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## **a part from you**


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*a part from you*

rick briggenhorst

Springfield Art Museum  
Springfield, Missouri  
May 2023

**Acknowledgements:**

Forever here for you,  
Shauna, Jimmy, Jane, Louise,  
and all of our future animals.

**A PART FROM YOU**

Art and Design Department

Missouri State University, May 2023

Master of Fine Arts

Rick Briggenhorst

**ABSTRACT**

I invite empathy through art that is technologically assisted to find alternative interpretations for nontheologically informed faith. The sudden passing of my dearest friend, Jimmy, encouraged me to dig through my archives of data, to cherish all the bytes that remain of him. In this endeavor, I find that death is not the end, but a post-physical state of being. I express this sentiment in a part from you, where the work utilizes inanimate constructs to place your faith in, to make sense of the complexities of grief in a digitally tethered way of life. This life that allows many states of being and celebrates an idea of existing in many placeless places. This work is my wish for those who are mending their spirits, as I am—to find hope in the bits of data we cherish (digitally and internally) and sustain beautiful sentiments beyond physicality.

**KEYWORDS:** grief, digital, immaterial, internet, techno-animism, contemporary art, nature, installation, light

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A PART FROM YOU

By

Rick Briggenhorst

A Master's Thesis  
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For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Studies

May 2023

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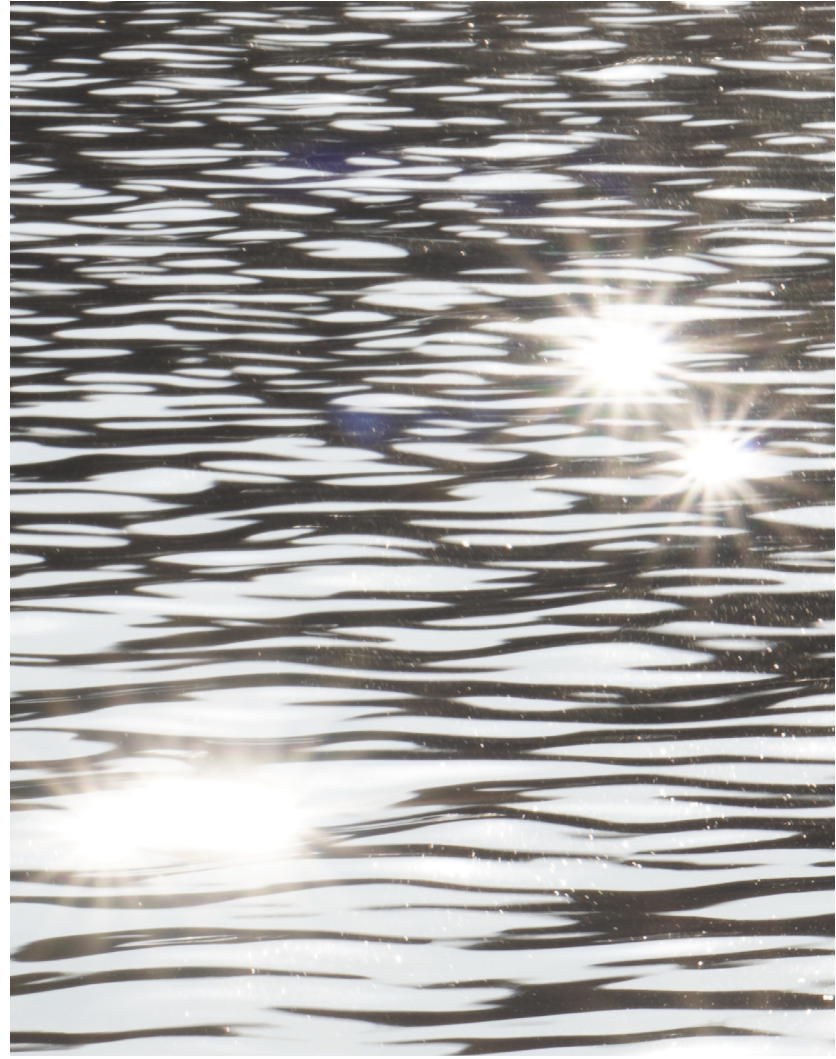
a part from you is a culmination of longing and trust.  
A longing for my dearest friend, Jimmy, and trusting myself  
that I would find ways to never give up the feeling—the  
feeling that, with enough faith in the world around me,  
he could still exist everywhere even after his passing.  
When we borrow from our ways of thinking about inanimate  
objects, or the animacy of them (e.g., ways of seeing, or  
projecting life into them), we allow ourselves, even for  
a moment of a moment, to have faith in the non-visible.

traces of you



tender





My childhood was full of this wonder. My physical self was born and raised in the Midwest, no stranger to creeks, shallow riverbeds, open plains, and wooded seclusions, but the vast open internet was where I flourished and found a second, equally real, self. My friends were always wrapped in a shroud of inanimacy. I felt as though my stuffed animals and the strangers in chat rooms each exhibited their own "lifelike" qualities. Much like traversing the woods, "surfing the web" was a real, corporeal experience. They were both places I would go, but the internet is an example of a known placeless place—one in which I would momentarily leave my physicality behind. Here, I found that people could exist in many places at the same time, all tethered by unseeable forces. All that is required is to believe in the unseeable—to inhabit a space that is non-physical.



