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## Inbal Abergil *The Presence of Absence*

Texte von Inbal Abergil, Robert G. Bean, Kathleen R. Gilbert,  
Caitlin Margaret Kelly, Stephen Mayes  
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**Wenn ein Haustürklingeln alles ändert: die Geschichte der Gold Star Families und ihr berührender Weg zurück ins Leben**

*The Presence of Absence* ist ein über zehn Jahre hinweg entstandenes dokumentarisches Werk, das die vielen Schichten von Trauma, Verlust, Trauer, Abschied und Heilung nach dem Krieg offenlegt.

Inbal Abergil verwebt die Geschichten von Gold Star Families – Familien, deren Angehörige im Einsatz gefallen sind – mit Stillleben persönlicher Gegenstände der Verstorbenen sowie Porträts der »Casualty Notification Officers«, jener Militärangehörigen, die den Angehörigen die Todesnachricht überbringen.

Die Stillleben zeigen, wie Hinterbliebene mit dem Tod umgehen und wie ein Objekt die Präsenz eines geliebten Menschen bewahren kann – schmerzlich und tröstlich zugleich. Die Porträts richten unseren Blick auf das Unvorstellbare: jene Boten, die an Türen klopfen und wissen, dass dieser Moment alle Beteiligten für immer prägen wird. Jedes Mal hoffen sie, den Text fehlerfrei zu übermitteln – als Voraussetzung für mögliche Heilung.

Während jeder Verlust einzigartig ist, richtet das Video mit vier Kanälen den Fokus auf vier Mütter, die ihre Söhne im Krieg verloren haben. Sie berichten, wie das Leben danach weitergeht, geben Impulse zum Umgang mit Trauer und dazu, wie man anderen in ähnlichen Situationen begegnet.

Die Fotografien, persönlichen Geschichten und Videosequenzen in *The Presence of Absence* machen das sensible Erinnern einer Gemeinschaft von Überlebenden erfahrbar – Menschen, die sich bemühen, ihre Leben nach dem Verlust neu aufzubauen. Das Werk lädt zu Reflexion und Dialog über den menschlichen Preis von Konflikten ein.

Aus dem Vorwort *Foreword* von **Robert G. Bean**, Sergeant First Class (Ret):

*It's one thing to help a family through the darkest time of their life, but it's a completely different thing to introduce them to it. [...] I just gave them news that will devastate their lives, and they want to offer me coffee, empathize with my mission, and hug me when I leave. [...] There is a bond between the Notifier and the family cemented in empathy and grief.*

Aus dem Vorwort *Grief's Flowing River* von **Kathleen R. Gilbert**, PhD:

*Grief is a river that you may never leave, but you will learn skills and abilities that help you deal with its power. [...] Grief is not about closure—it is a process of progressive reconciliation. Death does not end a relationship—it transforms it.*

**Inbal Abergil** ist Dokumentarfotografin nordafrikanischer Herkunft. In ihrer künstlerischen Praxis untersucht sie mit fotografischen und filmischen Mitteln sowie mit Zeitzeugnissen die Nachwirkungen von Kriegen und die damit verbundenen menschlichen Verluste, insbesondere Trauer, Schmerz und Heilungsprozesse.

Sie ist Associate Professor of Photography an der Pace University in New York. Abergil wurde mit dem Pollock-Krasner Grant und dem Documentary Essay Prize (beide 2018) ausgezeichnet und war Alternate Fellow des Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2020). Ihre Arbeiten wurden international ausgestellt und befinden sich in bedeutenden öffentlichen Sammlungen, darunter die National Gallery of Art und die Library of Congress (Washington, DC) sowie das Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. Sie hat einen MFA in Visual Arts der Columbia University.

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## Pressebilder



01\_ LTC McCarty

"We are not supposed to hug the family member; they say clearly don't hug. But when you notify a mother who is alone in her house, in the middle of the country, she is looking at us sobbing and asking, can I have a hug? The Chaplain and I looked at each other and said, you bet. I don't care what the rules are. You know what, you put me here to make decisions, you have to be a certain rank, you have to have a certain professional matraite, you placed me here to make decisions, and that is the call we made, and we don't regret it."

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02\_ Chaplain Smith

"One of the things that we ask is, "Do you mind if I pray with you?" I know there's a lot of things going on in the-in the family's minds right now, and probably the last thing on their minds is praying. So we always ask, "Hey, do you mind before we leave if we- if we pray," and yes, they were-they were receptive. I've never been turned down. I've never had anybody say, "No, please don't."

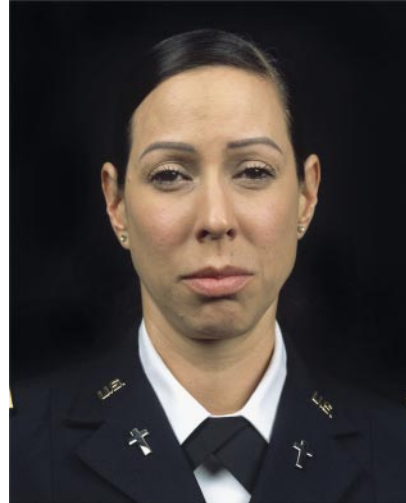
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03\_ SFC Hernandez

"On behalf of the Secretary of the Army, blah, blah, blah--" And you don't get through the whole message before they just break down. Well, now the wife, of course, understandably, didn't react the same as the Father. She breaks down and starts crying out loud, which is 100% normal, you would think everybody react- would react that way, but you still can't prepare yourself for that. It's emotional. Uh, you knew you ruined somebody's life."

