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Sad Socks Without Sole Mates

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Washington University in St. Louis
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Abstract

Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks is a series that uses the unmatched sock as a symbol to speak about the experience of losing and grieving a relationship. Positioned as a series of memorials, the project facilitates spaces for viewers to bring their own life experiences to the project as well as empathize with those presented in the series. The use of the unmatched sock, an inanimate object, allows for it to be projected onto and melded into the specific and individualized narratives that viewers bring to the works. In its ability to access a level of specificity for each viewer, the project becomes participatory in the unique involvement that viewers have with crafting the work and analysis of it.

Throughout “Sad Socks Without Sole Mates,” the methodologies of *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* such as the removal of context, use of text, inclusion of specific details of the artist’s life, and the involvement of collective spaces are analyzed through three projects *Crying Sock*, *Windsock*, and *Sad, Single Socks Valentine’s Day Celebration*. “Sad Socks Without Sole Mates” places *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* in conversation with other contemporary memorials as well as artworks that use similar methodologies to transform works from solitary artworks to collaborative projects. Overall, the statement provides an overview of the sock symbol and how it functions within the series as well as contextualizing the placement of this series within the contemporary art canon.

I found my ex's sock at the bottom of a laundry basket in my closet. I kept thinking about how this sock was experiencing a breakup as well. I had been struggling to communicate how my heartbreak was affecting me. The only accurate way to capture my feelings in language was by saying, "I feel like an unmatched sock."

I've come to find myself empathizing with unmatched socks a lot recently. I almost left one sock in the dryer and felt a pang of panic in my chest at the prospect of its abandonment. I almost shed a tear at the sight of a single bunched up sock sitting in a puddle on the side of the street. What is so sad about unmatched socks is they are inherently useless. Without their partners, they have no functional purpose. During the time when I felt like an unmatched sock, the attributes of these socks I saw around me felt as though they were reflections of myself. I wanted to give them the attention and care that I was lacking, so I collected them. I dug through my own drawer to pull out every unmatched sock I could find, laying them out in a grid on the floor, desperately hoping that in my search I would find their misplaced partners.

I laid out all 27 socks I had found and began noticing that removed from the drawer or from a foot, or even from their pair, I could see the individuality in each sock, their objecthood transformed into a personality through just the removal of it from its typical context. This was the beginning of my series *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks*, a series that uses unmatched socks to explore the experience of losing a relationship. Throughout this project I'm revealing the humanity of an everyday object to allow it to stand in for the near universal experience of grieving a relationship.



Figure 1 First 27 socks of *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks*, January 2023

Outside of their pair, this collection of single socks now served a new function, a reminder of a relationship that I was now mourning. My ex's sock was the beginning of a memorial. While within my own life this memorial consists of old photographs, letters, t-shirts, and anniversary gifts that I couldn't bear to discard yet, his sock stuck out to me in how much it revealed his absence. But after my sock drawer discovery, I realized that to begin to capture the breadth of my own breakup experience in this memorial, I needed far more than just my 27 unmatched socks. For the integrity of the project, it was crucial that these socks were worn and held a history in them, that they naturally experienced a breakup, rather than be forcibly separated for the sake of the project. I needed to turn to the people around me to expand my collection, to give a new purpose to the countless socks that sat in the depths of sock drawers.



Figure 2 First Instagram story for *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks*, posted in January 2023 to @shaeleecomettantart

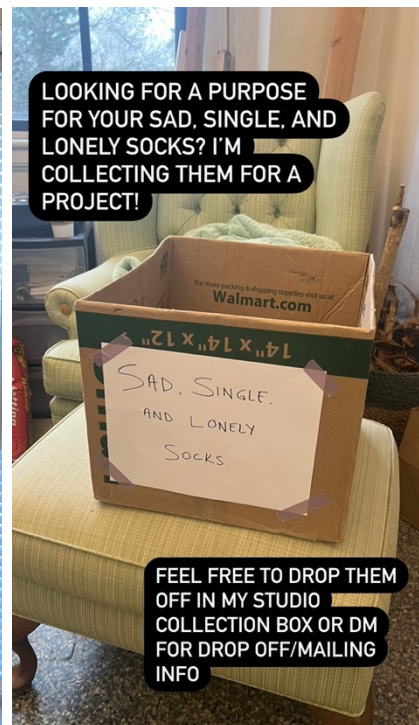


Figure 3 Instagram story of unmatched socks collection box, posed in January 2023 to @shaeleecomettantart

