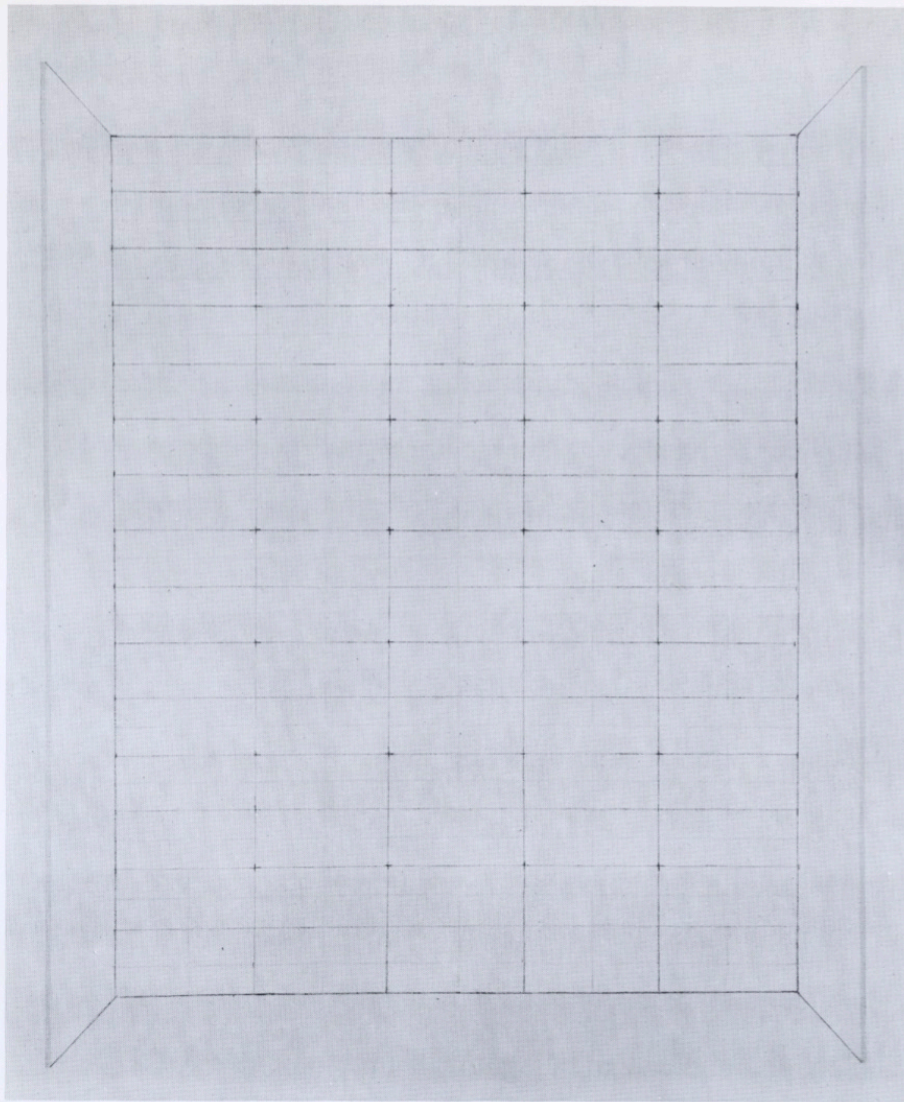


1975 Sgan-Cohen, Michael. ELAINE REICHEK. Rina Gallery, New York, New York.

ELAINE REICHEK

RINA GALLERY • 23 EAST 74TH ST., NEW YORK, N. Y. 10021
(212) BU 8-7004 OPENING: TUES., JUNE 10, 1975 6-8 P.M.



1. Untitled
1975
60" x 48"
gesso, raw canvas, graphite

In this century artists are confronted with the problem of total freedom. They therefore have to find and define for themselves new limitations and rules without which they would not be able to exercise the freedom given to them or, for that matter, create any communicative art. Elaine Reichek's paintings display an awareness of this situation as is evident in her choice of a geometric language. It provides her with structures as well as internal systems and invites consistent methods of working which assure her paintings a reading. By working with a primarily geometric vocabulary she joins a rigorous tradition of non-figurative painting. More specifically, she is interested in a certain kind of "systematic painting" which is built on the principle according to which every figuration in the painting stands in a definite relation to any other.

