

Penelope Gottlieb: Gone

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The exhibition explores the themes of ecological crisis and botanical extinction through highly detailed, and densely rendered, paint and ink based works on canvas, panel, and paper. Opens September 8 at Edward Cella Art + Architecture.



Gottlieb's recent practice continues an ongoing project of re-imagining lost species. The artist re-envisions, and ultimately re-invents, lost botanical plant life based on historical descriptions and accounts. In the absence of existing visual references for these perished species, Gottlieb engages extinction in a literal way by summoning its subjects back to life through a series of imagined reconstructions. Gottlieb's work, while charged with timely environmental anxieties, and conversant with our shared dread of ecological peril, is powerfully seductive and visually alluring. Deceivingly decorative and lush upon first glance, the paintings' aesthetic veneer is anything but superficial. Upon closer inspection, the work reveals an arresting network of imagery, complexity, and depth.

Gottlieb's aesthetic is informed by her consummate draftsmanship and graphic sensibility. Her dense compositions, embellished with highly detailed additions of pen and ink, create the impression of visual abundance. Each piece is painstakingly developed by the artist's highly saturated use of color, and by her meticulous approach to mark making. The visual dynamism and movement formally invoked by the work, conveys an impression of frenetic energy. It is as though they were truly living things. As large format works, these acrylic and ink based paintings are monumental and impressive: larger than life. They seem to defy the confines of their own image plane; and reverberate as if untenably contained. They are poetic investigations of loss that suggest an overwhelmingly frenetic imperative to "live". Through these works Gottlieb attempts to explore the dynamic shift in our relationship to the natural world. Her work resists the calm and disinterested representation of nature we tend to associate with pastoral imagery, historical botanicals, or still life, and instead activates it as a tumultuous and problematic subject.

Accompanying new works from the Extinct Botanicals series, ECAA will be featuring new works from Gottlieb's Invasive Species. In this body of work Gottlieb continues her exploration of loss and extinction through appropriated, and revised, images by John James Audubon (1785-1851). The artist intentionally takes these historically familiar representations of nature and alters our perception and understanding of them through a series of interventions. Invasive Species probes the exploitative nature of non-native species once introduced into foreign ecosystems. In these works the subjects are literally bound and suffocated by the presence of an invasive botanical growth. The creatures are visibly compromised in these



images, but the aesthetic remains serene and contemplative. By retaining Audubon's visual language, and in fact by appropriating it in her own emulative additions, Gottlieb's revisionist additions are intended to defer a moment of realization. We are not entirely sure if they are beautiful or distressing, and in fact they are both. Content is again deceivingly fraught beneath a beautiful veneer.

Penelope Gottlieb completed her MFA at the University of California in Santa Barbara, and has been widely exhibited throughout California. She has been featured in prominent international art fairs such as the Armory, NY, and was recently featured in Conference of the Birds, presented by Cynthia Reeves Projects at Mana Contemporary, NJ. The artist's work is currently included in an exciting touring exhibition Ignite! The Art of Sustainability presented by Exhibit Envoy, and touring CA from 2012 to 2015, reaching institutions such as: the UC Davis Design Museum, the Humboldt St University Art Gallery, the Arte Americas, Pasadena Museum of California Art, and the Museum of History and Art, Ontario. The artist's work has been acquired by several prominent public collections, including: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Chicago Art Institute, the Palm Springs Museum of Art, 21c Museum, the Nevada Museum of Art, and is on view at the Drawing Center, New York.