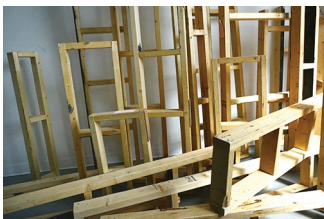
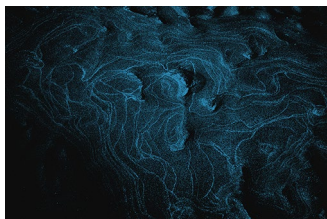
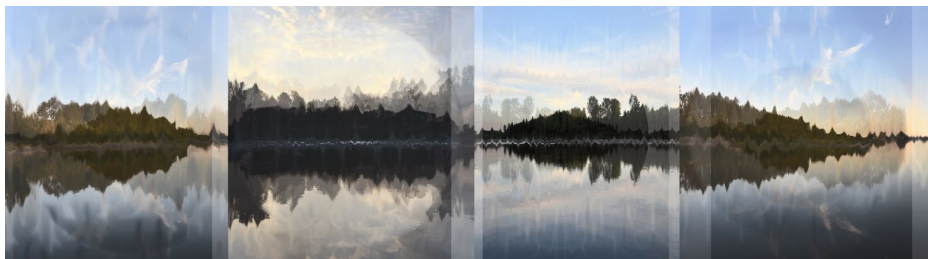




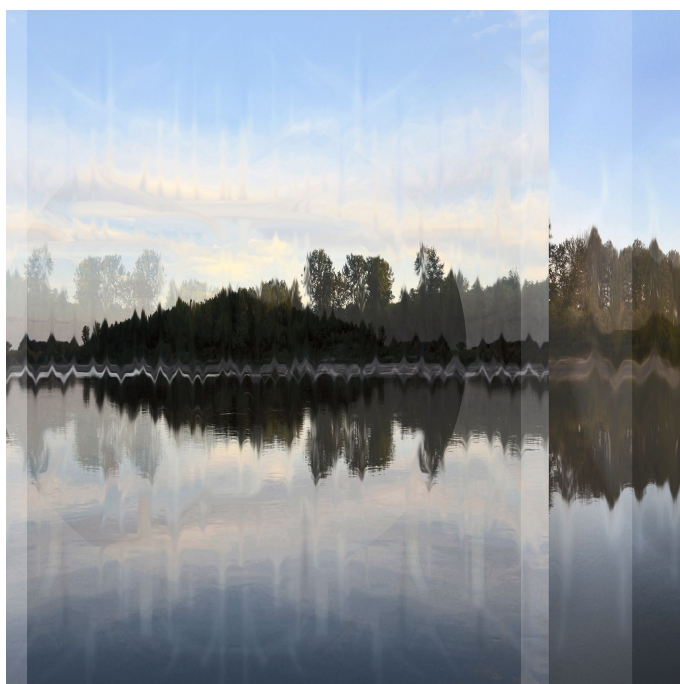
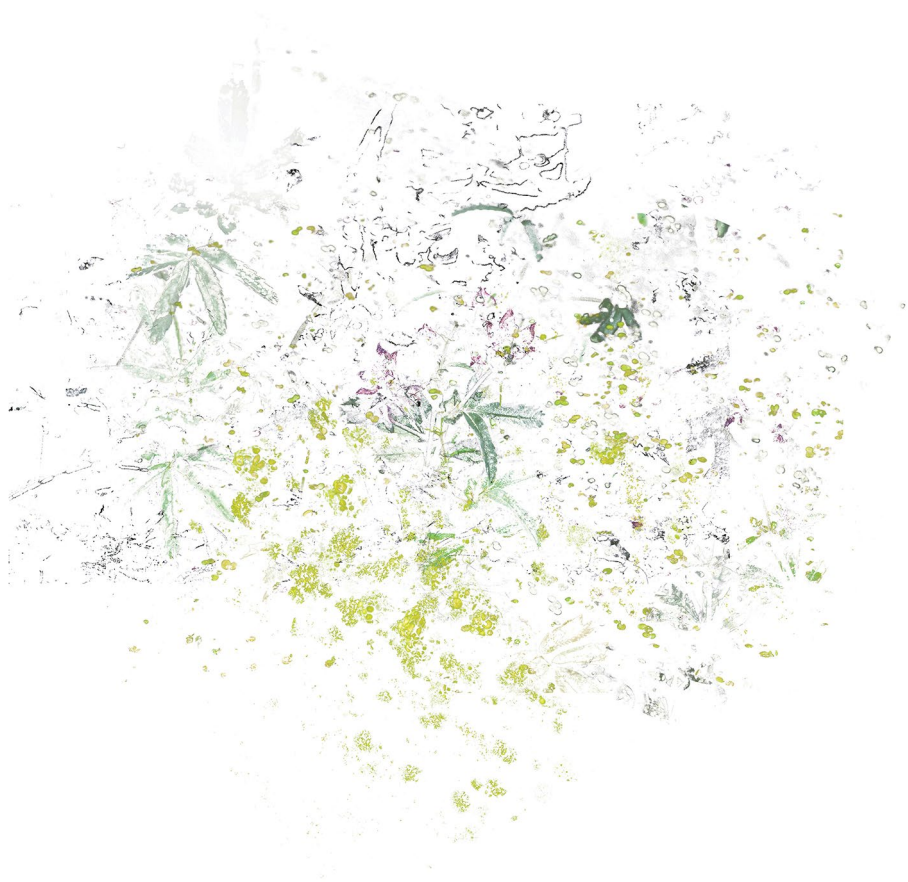
GABRIELA GARCIA-LUNA