JOAN OF ARF



uwerevertime

*here together, for a really really long time, i hope*

There is a desperate need for that physical object during grief. This is a way to corporeally feel what was at once within our reach. Our knowledge that something physical can no longer remain is a complete disassembling of our object permanence. I was introduced to the concept of passing as a child. When saying goodnight to my father, it was impossible to know it was for the last time. In the morning, I saw him in a peace I had no way of comprehending. As he lay in an inanimate state, my child-self believed that my father was still present. Could my child-self use the way he felt about his stuffed animals to believe that his dad was still close? This curiosity in the beauty and ambiguity of our passing has existed in me for as long as I can remember.



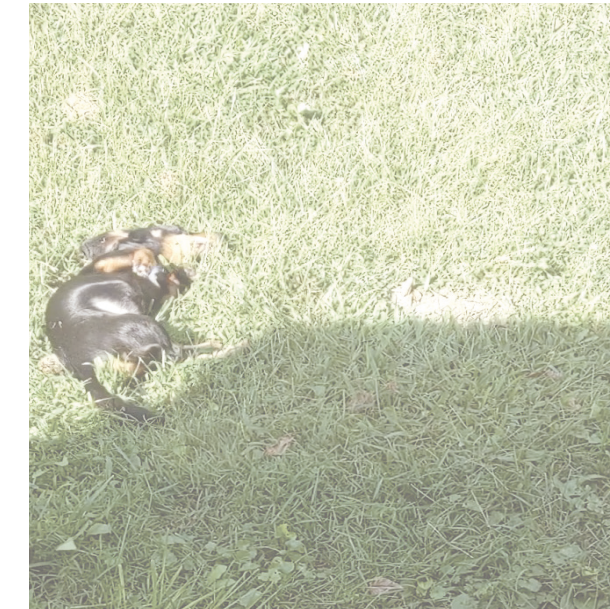
*you can hold me again*



*i can hold you again*



I'm working against the idea that death is the end of life. How do we define the end of something we can see, hear, and feel each day? Considering the wonder of how we exist in digital "places" and the ways in which we personify the inanimate, we find a form of faith in post-physical existence, prolonging the feelings we have with a loved one. Through ashes, hair, and will, I believe they are doing well someplace else. Pixels on a screen show me Jimmy is rolling carefree in the grass; MP4s contain the sound of his collar jingling.



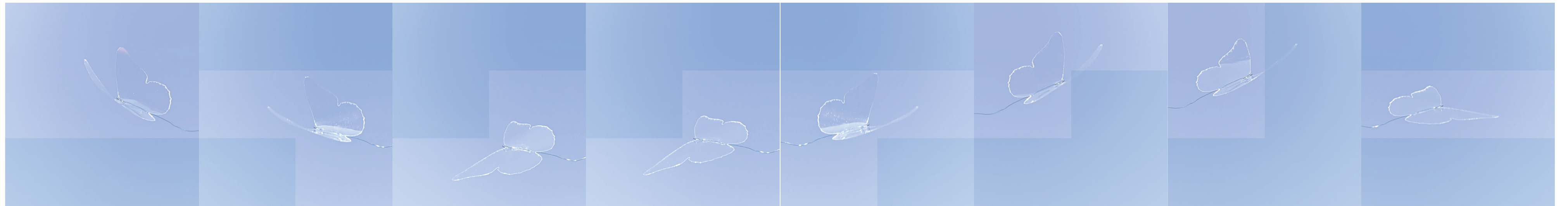


if these digital remembrances can so vividly evoke his life

then there must be ways to feel close again.

a part from you is the combination of my interest in nature, the endless possibilities of an online world, and navigating the grief of the passing of my dearest friend Jimmy—a life-altering experience that I’ve been learning to process in each moment of my life ever since. Before his passing, I had rarely delved into the complexities of death and post-life in our contemporary time—a time of boundless data archives.

The day Jimmy departed—from holding his body full of life and warmth, to days later holding his remaining physicality (ashes)—that experience invited the notion that his dissolved physicality was not a goodbye, but merely another way to love him. When I received his ashes, I felt like I had him right against my chest again, now knowing I had a new way to embrace him.

