



Barbara Bloom, “Present”

The artist meditates on giving and getting.

by Claire Barliant

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Barbara Bloom is known for smart, conceptual installations that mock fine taste and effete dilettantism, even while acknowledging the seductive charms of high culture. Her current show, which inaugurates Tracy Williams’s new space, takes a more generous tack. Titled “Present,” the exhibition consists of ten mixed-media works that function as gifts, not least of all to the viewer. Some gifts are real, such as a great mix-CD, a copy of which is bestowed upon each gallerygoer. Other gifts are fictitious, like the exchange of a key and a doorknob between literary lovers Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, a couple for 50 years who never made the leap to cohabitation. A few are symbolic, such as those meant for other artists. A visually striking and sonically gorgeous piece made for the artist Allan McCollum is composed of 38 wineglasses that resonate when viewers pass their hands over them. In keeping with McCollum’s practice of making unique objects that look like they were mass-produced, each glass is different.

Part of the appeal of the work is that every piece tells a story, whether about icons such as Marilyn Monroe and Sigmund Freud, or of Bloom’s own life. The artist’s nine-year-old daughter, MaHong, received a bicycle that came in a box wrapped in paper printed with personally relevant images, such as MaHong’s dental records. Judging from the happy remnants of the package shown here, the gift looks like it was well received.