I began this collection by cryptically posting an image of a sad unmatched sock on my Instagram story. It was hung in a dark corner of my apartment in a wooden frame found at a thrift store with the caption “how heartbreaking” written underneath it. The story was followed by a photograph of my sock collection box in my studio. Donations began appearing in my studio, delivered to me at hangouts, and even mailed to my apartment. The socks became a collective memorial making visible the absence of people in our lives. This building of a collaborative memorial aims to prioritize the necessity of remembering as a part of healing and moving on from loss. In each project in the series, I am putting forth a symbolic representation of a specific facet of my own break up through these socks. But each aspect of my experience is presented through this universal everyday object to blur the line between my own personal narrative and the lived experience that viewers bring to the project.

Portrait of a Hundred Heartbreaks is not the only form of memorial that is grounded in mass object collections. We can see objects used to represent human life in memorials such as in Jason De León’s anthropological display of backpacks found at the US-Mexico Border, *The Things They Carried*. Daniel H. Magilow, professor of German and Germanic history at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, writes when describing the importance of collecting in memorials that “A collection is not just a set of random objects; it consists of fragments of a posited whole...the collection necessarily implies the gaps” (Magilow, 28). These gaps are the parts of a scene that are not presented to us in the collection, the history of the object. When removed from their original context, especially as everyday objects such as backpacks, a context that most people are familiar with, we can imagine the life that these objects once had. Through the removal of their context, a collection makes visible an invisible history and a lost past in a memorial.



Figure 4 Jason de León, *The Things They Carried*, 2009-ongoing, found object assemblage

These gaps become particularly visible in De León's collection as the contents of the backpacks have been curated as well as abandoned by a particular person. Not only are we imagining a lost history of an object, but we can directly imagine a lost relationship between the object and its past owner. We can imagine this relationship that as viewers, we most likely have experienced ourselves. Yet the care in curation begins to complicate the separation between the owner and backpack. It brings into question the agency in abandonment that is displayed in the work.

As we look at the objects in the backpacks it becomes evident the emotional, utilitarian, and temporal investment an owner has placed in each individual backpack. With so much clear investment, it wouldn't make sense for an owner to disregard or abandon their collection. The absence of the owners in this series thus implies a narrative where the separation between a person and their backpack was not a choice, but that they were rather ripped from one another. Being positioned at the border, we then can fill in the gaps with our knowledge of high rates of immigrant death in the Sonoran Desert and the detainment of immigrants along the US-Mexico Border to imagine what the circumstances surrounding the separation may have been. Due to the

gaps in the memorial and the absence of the lost party in the relationship, viewers can fill the work with both their own personal narratives as well as context that complicates the presentation of the memorial. This complication in the memorial tells the story of loss at the border by illustrating the lack of agency and autonomy through the gaps implied in the collection.

This narrative strategy that is illustrated through the gaps in a collection are present within *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* as well. Similar to De León's backpacks, because a sock's context is to be worn on the feet as a functional object, it wouldn't make sense for them to be separated with the intention of continued use. The gap of the pair then reveals an implied emotional narrative around the idea of not just a loss of a relationship, but also a loss of purpose. The socks in the collection provide a structure for viewers to understand the symbol of the unmatched sock, but gaps in the collection provide an ambiguity in narrative that allow for viewers to bring their own life experiences as well as projections to the memorial.

The relationships we have with everyday objects are not just present in collections but can also be used as representations of universal and personalized spaces, such as Rachel Whiteread's *House*. Uros Cvorovic, Associate Professor in Art Theory at University of New South Wales, writes that:

while we may accept that a viewing body would respond to *House*, it is important to clarify that even on a phenomenological level, this type of response would be qualified by habituation. It would involve a specific response to a particular house, one we have lived in or one very similar to that. Therefore, instead of a generic body, we should talk about the body of the viewer—or better still the bodies of viewer and their respective homes (Cvorovic, 61).

