

NEIL GOLDBERG
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Saving the Dates

Western Bridge's Strange Weather
BY NATE LIPPENS



NEIL GOLDBERG A glorious blur.

19 Rainstorms
Western Bridge, 3412 Fourth Ave S, 838-7444
Through May 15.

The piece of art that works as a key to the weather map of *19 Rainstorms*, the current exhibition at Western Bridge, almost goes undetected at first; it nearly blends into the wall. It's a text etched on white Plexiglas by Toronto artist Tania Kitchell, who had a smart, breathtaking show at James Harris Gallery in January. In that solo exhibition her texts were included alongside black-and-white photographs that focused on winter skies and weather. Her piece included here is titled *21. 06. 02, 8 Minutes*. It's a record of the weather at that moment, on that day--a parcel of ephemera. If that conceit seems twee or lightweight (it did to me at first in the Harris show), it's actually at the core of how we use weather--as a place marker, a backdrop, and a foil (seasonal affective disorder, anyone?).

Weather diaries and almanacs have always seemed like a form of evocative conceptual writing. They record something unpredictable and evasive--the weather--and also something of the life behind the weather. When I was a teenager, my foster mother had a calendar on the refrigerator on which she recorded the weather and temperature in the square for each date (*March 10, Overcast, afternoon sh, 52 degrees*); she didn't keep a personal journal, just her weather diary. She also included a bit of personal life, an event. The week after her brother died I noticed on the calendar: *May 17, P cloudy, 63 degrees. Bob died*. When I asked her later why she didn't write more about the events, she said, "I'll remember how I felt when Bob died, but I might forget the weather that day."

At its deepest moments--and there are several in the exhibition--*19 Rainstorms* captures the poignancy of the impulse to record and map our lives by the weather's fickleness. It also mirrors the open-endedness and ultimate futility of such a process. Neil Goldberg's *19 Rainstorms*, which is the heart of the exhibition that shares its name, is exactly that: 19 rainstorms in New York City shot at various intersections over a five-year period. Goldberg hung a video camera in a plastic bag, letting it roll as it swayed in the wind. The shortest video is 40 seconds (*Seventh Avenue and 21st Street*) and the longest runs 12 minutes (*East Broadway and Market Street*). Rather than dates and times, Goldberg marks existence by using intersections, the grid of cross streets, as the organizing principle to New York life.

Against the orderly map of street intersections Goldberg uses the tactic of chance as practiced by John Cage to record the rainstorms, and he lets a similar sense of randomness and chance dictate the display of the videos; he leaves it up to the curator to create a system for viewing. At Western Bridge, Eric Fredrickson arranged the videos into a kind of walking tour of lower Manhattan (the exquisite installation was built by Matthew Cox). Goldberg's piece takes up the entire main space on the first floor and it's wonderful to see it given so much breathing room. Nine of the storms are in a row on monitors, one is a huge projection, another is smaller, more monitors are back-to-back in a circle, and others are tucked around the space. The ambient street noise transports you to New York and the random bustle and energy of the city creates a complete environment.

Life in a downpour looks mostly the same across Manhattan; people scurrying to reach their destinations; umbrellas bobbing along, struggling valiantly to be effective against the storms. The raindrops on the camera lens create some painterly effects. Depending on the incidental lighting of neon signs and car lights, the colors range from blues and grays to reds and yellows, from the earthy to the acidic for a kind of gonzo expressionism. It's a glorious blur dictated by the weather's whimsy but it's metaphysical at heart, bringing to mind something Goldberg said in an interview about his video series *Hallelujah Anyway*: "Today, this moment, the past, my prospects for the future are a burdensome, weariness-provoking, painful, sad drag and thank God for them."