If Reichek's paintings were to be appreciated solely on the merit of their systematic nature and its corresponding "look" we would have revolted since this kind of painting is hardly a novelty in 1975. But the systematic look in itself is not her goal; instead of re-presenting familiar painting, she sets out to challenge the impenetrable rigidity of system and structure and ventures to explore its vulnerable points as potentially expressive elements. For example, we can quote a system of horizontal and vertical lines as in No. 1. This grid is made visually accessible through scattered imperfections of measurement which Reichek creates by relying primarily on the judgment of the eye. This might sound arbitrary and unjustifiable; in this context, it is not. The eye is the most intelligent choice, as it will always yield imperfections. There are no horizontals, verticals or any other geometric functions which it can establish absolutely. This fact is consistently exploited in all of Reichek's paintings and forms one of her principal expressive means. This practice does not challenge the need for order; it does, however, express the realization that, artistically, "expression" can enter the system as its entropy.

Psychologically the geometric look of Reichek's paintings provides the spectator with a set of expectations which condition him to look for the perfect only to discover that it cannot be established. Along the same lines, many of the diagrammatic lines in the paintings, from which one expects precision, either fail to reach their terminating counterlines, or in some instances, overstep their marked destination (Nos. 1, 2). The lines themselves are created in different ways. Many of them are pencilled directly on the raw or gessoed canvas. The canvas' texture and the pencil's lead meet to create lines of various intensities and thicknesses, securing the desired imperfection. This is a "materialized geometry" which resides on the picture plane. Thicker lines or stripes are often made by using masking tape. Gesso is then applied, and finally the tape is removed exposing the raw canvas underneath. By this process a negative line is created. These stripes have imperfect edges as Reichek intentionally takes no precaution to prevent the wet gesso from entering the exposed areas.

Reichek's structures also defy our expectations and confront us with intended inconsistencies. In one painting, for example (No. 4), the left section presents the viewer with the problem of ascertaining not only the exactitude of the horizontal and vertical lines but also the very logic of the structure

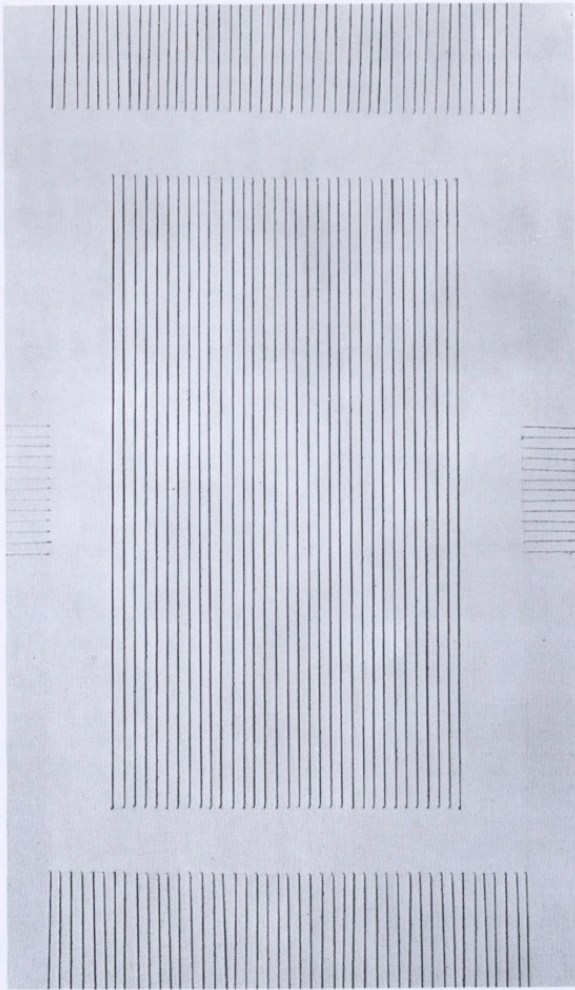
as a whole. It first appears as a vertical with alternating short and long horizontal lines which cross it. Since the two lower horizontals appear equal in length we have to discard our initial reading of the structure and are forced to face the artist's mind with its unpredictable spontaneity.