While most people have houses, they project onto Whiteread's *House* with their own relationship to their own home which allows for them to have a strong response to the disturbance of the work. This means that there can be no two identical viewing experiences of the work because each is crafted from the history a viewer brings to the work. The habituation of

the work evokes an emotional response through its ability to access a viewer's lived experience, rather than projecting the artist's. *House* is participatory because the work's power disappears when the viewer leaves.

In a similar vein, most people have socks, and so the presentation of the socks in *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* elicits a personal and individualized response in the body of viewers, as they witness the recontextualization of an object so commonly engaged with. It is also important to note that both with houses and with socks, this engagement is corporeal, our relationships with these objects live in our bodies. Our responses mirror the engagement by living in our bodies as well. In the same way that houses can be habituated, socks are as well, tailoring a response to the work to a specific corporeal viewer experience.

Cvoro writes that what is so disturbing about *House* is that it uses a domestic and recognizable space and defamiliarizes it through its inversion. Especially in the inaccessibility of the now inverted house, the space loses its function because there is a "literal impossibility of entering the house itself" (Cvoro, 62). We are unable to access the nostalgia that comes from entering a domestic space, we're not able to connect it to our own memories or take comfort in the space, the house becomes disconnected from our bodies, so we respond with a discomfort of being denied the purpose of an object we are used to accessing.

The collection of socks in *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* removes the function of the socks by displaying separated socks. We're denied the purpose of an object that is intended to conceal and protect our feet, confronting the viewer with the question of "what then do we do with this object?" Through the series, by relating the socks to the human body, both emotionally and physically, the question is answered by providing spaces to facilitate empathizing with the symbolic object.

While this series speaks to relationships in general, the core of it comes from remembering and memorializing my own relationship—with this, it is important to incorporate the specific details, narratives, and anecdotes from my own life into the presentation and conversation regarding the works. Poet Olivia Gatwood speaks about the way connection is formed through sharing memories. She says that,

If someone in this room stood up and told their most embarrassing story it would likely not be the same as anyone else in this room. But we're not looking for identical, we're looking for connection. Connection happens through knowing what it feels like to be embarrassed. And the only way we can know that feeling is through visceral description and imagery. (Gatwood, 4:38-4:58)

Through sharing my specific experience within my relationship and breakup, I hope to visualize the breadth of emotion such as mourning, loneliness, and confusion to facilitate the connection of what it feels like to grieve a relationship.

In the following pages I will outline 3 projects from the series that display three forms of remembrance. While not all of the projects use the literal object of the unmatched sock, each lays out a form of memorial that functions in the same way as the socks. In the first section, I discuss the importance of the corporeal response of a viewer using the work *Crying Sock*. In the second section, I write about the importance of written text in the project through *Windsock* and in the final section, I write about the collaborative nature of the collection through the public event *Sad, Single Sock Valentine's Day Celebration*. Each section is introduced with an anecdote illustrates the presence of that form of remembrance throughout my lived experience. By translating each form of remembrance into an artwork, *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* creates a memorial, not just for my lost relationship, but also for the process of healing that came afterwards.

I dropped him off at the airport on Monday morning. I remember thinking that it would be the last time I saw him. We had no more non-fundable flights purchased, no more excuses to see each other despite our separation. It felt for the first time, like this was it. I cried the whole way home. It was almost violent. Each exhale felt like screaming, yet the only sound that could come out was the exasperated collapse of breath when it finally was released from my throat. Every muscle in my body was clenched. Gripping the steering wheel with white knuckles, I could barely see the road through tears that blurred my vision as they poured down my hot cheeks. When I finally put my car in park on the side of the road, the feeling dissipated into the numb memory held in my aching chest.

After that, I couldn't cry for 2 months.