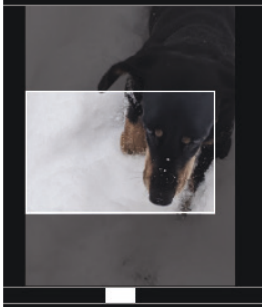


grasping for air

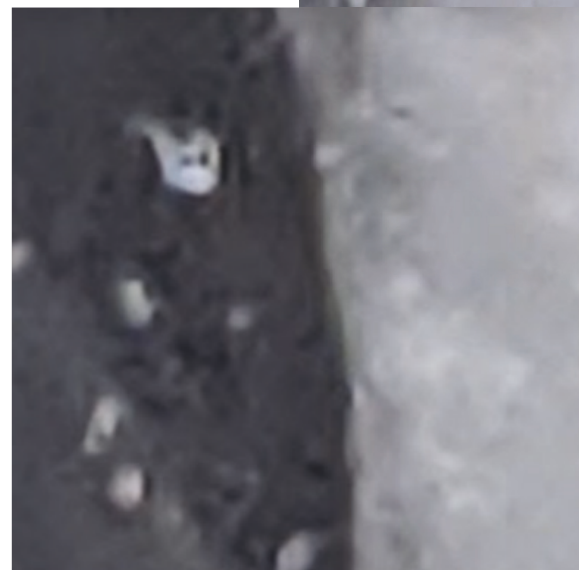
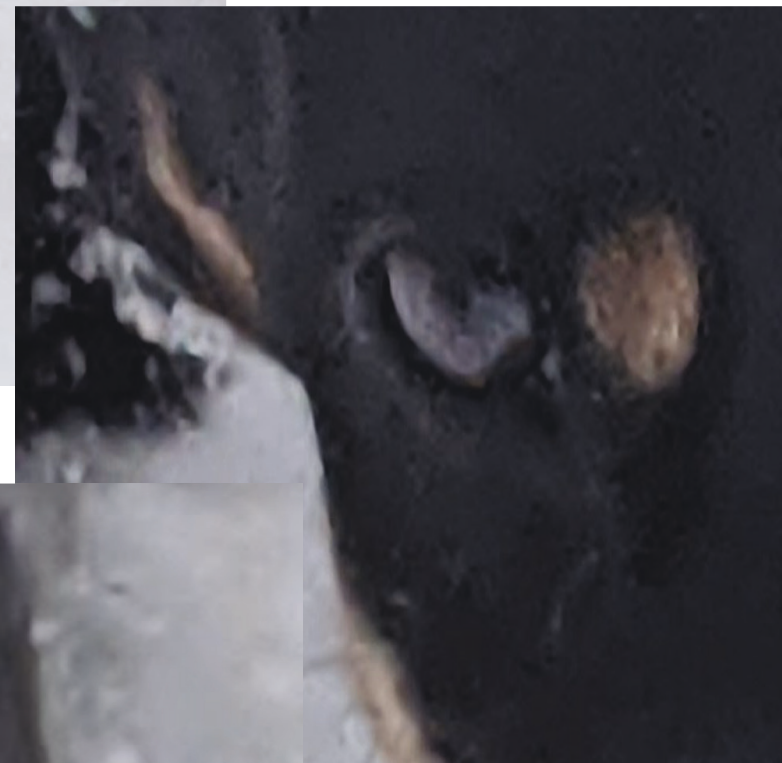
*A few days after his passing I felt compelled to make a social media post.  
I don't know why I needed to make my grief public.  
Is it something we just do?*