Color is avoided because it tends to defy any organization other than one based on traditional color theory. It also cannot be used as a complementary element to formal relations because Reichek's paintings rely to a considerable extent on line as an element which is not subservient to form. The areas of grey wash in a metallic acrylic function in several ways. They act as a counterpoint to the gesso's dominant whiteness, amplify the pencilled line, and the uneven washy surface corresponds to the more hidden unevenness which animates the gesso surface. The exposed canvas as negative color serves in an interesting way as a tonic to the value harmonies.

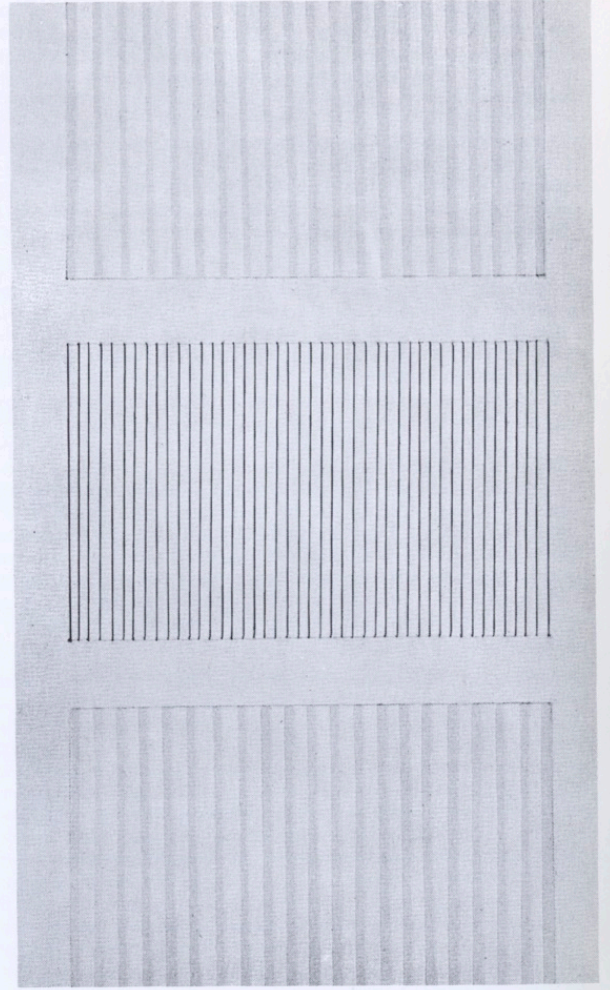
A number of small-scale paintings are among Reichek's best, most personal and intimate works. They encapsulate many of her ideas. A subtle imperfection can be found in the two almost perfect squares (No. 8). A variety of non-perfect lines is found here: pencilled, negative and even lines made by sewn threads (Nos. 9, 11, 13, etc.). The latter exist on the surface in a most literal sense (as reliefs) without losing their optical function. The use of sewing and threads deserves special attention. It is an assertive, however subtle, feminine statement which, being incorporated into a broader and sophisticated pictorial context is all the more effective because the purely pictorial context defies gender; or, these threads declare themselves as a reference to feminist self-searching and are liberated by virtue of their participation in a purely pictorial process. The sewn threads bring to mind the care and attention found in primitive artifacts and the authenticity and personal meanings they carry. This encourages us to ponder further upon her other paintings and to ferret out personal subject matter and additional meanings.

All in all, Elaine Reichek's paintings incite the viewer to an active visual and intellectual dialogue with the work of art much in the same way an active listener to music follows the internal expressive tensions between prescribed form in its relation to the creative arbitrariness of invention.

