

# Curator



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— Francesca Gabbiani

**INTERVIEW BY AMANDA QUINN OLIVAR, WEST COAST EDITOR**

**FRANCESCA GABBIANI** WAS BORN IN MONTREAL, CANADA IN 1965. SHE EARNED HER MASTER OF FINE ARTS DEGREE FROM UCLA, HAVING PREVIOUSLY STUDIED AT RIJNSAKADEMIE VAN BEELDENDE KUNSTEN (RAKB) IN AMSTERDAM AND ECOLE SUPERIEURE DES BEAUX ARTS (ESAV) IN GENEVA. SHE HAS HAD SOLO EXHIBITIONS AT MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY IN NEW YORK, NY; PATRICK PAINTER IN LOS ANGELES, CA; LORA REYNOLDS GALLERY IN AUSTIN, TX; AND MONICA DE CARDENA IN MILAN, ITALY, AMONG OTHERS. GABBIANI'S WORK HAS BEEN EXHIBITED IN SUCH PRESTIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS THE MUSEUM OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND; LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART, LOS ANGELES; HAMMER MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES; MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES; AND MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES. HER WORK IS INCLUDED IN SUCH PUBLIC COLLECTIONS AS THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK; MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; AND MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES.

**Amanda Quinn Olivar (AQO):** Your work involves a lot of detailed planning and execution! Let's talk about your subject matter and process.

Francesca Gabbiani (FG): In a certain way, I can see my work as landscape painting, especially this newer series. I'm interested in spaces that are overlooked, forgotten, or in transition. Nature and man-made. A modern urbanism or a lack of modern urbanism. Dead cities or dead spaces. Places where perhaps things have happened or did happen. I take photos often on the way to my studio, or while walking or hiking something catches my eye. Often something will jump at me through my peripheral vision. Something with a story or even a lack of a story. I have a bunch of photos from my iPhone... really. I make small drawings from my photographs first, and then I study them repeatedly until I am comfortable with a larger version.



*Unresolved Story*, 2017, colored paper, watercolor and gouache on paper, 105 X 72 in.



*Unresolved Story (detail)*, 2017, colored paper, watercolor and gouache on paper, 105 X 72 in.

**AQO: You spend months to years on each piece, meticulously carving paper pieces. Do you plan everything out, or do spontaneity and experimentation play a part?**

FG: Spontaneity is hugely important for me. Often, I'm drawn to make a certain image in a very instinctual way, almost like a dream state. Repetition is also a very important part of my work. I like to get extremely focused on detail and then draw back and let it explode a bit. I like to learn something about my image and then unlearn it.



*Lookout*, 2016, colored paper and gouache on paper, 72 X 105 in.

**AQO: Is there any allegorical content? Are there common themes that carry across your various series?**



*Lookout (detail), 2016, colored paper and gouache on paper, 72 X 105 in.*



*Lookout (detail), 2016, colored paper and gouache on paper, 72 X 105 in.*

FG: I find the content poetic, or at least I like to bring them to a poetic place... maybe another point of view of something common or overlooked. Devoid of narrative. Somewhere, it may partly come from being surrounded by things or environments that are in a precarious place. As if, the next day they could be gone. The ephemeral state. Also, I try to have things that do not belong to a certain time; I strive to have a certain quality of timelessness.



*Last Days, 2009, colored paper and gouache on paper, 34 x 60 in.*



*Untitled, 2018, gouache and ink on paper, 9 7/8 X 12 3/4 in.*

AQO: Tell me about your career path... How did it all start?

