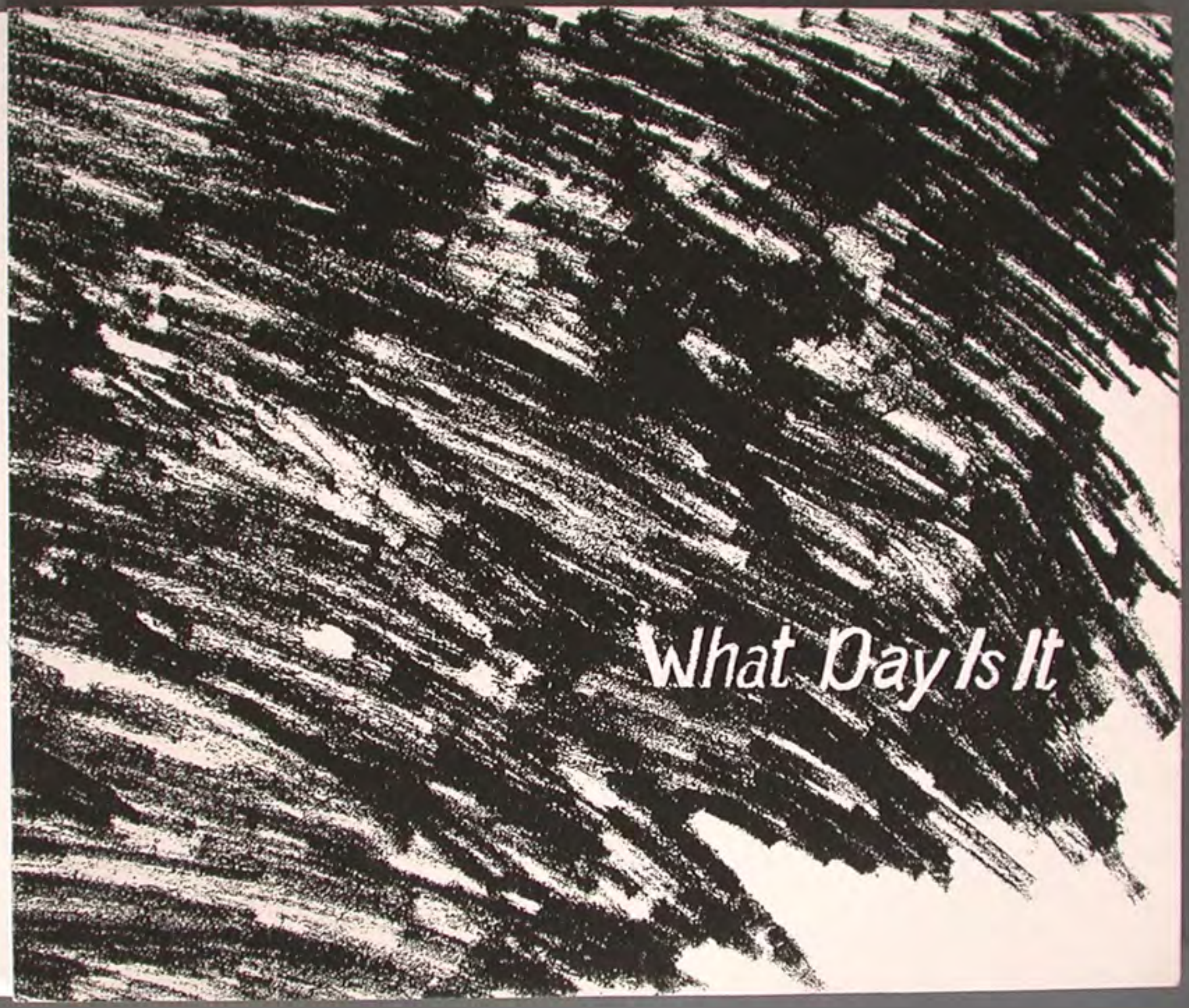

What Day Is It

POLAROID POEM I

by

LILIANE GIRAUDON

What Day Is It

AN ARTIST'S BOOK

by

KATE VAN HOUTEN

ENGLISH VERSION BY TOM RAWORTH

Fazer o que seja é inútil
Não fazer nada é inútil
Mas este fazer e não fazer
Mais vale o inútil do fazer

