

Interview

# FRANCESCA GABBIANI

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Photography Hilary Walsh

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“Here comes Francesca and her elaborate entrances into other worlds,” pronounces artist Ed Ruscha. Clearly the iconic L.A. painter has spent some time standing in front of Francesca Gabbiani’s work. “Up close, the shadows let you know that these are works made of cut-out paper, and all the shadows are in the right places.” Ruscha is referring to the 40-year-old Gabbiani’s latest series, where meticulously cut paper forms are assembled like wreaths around disturbingly blank black ovals. “I love the frames of rococo mirrors,” Gabbiani explains. “My pieces are like black mirrors that absorb you, but actually when you frame them behind glass, you do find your reflection there.” The imagery the artist uses to decorate these reflective black voids is heavily gothic, like opening the prop closet from a Grimm’s fairy tale—mushrooms, flowers, opium leaves, owls, snakes, flies, possessed dogs, and haunted staircases swirl around each other. “I’m very inspired by the idea of the cursed poet,” she says. “And, of course, Edgar Allan Poe, Alice in Wonderland, even films like Pan’s Labyrinth [2006].” This isn’t the first time Gabbiani has fallen for the creepier side of cinema. A previous series of paper works concentrated on interior scenes loosely taken from ’60s and ’70s Italian horror films like those of Dario Argento, and the carpeted hotel hallways from Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980). “Interiors and mirrors are very similar,” Gabbiani says. “At first they are very easy pictures to look at. But the more you stare, the more an uneasiness settles in. It’s funny—I’m very inspired by horror movies, but film really only entered my work when I moved to Los Angeles.” Born in Canada to an Italian father and a French mother, Gabbiani grew up in Geneva, Switzerland, where she studied art. In fact, while a student, she once saw a Ruscha show and was so impressed by his brushstrokes that she ran home to try to copy them (little did she know, Ruscha used an airbrush). Then, by utter coincidence, a few years after she moved to L.A., she met, fell in love with, and married Ruscha’s son (Edward “Eddie” Ruscha, Jr.). One of her next projects involves paper cut-outs constructed into a giant fire. It’s a subject that her father-in-law once painted just as ominously.

