



JULIE SAUL GALLERY

Maria Martinez-Cañas, 'Hortus I' (2001).

Maria Martinez-Cañas's "Hortus" at the Julie Saul Gallery is a series of large silver gelatin prints of plants and flowers, inspired by a botanical encyclopedia. The photographer composes these delicate forms by creating collages of pre-existing photographic fragments, which she then uses as a negative from which to make contact prints.

One of these negatives, mounted on a light box, is an artwork in its own right. It consists of a red cutout form resembling a cactus flower whose coiling roots are surrounded by small fossils. The bare branches assembled around it have been cut out of a photograph of bits of hair and dust. The composition exudes a sense of growth that is at once organic and ornamental.

In an adjacent print, a cyclamen plant is composed of differently textured leaves, petals, and roots, whose precisely delineated contours make them appear almost like a drawing. Shells and coral-like forms surround another one of these plants, whose roots dangle in mid-air. As a whole, the plants appear as carefully wrought, fabricated assemblages rather than natural forms. Their delicate, almost transparent surfaces and the play between matter and void resemble patterns embroidered out of lace.

These intertwining, proliferating forms have a fascinating, dream-like quality. "Naturalia," a series of smaller prints scanned into a computer and then printed and mounted on aluminum are dominated by a palette of violent and aquamarine against a black ground. Here the plants, which appear from afar to be paintings, appear as fantastical, artificial complexes composed of layered elements. These lovely specimens possess a jewel-like, almost evanescent quality, as if they were in danger of fading away.

Maria Martinez-Cañas, "Hortus & Naturalia" at Julie Saul Gallery until January 11 (535 West 22 Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-627-2410). Prices: \$2,100-\$5,000.