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Art 182: Forms of Influence  
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### **Coffee and Grief and Other Household Items**

Sometimes when I drink too much coffee I will spend the rest of my day with this persistent, nagging feeling in my body— like I am somehow empty and no amount of anything can fill it, and so instead I just have to wait until I feel normal again. This could be after just one cup or when I'm foolish and get an extra shot of espresso in an already very caffeinated latte. For me, grief feels similarly: I drink my coffee every morning, and usually I do not get the nagging feeling. In the same way, grief is something I carry around constantly, though only sometimes does it feel like something I will have to wait out. Typically, my grief feels like a scheduled part of my day in the same way that I always make a cup of pour over when I am making breakfast.

For my final project I made several mugs and cups, mainly out of porcelain. I wanted to embody the idea of grief as present and mundane in the ways that drinking coffee is a normal part of many people's mornings. I glazed the mugs and cups in shades of blue because I have never quite agreed with the idea that blue is a color for sadness— to me, blue is one of the most vibrant colors, and even in lighter and mellower shades, blue still holds something deep and meaningful and important beyond simple sadness.

I was inspired by the way that Roberto Lugo talked about colors— at his speech at NCECA in 2015 he states that

I made a series on the Bloods and Crips, a rival gang in Los Angeles, killing each other— predominantly people of color. And what I wanted to do is I wanted to make an image of myself with a red bandana, and I wanted to have a friend with a blue bandana. My friend was white. I wanted people to confront that pot and I wanted them to look at it. It's decorative for a reason to sort of seduce you to come in to look at it. I wanted them to see me and say, "That looks like a gangster". And then look at the other side and go, "That looks like a country girl, she's wearing a blue bandana. That's rather stylish". I put my face on pots because I want to put my face in a place that doesn't

belong. I want you to get used to it. A hundred years from now I want a lot of people of colour to be on pots so that you see it every day and you become comfortable with it.

Beyond just being pretty and serving aesthetic purposes, color evokes emotions and memories in ways that Lugo so excellently challenges. Watching this speech early in this project made me question the ways that I had chosen glazes throughout the course, and why so many of them had been blues and yellows. I realized that the colors meant light and joy and represented many of the mundane moments of my life— a brilliant blue sky on a Michigan winter day, the yellow flowers my father planted in the backyard, the colors of the school that my brother attended. They were the colors I reached for because they held meaning and happiness for me.

On another level I was also thinking about something Gerri asked me: how does throwing compare to playing a sport in terms of physicality? Something so charming about throwing, and especially making smaller things, is that there is that level of struggling with the clay that makes me focus in ways that I cannot focus otherwise. I think that I found with bowls and plates that the clay felt more forgiving since there was more to work with and more that I could simply trim off. I loved the process of making cup after cup because each one was unique and interesting and required a degree of concentration from me that I usually cannot conjure up. I liked that I was able to compare ceramics, a relatively new experience in my life, to sports, something that has been central to who I am since I was five.

Beyond the simplicity of a mug or cup, I wanted my project to live with my friends who had similarly experienced grief recently. Two of my closest friends live near me but I rarely see them because of the pandemic, and they have both experienced loss around the same time that I did. To be young and to lose those you love really sucks and so every time grief does feel exceptionally present, like the empty feeling from too much coffee, I am grateful to have friends

who have had similar experiences and to see that they are okay and that I will also be okay. I plan to gift the two smaller cups to them, and as they live together, I love the idea of their little cups and them in their home.





