

# RL Fine Arts

Florencio Gelabert - *The aesthetics of artifice*

Florencio Gelabert's work carries a subtle commentary not only on the contemporary obsession with appropriation but with the very real deformation of the natural landscape and the ecological challenges that several generations of industrialized society have brought about into our environment.

Starting with the 19th Century aesthetic of Symbolism, Charles Baudelaire, an astute art critic aside from being the chief exponent of the movement in literature, had already noted in his critique the strange beauty that accidentally had been created by industrial detritus. Whether exalting the magical reflections on the oily surface of a street or the strange colorings of factory smokes, we begin a long road of artistic appreciation within the context of a man-created nature, an alternative reality to the traditionally depicted in the paintings of the old masters.

The present concern for environmental challenges has not gone unnoticed by contemporary artists that are aware of its dangerous beauty. In Gelabert's work, a whole new flora is flourishing in unlikely places: old fixtures, discarded construction materials, wooden beams. In one of the works, "Mandala", the soil that gives birth to the plant growths is clearly chemically altered: it literally shines with colored reflections, indicating its layers of pollution through time. These new plants hold firmly onto the shiny surface of frozen polluted lakes and though they resemble known species the plasticized coloring betrays an interesting set of mutations to match a new age of genetic progress.

contd.

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The plight of nature can never be better described than we see in the trapped contraptions that grow in Florencio's sculpture: limited growths that flourish in abandoned building structures, a marble roundel, an unused pipe. These stubborn shoots have adapted to the new environment and are shockingly attractive. They are transforming their post-modern environment with their unexpected presence and unplanned arrival.

In his works on paper the artist has chosen a strong paper that resembles parchment sturdiness. Out of the limpid whiteness of the page protrude the sculptural smaller branches and flowers so prevalent in the larger sculptures, they seem to float on the space, like a new species of rhizoids that can survive on the elements of the atmosphere and no longer needs the support of the fertile earth to sprout. In other works the materials used depict a crater or fantastical landscapes, barely sketched, as if the artist was taking quick studies on a private viewing of future developments in our planet. This is not suggesting that the drawings are either detailed or hallucinatory, quiet the contrary, in a very matter of fact way the nature represented seems a totally expected development, and that may well be the reason they don't look altogether unfamiliar. These are miniature constructions from which the larger works have sprung, and can be perceived as the seeds for those, however the case may be, they stand very well on their own as relevant and very appealing works that are in no way minor because of their size.