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Elaine Reichek: Ariadne's Thread

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“Ariadne’s Thread” marks the artist's first exploration of one specific myth through an entire body of work. Runs through May 20 at Shoshana Wayne Gallery.

Reichek has referred to Greek myth in the past, but “Ariadne’s Thread” marks her first exploration of one specific myth through an entire body of work. Her new embroideries chronicle the entire saga of Ariadne, the behind-the-scenes heroine of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. Ariadne gives up her earlier life for Theseus, yet after she has helped him in his quest, he abandons her. After a period of despair, she marries the god Dionysus, becoming immortal as a constellation in the night sky.

Writers from Ovid to Eliot to Borges have been fascinated by Ariadne, and artists from Titian to Picasso to Warhol have mined her story in their work. The part of Ariadne’s symbolism that interests Reichek has to do with thread—the thread that Ariadne gives to Theseus so that he can find his way out of the labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur. For Reichek, that thread is line, a basic element of picture-making. As a conceptual artist working in cloth, she also sees thread as the building block upon which her art is made.

To explore the story of Ariadne in all of its contradictory turns and phases, Reichek uses embroideries she has handsewn herself, embroideries made on a digitally programmed sewing machine, and one large-scale tapestry woven on a computerized loom at a mill in Belgium. The works appropriate images of the Ariadne tale from throughout art history—from Greek amphorae to Picasso, George Grosz, and John Currin. The images are paired with quotations, also from a wide range of sources—from Catullus to Dante, Nietzsche, and Paul Auster. In combining carefully chosen images with carefully chosen passages of poetry and prose, Reichek reinterprets Ariadne and her significance for contemporary society. She translates the story to highlight aspects of the myth, finding at its heart the story a woman who gives up everything, loses, but then triumphs, trading a king for a god, the Apollonian for the Dionysian.

Elaine Reichek lives and works in New York. She has exhibited extensively at institutions in the United States and abroad, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Columbus, Ohio; the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and the Tel Aviv Art Museum.

