

Maria Parrella-ilaria (2017)

“We are made of star-stuff.”
Memory and Containment
Thank you, Mr. Sagan.

Clear acrylic mannequin, organic materials—milkweed, pinecones, acorns, horse chestnuts, birch branches/bark, cedar, dried tulips/freesia, rose hips, LED lights, mini Instax image, iridescent acrylic raffia, wooden bird house, acrylic paint, metal tape

This work is a companion piece to my 2011 installation *mancanza/abbondanza* (Italian for loss/bounty) which looked at grief, specifically grief around miscarriage. Six years later, the grief is still there, made more nuanced by a complex layering of experiences surrounding the deaths of my mother, extended family and friends. *Mamma* passed in 2014 due to a massive stroke, related in part to polycystic kidney disease, something I inherited from her. I live with the knowledge that I have a chronic, life-threatening disease that keeps me inextricably tied to my mom, her sisters, their mother and far into our collective ancestral past. It also keeps me tied to unpredictability as the disease is progressive and treatment extremely limited.

Two openings in the mannequin relate to the placement and size of enlarged kidneys due to PKD. From these ragged openings emerge branches of rose hips, cut from a rose bush in the front yard of what was my mother’s house. While rose hips relate to love and sorrow in Western symbolism, in Chinese Medicine, the kidneys are characterised as supporting memory, life energy and our connection to our ancestors. The mannequin contains organic elements from my 2011 installation—pine cones, horse chestnuts, acorns, milkweed and tulips/freesia, now dried. Birch branches are introduced as an element of protection as seen in Ancient European lore.

Atop this vessel of containment sits a star filled house, trimmed with new beginnings and full of memories, potentials—flashes of light, glimmers of hope. A tiny photo of a winged female form is visible to the viewer—a memory from years past, of a life that was briefly lived yet dearly missed but never truly gone for we are one and everything, just like the stars that gave birth to us eons ago.