A clothesline sags from the weight of a white champion sock clipped to the center of the string in an empty room. The sock is well worn, dirt permanently pressed between the stitches leaving it with a light brown underbelly. As you stare at the sock pulling down the line dividing the room, a small droplet forms at the toe of the sock. Slowly growing in size it falls from the edge of the sock, as if being wiped away by a hand, embarrassed by the show of a single tear, landing in a puddle on the ground below the sock with a gentle “plop.” The puddle expansively spreads across the floor in a wide pool that illustrates the extent, intensity, and duration of the crying. The puddle serves as a foil to the slow, yet melodramatic performance of tears by showing the magnitude of the sock’s imagined emotion.



Figure 5. Shaelee Comettant, *Crying Sock*, 2023, installation with sock, clothesline, and ice

Crying Sock illustrates the emotional performance of the sock by referencing crying, an act often met with an immediate response of empathy from those witnessing. Jennifer Doyle, Professor of English at University of California, Riverside, writes that “tears seem to embody both the height of unquestioned emotionality and the depths of emotional manipulation” (Doyle,

84). When witnessing crying, we are met with responsive empathy to the perceived genuine display of vulnerability. Usually, the only pry for explanation comes with the want to provide comfort and support, rather than a need to justify the emotional show.



Figure 6. Bas Jan Ader, *I'm too sad to tell you*, 1970, 27.7 x 35.5cm, gelatin silver print

This same embodiment of emotionality is displayed in Bas Jan Ader's video *I'm too sad to tell you*. In the three-and-a-half-minute video, Ader films himself slowly breaking down into a fit of tears. The black and white silent film begins with the artist rubbing his eyes and drying his cheeks eventually escalating to an excruciating sob. As the title explains, the artist is too sad to give a reason for his fit of passion, unable to provide a context for the performance. Doyle writes regarding this performance that, "his sadness is cited as the very thing in the way of explanation, and so it registers as expression itself" (Doyle, 87). By refusing to provide a context and a subjective trigger for the tears, Ader instead uses his tears as the evidence for his own emotion.

Part of the power of removing the context from the work is Ader is hinging solely on a physical performance to receive an empathetic response from viewers. As was mentioned in the introduction when discussing *House*, oftentimes a response mirrors the trigger in its expression. For *House* and the collection of socks in *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks*, a response is physical because a relationship between the objects of a house and a sock are physical. A response to *I'm too sad to tell you* would be emotional, responding to Ader's emotional display in the video—an empathetic mirrored response. It could be argued that Ader's crying is a physical act, rather than an emotional act, but by seeing the physical performance of the emotion,

the crying, we instead are allowed to understand the way the emotions of the artist have influenced this physical action. This in turn has a “revelatory impact on the observer” (Halprin, 104) allowing us to feel empathy towards Ader believing that his performance of crying is genuine because tears are triggered by intense emotions.

Within *Crying Sock*, just like Ader, the sock is performing sadness as it builds a tear and quickly wipes it away. This performance is present within the tempo of the motion. It becomes almost difficult to watch because of how much the sock is holding back each of the tears. While it can be painful to watch and experience an expressive and emotive cry such as the one in *I'm too sad to tell you* or the cry on my way back from the airport, it can be just as difficult if not more, to watch a quiet and restrained performance of the same emotion.¹ This is because the work *Crying Sock* subverts the expectation of a dramatic performance, such as Ader's, forcing us to further analyze the “emotional state” of the sock. The restraint in the intensity of the emotion is then undercut by the expansiveness of the puddle that shows how long this sadness has consumed the sock. Even though the sock isn't a human body,² we can still understand this performance of emotion, through its intimate relationship to the human body in its symbolic

¹ I say that this sock is performing the same emotion, but it is not feeling the emotion. It is an inanimate wet sock dripping water, it is not in fact experiencing a life altering heartbreak. But through the titling of this work, by naming it a “crying sock” rather than a “wet sock” the implications of crying are projected onto the sock. It becomes filled with sadness, an emotion previously inaccessible to the object. The sock also gains a timeline. Because it is a performing an action, we can also understand a version of this sock before and after the action. We can imagine a sock, before the heartbreak, before the crying, as well as a sock after it has stopped, a sock that has gone through at least a level of healing. By naming the action as “crying,” the title allows the sock to take on the personification that relates to the human body rather than to object.

