



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, The Rape of Proserpina (detail), 1621-22.
Source: <https://visit-borghese-gallery.com/rape-of-proserpina/>

Letting Go is my theme for this series of art pieces. I will visually investigate the journey from grasping to letting go to insight, with a special interest in visual metaphors based on the human figure.

The Buddha taught that three human tendencies give rise to suffering: Desire, Aversion, and Delusion. We want to get and keep the things we like, avoid or jettison the things we don't like, and remain in ignorance about things that confuse or confound us.

The Buddha also taught that suffering is optional. Recognizing these automatic responses brings the possibility to let them go. We still experience things we like, dislike, and are confused about, but our actions and emotions aren't hostage to them. We hold them lightly, and we notice how quickly conditions change. We learn to move in the world of what is instead of what we want there to be.



Stavros Pavlides. *The Grasping Hand*, 2013. 22' x 30". Ink on paper

Contemporary example:

<https://www.stavrospavlides.com/A-Gentleman-s-Agreement/The-Grasping-Hand>

Stavros Pavlides – NY now. Born in Greece

The Grasping Hand, 2013. 22' x 30". Ink on paper

Why does the theme “Letting Go” matter?

- It resonates on a personal level for me as I witness my elderly mother’s growing blindness and dependence, and as my 65th birthday arrives this year. What does ageing invite or require me to let go of?
- As the Buddha’s teachings underline, Letting Go is a universal human experience that has potentially transformative impact.
- Finally, the theme is ripe with visual metaphors: images of hands in various stages of grasp or release; use of erasure marks as signifiers of release; whole-body gestures that illustrate release, letting go, moving on, for example floating or falling.



Michelangelo, *The Creation of Adam* (detail), 1508-1512. Painted Fresco, Sistine Chapel

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hands_of_God_and_Adam.jpg

When, Where, How, Who?

- I will locate the work in the here and now, allowing me to weave in personal elements such as my mother's progressive vision loss.
- I am interested in the ways that erasure and hand gestures can serve this theme.
- Pictured at right is David Bailin's 2017 work *Forgotten*, part of his series based on his father's Alzheimer's Disease. His ideas inspire me to shift the focus of erasure from what is being forgotten to what is no longer being seen and must be located by touch and by memory.
- The "who" element will vary from piece to piece but I expect to feature the human figure in whole or part, drawing from photos and from life.



David Bailin, *Forgotten*, 2017. Charcoal, coloured pencil, and coffee on prepared paper. 83" x 84.75"

SOURCE: <https://www.bailinstudio.com/portfolio/>

Forgotten

Charcoal, coloured pencil, charcoal, and coffee on prepared paper 83" x 84.75". 2017

From his series "The Erasing" . Each work is an exploration of memory, and memory loss, inspired by his father's Alzheimer's Disease, enacted by many iterations of drawing, erasing, drawing over, erasing, so the final work has ghostly traces behind and mixed in with the extant images.

Contemporary Example 2



Banksy's street art *Girl With a Balloon* has been omnipresent since first it first appeared in Shoreditch, London in 2002 (above left), with multiple extant versions as street art, on paper and in print form. While ambiguous emotionally (is this the anguish of loss or a moment of wonder?), its subject is not ambiguous, as Banksy clearly portrays the instant after letting go. To deepen the metaphor, his most famous/infamous version was auctioned at Sotheby's in 2018 for over a million pounds. As the sale completed, the bottom half of the page suddenly moved through a paper shredder built into the frame, a surprise to everyone but Banksy and his team. The work has been rechristened *Love Is in the Bin* and its new owner had a shocking lesson in Letting Go.

SOURCE: <https://banksyexplained.com/issue/girl-with-balloon-graffiti-legend/>

This slide, like the previous one, shows a contemporary artist with work on the theme of Letting Go. In the last slide I mentioned working with erasure to represent the loss of vision. In addition, I want to place a figure (or figures) in the drawing to illustrate not just the vision loss but the coming to terms with it. Other drawings in the series will explore in letting go in other circumstances -- what is revealed at the moment of letting go a long-held belief, a stubborn habit of mind? Perhaps the figure is shown with a veil or barrier in the process of being released from hand grip, with a glimpse of what is on the other side. Perhaps the figure is removing a pair of glasses and half the scene is shown through the glasses, half is seen without the glasses. Perhaps the figure or face is shown straining and failing to see in half of the image, then relaxed into receiving information by touch on the other half of the image.

Technical Inspiration



Mary Borgman, *Portrait of Damian Deneer*. Charcoal on mylar. 41" x 50". 2017



David Bailin, *Plug (from "C-Series")*. Charcoal and coffee on prepared paper, 52" x 52". 2012

How am I inspired by these artists:
Mary Borgman – figures, charcoal on mylar. Luminescent quality, high contrast, texture,
David Bailin – quirky perspective, humourous situation, charcoal on paper, somewhat of an existentialist cartoon feel.

In Summary:

- The series theme is Letting Go
- The setting is contemporary life, human figures are shown at the inflection point between suffering and letting go of suffering
- Possible subjects include my mother learning to cope with progressive blindness; myself or others in the moment of releasing an old perspective and glimpsing a new one.
- Possible visual metaphors include erasure; hands that grasp and release; floating, leaping or falling; a scene glimpsed simultaneously from two perspectives (removing old pair of glasses or lowering a veil).
- Technically I take inspiration from the charcoal drawing styles of Borgman and Bailin, and I will trial working on Mylar for at least some of the pieces.

SOURCES:

<https://visit-borghese-gallery.com/rape-of-proserpina/>

<https://www.stavrospavides.com/A-Gentleman-s-Agreement/The-Grasping-Hand>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hands_of_God_and_Adam.jpg

<https://www.bailinstudio.com/portfolio/>

<https://banksyexplained.com/issue/girl-with-balloon-graffiti-legend/>

www.duanereedgallery.com/mary-boroman

<https://www.bailinstudio.com/portfolio/c-series/>