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I promise

Maya Luque

This exhibition is about Chinese burial sites and the practices that accompany the loss of a loved one. My first encounter with loss of a parental figure happened when I was 3 months old in China; I was given up for adoption. My second encounter with the potential loss of a parental figure occurred with my American adopted parent. In this exhibition I combine these two major life events together. By blending both Eastern and Western ideologies I am able to ruminate on the metaphorical, as well as the physical death of parental figure/s, as well as contemplate what that death does to those left living.

The Chinese have a practice where they build large earthen mounds as burial sites; they then visit the sites of their ancestors once a year. I have made my own burial site out of beeswax-dipped paper, which I have then stitched together, like a quilt, to form a hollow version of this mound. In traditional Western home economics quilt making is important; in my installation I use the stitch work to represent a home.

The hexagonal shape of the dipped paper reflects a hive, while the beeswax pushes the hive notion further. This is because bees and humans both have a strong communal nature.

In this installation I have lit the mound with the light source coming from inside the structure, leaving shadows along the walls. A viewer can look out from underneath the mound and see shadows of those outside, while those looking in can see only light. The mound is lit from the inside because I find that people idolize the dead, and allow the deceased's presence to either blind or guide them.

This burial site is made of beeswax and due to the lights warming the wax a strong smell comes over the viewer. This smell is stronger when the viewer is inside the burial dome, when the viewer is "dead."

In China burial mounds eventually erode leaving only a stone grave marker behind. The grave marker in my installation is made of beeswax and plastic. Carved into the front of the grave marker are the words "birth date, death date, name, spouse, familial relations" in Chinese; on the opposite side are the words that a family will typically write on a gravestone in the United States, "first name, last name, birth date, death date." In this lack of definitive dates and names I aim for the viewer to think about who's death they are most affected by.

In this installation my aim is for the viewer to be able to place themselves inside the burial site, walk around it, and to think about death. I believe all events become easier by confronting them. It is my hope that in confronting this installation death becomes slightly easier, because death is tough, especially for the living.