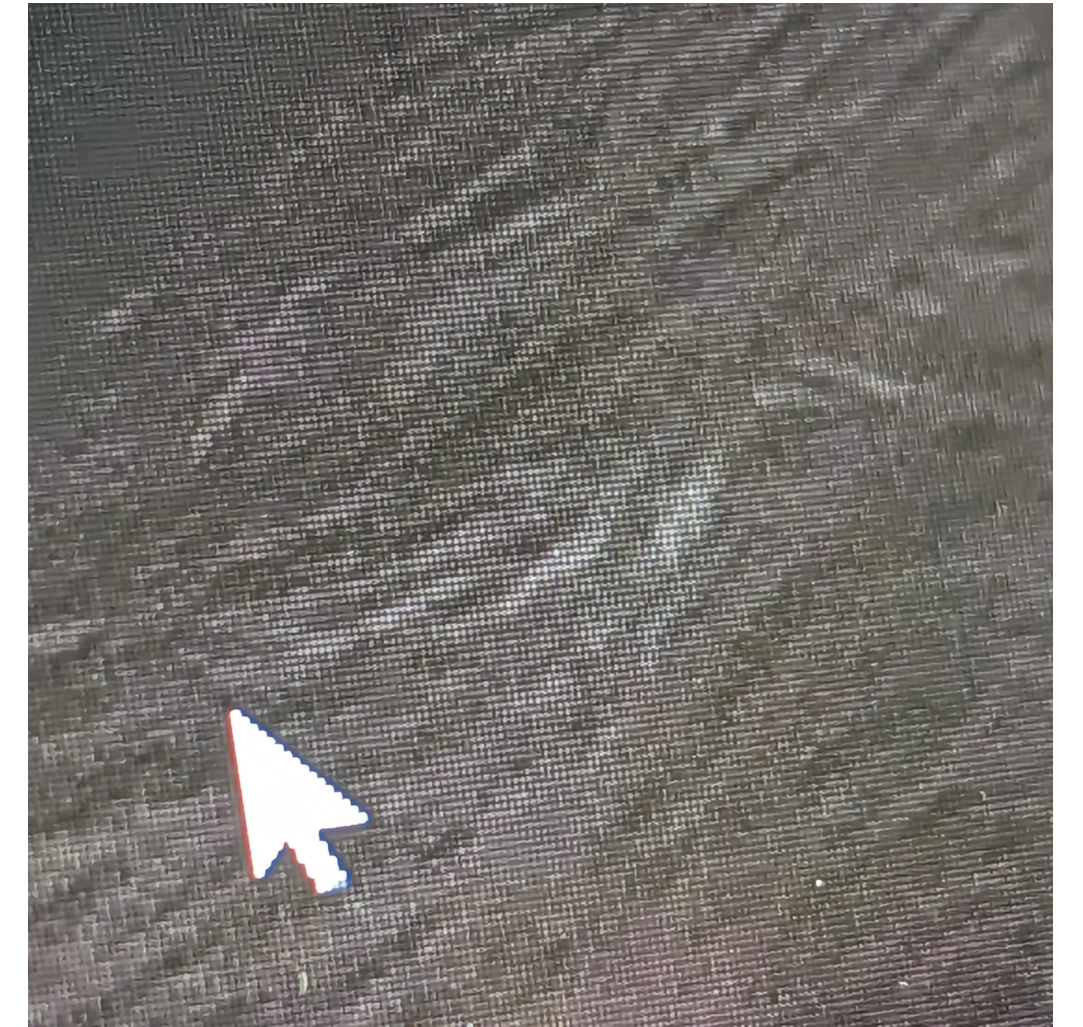




*To not be there at the departure, to be holding him for the last time without knowing. I just can't believe it; he was right there, and now he wasn't? But maybe he still was. Is there a part of us that knows a version of our departed loved ones will resonate with our digitized sorrows? I felt compelled to share with the world that something so beautiful was no longer "with us," but he is!*



As I spend time getting to know the digital remains of him, I'm able to zoom in close enough to where the smallest part of his face is as big as the world itself. I knew this wasn't the end. I knew that every memory he was a part of is real, and at times I wish I could use them to have him back by my side. When I clench onto the objects that hold his ashes, they feel much more to me than cindered fur and bones. I believe I would never lie to myself. With complete trust, these remnants are a catalyst for my heart to conjure the spirit that made me whole. I had to find more ways to feel close to him. Deep down I know there are others that are mending their fragile hearts the same way as I am.





My work has taken a pivotal turn. I've grown to find new meanings within previous works that utilized day-long videos of the sky passing by. If I watch a digitized sky pass me by, to know that it existed then, and exists someday now-then I can do the same for Jimmy. The countless videos of water in motion slowed to a frame-by-frame status are a reminder of my own tears finding their way to the grass he once rolled in. With this work being digital and saved to the same places he now exists, it feels as though I'm still able to communicate with him. I can send him parts of the world I remain in now, to show him that we are here and thinking of him. This relationship I've built with digitized natural moments has become another way of seeing and being a part of the world around me, where I know I feel even a fragment of Jimmy again.





