

Art in America

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Barbara Bloom at Tracy Williams

For her first exhibition at Tracy Williams, Barbara Bloom related her work to the gallery's architecture (which is old-fashioned and residential), in keeping with her ongoing interest in the properties of absence and the resonance of detail. In *Absence-Presence* (2006), crisp, readable shadows served as a key link in a conversation among objects, their representations (in the form of framed and matted photographs installed on the downstairs room's far wall) and rectangular fields of latex paint on the near wall, each equivalent in color and dimensions to the corresponding mat on the opposite wall. Separating these paint rectangles from the objects and photos was a floor-to-ceiling scrim that bisecting the gallery lengthwise. A low platform running along the bottom of the scrim supported a variety of metal stands, including an office stool on casters, a music stand, a ringed stand minus its birdcage, an artist's easel, a wrought-iron plant stand, a weathervane, a photographer's umbrella stand and a fiberglass planter. All were brightly lighted from above and cast crisp silhouettes.



For Bloom, the photographic image is never far from view. The stool appeared as a detail in a photograph of a seated marble figure whose missing limbs were replaced by metal rods; the mat is an olive green. On the far side of the scrim, where the photograph was not visible, it was evoked by its matching rectangle. Next, the music stand faced a framed sheet of musical notations matted in gray, figured with small prints of a doubled woman at rest in antique ruins; on the far wall was a painted rectangle in the same shade of gray as the mat. Each of the elements on the platform was elaborated in similar fashion, continually revealing nuance and engaged wit.

Among equally compelling works upstairs, *Hand in Glove* (2007) offered a more tightly constructed narrative of evocative absence. A roughly 26 ¼ -by-29-inch frame contained two chromogenic prints, accompanied by a legend on the wall nearby. One photograph showed a bride, veiled according to Pakistani tradition and - again by tradition - seen by her husband only in a mirror, represented here by small round mirrors incorporated into elaborate handmade fabric behind the photo. The other printed image, of a glove, was wrapped in vellumlike paper sealed at the top by the insignia of the hand. A wall text accompanying the two photos associated the glove with a Dutch colonial custom that permitted couples to marry while separated; here, one of the partners was in Holland and the other in Indonesia. Separated by half the world, each would hold a glove and speak the vows.

- Edward Leffingwell