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Art in Review

Barbara Bloom - 'The French Diplomat's Office'

By GRACE GLUECK

A watercolor picked up at a Paris flea market has inspired this low-key but provocative installation, whose Minimal spareness leaves ample room for inference. A replica of the watercolor, hung on the wall, depicts a suavely sumptuous office interior presumably rendered by a decorator. Barbara Bloom has translated the rug and the walls into the here and now, so to speak. She has painted abstract versions -- sans decorative moldings -- of the walls in the same hues as the watercolor, and placed a wool rug on the gallery's floor that suggests the arrangement of furniture in the painting merely by darker areas of color.

A confused trail of woven footprints, a man's and a woman's, also appear on the rug, evoking the imagined movements of a couple -- the French diplomat and a female companion? -- around the room. At times the footprints meet before various pieces of "furniture," including a couch.

A schmaltzy soundtrack, a mix of French movie music and what might be noises in the room, made by Ms. Bloom with the artist and composer Christian Marclay, accompanies the installation.

The artist acknowledges her admiration of the "anti-novel" French authors and filmmakers of the 1960's, in which absence evokes presence and ambiguity is all. She has done well by them.

Also on view are a group of Ms. Bloom's photographic studies of how cultural artifacts are presented. In them, she places frames around jewelry and mannequins' legs displayed in store windows, and cuts up paintings by Vermeer and a little-known 17th-century English painter, David Bailly. Her intentions here are harder to read.

Much clearer is a separate work based on Alfred Hitchcock's 1964 film "Marnie." A big color photograph of a gloved hand turning the combination lock of a safe swings out from the wall to reveal an actual safe behind it. Illusion, meet Reality.

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