² To return to the idea of habituation from *House* from the introduction, there is another layer to the response in *Crying Sock* outside of the emotional response to crying. As we habituate socks, we can imagine the feeling of them wrapped around our feet when we see them, we relate our bodies through viewership to them. In *Crying Sock*, this habituation is accessed through the discomfort of viewing and thus feeling a wet sock. The discomfort of a wet sock can be imagined in relation to our own bodies, imbuing this sensation into the experience of viewership. This bodily discomfort foregrounds the emotional response by filtering it through a physically uncomfortable setting to confront to performed emotion through.

form, through the duration of crying, and implication of the pain held in the restraint in the performance.

There's a hand-written letter hanging up in the bulletin board beside his front door in Providence. The letter is printed on the inside of a linoleum print card I purchased at the farmer's market back in August. I bought the card because the whole time I was walking through the market, I was thinking of how I couldn't wait to take him to one when we were back together again. I list out all the dates I had taken myself on that summer that would've been better had he been by my side. This is the last letter he received before breaking up with me. I expressed my love for him through these letters. He expressed his through making me playlists.

Since the breakup, he's added 5 songs to our playlist "Faith in Love."

And I wrote letters that I never sent.

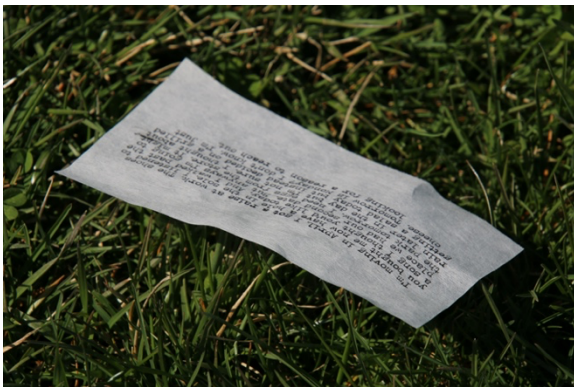


Figure 8 Shaelee Comettant, Detail letter from *Windssock*, 2023, lithography



Figure 7 Shaelee Comettant, letters floating from *Windssock*, 2023, lithography

Concealed within translucent fabric envelopes are 25 letters written to an ex-lover. These envelopes are flimsy, they would never successfully make the trip to their destination. Each letter, printed on a thin piece of Japanese paper in small charcoal colored typeface, can be barely seen through the translucency of their encasing, like emotions worn on the sleeve, the purpose of the envelope feels almost useless. They do not protect the words, they do not hide the words, all they do is hold onto them, give them a space to be acknowledged.

Within the series *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks*, writing is crucial to tying the subject matter to specific experiences. While the work *Windssock* doesn't use the unmatched sock

as a symbolic stand-in,³ it illustrates how the series uses written text to emotionally activate an inanimate object as well as how displaying specific details from the artist's experience can be used to facilitate connection through them.

Letters have become impractical in the digital communications age. But the analog form of letters as well as the processes that create them in *Windsock* create a direct connection to the body. José van Dijck, professor in media studies writes that, "Handwriting never simply structures reflections or thoughts but literally creates them; by the same token, a typewriter constitutes a different relation between author, words, and representation...unlike handwriting, the noise of fingers pounding on a machine severed the physical intimacy between body and word" (Dijck, 64). The analog processes both of handwriting and printmaking, maintain this intimacy and allow for an embodied aura to remain intact in the object. Through the process of printing these words, by inking up the plate they originally existed on, wiping away the excess and treating each letter with a sense of care facilitates the intimacy. In the treatment of the paper, of carefully tearing the edge, in a way so human and tender that could not be replicated by a manufacturer, by gently aligning the paper in the exact, in the least calculated meaning of exact, location intended, and physically exerting my own strength as I ran the print through the press, the words on the page are not only extensions of myself and representations of my voice, but

³ Initially the work *Windsock* directly gave voice to imagined unmatched socks writing to their lost lovers as fictional letters. They referenced the sites of their breakups (the washing machine, the bed at an owner's best friends' house, a hotel, etc.) and wrote about different reasons for how and why a sock might lost its partner (uneven wear between the two, being unintentionally paired with another in the drawer, one being abandoned) to metaphorically speak about relationships. While these letters were intended to be fictionalized, in the act of writing, they slowly became diary entries processing my own feelings, rather than the fictionalized narratives I ascribed to the socks. In this transition of the project, the sock was abandoned as a symbol as only became a barrier to sharing the details that viewers may find connection over. *Windsock* remains connected and a part of *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* not through the sock symbol (which is only present in the title and form of the project), but through the way the project memorializes grief in written text, a theme present throughout the entire series.

they are literally created by the body and mind. I put whole self into these letters, metaphorically and physically.