EDGE

ART GALLERY OF REGINA



top: *Traces I*, 2019, archival ink on rag paper, 30 x 94 inches
middle: *Altered*, 2019, archival ink on rag paper, 42 x 156 inches
bottom, clockwise from top left: *Cluster I*, 2019, archival ink on rag paper, 40 x 28 inches;
Structure for Emptiness (detail), reclaimed construction materials/wood
& archival ink on paper; *Affinity* (detail), apple & poplar branches, gold leaf



top: *Traces I* (detail), archival ink on rag paper
bottom: *Altered* (detail), archival ink on rag paper

I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this.

H. D. Thoreau, *Journal*, 3 January, 1853

I recently walked into Gabriela García-Luna's Saskatoon studio to observe and comment on a range of new lens based works she's completing (and for which she is renowned) and encountered a growing body of experimental work not only in photography but also assemblage, installation and new genre. The range of works was daring in materials and applications, from gold leaf embossed colour photographs of India's rain tree canopies to a minimalist sculpture comprised of dismantled wall framing units in wood. Every surface was covered by works in progress.

Gabriela's highly observant and patient eye as a photographer has been wandering over earth's landscape for many years – from Mexico to Canada to India to northern Saskatchewan's River Delta and beyond. Hers is a speculative eye attuned to any positive impressions of a lost or new-found landscape we thought we knew as paradise. In 2018 Gabriela travelled to the Saskatchewan River Delta to observe up close the fine lines of resistance and exploitation drawn between Nature and man. As a starting point for our discussion, Gabriela forwarded H.D. Thoreau's *Journal* entry above to inspire my writing, just as it inspired Gabriela's artmaking process. In many ways her work and process is an extension of Thoreau's sustained reflections on the fragility of nature in the 1850s and our tentative divorce from earthly paradise in the 21st century.

Art in the last few hundred years offers predictable visual representations of paradise not dissimilar from the places Gabriela visits and often calls home for periods of time. Artists have chronicled human pleasures, delirious landscapes, plausible dreamscapes, artistic interpretations of a faraway idyllic retreat or an idealized social order represented above and below ground in the form of "perfect" physical, social and mental and spiritual health. For example, the delirium of a Hieronymus Bosch landscape offers a perspective on the artist's materialistic paradise on earth and an every-person's critique of the social order of the time. Bosch visualized a prosperous medieval northern European landscape populated by a vast array of class conscious figures. His quasi-comical illustrations of citizens and social functions included carnival costumes and masks to offer a ribald lampoon of the all-prevailing power and control of the Church and the ruling elites. The landscape in many ways played a tertiary role in a tentative vision of paradise on earth. This vision of a social paradise on earth remains familiar and commonplace. Western art history's depictions of paradise generally portray humans striving to maintain a level of harmony with Nature, a co-existence with plants, animals and other humans while largely managing to ignore humanity's innate competitive drive to monopolize resources. The cultured, human-scaled Garden of Eden associated with Western art's paradise is repeatedly referenced in art as a form of heaven on earth.

