

JENNY PERLIN: GALLERY 400

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The raspy clackety-clack of 16 mm cine projectors is already a poignant and wistful sound, and this exhibition of recent films and drawings by Jenny Perlin included four such projectors running nonstop. One of them showed *Washing*, 2002, a grainy, ten-second silent black-and-white loop of the artist washing a window in her Brooklyn studio, the Manhattan skyline visible outside. Poignant and wistful certainly but melancholic and forlorn to boot, the repetitive act of stroking the window through which Manhattan beckons seems an act of obeisance, an acknowledgment of the fractious relationship between Manhattan and Brooklyn, a paeon to the city just an arm's reach away, a wish to serve and groom it. Of course, that skyline was radically transfigured just before 2002, and washing its vista also suggested a gesture of healing, of coaxing it back to life.

Some of the mundane realities of life in New York in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 also make up part of *Rorschach*, 2002, one of three hand-drawn animated 16 mm films shown here. Employing traditional stop-motion animation, the artist uses a 16 mm cine camera to photograph and rephotograph a sheet of paper as she gradually works up a drawing. When these individual frames of film are shown in sequence, the drawing seems to come to life before our eyes. Many of the several-second vignettes of which *Rorschach* is composed are slavishly copied ephemera such as computerized receipts, immigration questionnaires, and fortune-cookie aphorisms. Perlin's renderings of food receipts from September 18 and September 21, 2001, and the receipt headed I [love] NEW YORK from October 21, 2001, all become, through their very banality, powerful mementos.

Perlin is adept at excavating the paper trail we leave behind us every day--a true vernacular--and watching a computerized receipt for a purchase of Chinese note cards form itself before us immerses us in the ubiquity of the generic and the hidden implications of the mundane. The exhibition is titled "A worry-free life or your money back," and while we're unlikely to receive either one, the wish feels curiously soothing. *Sight Reading*, 2004, is a three-channel video projection, each image showing a skilled musician seated at the same piano at different moments, playing Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor for the first time. It is mesmerizing to watch music being translated into physical action, creation in real time. Each musician approaches the piece slightly differently, and Perlin has edited the film so that if a pianist makes a mistake, his or her projection disappears for a few moments. These stops and starts are not oblitative punishment; rather, they show knowledge being earned, as each pianist communes with the composer, learning intricacies and replaying tough passages, less in a performative mode than in intense and solipsistic study. This is what Perlin is most intrigued by: our negotiation with the multiple languages that perpetually surround us. It is a process that may be clumsy or absurd, poetic or revelatory, but is most often awkward and incomplete, as we sight-read every step of the way.

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