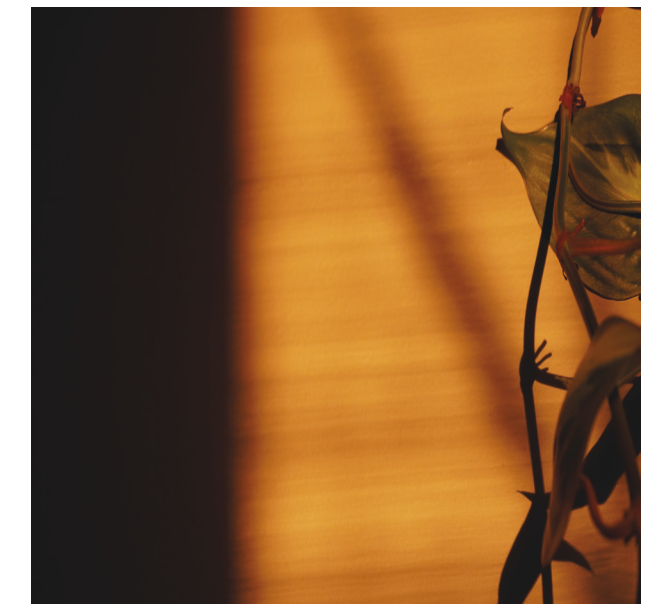
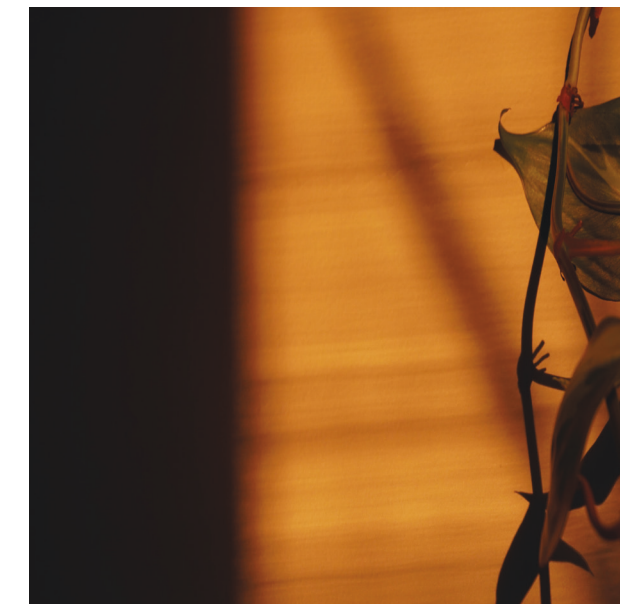
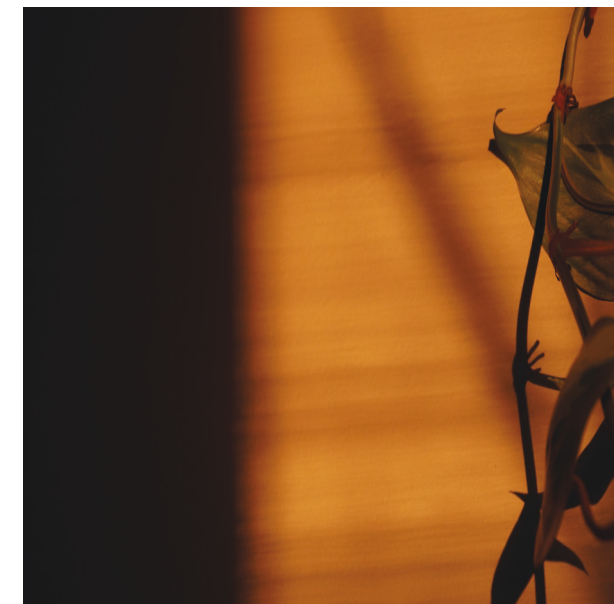
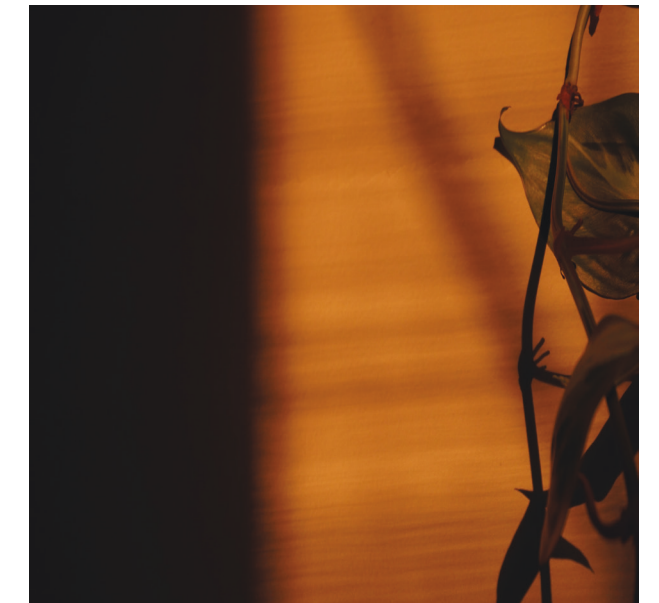
