

**Laura Findlay: The Necromancer's Garden
at Norberg Hall, Calgary, Jan 22- Mar 5 2022**

Midway through Rebecca Solnit's new book, *Orwell's Roses*, is a chapter on gardens and enclosures. "A garden is an ideal version of nature filtered through a particular culture," she writes, "whether it's as formal as a Japanese rock and sand garden or an Islamic paradise garden with a central fountain—or as haphazard as a lot of ordinary private gardens are, arising as they do from limited space, time, budget, and planning." Solnit continues, "A garden is what you want (and can manage and afford), and what you want is who you are, and who you are is always a political and cultural question."

That's a fundamental perspective worth keeping in mind when considering Laura Findlay's latest gathering of paintings, *The Necromancer's Garden*. Ranging in size and scale with varying placements on the gallery walls, Findlay's paintings capture fragments of a cultivated natural order in flux. It's a framework of renewal, adaptation, fragility, resilience—a nested clutch of robin's eggs, the sprouting buds of a rose bush in bloom, the fruit-laden branches of an apple tree, the dusk silhouette of a spider's web—rendered in the hard-flash chiaroscuro of Findlay's photographic references. There's an undeniable sense of beauty and pleasure here, but something more intimate and complex lurks beneath the surface. Gardens are, after all, also sites of memory: from season to season, year to year, a garden's rhythm—its inherent generative impulse of growth and decay—is at once determined by but also extends beyond a "natural order." Any one of Findlay's tightly cropped, snapshot views, meticulously composed through an additive/subtractive balance of applying then selectively thinning pigments, offer fleeting narrative cues where the personal and, if Solnit is right, the political and cultural converge. This is the garden as allegory, a conjuror's inventory of memento mori, of choices made and not made, where what is gained and what is lost is for each of us as unpredictable as it is inevitable.

Text by Bryne McLaughlin