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Elaine Reichek: 'Ariadne's Thread'

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Ariadne, the clever heroine of Greek myth whose ball of thread helped Theseus escape from the Minotaur's labyrinth, makes an ideal subject for Elaine Reichek. Ms. Reichek has been working with thread since the 1970s, most recently in canvases embroidered with the help of sophisticated digital machinery. (She has a large-scale tapestry in the Whitney Biennial, which opens on Thursday.)

In a bookish but appealing series begun in 2008 Ms. Reichek uses digital and hand embroidery and silk-screen to reproduce a wide range of images and literary quotations relating to the Ariadne myth. She begins with a sample from the third century B.C. epic poem "The Argonautica," which is paired with Giovanni Crosato's "Bacchus Crowning Ariadne With a Diadem of Stars." Later we see Warhol's "Italian Square With Ariadne (After de Chirico)" and a Theseus motif from an Attic black-figure amphora.

Keeping this exercise from becoming pedantic, Ms. Reichek finds elements of the myth where we least expect them: in "The Shining," for instance (an image of the hotel's patterned carpeting appears below a poem about the Minotaur going mad). Comic books and other unexpected sources pop up in the photo archive "Minotaur/Labyrinth," on view in the gallery's front window.

The series is most insightful, though, when it focuses on Ariadne. We tend to think of her as a crafty gal Friday, but Guido Reni's "Bacchus and Ariadne" shows her as helpless nude, deserted by Theseus and about to enter a pity marriage with the wine god. Accompanying this image is a quotation from Nietzsche's "Ecce Homo." It reads, "Who besides me knows who Ariadne is?," and the words seem to come directly from Ms. Reichek.

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