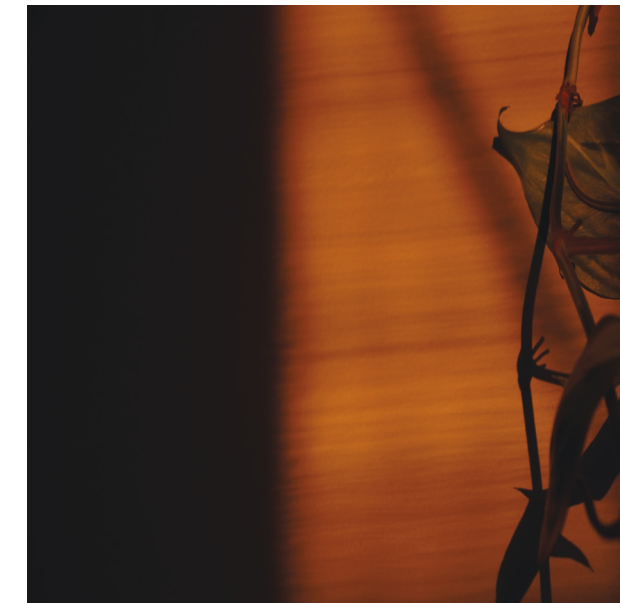
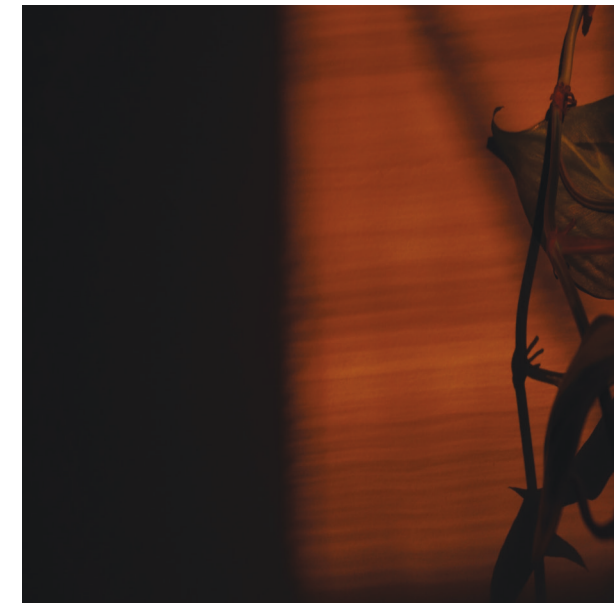
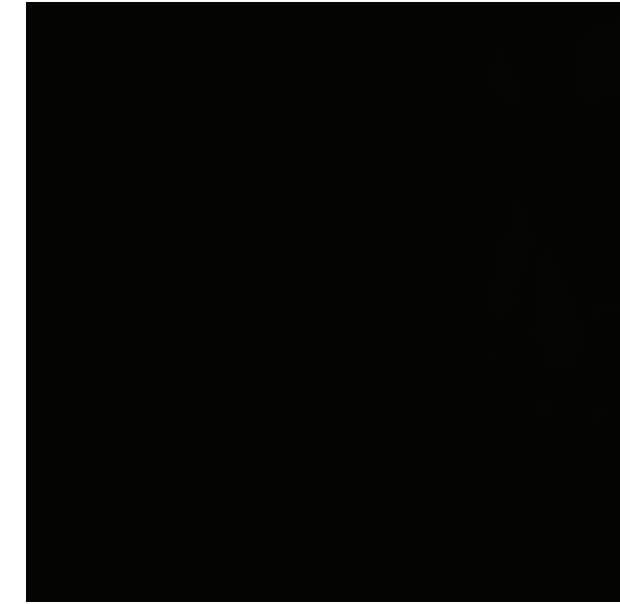
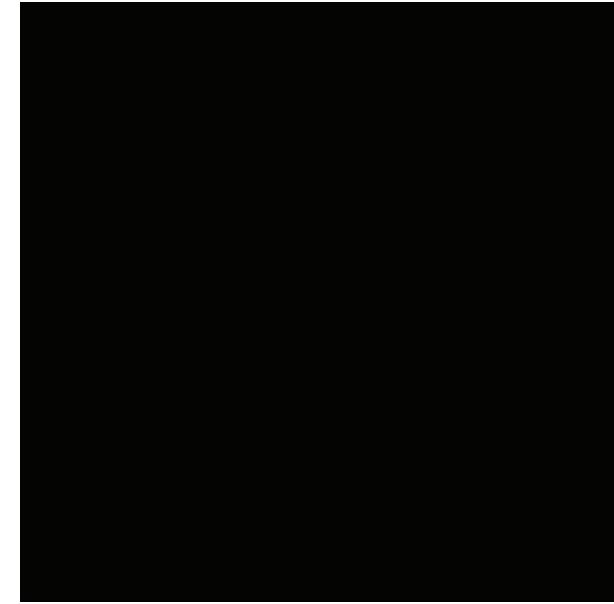


