

maharam

Shared Origins



Consider the word *text*. Perhaps what comes to mind first is your cellphone. Or maybe it's a printed page. Or possibly it's literary theory, and you're thinking about how a text is anything buzzing with communicative content. In Elaine Reichek's embroideries featuring quotes from celebrated writers, the artist taps into these multiple meanings, from the analogue to the digital, while reminding us that *text* and *textile* share their origins in the Latin word *texere* (to weave). She also draws attention to how the building up of lines in textiles is similar to the accrual of words into sentences, and then into paragraphs, as well as lines of text into code.

Thirty pieces from the past three years each excerpt from a story, a play, or a poem in Reichek's recent exhibition, *Sight Unseen*, at Marinaro Gallery.

They revel in the many ways words can be put to work, and disclose an unhurried pace, one reminiscent of the slowness and precision it takes for certain kinds of writing. Drawing her needle through linen to painstakingly produce a sewn script based on actual handwriting or font, Reichek largely explores a meditative deceleration.

This is not to say her works are devoid of drama. *Faust and Mephisto* (2016), which was installed in the gallery's downstairs grotto-like space, presents a quote in a gothic script from the contract corroborating the sale of Faust's soul. *The Purloined Letter* (2017) offers a simple wax-sealed note, as if to say not everything is meant to be seen. A work resembling a page from a book presents a line of text in serif font by Marilynne Robinson: "It was a source of both terror and comfort to me [then] that I often seemed invisible—incompletely and minimally existent." A similar (sister?) piece excerpts Elena Ferrante: "I didn't choose anonymity; the books are signed. Instead, I chose absence." That inconspicuousness is key to Reichek's work, too: she also chooses absence by highlighting other people's thoughts. In the few works displayed that were made with machine or digital embroidery, the distance from the artist was even more deeply felt.

For 2017's *A Damsel with a Dulcimer (Coleridge)*, Reichek mimics Samuel Taylor Coleridge's handwritten text from a 1797 draft of his poem "Kubla Khan." Taking his distinctive scrawl into her own hands, she also subverts Coleridge's notable views on imitation, namely this idea: "To admire on principle, is the only way to imitate without a loss of originality." And yet, as we know from Duchamp and Warhol, one can copy with originality. Reichek takes this one step further: her citational works are teeming with ingenuity, and, to be sure, admiration—not just for these writers but also for the long, interlaced history of text and textiles.

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