

# THE NEW YORKER

## As It Were . . . So to Speak: A Museum Collection in Dialogue with Barbara Bloom

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Scent, in the Jewish tradition, is a gateway to the soul. In this beautiful exhibition, a selection of spice containers stand in for historical figures (including Marilyn Monroe and Vladimir Nabokov) who had the gift of synesthesia. They are just a few of the two hundred and sixty-seven domestic objects chosen by the whip-smart New York conceptualist from the museum's vast collection. (One standout is a nineteenth-century game based on the Dreyfus affair.) Inspired by scholars' commentaries on the Talmud—conversations across generations—Bloom uses the objects to reflect on eclectic subjects in essays displayed in the form of open books. Marriage contracts lead to musings on the Song of Songs as it relates to the lyrics of Leonard Cohen; drinking glasses spark an interest in the origin of toasts. The items are installed in sculptural tableaux that suggest furniture and hint at the museum's past life as a grand family mansion. The fissures that divide history and memory have long obsessed Bloom, who has a distinctly literary approach to visual art. By looking at the overlooked—privileging the personal and anecdotal over the public and official—Bloom does more than search for lost time; she makes us feel as if we've found it along with her. Through Aug. 4.