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The Museum of Modern Art

NEW INSTALLATION BY ELAINE REICHEK FEATURED IN PROJECTS SERIES AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Projects 67: Elaine Reichek
February 4-March 30, 1999

The Museum of Modern Art presents *When This You See...* (1996-1999), a new installation by New York-based artist Elaine Reichek, as part of the Projects series from February 4 through March 30, 1999. Elaine Reichek and Beth Handler, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, who organized the exhibition, will discuss *When This You See...* in a conversation with the press on Tuesday, February 2, from 5:45 to 6:30 p.m.

In *When This You See...*, Reichek considers the history of embroidery, knitting, and weaving for what it reveals about art and relations between the sexes. Some twenty-five samplers, Reichek's contemporary versions of traditional embroideries that frame truisms with decorative patterns and motifs, will be on view. The artist replaces aphorisms that normally appear in samplers (such as the fragmented one of the show's title) with quotations culled from art history, literature, science, mythology, and popular culture. Sources for the quotes are emphatically diverse, ranging from Mary Queen of Scots to Ad Reinhardt, and from Homer's *Odyssey* to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Punctuating the samplers are embroideries that refer to modernist and contemporary artists, many of them championed by MoMA either in its collection or its exhibition history. All of the works are displayed in a carpeted and painted room with molding on the walls, recalling the space of the home (the usual location of the sampler) and of the more traditional museum.

"Reichek engages in a self-referential inquiry that links disciplines and mediums, cuts across time, and is at once cerebral and corporeal," says Ms. Handler. "She examines domestic practices for signs of social critique. Just as discrete elements of content and style combine to create the effect of each sampler, thematic and rhythmic currents connect the samplers and contribute to the overall meaning of the installation."

The show begins with *Sampler (Ovid's Weavers)* (1996), which modifies the design of an 1818 sampler, and inserts quotes drawn from Ovid about Arachne and Philomela. Arachne is a weaver who is turned into a spider by Athena as a consequence of her extraordinary skill, and is doomed to weave forever. Philomela uses a tapestry to recount to her sister her brother-in-law's crime against her. In these tales, which are time-honored subjects in art, conditions of identity and action are based on weaving; Reichek's choice of the related medium of embroidery to tell the stories plays upon the role of mythology as subject matter in art and its relation to the process of artmaking itself.

Sampler (The Ultimate) (1996), in which Reichek takes the Bauhaus as her subject matter, jumps to the twentieth-century. Reichek uses a geometric

weaving motif by Anni Albers as a border between a decorative design of vases and flowers and the quotes that assert an intersection between femininity and ornamentation. Albers's avant-garde motif is combined with the conventional design that it supposedly rejects. Even while celebrating the Bauhaus's advancement of textile design, Reichek examines the hierarchy of talent and aesthetic success that it proposes. The Projects series is sponsored by Peter Norton.

No. 2

[press office](#)

[menu](#)

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