*Shedding my physicality, existing in a place I know a part of him still remains, imbued by the remnant energy upon the echoes of his departure.*





Vision blurred, I force myself to see through tears I refuse to wipe away. I want to share this experience that has helped me through the grieving of my friend Jimmy. I no longer want to hide how I feel, an involuntary action that occurs whilst being in digital places. Dozing off inside on the floor, the sensation of warmth overcomes me as the sun finds its way to my chest. Large shapes pierce the windows, they burn a shape onto me that feels familiar. Could it be in this instance that for a moment I felt a part of you?









I developed a *part from you* to share the feeling of warmth I felt when the sunlight pierced the clouds and found its way to me. I have created an installation that invites viewers to engage in the complex relationships we have with inanimate objects and grief. You become participants in the art viewing experience, but deeper than that—a vital component of the longing that remains upon the departure of something beautiful. I'm using inanimate objects that, with light coding, become full of life, to recreate the sensations of a natural phenomenon while also recreating the sensation of an individual whose physicality may be dissolved. This idea remains close to the experience of telecommunication: you must believe in forces that are, at times, not visible or tangible. Texting a number I know the holder of, I trust my message (a part of me) found its way to another. If I video call my mother, we recognize each other, and even though we are made of hundreds of pixels, it's enough.

viewer experiencing a *part from you*,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri



installation image of a *part from you*,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri

Having faith in an inanimate object is a co-operative action. As an invitation to feel warmth, two Arduino-controlled motors slowly push and pull a shade in front of two warm spotlights, emulating the sun finding its way through the clouds. The piece contains just two chairs, one for yourself, and one (if empty) to be filled with that loved one that may be elsewhere. Tethered by proximity, you experience the passage of time formed by low temperature spotlights and small motors. These create time and space to be shared together in which each passing moment is visible. We follow their movements, as ephemeral as they are. Watching a recreation of the sun's journey, you hear hopeful yet somber melodies lull over the gentle whines of geared motors—a reminder that this experience is fabricated. The composition of ambient notes facilitates immersion. You are free to believe that you are elsewhere, perhaps in a place that does not rely on the harsh rules of reality. These small machines work quietly together to aid in your emotional well-being.

Participants enter through a doorway created by walls, hearing sounds that can be described as ethereal and somber. A light is shifting slowly across the room where two chairs are situated for viewing experiences. The lights and sounds are produced from two discrete wall mounted boxes behind the chairs. The boxes have a shade over them that moves back and forth slowly, casting light outward. The shade is a drawing of the negative space between a canine's ribs; that has been laser cut through wood. It is important for me to find alternative resolutions when working with technology and nature. The act of mimicry through analog means is no exception. An entirely digital process, using high-resolution projectors, could truly capture the details of a specific place. This approach is not appropriate for *apart from you*. *a part from you* uses warmth in color and temperature lights, to go into a feel-based experience of a natural world recreation (an analog experience). Location becomes an internal dialogue, rather than an outward spectacle. The small motors and 3D printed parts that are coded to work together are inanimate objects, but with a romantic way of thinking, are ways to see ourselves in different states of being. Personifying the objects around us is a familiar phenomenon, and *a part from you* pushes this sentiment into the processing of grief by cherishing all the physical/immaterial objects that remain upon the passing of a loved one.

Lovers embracing in front of a part from you,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri



trying to feel alive



You are invited to participate on your own or with a group. I'm hesitant to use the language of "by yourself" because while making this work, I did not feel alone. This could be a way to feel close again: a center for reflection and possibilities. Reaching for something you cannot fully grasp mentally or physically, but you know it to be there. It is not mere illusions, but existence in a new state.

A light piercing many layers of atmosphere to find its way into your heart; it has traveled so far and will always find a way to you. Similarly, we find ourselves caressed, nestled in the data that compiles to become our loved ones again.

As we watch our shadows dissolve, we revel in knowing that a graspless part of ourself is with them.

viewer shadowplaying with a part from you,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri





*I'm a creek that holds tight to every drop of rain  
That recognizes when it's time for it to fade  
Knowing there will be a time to feel full again  
All the joy in life (is within us)*

