



Barbara Bloom "Takes One to Know One"

by Joshua Mack
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Barbara Bloom's conceptually nuanced show plumbs the capacity of art to convey complex and often contradictory meanings. In *Girls' Footprints*, Bloom's photograph of children playing hangs above a rectangle of gray carpet. Footprints in the rug correspond to some, but not all, of the feet in the photograph. Any attempt to reconcile the two is a mind teaser: It conveys both simultaneity and asynchrony.

Hand in Glove pairs a photograph of gloves and a portrait of a bride gazing at her reflection. According to accompanying text, the first image refers to the Dutch colonial practice of "marriage in absentia," in which gloves were substituted for the missing spouse; the second, to a Pakistani custom that calls for the groom to catch the first glimpses of his new wife in a mirror.

By contrasting these images, Bloom raises issues of substitution and representation, concepts that are explored further in the most ambitious work on display, the room-sized installation *Absence Presence*. Eight objects – among them a stool, a music stand and a lightning rod – are lined up behind a translucent scrim onto which they cast stark shadows. Photographs on a wall near the objects depict related items, while rectangles the size of the pictures are painted ("framed") on the wall across from the scrim. The juxtaposition lets you ponder a number of dialects: dimensionality and flatness, representation and abstraction, presence and absence.

Bloom has covered this territory deftly for more than two decades. If her current show lacks substantial innovation, its complexity nevertheless reinforces her position as an artist of deep thought and real accomplishment.