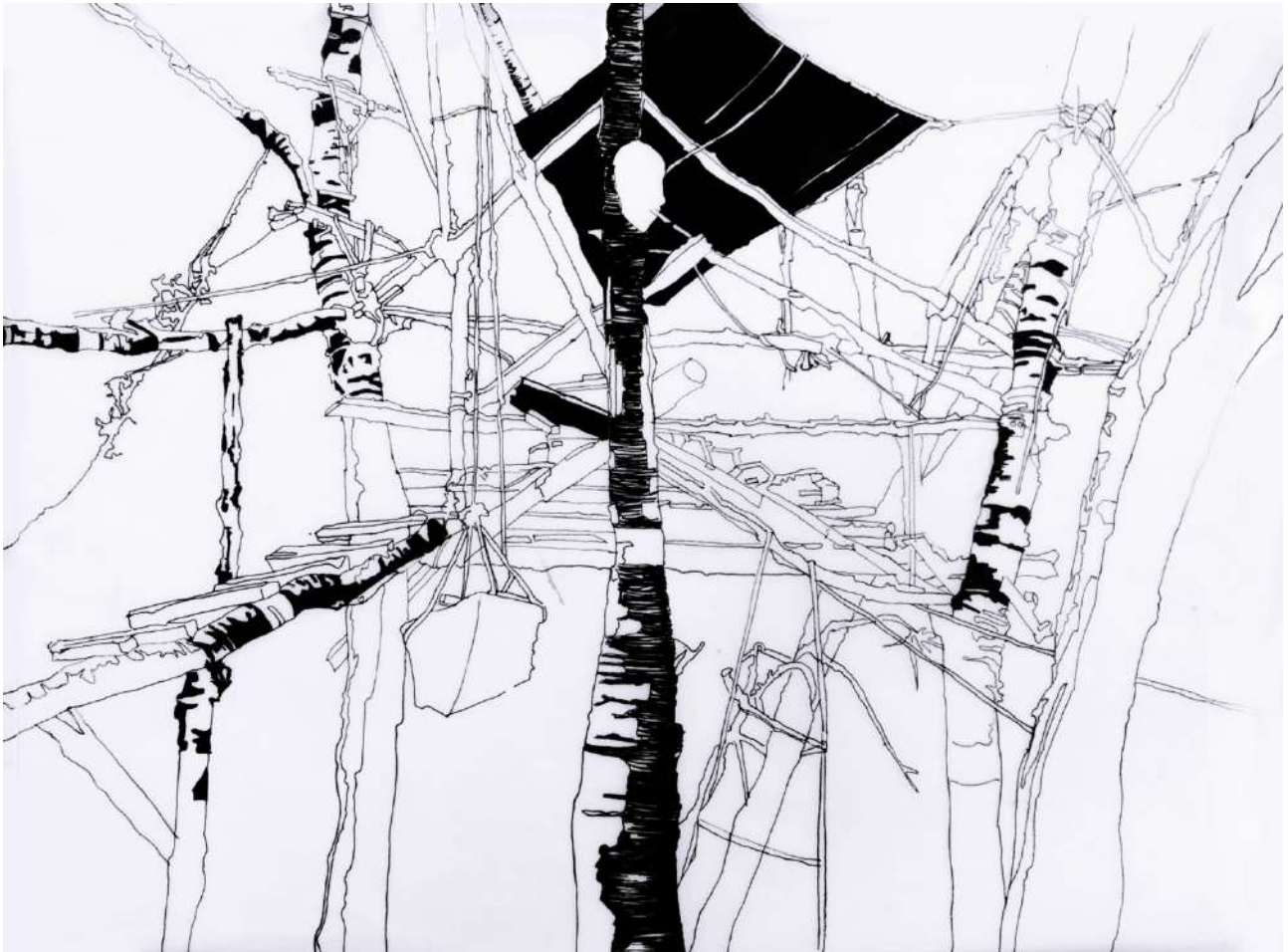
FG: I studied painting in Europe at the beginning. It was a relief for me to come to the states, as there were so many more women painters here when I arrived in 1995, to do my MFA at UCLA. So, I would say it started with more of a European influence and moved into becoming Southern Californian. The arc of my path turned into a wave at that point.

AQO: Looking back over your work for the past ten years, would you say that your underlying creative concerns have remained consistent? Or, how have they shifted?

FG: When I look back on my work, I feel that my path has gone from one explosion to another, or even the opposite of an explosion, where things gather at each center point, often with similar elements from before. I really feel it's in a constant, shifting, mutating arc. I don't feel comfortable doing things the same in my work, so I always try to subvert or alter my techniques.



*Dream Warfare*, 2009, colored paper and gouache on paper, 72 x 72 in.



Badlands Treehouse (sketch), 2014, ink on vellum, 8 1/2 X 11 in.

Vague Terrain (detail), 2018, colored paper and gouache on paper, 105 X 72 in.

AQO: Although you work in a variety of mediums, your focus seems to be paper and collage. What is the significance of material, color, and technique?

FG: I have always loved working with paper. It can be seen as a humble surface, not precious. You can get paper anywhere! Also, I want to make something beautiful or magical, or with a certain amount of playfulness. Colors are also very important. They can define the intensity of a scene. I constantly make color combination lists and studies, in order to get where I want to go. My environment influences me a lot, whether it's music or a book I'm reading, a film or a TV show I'm watching.

Parts of Synecdoche 4, (Destruction of a Radical Space), 2017, cut paper.

Synecdoche 2, (Destruction of a Radical Space), 2017, colored paper and gouache on paper, 20 1/8 X 26 5/8 in.

AQO: Was there a specific moment or impetus that led to your current series?

FG: It happened very gradually. Architecture and spaces have always been an interest of mine. I think this series contains a bunch of my personal history and my continuous research of the tales of LA.

AQO: What is inspiring you right now?

FG: I was really impressed with *The Florida Project* and found it very inspiring, or legitimizing. The way the kids move about in their forgotten world is something I've always tried to capture. A sense of wonderment. It's a very bleak American view of life, but there's an inherent beauty to it as well.

AQO: You married into an important art family. How has that affected or influenced your artistic path? Your father-in-law, Ed Ruscha, has said your pieces are "elaborate entrances into other worlds". What is he referring to, and where do your ideas come from?

FG: For me, I don't think about it that much, because it's just the way it is. I also try not to think about it too much, and just do what I do. Of course, my father-in-law is a great influence on me as well as many others, and it's inspiring to be near. When he said that about my work, I felt very honored.

AQO: What projects and exhibitions are you planning now?

FG: I have a show, *Vague Terrains/Urban Fuckups*, on view until May 26, 2018, at Gavlak Gallery. I am just able to think about that one right now. I'm very excited.

Vague Terrain, 2018, colored paper and gouache on paper, 105 X 72 in.

AQO: What is your favorite art accident?

FG: I don't have a favorite; they're all good. I do not know what to tell you about accidents. They are part of my works. All the accidents are welcome and considered.

Francesca Gabbiani in studio. Photo courtesy of Olivia Fourgeirol.

Featured Image: Francesca Gabbiani. Courtesy of Olivia Fourgeirol. All artwork images are courtesy of Francesca Gabbiani and Gavlak Gallery.

\* Bollen, Christopher. "Francesca Gabbiani." Interview Magazine, 7 March 2009. Interviewmagazine.com. Web. 28 March 2018.