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## Barbara Bloom D

## Role Play

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I would like to call attention to this small (in physical scale) exhibition, as it might present an interesting counterpart to large-scale shows: *Revised Evidence: Vladimir Nabokov's Collection of Inscriptions, Annotations, Corrections, and Butterfly Descriptions*, curated by me at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, New York, in 1999.

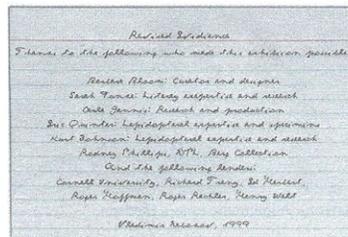
A more welcome phone call is hardly conceivable than the one I received from Glenn Horowitz. He was inviting me to curate and design an exhibition incorporating a collection of hundreds of Vladimir Nabokov's own books from his private library, to coincide with the centenary of the writer's birth.

It felt like I had died and gone to heaven. Here was an opportunity to make an intricate, highly detailed, and researched exhibition about and tribute to my favorite author. The show would be geared toward an audience who was familiar with and interested in Nabokov's work, fans who could be counted on to read the fine print and appreciate innuendo.

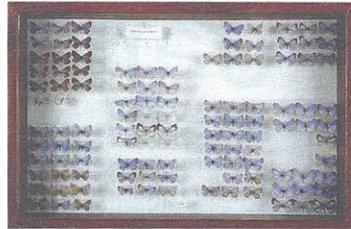
In his quasi-autobiography, *Speak Memory*, Nabokov wrote, "There is, it would seem, in the dimensional scale of the world, a kind of delicate meeting place between imagination and knowledge, a point, arrived at by diminishing large things and enlarging small ones that is intrinsically artistic." He was the master of the minuscule and the particular, the perfect telling detail through which everything else comes into focus. This trait was critical in his writings as well as in his lepidoptery, his framed study of butterflies and moths.

And so I set about to create for the visiting viewer/reader the odd sensation of being inside Nabokov's brain, where various passions - for writing and language, for the collection and study of butterflies, for the doubling and doppelgangers, for history, and for his wife - mingle, illuminate, and incite one another. It was a setting in which it was all in the details. There was no possibility of a quick read, and slow attention was rewarded. Like specimens under glass, there were displays of books, and butterflies, snippets of Nabokov texts, and tiny photographs doubled into doubled into winglike symmetry. They were accompanied by annotations, labels, inscriptions, corrections, notecards, and butterfly drawings. The worlds of writing and taxonomy combined and coexisted, so that first-edition books were coupled with butterfly labels, and months were pinned on top of diary entries.

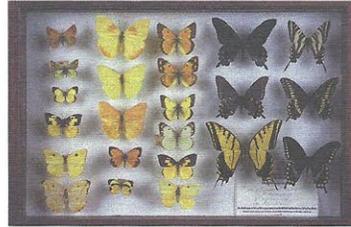
This exhibition was probably most comprehensible when viewed with a metaphorical magnifying glass, scrutinizing with an intensity that Nabokov could appreciate. It hopefully precipitated a reading or rereading of the author's works, and perhaps thinking of the pages of Nabokov's open books as the wings of butterflies.



Index cards were used to annotate the exhibition. They contained notes from the author, excerpts from his writings, all written in a digital font of Nabokov's handwriting. By adopting the same index card format Nabokov used to write his books, and by using only quotes from the author as accompanying text and labels, it made for a sense that he was there overseeing, commenting, narrating.



Entomological case containing specimens of Karner blues (*Lycaeids Melissa Samuel's*), the species studied and first described by Nabokov.



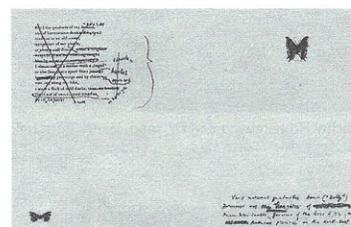
Entomological case containing specimens of butterflies that Nabokov described in various books as having been the species he collected as a child in Russia.



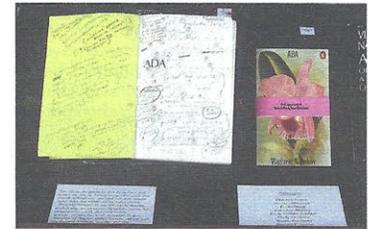
Entomological case with doubled and pinned butterfly-sized photographs of Nabokov either writing or reading. Each is labeled with a different pseudonym used by the author: Vladimir Sirkin, Vasily Shiskov, Vivian Darkbloom, Dorian Vivacom, etc. Nabokov's fascination with twinning, doubling, mimicry, and impersonation is well documented.



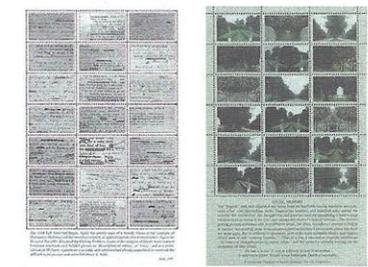
Entomological case with doubled, folded and pinned miniatures of various covers of *Lolita*. In the background is Nabokov's diary from September 18, 1954, with a memo (to whom?) about the whereabouts of the manuscript of *Lolita* (in locked table in office key in small box with flowers on lid - presumably peonies). At this stage he planned to publish the book pseudonymously and was apprehensive that someone might find it.



Detail of the wallpaper that covered the walls of the exhibition space, the pattern of which was made up of Nabokov's butterfly drawings, snippets of annotated text, corrected copy, deletions and additions.

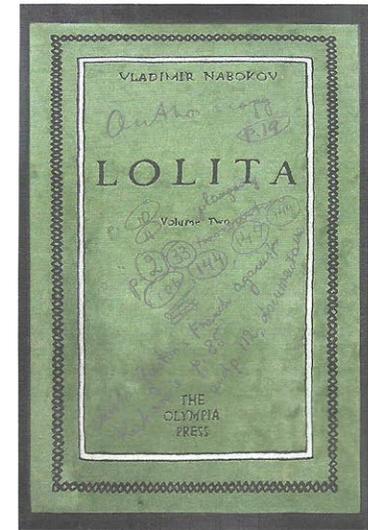


Title page of *Ada* filed with notes and page numbers referring to Vladimir Nabokov's many corrections to be found in the volume.



Left - Commemorative stamps of corrections found in various Nabokov volumes.

Right - Commemorative stamps of various permutations of parks of remembered, re-remembered, and misremembered gardens in *Speak Memory*. They are possible depictions of what Nabokov called "Unreal Estate."



Many rare editions of Nabokov's *Lolita*, with a wide variety of book covers in languages including Swahili and Bengali, were shown in a room in which there was a carpet depicting the author's own heavily annotated copy of the first edition of *Lolita*.

All images from *Revised Evidence: Vladimir Nabokov's Collection of Inscriptions, Annotations, Corrections, and Butterfly Descriptions*, curated by Barbara Bloom at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, New York, 1999. Courtesy: Barbara Bloom

**Barbara Bloom** is an artist who works in a variety of media. Her work rarely concerns itself with single objects or images. Rather, there is a fascination with the relationships between objects or images - and the meanings implicit in their placement and combination. Though enthusiastically visual, her work stems more from the traditions of literature than it does from those painting or sculpture. She has said, "I am probably a novelist, but somehow ended up standing in the wrong line, and inadvertently 'signed up' to be a visual artist."