

**PROJECT STATEMENT – Kara Tanaka**  
**Collezione Maramotti for exhibition in 2010**

*A Sad Bit of Fruit, Pickled in the Vinegar of Grief*  
(From the body of work *Embalmer's Stone*)  
12 May 2009

In the wake of the Bush presidency, the economic recession, the unsettled war in Iraq and the focused attention on environmentalism and global warming, the prediction from the US death care industry is that a shift in body disposal practices is beginning to take hold. The growing trend is toward cremation and natural burial and away from the pomp and circumstance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American funeral which included embalming the body to preserve it long enough to have an open-casket viewing before burying in a cemetery or entombing in a mausoleum. Over the next fifteen years, cremation is predicted to become the majority choice for body disposal in the United States, and in this raw and tender moment of American history, one must ask how the failings of American nationalism are reflected in its death practices.

For the Collezione Maramotti I prepared a meditation on the decline of the United States' global power as it is reflected in the shifting of modern death practices. A sculptural installation of thirteen customized white fiberglass embalming tabletops will cantilever out from the long wall of the gallery, each with its own signature trace of body and embalming fluids in the sluice. The tabletops jut out into the space at varying angles, leaving the linen-covered backs of the tables and the red aluminum brackets exposed. Because of the unique structure of the exhibition space, the installation is arranged for a strong frontal encounter with the sculptures before the unexpected discovery of the stunning red bracketing system.

The disappearance of the human body factors heavily into my sculptural practice because so much of our behavior is based on the demands of a body. To lose, destroy, bypass or ignore the body allows the energy of a life to be focused and extended on other purposes from existential explosion, space travel, religious ecstasy or new philosophy about the nature of human existence. The missing bodies in *A Sad Bit of Fruit, Pickled in the Vinegar of Grief* focuses the attention on a kind of new humility in death practices, one that rejects the desire for immortalization and embraces a complete disappearance from the earth after death. What does it mean for a waning empire to reject methods of death immortalization in favor of a repentant disappearance?

Kara Tanaka