These letters are not only expressions of the self, but they are also an invitation for indulgence from their readers. Dijck writes that diary writing is not solely a need to express a thought, “Even as a form of self-expression, diary writing signals the need to connect, either to someone or something else or to oneself later in life” (Dijck, 68). Through these letters, the writer’s desperation to connect with their old partner is evident, especially in the repetition and mass of letters included in this piece, the one-sided communication feels more and more desperate as it reaches out without response, illustrating the need to connect.

In engaging with these letters, readers are making the choice to accept the invitation into a conversation about the emotions expressed in them. Reading these letters is not a passive act, but rather a reciprocation of expression. Dijck writes that “when people read or hear reminiscences narrated by others, they often feel triggered or invited to contribute their own memories” (Dijck, 56). Whether or not a connection is initiated outside of the reader and writer where the reader is given the opportunity to contribute their own memories, they are still triggered and brought into the context of piece. Just like *Crying Sock*, these letters don’t contextualize their situation for the reader, but rather focus on the emotions triggered by the experience. By focusing on the emotions, these letters become more universal and can be molded into the frameworks outside of the writer’s lived experience. Through the text, audience’s experiences are invited into the work as well, transforming the universality of losing a relationship into the specificity of the viewer’s experiences and memories.

I asked him to make the playlist for the Valentine's Day party I was hosting. Less than two hours later, I received a playlist titled, "Sgt. Peppers Lonely Socks Club Band." While I decorated the sugar cookies in the shapes of socks, he curated a playlist of 4 hours and 23 minutes of breakup songs for me. Even though I asked him to make this playlist, I couldn't help but wonder which songs he resonated with, which one's captured how he felt following our breakup. As I listened to the playlist while coating the sugar cookies with frosting and patterning their surface with various of forms of sugar, I made note of the one's that said what I wish I could tell him.

The day before Valentine's Day I held a "Sad, Single Socks Valentine's Day Celebration" where members of the St. Louis community were invited to my apartment with the intention of collecting unmatched socks to be used in the series. The event hosted over 20 guests, each bringing different socks they had found across their apartments to donate. Upon arrival, they were invited to hang up their socks on the clotheslines strung throughout the apartment, directly adding their abandoned object to the collection. *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* illustrates a desire, even a need, to connect through one's feeling of solitude. As was mentioned in the previous section, text allows for audiences to connect their own memories to the work, but it only creates the urge to contribute one's own experiences without the opportunity for sharing. Through hosting events, *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* fills that space, creating opportunities for connecting, sharing, and giving viewer's selves to the project.



Figure 9. Documentation from *Sad, Single Sock Valentine's Day Celebration*, 2023, public event

As I walked around my apartment during the Valentine's Day celebration and watched people hang their socks on the clothesline, I heard someone ask, "I wonder which sock belongs to who." Guests giggled as they pointed to the most unique socks making guesses as to which ones belonged to their friends. I kept coming back to this pondering overheard over plastic cups

of wine and brightly colored sugar cookies. It is hard to pinpoint whose sock hanging on the clothesline belongs to who. While each sock carries its own history within its materiality, there is next to no identification present within the object, it allows for the carrier of narrative to become anonymous.

Anonymity is a common practice for participatory artworks as it allows for audience participation to remain private, despite being a part of a public project. Yoko Ono's practice often invites participation from viewers to expand the works. Her work *Cut Piece* relies on the involvement of audiences to publicly get on stage and cut off pieces of her clothes. Accounts of the performances note the hesitancy in participation in performances of *Cut Piece*, especially at the beginning—this hesitancy is often attributed to public and theatrical setting of the performances, the fact that there is a crowd watching each interaction with Ono (Bryan-Wilson, 99-123). Because there is no anonymity, the stakes for participating in *Cut Piece* feel significantly higher, deterring many away from engaging.



