

# THE ART OF A LIFE WELL SPENT

An Exploration of Death in a Creative Context

# PROJECT

*The Art of a Life Well Spent* is a drama short film about a young man who creates art inspired by the journal entries of his recently passed grandfather. Along the way, he gets to know his grandfather after he's gone, whilst figuring out how to grieve for someone he hardly knew.

As the writer and director, I sought to explore the subjects of grief and getting to know someone after they're gone through the medium of film.

Lots of research was needed to take this from page to screen.



**Fig. 1** Sam finding his grandfather's journal from "The Art of a Life Well Spent". Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.



# WRITING

Fig. 2 Sam drawing from "The Art of a Life Well Spent". Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

1 INT. MOVING CAR - DAY

1

Rain streams down the windows of a small family car.

SAM (19), an artist who never finishes his sketches, slumps in the backseat. In black suit and tie, head against the dark window, his hands sketch a cartoony scene... a ghost on a swing alone in a park.

His world is interrupted by a tap on the knee. A hand from the passenger seat offers a small elephant animal cracker. BETH (21) turns her head to reveal a smile and a large, bear-shaped jug full of crackers in her lap. A gesture of comfort from an older sibling.

Sam gives a small smile. He grabs the cracker and eats it. Beth reaches her hand back in the jug to find the best animals.

A glance up to the rearview mirror, Sam's eyes meet his mom's-- RACHEL (40s), driving...

RACHEL

My cousins are gonna be there.  
Remember to talk to them, okay?

Sam returns to his sketch. Rachel's eyes return to the road.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

They're probably taking it pretty hard.

The rain overtakes the car.

2 INT. COMMUNITY CENTER/MAIN ROOM - DAY

2

Frames, photo albums, and flowers atop cream tablecloths. A familiar old man's face in every picture--Sam's grandfather, ROBERT ANDERSON (20s, 60s).

Sam stands, hands in pockets, amid people of all ages. Parents, couples, family friends. All dressed in black. He observes as they wander around.

He notices Rachel. She stands beside an older woman, HELEN (70s), Sam's grandmother. They greet guests and exchange condolences. Helen with hugs, Rachel with handshakes.

His eyes linger on the scene.

As Sam observes, his ears tune into hushed conversations.

# WRITING

During the writing process, I studied the following:

- Time Period for Journal Entries (1960s)
- Similar Stories (similar genres, *Lady Bird*)
- Three Act Structure
- Other Short Films

A top-down view of a wooden desk cluttered with various items. In the center, a white rectangular box with a thin black border contains the text "RESEARCH IN PRE-PRODUCTION". Below the box, a piece of paper shows two pencil sketches of a person's feet wearing socks and bunny-shaped slippers. To the left, there are several sheets of paper with faint sketches. Above the box, a tray of colored pencils and a spiral notebook are visible. To the right, a white bowl with a red rim sits on the desk. The overall lighting is dim, creating a focused and creative atmosphere.

# RESEARCH IN PRE-PRODUCTION

**Fig. 4** Sketches on Sam's desk from "The Art of a Life Well Spent". Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

# PRODUCING

My producer and I had to research many things in order to make the film happen.

- Locations
- Food
- Housing actors
- Budget
- Problem solving in preparation for set

# DIRECTING

## Directing techniques

- interviews
- *Directing Actors* by Judith Weston

## Pre-production Meetings

- Meeting with Director of Photography and other department heads



Fig. 5 Photo by Brent Tyrrell on the set of "The Art of a Life Well Spent". Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.



Fig. 6

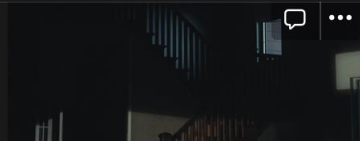


Fig. 6



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 6

# AESTHETICS

I had to research different areas of aesthetics in order to be able to tell my crew what I wanted...

- Color
- Composition
- Moodboards

**Fig. 6** *Martha, Marcy, May, Marlene*. Directed by Sean Durkin, Searchlight Pictures, 2011.

**Fig. 7** *Call Me By Your Name*. Directed by Luca Guadagnino, Sony Pictures Classics, 2018.

**Fig. 8** *The Farewell*. Directed by Lulu Wang, A24, 2019.



# RESEARCH IN POST-PRODUCTION

**Fig. 9** Sam asleep on desk with sketches from “The Art of a Life Well Spent”. Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

# ANIMATION

The most important area to study in post-production has proven to be animation.

- Finding an illustrator
- Animation program
- Execution with projector
- “Space Kid”



Fig. 10 “Space Kid.” Directed by PJ Liguori, YouTube, 2016.



Change cover

# Music

Add comment

Inspo / Temp Music!

**sam**  
abigail manning

PREVIEW

1	Theme - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	2:23
2	Reconcile	Jon Brion	1:24
3	Peer Pressure - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	1:12
4	The Secret In The Wall	Daniel Hart	4:11
5	Phone Call - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	1:02
6	Row - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	0:59
7	Bookstore - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	0:52
8	Elephant Parade - From "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"/Score	Jon Brion	0:26
9	Lady Bird	Jon Brion	5:10
10	The House that Hårga Built	Bobby Krlic	3:33

▶ Message to Email

▶ prep for spotting session

# MUSIC

Another area to study has been music.

- Looking at other films and how they use it
- Making a playlist as reference

Fig. 11

Brion, Jon. *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*, 2004. Spotify, [https://open.spotify.com/album/5yOO5ZvqDZx5Sr8jOGtVRR?si=a0m7NthmT\\_eS2jVxVzu7yQ](https://open.spotify.com/album/5yOO5ZvqDZx5Sr8jOGtVRR?si=a0m7NthmT_eS2jVxVzu7yQ)

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# FINAL THOUGHTS

Fig. 12 Family gathered on the couch from “The Art of a Life Well Spent”. Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

LINK TO FILM!

Finally, we will be watching a portion of my film.

Note: it is in post-production and therefore is unfinished. There is no coloring, no audio editing, no animation, and only a rough score.

<https://youtu.be/TJAL2qIQBvI>

\*Illustrations by Emma Shuler



Fig. 13 Sam drawing from “The Art of a Life Well Spent”. Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

# WORKS CITED

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"The Art of a Life Well Spent". Directed by Abigail Manning, 2023.

*The Farewell*. Directed by Lulu Wang, A24, 2019.