

GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN

Barbara Bloom: Present

October 30 – December 23, 2010

Barbara Bloom's interests turn toward the ways in which we individually and collectively bestow meaning and value on objects. In her latest works for "PRESENT" she continues this exploration, focusing on the realm of gifts. Bloom asks us to note the similarities and differences the acts of giving and receiving gifts, and the practices of showing and apprehending art.

Most anthropological and theoretical writing on gift exchange, discuss the giving, receiving and returning gifts. These acts, steeped in bonds between people, can be understood as moral, economic, political, kinship-oriented, legal, mythological, religious, magical, practical, personal and social. The gift is seen as more than a simple commodity or memento changing hands, it metonymically (as part for whole) stands for every aspect of the society it is part of.

We are familiar with the notion of the "gift" of looking at art as potentially spiritual experience. We stare awe struck at these images/objects, and receive their enlightenment. We comfortably think of artists as possessing a "gift" within themselves that must be passed on to the world.

Bloom's practice as an artist has brushed shoulders with these issues, but these are not the aspects of gifts that most occupies her. The problem at hand might be described like this:

In giving a gift to a friend, there can be many subtle and implied references to things one know about that person: His/her favorite colors, tastes, writers, etc. The gift can allude to a conversation had, some shared secret, some moment from a common past. The references to these matters can be subtle and elegant, filled with innuendo... the friend can be relied upon to fill in the blanks.

When making and showing an artwork, the object is not intended for a single viewer but for a larger audience. The artist cannot rely on shared knowledge or memory with the audience. All references must be contained in the work itself, or in the information told, written (leaked) about the work. One hopes to avoid the lowest common denominator, there is a desire for subtlety and the knowledge that there is point at which the work becomes opaque. Or as Julian Barnes writes in *Flaubert's Parrot*, "How submerged does a reference have to be before it drowns?"

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Bloom asks us:

Can we conceive of positioning of an object as an intermediary, a messenger, an ambassador between humans?

Could we shift our focus from the thing, to the *apprehension* of the object by its presenter and recipient, and nature of its *passage* from the presenter to its recipient?

Can we call wrapping the clothing of a gift, its' protection and image to the world?

Can the wrapping be the gift, (can the box be the artwork)?

Should we keep in mind that "Gift" in German means "Poison?"

In the exhibition "PRESENT" the objects take these various forms:

Something for You

The wrappings left after the opening of a private gift to an unknown and dear recipient

A token of gratitude, homage for the insight of a renowned individual

A fictitious gift from an infamous woman to her famous man

An equal exchange of between two famous lovers

An offering to the spirits of someone dead

The return of thanks from each and everyone one of us to him

A receptacle of rumor, speculation, and gossip about what the box could contain, for whom it is intended

A notorious secret ring of gratitude

The possibility for act of charity

a little something

In Burma, we visited Bagan and it's vast and plateau with thousands of pagodas and temples. The barren beauty of place and the summer heat took your breath away. As we went to one after another temple, their grounds were filled with children greeting us by shouting out "Present" Present."

The word resounded with both a request for a small token from us (baksheesh) and the overwhelming announcement that we were there together, sharing that particular moment – the Present.