Figure 11. Yoko Ono, *Wish Tree*, 1996-ongoing, dimensions variable, installation.



Figure 10. Yoko Ono, *Wish Tree*, 1996-ongoing, dimensions variable, installation.

On the other hand, one of Ono's most engaged with works is *Wish Tree*, which invites audiences to write a wish of theirs on a tag and tie it to the branch of the installation. In *Wish Tree*, the trace of one's interaction with the work is left behind on the tree, but the only element

tying the work back to a viewer is their handwriting. With few instructions regarding what kind of a wish viewers should leave, Ono allows for the viewer to decide the terms of their interaction, the level of vulnerability they open up with, and how much of themselves they leave behind.

By providing agency for viewers to decide the level of engagement they initiate with the artwork, as well of the privacy in the anonymity of the engagement, Ono facilitates a space that welcomes participation in *Wish Tree*. A similar space is created in *Sad, Single Socks Valentine's Day Celebration*, where besides the donation of a sock, an anonymous act, there is no trace left behind of an engagement with the socks and artwork. This anonymity is important in allowing for a spectrum of contributions to be included in a project. These interactions can be as explicit as viewers sharing their own experiences of feeling like an unmatched sock with each other and others as quiet and subtle as the act of hanging up one of their own socks. Anonymity allows for audiences to invest a part of themselves and their narratives to a project with no stakes. The participation contributes to creating a shared space—in the space we come together through the universal experience of solitude using the universal object of an unmatched sock to contain our emotions and stories of loneliness to connect over.



Figure 13. Documentation from *Sad, Single Sock Valentine's Day Celebration*, 2023, public event



Figure 12. Documentation from *Sad, Single Sock Valentine's Day Celebration*, 2023, public event

Sad, Single Socks Valentine's Day Celebration is less about the socks collected and more about the act of collecting them. The artwork is the act of being brought together to celebrate the abandoned object and what it comes to symbolize, not the object. As Daniel H. Magilow, professor of German at University of Tennessee, Knoxville writes, "Memorial collecting values the processes of memorialization over memorials themselves." Remembering someone can be a passive act through witnessing a memorial, but when the memory of someone or something can incite an action that is when the memory has power. By memorializing, *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* creates a space to acknowledge the power of the memory of a relationship while providing an action that allows participants to take agency over the memory.

While collective memorials are common, there have been many critiques of them, minimizing them as childish. Magilow, pushes back on this critique by acknowledging that,

Perhaps children seek through their collecting to eradicate symbolically the belligerent ways of the adult world and to heal the wounds the grown-up world has produced. Collecting becomes the vehicle to work through a received trauma—or, rather, to play through it—and clean up its figurative messiness.

Perhaps this project in a similar vein works to heal the wounds that a breakup has caused, to clean up the messiness of emotions surrounding the loss and grief. When the project began, I looked at my ex's sock with sadness in its loneliness, but through collecting other lonely socks, each has been transformed into an individual, a unique personality outside of the partnership it once inhabited. The goal of the project, to organize and make sense of the grief following a breakup returns to the idea of memorialization. The act of remembering and processing by returning to a moment in time or an emotion in time is valued higher than the representation of that memory in the work.

As Doyle writes, "Feelings happen in art on multiple levels: as a subject represented in or by specific works, as something produced in us by those works of art, and as something

experience as expressed by the artist” (Doyle, 69). These three levels of feeling as it exists in *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* are illustrated in the three projects analyzed above. The series aims to complicate our approach to heartbreak, showcasing the everchanging and multiplicity of emotions following losing a relationship. As this project serves for myself as a form of processing my own experience, it also creates the space for a similar healing for viewers through the direct invitations to participate. *Portrait of A Hundred Heartbreaks* is inseparable from personal narrative, it forces us to respond using our own experiences to reflect on what a loss of a relationship means each of us.



Figure 14. Documentation from *Sad, Single Sock Valentine's Day Celebration*, 2023, public event

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