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04\_ Chaplain Martinez Perez

"I bring the Chaplain Corps a little bit extra than anybody: prior experience in the military, being a female, being a Spanish speaker, being a Christian, all these different roles. My fellow chaplains know that. Families are still notified in English while they speak only Spanish."

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05\_ 1SG Annabell Lujan

"There's no words to even express or say, or you can't even say sorry. 'Cause if you almost imagine yourself in their situation and to hear the words "I'm sorry" and to hear all these other words, I don't think are the words that they wanna hear. So sometimes you just sit by them. You just sit by them and try to guide them the best that you can, especially to go through all the processing of the paperwork and stuff for them to prepare them. And it happens so fast 'cause it seems like you do the notification and about a week later you're already preparing funerals and rosaries."

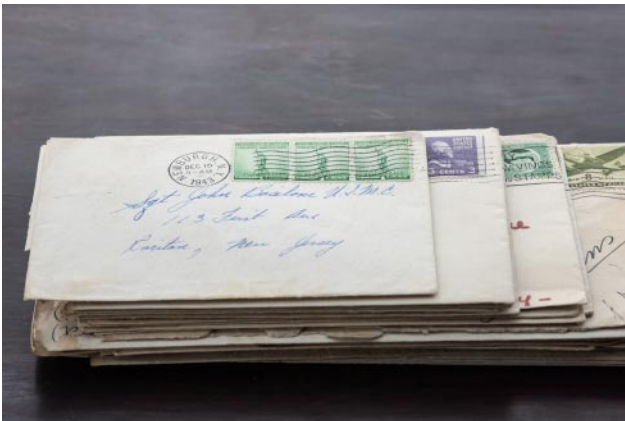
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06\_ Chaplain Paul

"Uh, the crying—when somebody cries, our natural tendencies are to tell them not to cry. When we do that, we're telling them not to feel what they're feeling. Cry is a natural way for them to express their grief. Sometimes, you know, it's OK for them to cry. It's a natural response for them to do it; let them cry. My job is to just to be there, not to say platitudes, not to say things, but just to be with that person. Our presence is all they want, somebody to be there."

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07\_ Diane Hawkins, niece GySgt. John Basilone, Killed in action, February 19, 1945 Japan

"My grandfather would talk about how they had the parade for him, and they named a ship after him, they named streets after him. There's a Basilone Drive in New Jersey, on the town park; there is one in Santiago. There is a bridge in New Jersey, there is a piazza in Santiago. I mean, you kind of remember this is a little town in New Jersey, and all of a sudden there is a hero."

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08\_ Christina Bixby, wife CH Dale Allen Goetz, an Army chaplain, Killed in action, August 30, 2010 Afghanistan

"He said, "Honey, I want you to give me a haircut. I do want the boys to help out a little bit. Just shave it all off." And he had salt-and-pepper hair. The boys came and he had them shave a little bit off and a little bit off, and then of course I made it look better [laughs]. I cut the rest of his hair, just shaved it off so he won't worry about having it the right length for his profession when he got to Afghanistan. I swept it up and I put it in the baggie, which is not normal, and so—anyway, I did that. And then about two o'clock, he grabbed that duffel bag over there and had his stuff, and he drove away in the car."

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09\_ The Presence of Absence- Tracy Dice-Johnson, wife Sgt. Donna R. Johnson, Killed in action October 1, 2012 Afghanistan.  
 "Part of the heartache about that was, like, even her wedding ring—she did not have her wedding ring on that she was wearing when she was killed, and this is a necklace I keep it on me at all times. I'd bought her this when she graduated law enforcement. It is Saint Michael, which is the patron saint of protectors. These were supposed to be given to her mom because I wasn't considered her Next of Kin, and it really hurt that I had to give her our wedding ring. I do what I was supposed to do; I turned everything over to her mom, and then her mom turned around and gave it to me."  
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10\_ The Presence of Absence- Janice Chance, mother. Captain Jesse Melton III, U.S. Marine Corps, Killed in action September 9, 2008, Afghanistan.  
 "Every place that he touched he left that fragrance. When he said he was going to make a change, he did it. He changed the lives of so many people. God used him in those 29 years to do more than some people do at 89 years. I believe that Jesse's day, if it had not been Afghanistan, would have been somewhere else. That was the day that was written for him in God's book, 29 years. That was it."  
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11\_ The Presence of Absence- Barbara Moinester, sister. LTJG Robert W. Moinester, Killed in action January 31st, 1968, Vietnam  
 "My parents got very involved in the ship. It was a living legacy, if you will. When the ship would come into the Brooklyn Navy Yard or up to Maine, they were always there. They were in communication with all of the commanding officers, the Captains of the ship. They would go to the Helen Farewells. They met them all. They met the crew. They were very, very involved. And I think that was their way of saying: We're assisting in keeping the legacy of Robert alive by being involved. Lots of memorabilia."  
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12\_ Kendra L. Lynn, sister Staff Sergeant Steven R. Tudor, Killed in action April 21, 2007, Iraq  
 "He gave this doorbell to me when I first bought this house, and I never put it up until two years ago, and he had this made for us. When we got this new door, my husband finally put it up two years ago. I love when I walk in, I would see this, and I would think of him every time someone knocks on the door. Yes, it's him."  
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