This moment feels like a tiny gift from the universe, a tiny star that I can keep in my pocket. It feels like how I felt when I was 6 and I would come home from school and restore the grand foyer in "barbie as rapunzel's" palace on my parents' desktop. I rinse out my smoothie cup and put it in the dishwasher. I am trying to get it together these days. I put my headphones in and turn on some Daniel Johnston. *"Hey George, do your chores, don't feel sore, I know it's a lot more than just being bored."* I watch the cat witches stand up and march into the woods single file, like a scene out of a Studio Ghibli film. *"There's a heaven, and there's a star for you."*

"There's a Heaven and There's a Star for You" is titled after a line from the Daniel Johnston song "Hey Joe." The piece is about starting over any time you want, and not giving up, even though it is not easy. I made this piece by dyeing and painting a piece of fabric and attaching images and trinkets so that it became a kind of personal universe map, and at the nexus there is a ziplock bag of clay stars that I shaped by hand. The ziplock bag of stars is saying, "Here's a little bag of stars, you can have some now and save some for later, you can carry them in your pocket or lunch box or backpack, they are there for you when you need them." I was inspired by quilts, for their handmade and personal aspect, and for the way that they can represent milestones or important events in one's life. I was also inspired by 2000's desktop screens and my connection with that period of time.

I went back to the earth chasm I created when I was the size of a mountain. Smaller now, I climb inside. It was so cold and dark inside the cave, except for the radiating glow surrounding the keys that was almost too hot to touch. I extended my hand out towards the golden glow, but my hands were like ghosts, transparent and unable to grasp a single treasure.. An overwhelming feeling of loneliness wrapped its arms around me in a bear hug and tears started forming in the corners of my eyes, darkness flooded the cave. My tears began to harden into lustrous pearls and fell like hailstones around me. I held my shirt out to catch them, like the way I used to do as a child collecting seashells on the beach. When the tears stopped I was left standing there holding my bounty of pearly tears like a basket of Halloween candy. "Trick or treat" I whisper into the cave, just to see how it would feel. A golden and glittering warmth flooded the cave and guided me home.

"Reaching" is a sister drawing to "Such a Huge Awful Loss I Felt," and dives deeper into its narrative. I wanted to build more of the world that I created in the first drawing, and also play with the idea of ephemeralness through the use of transparency.

I fell asleep in the worst way, in the worst chair, with all of the lights on. Oops, I think my cup runneth over, and I think its contents are pooling underneath my feet, getting inside my shoes, making my socks feel all weird. Before crawling into bed I have

to crack myself open like a geode and take things out. I do this so I can fall asleep. I imagine the rest of me slipping out through the holes in my window screen and floating up into the sky, over the mountains, over the shell station, over the walgreens, over your house, over the interstate, 65 miles an hour, for one more night, for one more time with feeling. I'm thinking about eternity and how to explain it to myself in a way that doesnt make me break down. I imagine everything is pink and squishy and teaming with light. I will be weightless, I will be absorbed into softness. I imagine everything is ice cold and hard and armed with a knife. I will be guarded with my good luck charms. What about me? Will I get to choose my clothes? Will I have clothes? Will I be a little orb of light bumping around eternity like a pinball? Will I be anything at all? I try to stop asking myself these questions, I thought I took them all out before bed. I always seem to miss a few. Think pink, think soft billowing clouds, think about floating through the little holes in your window screen and climbing into bed with you until eternity.

This painting "Untitled (Spirit World)," focuses on the cycle of experiencing death anxiety and trying to cope with it, and the cognitive dissonance that occurs with it. It is about trying to explain eternity to yourself and grappling with mortality. I used fluorescent pink paint over purple tones because I wanted the environment to feel hot and cold at the same time. I wanted to represent a temperature where nothing mortal could survive. The landscape itself is like a giant, sleeping spirit that I imagine myself climbing, trying to cling onto things but slipping. Traveling through eternity is daunting so I supplied some good luck charms to combat the fear. Suellen Rocca and her use of signs and symbols influenced this work, especially her painting "Bare Shouldered Beauty." "Spirit World Pt. 2" is a painting that represents a slightly different version of eternity. The hands reaching over the womb of flying horses represents both myself pondering existence, and a possible "higher power" pulling the strings.

