

# FABRIK

ART. DESIGN. ARCHITECTURE.

ISSUE 18

COMING OUT, GOING IN

## EDWARD CELLA ART+ARCHITECTURE

6018 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

WORDS PETER FRANK

GOING IN: Penelope Gottlieb, “Gone,” Ruth Pastine, “Counterpoint,” through Oct. 27



POTENTILIA MULTITUJUJA, 2012 • PENELOPE GOTTLIEB • ACRYLIC AND INK ON PANEL • 78 X 84 • INCHES

In their extravagance, of both form and detail, Penelope Gottlieb’s paintings and drawings of flowers clearly point at something beyond the mere decorative presence of colorful flora. The blooms burgeon into and among one another with a fury that bespeaks at once staggering vitality and gripping urgency. Gottlieb draws and paints with thoroughgoing grace and precision, but her flat, eye-popping color moves her pictures well beyond hothouse refinement and into the realm of poster-bold politics. In fact, with these harshly gorgeous images Gottlieb bemoans and protests the extinction of many of the very flowers she portrays. By extension, then, these pictures add to the ecological clarion call, and their shrillness would seem to borrow from the general tenor of the environmental movement. But in this context such a voice drives home its message with noisy beauty, as if nature itself were crying out for help. The exhibition features works from two series, “Extinct Botanicals” and “Invasive Species.” As its name implies, the former group comprises depictions of

floral species that have disappeared; Gottlieb is in effect painting their ghosts. The other series portrays the “bad guys,” flowers introduced into foreign climes where they have driven out native variants, many of whom now number among the extinct. But by rendering these plants in such an over-the-top, decoration-conscious manner - at the same time referencing traditional visual practice in botany (such as Audubon’s) - Gottlieb reminds us that these plants do not wage war on one another, but that their victimization and their transgressions are our fault. On beyond this war of the flowers, Ruth Pastine’s ethereal pastels propose transcendence through pure color. Already well known for her near-monochrome paintings, Pastine finds a different optical space in her works on paper - not only because these are too small to occupy the viewer’s entire optical field (and must thus operate like pages, miniature portals into universes of color) but because their dry, smoothly powdery hues have a different presence than do her painted surfaces. In effect, they feel different to the eye, more tactile and even sensual. This allows Pastine a sweeter, and perhaps fleshier, palette. However, she resists the temptation to “go pretty”; these intimate visual spaces still pull us toward purity.



COUNTERPOINT #33, 2012 • RUTH PASTINE • PASTEL ON PAPER • 30 X 22 INCHES