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I most associate the work of Charles Ray with the human body. Much of his early work involved the use of his own body (*Plank piece I & II*, 1973), or the body of the viewer (*Bench*, 1974) and later, mannequins and depictions of the human form. Although *Golden Jewelry* is decidedly not a human form, it embodies the conflict between natural and unnatural, and the contrasting focuses present throughout Charles Ray's body of work. The Golden Jewelry is not intended to be worn, but rather held. The sculpture is a small golden apple core, with all but the top and a sliver of the side eaten. The eaten parts closest to the core are wrinkled and decayed, with bits of the seed showing. The color is a divergence from Ray's usual use of cooler toned materials like aluminum and white plaster. The apple is smaller than the size of a palm. It challenges the concept of jewelry as a worn object with its gilded appearance, its content, and its inability to decorate the body.

The *Golden Jewelry* fits nicely with other works by Ray, both visually and in its function. Visually, it resembles the mangled front of *Unpainted Sculpture* (1997). The crushed doors of the Pontiac are echoed by the wrinkles in the apple. Both sculptures embody a narrative of decay by showing the objects post destruction. The Pontiac is completely crushed, doors and hood beyond dented, and the driver's seat fully reclined. There's a human physicality without the person being there. There are remnants of a story in the details of both. The discriminant, unfinished bites taken of the apple and the position of dials on the dashboard of the car reflect human intention, despite both these scenes resulting from nature or chance. In subject matter, I think the Golden Jewelry is most comparable to *Hinoki*, a large scale sculpture of a tree made of cypress. Both depict rotting natural objects. The tree is its complete opposite in scale, which changes the tone of the work. It

feels expansive and regenerative, while the apple feels very final in its presentation. The recreation of the dying tree in new wood and the brass cast of the apple are forms of preservation, but in different ways. The tree is reborn as a new piece of wood. The visual evidence of it falling and rotting is still there, but exists in a fresh vessel. The brass cast of the apple preserves the moment of decay and adds grandeur, but the object itself is redefined rather than renewed. The scale of the sculptures reinforces this, as one would interact with *Hinoki* much the same way one would interact with a fallen tree in nature, whereas the apple's primary function as sustenance has been removed from it altogether. *Light from the Left* is a 7 foot tall panel of painted fiberglass, stainless steel, and aluminium. It depicts a scene of the artist and his wife. The two figures are standing against a window in their home, the body of his wife facing the viewer while both of their heads and Ray's body face inward. He gives her a small bouquet of flowers, which are central to the composition. The flowers themselves are more clearly defined than the two figures bracketing them. The bouquet itself is a mix of leaves, flower buds and fully bloomed flowers, showing the bouquet at different stages of its life. This depiction of Ray giving flowers to his wife reflects the original function of the *Golden Jewelry*. The naturalism of the flowers parallels the naturalism of the apple, although both are made of materials that oppose how they look in the natural world. The flowers have been cut, some of them having never bloomed, and others wilting blossoms. The stasis of decay in flowers mirror the apple, both frozen in an active process that would eventually reduce them down to nothing.

The placement of *Golden Jewelry* in the gallery emphasises the lack of space it takes up. Within the gallery space, the object takes on a different function. It's not intended to be interacted with, enveloped by the white of its pedestal and divided from the viewer by glass. Its placement near the Bacchus imbues it with theological meaning, both through the biblical story of the Garden of

Eden but also the presence of the golden apple in greek myth. The iconography of the bitten apple holds weight in a religious canon, possessing cultural meaning without the more obvious indicators of its narrative. The abundance of empty space forces the viewer to look more carefully at the object itself, rather than examining its connection to the other works in the Gallery. Ray describes the goal of his work, *Chicken*, as wanting “...the life force, or the energy, of the chick hatching to be met with the energy of your looking—with your bending over, with your curiosity,” I think the placement of the *Jewelry* achieves this effect with the use of empty space.

Much of the narrative of *Golden Jewelry* exists in the unseen and undepicted. In an interview with the artist, Ray notes the absence of Adam and Eve alongside the apple. Their physical presence is absent, but the evidence of their ‘interaction’ with *Golden Jewelry* helps to expand the story. First, the viewer can question who ate the apple, then where it came from, and so on. It rests in its case as though someone left it behind. The idea of absence works in tandem with the theme of decay. Absence is the final stage of decay, and *Golden Jewelry* has paused the apple in its transition between the two stages. Ray relates the absence of additional elements to the effectiveness of his work, distilling the subject of his work to its sculptural elements. The accuracy of the content is secondary to the sculpture itself. *Sleeping Woman* depicts a homeless woman lying on a bench. The sculpture lacks concrete indicators of her poverty, so she is able to exist as a sleeping woman. She is freed from a more singular interpretation by the absence of additional elements, and the viewer is freed from narrow interpretations of the subject. The apple is a globally produced comestible that is imbued with symbolic meaning in both theology and art. The ubiquity of the fruit and its place within art tradition are magnified by *Golden Jewelry*. The work emphasises the value of the apple, gilded at the height of its decay.

Believe, Julie L. "Charles Ray." *W Magazine*. Future Media Group, November 1, 2007.

<https://www.wmagazine.com/story/charles-ray/>.

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