

Sediment

An exhibition of new work by Gillian King
Text by Katie Lawson

Plantago major: Common or Broadleaf Plantain, Black Jack, Lamb's Tongue, White Man's Foot. In an act of close looking, we might notice the leafy kin of our sidewalk cracks, our backyards, our parks, our dumps — if we tune our ear, we might hear the stories they tell through their constant negotiation of an ever-changing world. Called by many names, common plantain is merely one non-native plant species that is entangled with histories of colonialism and the violence of European settlement in North America, where the first recorded sightings of the plant came in the eighteenth century. With each plant producing 20,000 tiny seeds, every muddy sole, snagged stocking, skirt hem, foot or coat of domestic animals, human or otherwise, furthered its dispersal. As the rapid spread of common plantain chased the westward expansion of colonies, the development of land followed, conquering the continent. While the plant carries properties of an herbal remedy, it is now ubiquitously classified as an invasive weed — yet for Gillian King, plantain joins a chorus of other plants and vegetal matter as creative collaborators and cocreators. Black Walnut, Cedar, Hollyhocks, Onion Skins, Red-Osier Dogwood, Roses, Sumac and Wildflowers are similarly invited into her painting practice as an artist deeply concerned with the codependency of all living things.

In a process that blends alchemical methods with printmaking techniques and fibre art, King's process can be understood as a teasing out of effective methodologies for moving forward in the midst of changing geographical landscapes. These methods frame the ritual of art making as rich with invention, collaboration, play, and an exploration of our mutual fragility and mortality with all earthlings. The creation of her paintings begins with the careful gathering of materials, rooted in a curiosity tied not only to their physical properties but their symbolic relevance and resonance, recognizing that all matter carries its own history of its relations with humankind.

A sustained engagement with gathering materials from the earth holds the potential to teach us about responsible relationships with all earthlings. Through trial and error, a forager will learn to never take the first or the last, to only take what is needed, to harvest in a way that minimizes harm, to never waste what has been taken, and to share. These guiding principles ensure that we can continue to live in relation to the plants that sustain an entangled network of beings. This aspect of reciprocity carries over into the processing of plants back in King's studio, where the (im)prints and dyeing of canvas come to inform how each composition is finalized using beeswax, oil paint and raw pigment. The artist engages in a process of giving and receiving, a practice of recuperation via the possibilities of making something together with nonhuman kin — an act of Sympoiesis, the term coined by Donna Haraway to challenge our ideas about bounded individuality and autopoiesis (isolated acts of self-making).

Galerie Nicolas Robert

The cycles of growth, harvest and regeneration necessitate a time-based element to King's art-making which is heightened by the acts of processing plant and vegetal matter through intensive processes of dyeing and printmaking, inflecting the artist's own practice with patience, a slow-moving intention that has the potential to lead towards insights on how we might move through the world. The body of work produced for the exhibition *Sediment* expands to invite collaborations with a broader collective — not just of plants and vegetal matter but also rusted metal. It is with this development in her work that the aspects of time and transformation become optically explicit in the recognizable natural chemical processes and transformations.

Some of the metal forms have been used and reused as dyeing treatments across multiple paintings and familiar shapes begin to emerge from the abstractions that populate King's canvases. Circular imprints repeat and shift across a number of the works — a material trace of an enacted practice of salvage and reuse as King uses found metal rings from wine barrels. In *Hollyhocks* to *Ether*, it is this ring that acts as a central anchor to the ghostly traces of plants and pigments dispersed across the work's surface. This subtle nod to a fermentation-based transformation of elements of terroir constitutes a part of the artist's exploration of worldmaking and ways of living in relation to a complex and entangled set of environmental factors and contexts that affect a crop's phenotype and in turn, agricultural practices in viticulture.

The metal sheets and rings that King works with in her studio are not only present through the traces of their interaction with her canvases, but in the case of *Sediment*, we find the forms themselves present throughout the gallery as companions to King's paintings, witnesses to the act of their own co-creation. All constituent parts of King's practice are teeming with life and vibrancy, connected through the fulcrum of her own body working with materials at a scale which relates intimately to the range of her gestural movements and embodied experience. King works primarily with her hands in the treatment of her canvases and materials through movements whose choreography can be traced by following the density of graphic forms. So too, the patterns of rust from the metal shapes transfer to canvas in a way that brings to mind the undulating effect of water moving over sand and rock across time.

Which brings us full circle to the title of the exhibition — *Sediment*. *Sediment* is the name we have given the particles that settle to the bottom of liquid matter, a naturally occurring material that is broken down through processes of weathering and erosion. We find it in our watersheds, our tributaries, our fresh and saltwater, these bodies that are ruled by the gravitational pull of the moon. It is solid matter that is transformed and moved from one location to another. It can consist of rocks and minerals, but also the remains of plants and animals — it is a term which, interestingly, is indiscriminate towards the boundaries of species and animacy imposed by Eurocentric understandings of the world. Residue, remains, accumulation, silt, sludge. *Sediment*. A title which signals the singular, but points to the inter-relatedness and entanglement of all forms of life.