I had a dream that I was wearing a crown of pearls and each one was a teardrop that had hardened under an extreme heat. One was formed under the extreme heat of the August sun. Another was formed under the extreme heat of the on-fire car that we drove past on the Palisades Parkway. And a third one was formed under the extreme heat of an anxious sweat. I think about a lot of things, when I am staring blankly into the night, or focusing on some random crack in the ceiling, but most of all I think about your skinny toes in the sand, my beer falling into the ocean and our hair sparkling underneath the light.

"Save the Last Dance for Me" is a small painting that is about discomfort, resilience, and making mistakes. It is about tripping and falling down, but getting back up to dance.

It is nighttime, and the moon is peaking through my window. I am 3 years old and I can hear the bugs making sounds outside and I can feel the warm breeze on my toes that are sticking out of the blanket. I swing my legs off the side of the bed so I can get up for a glass of water. My little white duck is hanging on my doorknob, and it dances gently back and forth as I open the door. When I tiptoe back into my room, I pull the rope so I can hear a lullaby, and I crawl back into my bed, and the moon and the bugs and the breeze and the little white duck all sing me to sleep. Fast forward two years and I am at summer camp, playing my Pokemon Ruby on my gameboy advance. I am getting annoyed because this kid is in my ear saying “Use hyper beam!” Doesn’t this kid know that hyper beam is ineffective against rock types? Oh well. Maybe heaven is inside of a crystal cave on Yoshi's island. I thought that it would get easier when I got older. I did not know that 26 would look like this. There’s nothing quite like the feeling of playing gameboy when you’re five years old, on a snowy day with a plate full of chicken tenders. People would say “You should get outside! Enjoy the snow!" Why would I want to do that? It is cold and wet, and I hate lacing up my snow boots. I want to enjoy the warmth while I can, I want to shoot fireballs from my hands or wield a frosty sword. I want to solve puzzles and read strategy guides. I will face the cold another time.

“Trial by Combat” is about the battles faced in video games from childhood versus the battles faced in adulthood. Thinking back on memories of battling video game villains and eating my favorite snacks is something I find extremely comforting. Such a simple moment can be a valuable thing to hold onto.

"Such a Huge Awful Loss I Felt" graphite on 14 x 17 in drawing paper and frame made with dyed fabric stuffed with polyfill, 2021

"Magic and Loss" Wine bag, polyfill, crayon, stickers, pearls, beanie baby, 2021

"Untitled Container for Holy Relics" approx. 10 x 5 in Model Magic, acrylic paint, stones, stickers, beads, shabbat candles, 2021

“I’m An Iceberg and I’ll Melt and Out I’ll Run” 36 x 48 in acrylic on canvas, 2021

"There's a Heaven and There's a Star for You" approx. 34 x 48 in dyed fabric, inkjet photos on printable fabric and mixed media on holographic fabric, 2021

"Reaching" 12 x 16 in graphite on drawing paper, 2021

“ Untitled (Spirit World)” 36 x 48 in acrylic on canvas, 2021

"Spirit World Pt. 2" Approximately 36 x 30 in, acrylic on canvas

"Save the Last Dance for Me" 16 x 20 in acrylic paint, beads, stickers on canvas, 2021

“Trial by Combat” 38 x 38 in acrylic on canvas

Bibliography

Charles, Rupaul, *"The Beginning."* RuCo, Inc. 2011.

Elverum, Phil, *"The Water is Wide."* St. Ives, 2002

Johnston, Daniel, *"Hey Joe."* Homestead Records, 1988.

Kelley, Mike, *"More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages of Sin."* 1987, Whitney Museum, New York.

Pokemon Ruby. Gameboy version, Nintendo, 2002.

Reed, Lou, *"Magic and Loss."* Sire Records, 1992.

Rocca, Suellen, *"Bare Shouldered Beauty."* 1965, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.