



*The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet again inspire the composer; but when the last individual of a race of living beings breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again. -- William Beebe, The Bird,*

**Penelope Gottlieb's** recent series, **GONE** considers vanishing plant life and its ecological and biological ramifications. Exploding bouquets of flowers and plants, now expired, burst out vigorously from a cloudy center, depicting a violent reflection of the process of extinction. Using fluid black lines and a brilliant palette of reds, blues, purples, greens, and yellows, these paintings take on a dynamic, Pop sensibility that echoes the animated force of the subject matter.

Gottlieb begins by studying vintage botanical renderings popularized by natural scientists who attempted to catalog the flora and fauna of specific regions, such as Alexander Von Humboldt and Charles Darwin. The artist also follows the steadily growing list of plants on The International Union for the Conservation of Nature & Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, many of whose descriptions are only depicted by text with little or no visual reference. Taking botanists' written descriptions, Gottlieb creates an imaginary menagerie, all titled in their Latin names, of extinct floral paintings under attack by external, contemporaneous conditions. Unlike the placid, romantic depictions of extinct botanicals traditionally painted, these renderings suggest a paradigmatic shift to the accelerated harshness of today's ecological conditions. According to the artist, "This art addresses the dire state of the planet, offering visual "eulogies" for lost plant life, and larger patterns of ecological destruction."

Although radically immediate and innovative, these paintings are also stylistically steeped in art historical traditions. Kandinsky's abstractions, filling the entire canvas, created a vivacious effect that can be found in Gottlieb's dazzling paintings. The fervent compositions of the Italian Futurists, who celebrated progress and modernism, ironically bear a resemblance to Gottlieb's botanical paintings, alternatively employing motion to lament the impacts of industrialization. Recently, Gottlieb's paintings share affinities to a group of artists like Alexis Rockman, Rachel Berwick, and Mark Dion, whose artistic

practices explore the intersections between art and science. Like these artists, Gottlieb presents us with apocryphal representations of the precarious relationship between humans and nature. **GONE** is thus an exploration of the construction, interpretation, and presentation of the natural world, historical methodologies, and current events. Ultimately, this series of works can be seen as elegiac resuscitations of plants no more, acknowledging the brutality of loss, yet championing the power of the imagination and perhaps desiring a spirit of renewal.

**-Miki Garcia, Executive Director, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum**