

# Nancy Lorenz

May 14– June 29, 2013

**MORGAN LEHMAN**

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# Nancy Lorenz

— Geoffrey Young

In rap parlance, to “represent” means to show respect whence you came (family and neighborhood), to assert yourself in your milieu (to bring what you got), to be alive in the moment, a player.

Representation in painting has a lengthy, complex history, as well, from the Greek ideal of likeness and verisimilitude on the one hand, to more recent theoretical categories (an abstract painter “represents” the genre of abstraction) on the other. But it too requires that the artist bring what she has, asserting herself, respecting tradition but not being limited by it, making the essential moves as witness, observer, transformer. Artists are avatars of crucial information.

Now let’s introduce the weather. Surrounding us, of interest to all, weather can be subject and setting, as well as a magnet for adjectives—clear, cool, stormy, damp, serene, etc. Like TV, weather obliges a keen observer by always having something on.

Nancy Lorenz’s favorite channel is Storm.

If conditions are inescapable, what can we make of them?

On three separate occasions, during summer months, Lorenz has traveled to and stayed at a coastal spot in Ireland. Called Cill Rialaig, in Ballinskelligs, County Kerry, Ireland, she installs herself in a cottage on a rocky cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean for one to three weeks. It’s always raining, she says. Most

nights she builds a peat fire. And in the morning she likes to draw with the ashes.

Eager to capture the elemental conditions there, she observes squalls, windy tumult, the shifting angles of slant rain. She is attentive, as well, to the aery, infinitely mercurial fact of light reflected on water. Not as theory (Futurism's interest in motion is not what she is quoting, or interested in documenting), but as witness. "Here I am," her quick-sketches drawings say. "This is what I see." A storm is raging, the ocean pounded by rain, pelted by squalls, its wind-whipped surface a broken mirror.

From her perch overlooking the action Lorenz makes her marks. Sometimes sea-birds, called gannets, like vectors, dive into the ocean, fishing. The straight lines their descending bodies make end abruptly, as if into the water they've gone. With ashes, with colored pencil, or with watercolor, the hand of the artist tries to keep up with her overwhelmed eye.

Lorenz catches these moments in drawings that amass energy and density. Her gestural repetition creates precision-tuned spacing. She sees natural phenomena as the quicksilver temporal events that they are, as well as the source of potential compositions. Intermittent horizon lines, as if seen through fog, add their compositional voice to her strict economy.

These drawings, the first responders, are just the beginning, however. Once back in the studio, they undergo a long and curious transformation into paintings. The mark-making precision in the drawings is changed from spontaneous hand to laborious cut and paste of exotic materials. Thin strips of mother-of-pearl, of shell, are incised into grounds of silver or gold leaf, these new lines substituting faithfully for the lines in her initial drawings. She honors those drawn lines by preserving their exact shape, width, length, and location.

But these new lines don't just substitute for the originals, they alter reality. They slow everything down by their exacting methodology. They analyze, the better to surprise. And as they do, their surface sheen—their tonal specificity—begins to have the capacity to convey the retinal experience of the weather conditions she's concerned to celebrate. Things begin to shimmer as we move around them. These Lorenz works declare for, they *represent* the momentary apprehension of the ceaseless roiling of natural elements. Sometimes an artist has to go a long way out of the way, to come back a short way correctly, as Edward Albee wrote, a million years ago.

If along the way a viewer is reminded of a scribbler like Twombly or of a tantrum-thrower like Arnulf Rainer, so be it. Think Art Brut, Fontana's rupture, Celmins's patience, Whistler's fog. Lorenz operates within a tiny quadrant of Turner's operatic British fleet, but for a purpose altogether less imperialistic. And what of Tiffany's luxurious constructs, Warhol's silver period, or the impeccable divisions in Agnes Martin's scrupulous procedures?

Not mirrors (though gold and silver leaf do reflect), and not windows (we're not looking through anything but at the thing itself), Lorenz's phenomenology is all art, even if it owes its soul to worldly beauty. The passing moment succumbs to her seduction, or vice versa.

Among these new works there is the use of a surprising material: corrugated cardboard. Not that this material looks all that much like cardboard when Lorenz gets done with it, in most instances, but cardboard it is. She has a wonderful way with its undulating surface, finding a way to allow its ribbed structure to contribute to the feeling of oceanic space, to suggest a kind of slo-mo rippling as far as the eye can see. She gouges, tears, peels, and violates this cardboard in the interest of conveying the whiplash thrashing of the elements, as well as the dark depths below surface sheen. Judiciously covered with layers of some particular color of paint, these works become dazzling embodiments of storm as aesthetic experience.