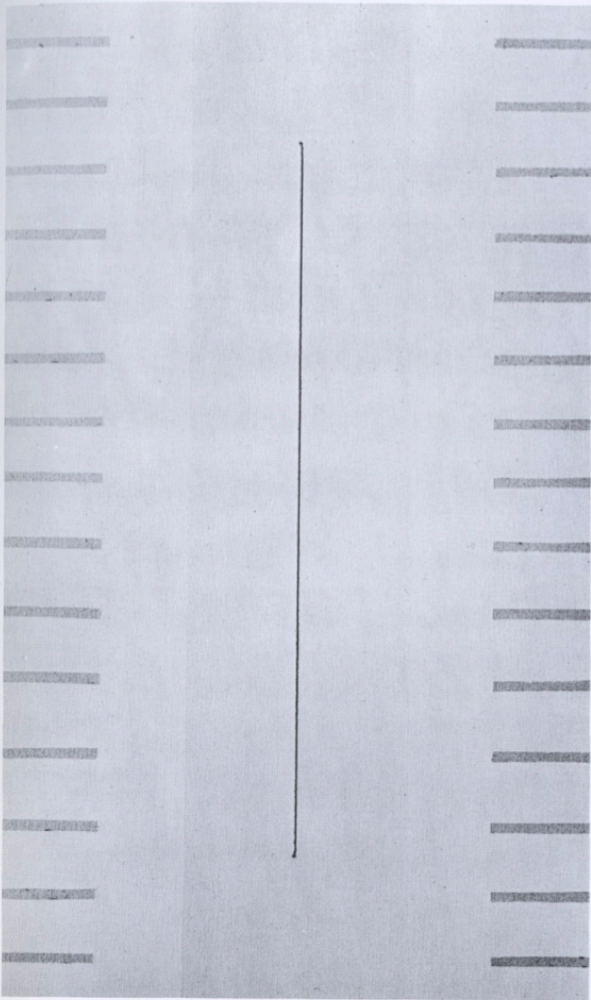
Michael Sgan-Cohen



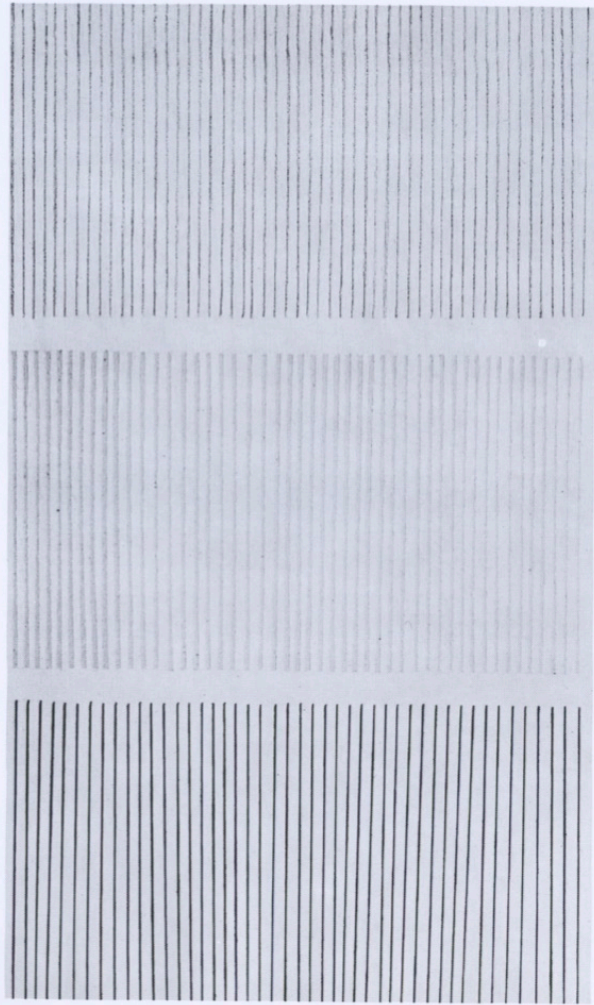
9. Untitled
1975
24" x 14"
gesso, thread