João Cabal de Melo Neto

dedication from L.G. for Ines Oseki-Depre & from K.V.H. for Erica Van Horn

to do anything else
is useless
flowers
and they are tulips

at the end of the corridor
you wait
to be carried away
that day
will be night

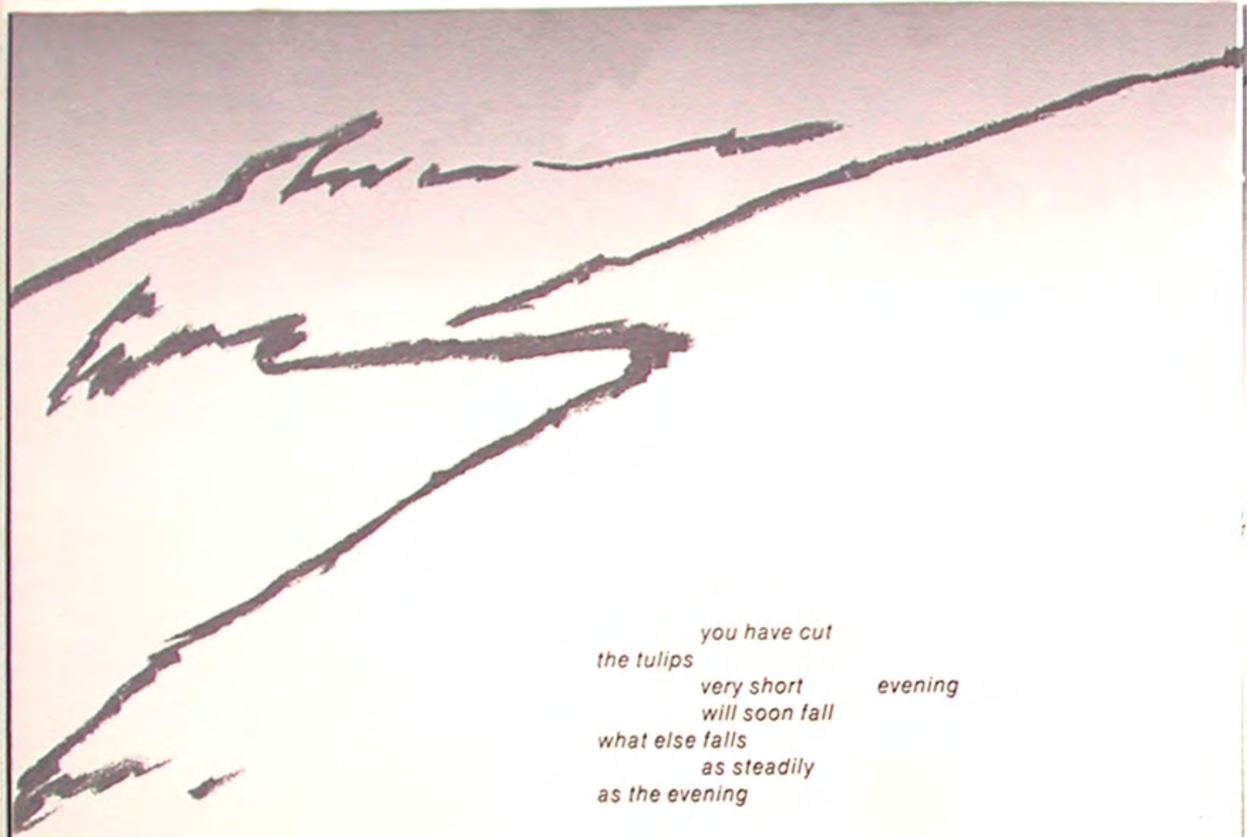
savage and limp
they have never seemed
so beautiful

their shadow is soft
in the mirror

I look at them
and the coffee beside me
steams gently
near my cigarette
gone out
in the general muddle
imprecision of statement

what day is it

it is time for a new attack
on the inarticulate
Hello Eliot!
and you Cabral
de Melo Nero imprecision of statement
as at the first corner
of the second floor
the man yellow
with sanded sawdust
swirls
in the evening air



you have cut
the tulips
very short *evening*
will soon fall
what else falls
as steadily
as the evening

Here
is partial testimony
of the sort of activity
that takes up
most of my time
and my life
like yours
falling
steadily

you cut
the tulips
too short
they are cramped
in the pretty glass jar

to do nothing
is useless
but between doing and not doing
far better
the uselessness of doing

as the sky
changing behind your head
is the exact colour
we are speaking about
of course life
is no longer the same
that is what I told myself
this morning
in the dark barely awake crossing
quickly past the murmuring
rubbish tip
if

the image itself
and it alone
should still be
the sole possibility
of holding suffering
well
what use continuing
to write the
Berlingots don't taste
the same any more even
those from Carpentras
today
is another matter

the gallery brightens
as sunlight comes
brusquely
neither outside nor in
then red
yellow and pink
lonely sour almost
an effect of seclusion
when nothing
any longer stays the same
but

we already made
a similar comment
about another
case of this type
on page 48 of the second notebook
right beside
the polaroid portrait
cigarette papers

RIZ LA ✠.

it concerned
something there is nothing more to say about
and after so much time
it seemed that finally
we were getting near
to doing it
because that is more difficult
than not doing it
easier than

this was not done
for anyone
which is why you continue
to do it
not knowing if
one day
you have truly begun
and for whom
this thing
continues
nor sometimes
how it is all possible

like soaking
your lips
in dark
liquid
it is cold outside

slightly bitter
the light
fades
almost completely
it is time
to switch on the lamp
to prepare for night

sticky face-cream
after a bath
don't forget
the dead skin
and then eat
the 2 small cucumbers
a few strawberries

All these life-size details.

The poem is not a depository, but a dump and a temporary altar, for suffering. Writing in the ordinary surroundings of night but as if in profile. What day is it? What is the weather like? Not the qualification of the moment; rather that of detail. Which makes writing resemble a Ring Road. What day is it? What is the weather like? When no bright ideas come (to be inside a dark fist).

"The litre receives and envelops the water."

The woman goes to bed. You should notice how strange her son's voice seems. Writing to reach such a speed that I will no longer realize I am writing. Note: the right hand ages faster than the left. Because of the wave passing through it, little volleys, powder magazine, slight jerks. Something empties itself out that way. When sky and sun glare that is the hand you raise to shade your eyes. It lifts up food to your lips. And all liquids. And the tiny flame that darkens your lungs.

I dream of another reader for these poems.

A reader too crushed to even be able to open a book, to turn the pages like lettuce-leaves. Green enters your mouth, is ground up, shrinks, then vanishes from your face. Write no more for the keepers. The disciple is also the betrayer. Remember that. Don't forget to remember. What is done for no-one will therefore be of use to all those whom Benjamin called 'the crushed'. . . . precisely those with whom, historically one does not go into details.

Kate van Houten 90/3

© 1986 Kate Van Houten
Published by Women's Studio Workshop, PO Box V, Rosendale, New York 12472, with major funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.