The absence of bright colors works to suggest the enormity of space implied in her work, as if she has drawn back, is in fact more interested in energy than description. A modernist, Lorenz maintains the luxury of gold, silver and white as colors, celebrating monochrome as one more arrow in her quiver. Objecthood, as well, claims its place in her aesthetics. When combined, Lorenz's color, formal constraint, and capacity to make an object sufficient unto itself place her in the heart of the modernist achievement. That her work responds to the world—that it starts from something as common as her desire to embody the volatility of weather—keeps her poetics clearly on the Romantic side of devotional observation.





*White Gold Water*

2013

18 x 24 inches

white gold, mother of pearl, clay,

pigment, shellac, on panel

(detail)

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*Palladium Water*

2013

60 x 96 inches

palladium, mother of pearl, clay,

pigment, shellac, on panel

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*White Gold Sea and Sky*

2013

24 x 18 inches

white gold, mother of pearl,

clay on panel

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*White Gold Water*

2013

24 x 18 inches

white gold, mother of pearl, clay,

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*Blackened Silver, Cardboard II*

2013

24 x 18 inches

blackened silver, gesso, clay,  
cardboard on panel

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*Red Gold, Cardboard I*

2013

34 x 22 inches

red gold, gesso, clay,  
cardboard on panel

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*Palladium Rain*

2013

24 x 18 inches

palladium, mother of pearl, clay, pigment,  
shellac on panel

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*Palladium Sea and Sky*

2013

24 x 18 inches

palladium, mother of pearl,

clay on panel

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*Silver Sea and Sky*

2013

24 x 18 inches

silver, mother of pearl, clay,  
pigment, shellac on panel

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*Untitled from Cill Rialaig V*

2012

11.5 x 7.5 inches

ink and gesso on book cloth

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*Untitled from Cill Rialaig II*

2012

11.5 x 7.5 inches

ink and gesso on book cloth

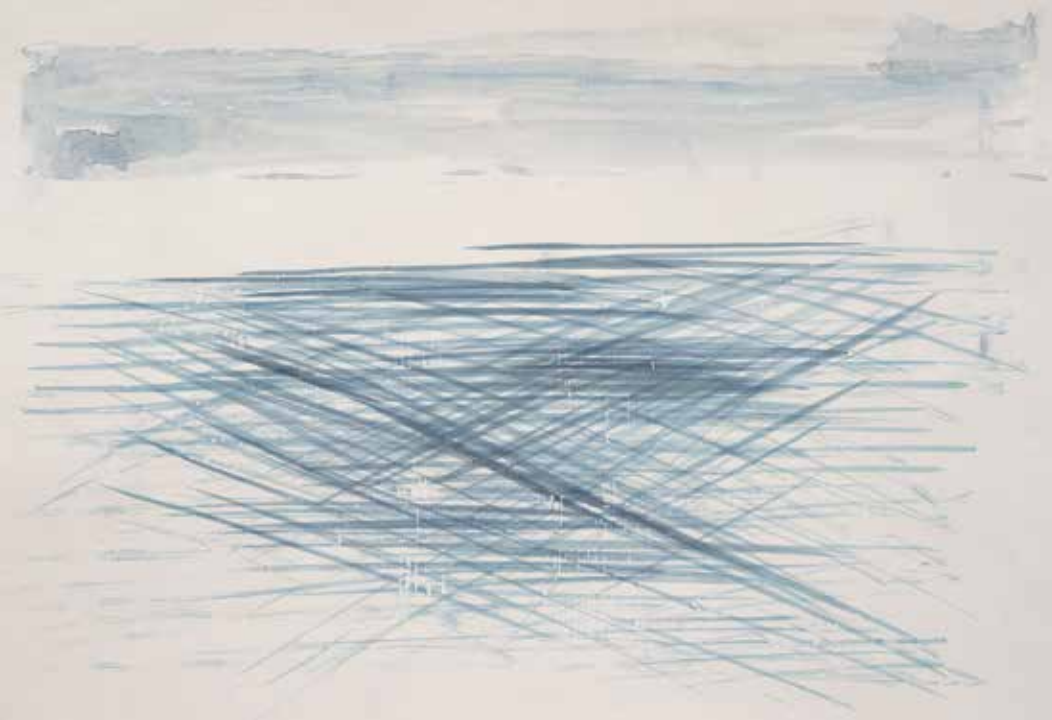
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*Untitled from Cill Rialaig I*

2012

7.5 x 11 inches

ink and gesso on book cloth

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*Untitled Cardboard I*

2013

7.5 x 11 inches

cardboard and gesso

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