The Weather
Barbara Bloom

November 5, 2016 - January 7, 2017
Capitain Petzel    Karl-Marx-Allee 45    10178 Berlin
Absence and its depiction has been an ongoing theme of exploration in the work of Barbara Bloom. Fingerprints, lipstick traces, watermarks, tea stains, footprints, invisible texts, erasures, cross-outs, Braille, and ellipses… are her favored forms and objects. These flirtations between visibility and invisibility have been frequent presences in her work.

Another equally strong aspect of Bloom’s work has been its relationship to literature. She uses books as carriers of meaning, uses texts from favorite authors, and often suggests implied narratives. Bloom has often said that she was meant to be a writer, probably a novelist, but somehow ended up standing in the wrong line (and inadvertently ‘signed up’ to be a visual artist).

The Literary and the Absent come together in Bloom’s latest exhibition The Weather. Hovering in varying heights above the floor are carpets, each in a subtle shade of gray-green-blue. The carpets have raised-dot patterns forming texts in Braille.

It seemed to Bloom that the texts should be descriptive ones, as this would accentuate the complexity and melancholy in “reading” the work. A blind person would not be able to see what was being described, and a sighted person cannot read the Braille. For the texts Bloom settled on descriptions of the weather, as weather is something we all can imagine. And there is a vast variety in styles of description of the weather.

Eight carpets are hovering on platforms at various heights above the floor, each in a different hue reminiscent of clouds and sky, and each with a different text about the weather. The walls are painted only part way with a gray-green-blue color, so that one has a sensation vaguely reminiscent of flying above, and looking down at the clouds and land below.

1

For example, the wind has its reasons. We just don’t notice as we go about our lives. But then, at some point, we are made to notice. The wind envelopes you with a certain purpose in mind, and it rocks you. The wind knows everything that’s inside you… From top to bottom. It only occurs to us at certain times. And all we can do is go with those things. As we take them in, we survive, and deepen.

(Haruki Murakami, The Kidney-Shaped Stone That Moves Every Day)

2

It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight… It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill… It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

(James Joyce, Dubliners)

3

Under a sky of flawless blue; during the twelve days… there has not been a single cloud nor the slightest diminution of sunshine… the weather has been of crystalline clearness for the last two months. I am neither sad nor cheerful; the air here fills one with a kind of vague excitement and induces a state as far removed from cheerfulness as it is from sorrow; perhaps it is happiness.

(André Gide, The Immoralist)
There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen.

(Raymond Chandler, *Red Wind*)

All the sky to the north had darkened and the spare terrain they trod had turned a neuter gray as far as the eye could see... The storm front towered above and the wind was cool... Shrouded in the black thunderheads the distant lightning glowed mutely like welding seen through foundry smoke. As if repairs were under way at some flawed place in the iron dark of the world.

(Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*)

There was no moon. The sky above our heads was inky black. But the sky on the horizon was not dark at all. It was shot with crimson, like a splash of blood. And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea.

(Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*)

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(Raymond Chandler, *Red Wind*)

It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days. There were periods of drizzle ... but the people soon grew accustomed to interpret the pauses as a sign of redoubled rain. The sky crumbled into a set of destructive storms and out of the north came hurricanes that scattered roofs about and knocked down walls and uprooted every last plant of the banana groves.

(Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred years of Solitude*)

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Temperature 66 °F
Growing Degree Days 16 (Base 50)
Humidity 73%
Precipitation 0.00 in
Sea Level Pressure 29.83 in
Wind Speed 4 mph (SW)
Visibility 8.0 miles
Conditions Calm

(Weather Statistics at the moment of Barbara Bloom's birth: Los Angeles, July 11, 1951 2:00 AM (PDT))
Each of the seven *Works for the Blind*, contains a text about the nature of seeing. The text is used once in Braille typed over an image, and once – the size of a postage stamp – in five point type printed white on black. Accompanying each text is a photograph of an illusion – a magician levitating a matchbook, a UFO landing, an egg floating in midair. The pictures and the texts all speak to us of the difficulty of seeing things for what they are, but very few people will be able to make sense of both. Sighted people can see the illusionary photograph (though not how the illusion is accomplished), but most will only be able to squint and guess at the too-small text. The blind will be able to read the text (the plexiglass is cut away over the Braille so it can be touched), but unable to see the photograph. The one thing that is clear to all is that everyone is blinded.

One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon’s youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: “I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.” Sometimes I would mention this amazement, but since no one seemed to share it, nor even to understand it (life consists of these little touches of solitude) I forgot about it.

(Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*)

I saw in a photograph a boy with slicked-back blond hair and a dirty light-coloured jacket, and a man with dark hair, standing in front of machine which was made in part of castings painted black, and in part of smooth axles, gears, etc., and next to it a grating made of light galvanized wire. The finished iron parts were iron-coloured, the boy’s hair as blond, the castings black, the grating as zinc-coloured, despite the fact that everything was depicted simply in lighter and darker shades of the photographic paper.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*)

Always distrust a man who looks you in the eye. He wants to prevent you from seeing something. Look for it.

(Dorothy L. Sayers, *Strong Poison*)

Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is, is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth.

(Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*)

Consider that things can be reflected in a smooth white surface in such a way that their reflections seem to lie behind the surface and in a certain sense are seen through it.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*)

Golden is a surface colour.

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Couldn’t a member of tribe of colour-blind people get the idea of imagining a strange sort of human being (whom we would call “normally sighted”)? Couldn’t he, for example, portray such a normally sighted person on the stage? In the same way as he is able to portray someone who has the gift of prophecy without having it himself. It’s at least conceivable.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*)

Fingerprints, lipstick traces, watermarks, tea stains, footprints, etc., and next to it a grating made of light galvanized wire. The finished iron parts were iron-coloured, the boy’s hair as blond, the castings black, the grating as zinc-coloured, despite the fact that everything was depicted simply in lighter and darker shades of the photographic paper.

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