Gabriela casts a wary eye to the relationship humans have with the natural world, as did Thoreau, and wonders about our limited capacity to symbolize heaven on earth today. She understands that the classical concept of landscape of paradise must be unpacked, to examine what is haunted or poisoned by human intervention and in need of stewardship. Even as a concept for her, the landscape as paradise is something distant, unreal or outright untenable in 2019. Eliminating the exploitative human may be a building block of her critique of our idyllic paradise in northern Saskatchewan. The visual politic embedded in her representation lays bare the rhetoric of the construct. The historical portraits of "landscape with human figure" forms a compendium for the

remaking of paradise in art history (from Bosch to the Group of Seven), one that has, in turn, legitimized colonialism, aligned the “march of progress” or Manifest Destiny as natural, and (un)veiled the exploitation of natural resources in virtually every culture and economic system. In questioning the liabilities of a compromised landscape as paradise, artists of Gabriela's generation have acted as moral rudders for society. With conviction Gabriela produces work that effectively becomes a GPS way-finding system to a more civilized co-existence.

Gabriela's lens-based work offers a long-term examination of the in-between spaces of the material and immaterial worlds. Her artistic interventions in nature (i.e., some incorporating artificial light sources) and immersion in states of consciousness are her reliable portals to examine the gap between things and the experiential moment (see her 'Ponds' series). Her current work continues this intent to representing the experiential in-between moment. Two large-scale photographs in Gabriela's studio (see *Altered*) depict a heavily treed landscape in the Saskatchewan River Delta, a brooding sky and a foreground reflecting in a body of water. The Photoshopped image implies an earthly paradise subtly distorted to form a lurid, nightmarish scene. The landscape appears to vibrate and is both, painterly and hallucinatory, as if it's ingested a mind altering drug. The digitally altered image of the raw natural environment registers in grey scale with receding horizon lines and details alternately sharpened or blurred in transition and then hyper accentuated.

Gabriela has shifted her studio practice in 2018-19 to tentatively include large-scale drawings (in progress) and experimental sculptural forms. The largest sculpture in the studio ('Structure for Emptiness') is assembled from a demolished wood frame retaining wall. Loosely assembled sections stand as if they're sentinels or grave markers for the landscape photographs in her studio. The wooden sculpture inadvertently mimics a Constructivist ready-made, devoid of the sentimentality and human spirit of its maker. Nearby, on a studio drafting table, is another sculpture, this one comprised of twigs arranged in a 24-inch circular pattern. Each twig has been branded by Gabriela with a strategically placed spot of gold leaf. By applying gold leaf the radiating twigs and the entire assemblage are elevated from the commonplace and made precious. It's an oddly transient sculpture that one imagines reassembled and shifting shape, its idiosyncratic details in a never-ending flow of uncertainty, collapse and reassembly. The composition in twigs and gold leaf is a collection of natural resources as remnants, both refined (gold) and natural.

Two new series of photographs investigate the material remnants of shifting river delta beds in Northern Saskatchewan. The first series documents the found topographical patterns of delta sand and dirt shaped by receding waters (activated by the release and retention of river waters by a hydro dam) and wind erosion. The textured surfaces take on fantastical labyrinthine shapes. The second series explores the spaces between natural materials and the immaterial. Using a photo assemblage method, Gabriela produced photo-based drawings of delicate flora (specks of dust, leaves, stems, seeds and other earthly matter) arranged on a white background. What emerges is a new abstracted and delicate landscape born of the diverse geometric elements of the earth. The density of the supporting land has been edited out. In its absence is a clear view of matter that appears to be unmoored. Under the right conditions the deconstructed flora could survive in the wild for years, the seeds eventually germinating and producing something exquisite.

In each successive body of work Gabriela has struggled to identify the appropriate media and forms to elicit the best, most resonant representation of her ideas around the disturbances to the earth –as economic, physical and social issues inherent in representing an iconic landscape. Each is a challenge to establish the best form of representation to document and poetically reveal something about human subjects who are physically and emotionally strained, in a state of retreat, paralysis or exhaustion. Gabriela knows instinctively that the greatest attraction to what we see in her work may be what we don't see.

ART

GALLERY
OF REGINA

Gabriela García-Luna: Edge

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Curator: Holly Fay

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Cover Image: *Cluster II* (detail), 2019,
archival ink on rag paper, 40 x 28 inches

Photographs: courtesy of the artist

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EPIC ART + DESIGN