Penelope Gottlieb’s practice is as compelling as her aesthetic is contentious and complex. The Californian artist’s subject matter is anything but easy, as she attempts to convey nature under threat and siege. Penelope Gottlieb’s work 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. 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. 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 they 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 under siege.

Penelope Gottlieb will be exhibiting new pieces from her two major ongoing bodies of work: Invasive Species and Extinct Botanicals with Edward Cella Art + Architecture in Los Angeles. GONE, opening September 8th and on display until October 27, is the gallery’s first solo exhibition of the artist’s work. To see more of Gottlieb’s work, visit edwardcella.com and penelopegottlieb.com.