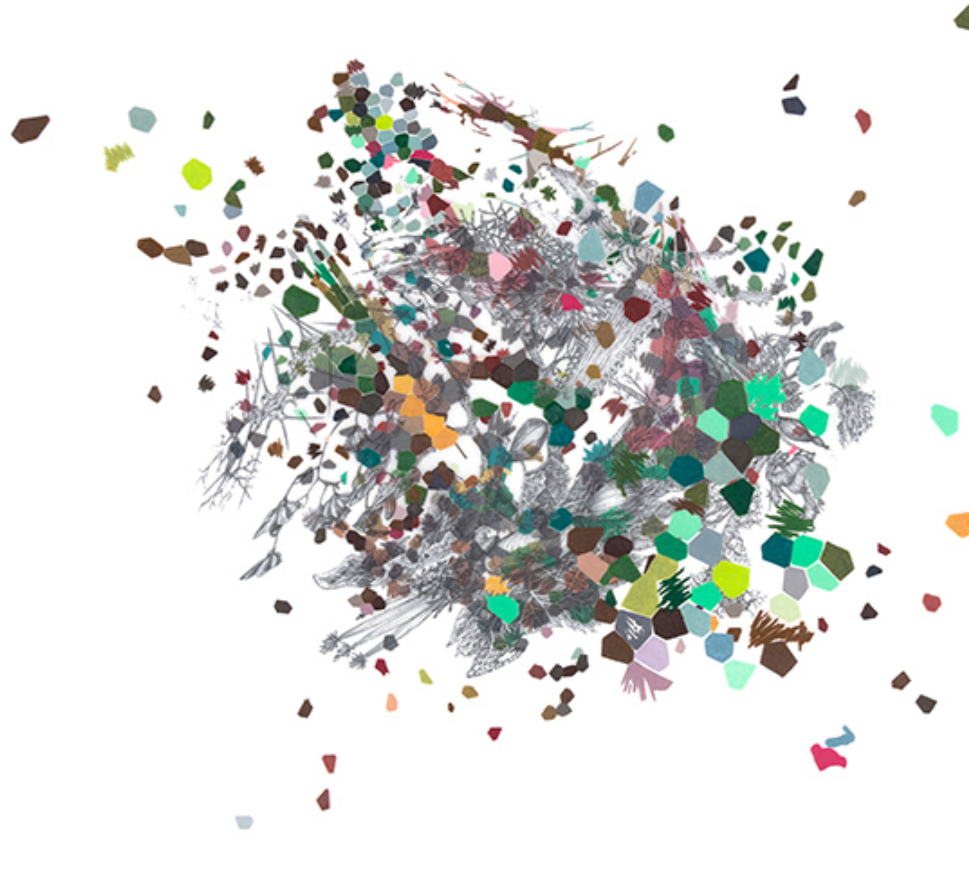


By: New American Paintings
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Color Pollination: Leigh Anne Lester at grayDUCK Gallery

If your produce shopping is limited to sustainable farmers markets rather than the neighborhood big-box — or if you haven't followed decades of GMC developments — you may be unaware of genetically modified crops' tenacious pervasiveness in the global community. In *Venomous Cabbage* and other demands satisfied, the inaugural show at grayDUCK Gallery's new eastside location in Austin, Leigh Anne Lester wields graphite and rich color as her magnifying glass to this agricultural reality.

— Brian Fee, Austin contributor



Leigh Anne Lester | *Deviant Pollination*, 2014, graphite and color pencil on drafting film, 29 x 24 inches. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Lester's 'color cells' — dots, chips, or great lozenges of pure color that stipple or consume her botanical compositions — are a recent development in her ongoing investigation into representing genetic modification and its aftereffects. They're a neat compositional trick here, like how the cool tones of Marker 1.8 snake around a leafy anonymous bulb, visually destabilizing it while echoing the hybrid plant's shape. In *Deviant Pollination*, tonal blots explode outward from a tight mass of spiny graphite flora, deliquescing into tinier and tinier bits like a pollen-accented sneeze in freeze-frame. It is notable that this work, like the majority in the show, feature botanical drawings in pure grayish graphite, though when viewed with color cells clouding the perimeter, our eyes connect the vibrant, cellular hues to the drained plants themselves.



Leigh Anne Lester | *Marker 1.8*, 2014, graphite and color pencil on drafting film, 14 x 12 inches. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.



Leigh Anne Lester | *Mutant Generate*, 2014, graphite and color pencil on two layers of drafting film, 43 x 35 inches. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

The only full-color botanical in the show, and the genesis for most of the works, is the fittingly titled *Mutant Generate* (Lester's titling is on point, recalling the synthetic nature of her subjects, just as her choice of surfaces, translucent drafting film, is purely manmade). Lester 'sampled' its leafy, verdant greens and pale yellows, its powdery pinks and funky browns (plus whatever appears in the second layer beneath the surface), into Photoshop, extracting tones and plant-parts that recur in simplified or remixed versions elsewhere in the show. She acts as the Frankensteinian creator of these superflora, spreading visual genomes to create future generations that nourish her body of work. The exhibition title is named after an actual genetically engineered cabbage strain that produces scorpion poison to kill caterpillars (yet still, somehow, remain nonhazardous to human consumption) — it is the stuff of nightmares, from the marketplace to the dinner table, but it tells only half the story. The rest, "and other demands satisfied", considers the idea of manufacturing venomous cabbage to limit the usage of pesticides in commercial crops, a globally maligned practice. Which is the lesser of evils? Lester leaves that for us to mull over, using her beguilingly beautiful (yet entirely unnatural) plant combinations as the portal to what looks good and what is actually good for us.



Venomous Cabbage and other demands satisfied installation view. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.



Leigh Anne Lester | *Oblique Inception*, 2014, graphite and colored pencil on two layers of drafting film, 25 x 23 inches. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

This exhibition inaugurates grayDUCK's new location on Austin's eastside. I interviewed grayDUCK director Jill Schroeder for *New American Paintings* in October 2011, shortly after I set up my 'home base' in Austin, and so long as I am in town — my schedule in Texas is fitful, particularly in the spring and fall — I never miss an exhibition. While the wait after December 2013's Send Off group art-energized neighborhood, I knew her move to Austin's eastside, in my opinion the most art-energized neighborhood in this city, would be worth it. Schroeder explained she knew she would open her eastside space with Lester, noting the artist is fantastic to work with and "she could roll with the punches", as the opening date shifted from March to May. Schroeder is planning more solo exhibitions in this new, larger venue, in addition to the two-artist show next, emblematic of her tight curatorial prowess I evinced when meeting her over two years ago. In my experience, grayDUCK has maintained a strong presence in Austin's art scene, and with its elegant and spacious new location and the maturity of exhibitions like Lester's, that presence will only continue to blossom.



Venomous Cabbage and other demands satisfied installation view. Image courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery, Austin.

Leigh Anne Lester (born in Shreveport, LA, lives and works in San Antonio, TX) received a BFA in Painting from University of Texas at San Antonio. She was awarded the 2011 Hunting Art Prize, a prestigious annual competition for Texas artists in mediums of drawing and painting, for *Mutant Spectre*. Recent exhibitions include *Crossing the Line*, curated by Michele Monseu at Centro Cultural Border, Mexico City; and *Flatland*, curated by Patty Ortiz, opening at Museo Guadalupe, San Antonio, in July. *Venomous Cabbage and other demands satisfied* at grayDUCK Gallery continues through June 1.

Brian Fee is an art punk based currently in Austin, TX, but he can usually be found in New York, Tokyo, or Berlin, depending on the art season.