

EMILY HANAKO MOMOHARA

www.ehmomohara.com

Koden

After seven recent deaths of friends and family during a short period of time, I have begun to contemplate bereavement and legacy in a new way. I began to look at the settings we grieve in and wonder at their strangeness and soothing abilities.

Through the use of tableaus and funeral home locations, I create self-portraits that represent haunting aspects of those who have passed on. Several people were family or community members who added to my Japanese American upbringing. The blend of Asian and American symbolism and aesthetics compliment each other in my work. Likewise, the images I create in homage are full of the dichotomies that life and death offer. I show the need to hang on to my loved-one's life, as well as the fleeting quality of memory and time. Strange shadows and blurred movement discuss absence and presence while light symbolizes a physical connection between heaven and earth. The Americana chapel-like funeral homes are familiar, yet bizarrely uncomfortable. Insects such as butterflies represent transformation and new life, as well as frailty and limited longevity. The presence of nature is uncanny and unexpected, however innate to life's cycles.

Foucault theorizes that our culture provides sacred spaces where we can carry out specific acts. At funerals, we cry and grieve with individuals, which we would never embrace in normal environments. I use the funeral home as a space for private performances that express loss and acceptance, as well as presence and absence.

Digital techniques to produce the images have offered me the possibility of creating magic realism. However, simple props and cardboard cutouts are the bulk of the staged scenarios I create.

This body of work is titled *Koden* after a Japanese tradition of gift giving to bereaving families.