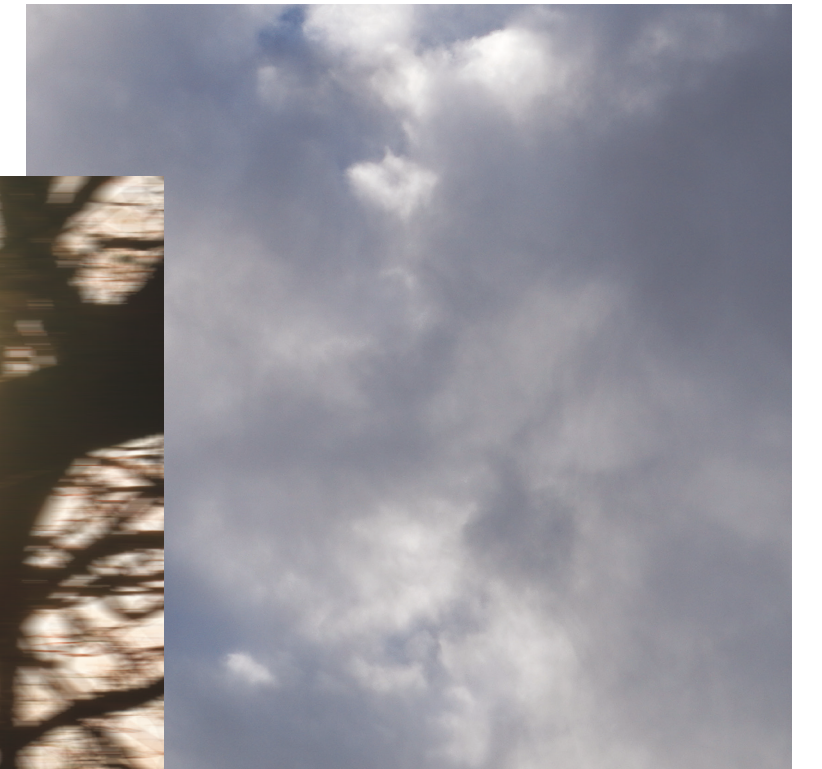
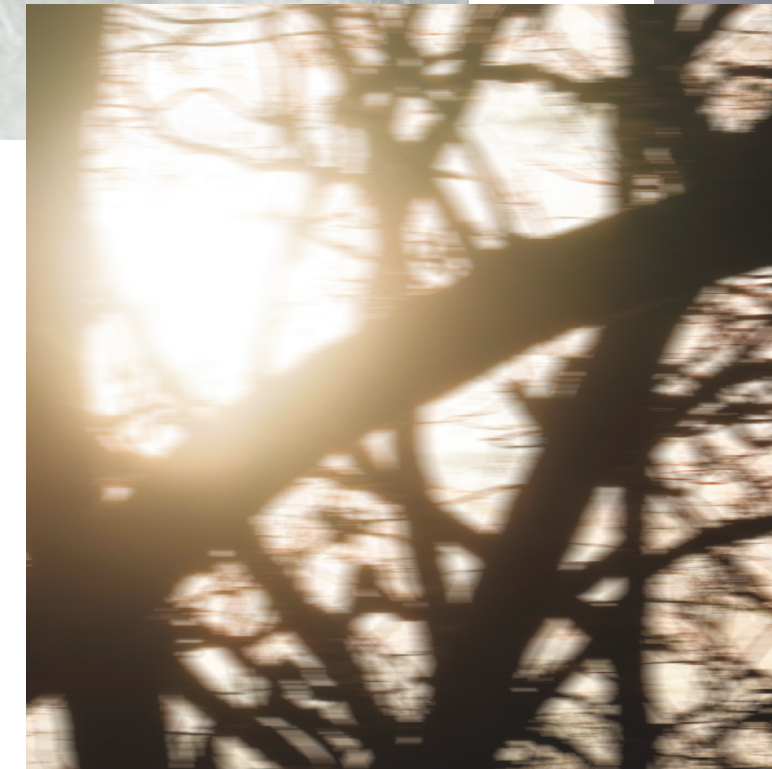


*every tear is for you*



a *part from you* is a way to sustain hope—a hope that, in some way, your physicality (its longing, its tenderness) can revel in the ephemeral traces of a loved one again. There is no coincidence that in healing we find new meanings in the world around us. We seek those moments that were always a part of us, but now mundane experiences become enhanced with our longing.

viewer looking outward in front of a *part from you*,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri



*rain - water returning to the soil- tears salting our skin.*  
*sunlight - warmth - chest-to-chest embrace.*  
*clouds - slowness - wind through my fingers.*

can i *slow* the days?



My wish for those that are mending their spirits: please use this research as an invitation to find hope in the bits of data that we cherish. No matter the state of being, sustain those feelings for your loved ones beyond physicality.

lovers sharing a moment in front of a part from you,  
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri



embrace



*fleeting moments  
of our time here together  
nestled in our heart's memory*

*synthesized to present  
a new way of embrace*

*your physicality dissolved  
is not a goodbye  
but merely another way to love you*



*fleeting moments  
of our time here together  
nestled in our heart's memory*

*synthesized to present  
a new way of embrace*

*your physicality dissolved  
is not a goodbye  
but merely another way to love you*

a new way

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