

Spatial existences: the role of space in the works of artist Gabrielle Garland

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In her artistic research, artist Gabrielle Garland explores the concept of space as a fundamental dimension of human existence, not limiting herself to considering it as a simple container of objects or an abstract reality. For her, space reveals itself as a field of infinite possibilities, a place where individuals unfold, leave traces of themselves and contribute to building the conditions for a universal existence. In her view, physical space represents much more than a simple surface on which things are deposited. It is the theatre of human relationships, of traces left over time and of imprints that contribute to defining the identity of the individual. Every gesture, every mark engraved on the wall, every trace on the ground becomes an act of self-definition, a way of leaving an imprint that speaks of oneself in the great fabric of history. And in this dynamic, leaving traces becomes an act of will, a way of transforming a void into a shared heritage, a concrete expression of the desire for existence and continuity.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an artist? Was there a decisive moment, or was it a gradual realization?

My parents are artists and met at Herron School of Art and Design (then married, moved to New York City and had me), so art supplies were always available! I have been painting and creating ever since I can remember. I painted through my childhood, my teen modeling years, all the way through to the present. I cannot imagine a time that I would not be making something!

Which techniques do you currently prefer and why? Are there any tools or materials that you have revolutionized over time?

I like to say the structural theme of my work is a kind of virtual collage which allows many different systems of order to exist in a single piece. (Though I do not use a computer to create any sort of preliminary images for my paintings.) I include the third dimension by sculpting forms out of the paint.

This series of paintings demanded a palette of intense colors. I wanted to take control of color in the same way I do with the framing and structure of a painting. Outdoors I simply explore urban and suburban landscapes from the public domain—city streets, sidewalks, from other built structures. Spaces themselves are my primary source material; my photos the secondary. My camera documents these spaces to capture a multitude of viewpoints and levels of detail.



Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

—Blanche DuBois, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), 2025,

Acrylic, oil, and glitter on canvas, 48 x 48 inches.

I then compose this material in a kind of painted assemblage. I select particular elements and transform them, intensify them:

- I selectively combine different viewpoints
- I emphasize specific details and materials, and leave others out
- I combine things from different photographs; I have a separate series of images of front doors taken from different times of day.



*It would seem that you have no explanation for what you have done.
You have shed the blood of so many Christian souls, and yet... before
me now, all I see is a... young and vain and foolish man so easily riled, so
easily beguiled. — Catherine, The King (2019), 2025, Acrylic on canvas,
36 x 36 inches.*

What themes recur in your practice and why?

I am looking for and intensifying the details and conditions that mark human habitation. In college (and throughout grad school) and for a few years after, I had an ongoing series called Artists' Spaces. A particular focus of mine is space activated by art, and the Artists' Spaces series was created to highlight that, especially art inside the home. I focused on only artists' spaces by photographing the living spaces of members of the Chicago and New York art community and used the images as the subject matter for my paintings.

A few of the people represented in this series include Michelle Grabner, Mickalene Thomas, Peter Halley, Izhar Patkin and Laura Letinsky. As time went on it became more difficult to get acquaintances to agree to let me photograph their space or to even send me a few snapshots, so the series ended. The main theme of my work explores the ways we inhabit domestic space. Inside or out, all of my portraits may be devoid of human form, but their existence is marked by the evidence of their properties.

How does observation of everyday life transform into visual imagination in your work?

Memory plays a crucial role in my creative process. My photographs are not intended to document a space; rather, I use them to remind myself of my personal experience within that space. When I incorporate existing photographs, they must clearly map out the environment for me—like a blueprint—so I can imagine myself there and grasp the space as a whole. I appreciate Richard Serra's quote: "If one works for several days continuously in a space, one becomes aware of how people transverse that space, how the light appears in that space, how the entrances and exits of that space are being used, whether it is a transitory space or a gathering space." I think about this insight often, especially when working with found photos, because over time, new details gradually emerge and reveal themselves.

In your series of houses, the architecture seems to defy the laws of gravity and stability. What is the metaphorical "gravity" that you are trying to question?

My work is inherently subjective. As a phenomenologist, I am fascinated by the lived experience of spatial order. I challenge traditional rules of perspective to express my perception of space. While these rules produce an objective depiction, they often fail to convey how we truly experience space. In reality, we never perceive space from a fixed vantage point; instead, we move, change our focus, and recall particular features that stand out to us among the surrounding environment.

Your works seem to establish a threshold between clarity and ambiguity; what do you see in contemporary human beings? Why is this ambiguity necessary to describe humanity?

Thank you so much! I want the paintings to be ambiguous they show that our ideas of order and disorder are subjective. If we see them as rural homes, they seem rustic, appealing. When we realize they are the remains of a city that was once vibrant, and is now impoverished, they can become dangerous, menacing. (We also see the dogs very differently if they are wild or domesticated.)

We can appreciate whole neighborhoods and houses for a kind of natural beauty, but I do not want to forget the history, the forces, and the lives that were and are involved. I have no memory of these spaces, just like I have no memories or knowledge of the people who reside in them, so in a sense I am freer to interpret and transform them. I pass no judgement; I love all the ways we claim and define our homes. It is a form of artistic expression. The quotes are a way to hint at how I am thinking. To suggest that someone might have just stepped out of the frame. I would like my audience to imagine whomever they wish (or not).



Good morning, winner. Take a deep breath. Good. You're ready to dominate this day. —Motivational Voice, Booksmart (2019), 2024, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches.



I'm glad he's single because I'm going to climb that like a tree. — Megan, Bridesmaids (2011), 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches.

The Miles McEnery Gallery in New York is hosting a solo exhibition of yours entitled: "I'll Get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too"; open until 25 October 2025. What is the meaning of this title?

Finding and making a home for ourselves seems to be more of a challenge everywhere for many reasons. Like the quote at the beginning of the movie, Wizard of Oz, we know there's incredible life-threatening danger ahead. But yet, like Dorothy, we try to persevere. It is in our nature to survive. And, we are keeping our little dogs safe with us, too!