11. Untitled
1975
24" x 14"
gesso, thread



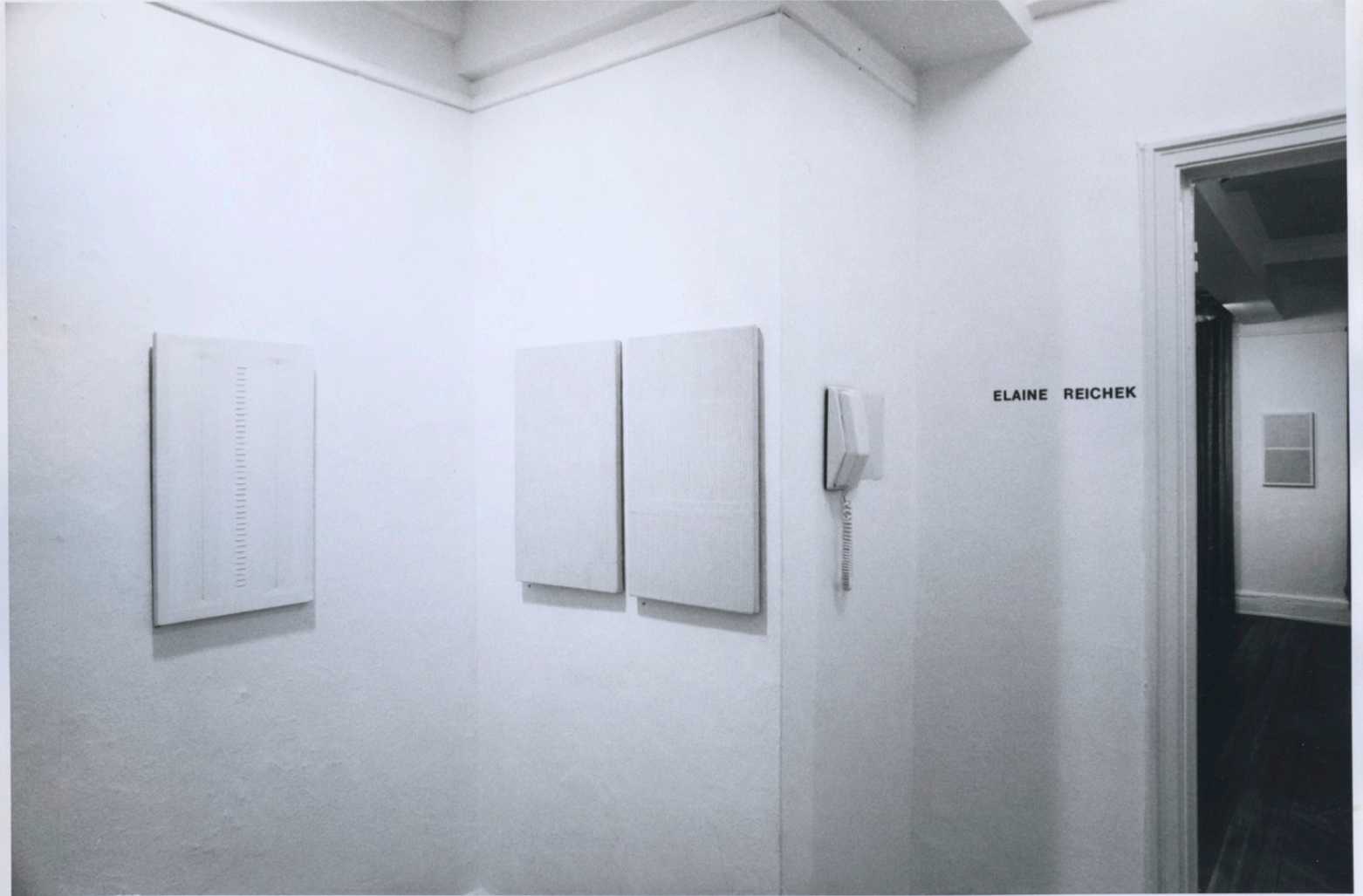
12. Untitled
1975
24" x 14"
gesso, raw canvas, thread



13. Untitled
1975
24" x 14"
gesso, raw canvas, thread, graphite







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