

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

CLAINE REICHEK is best known as the pioneer of the knitted documentary. Her breakthrough ethnographic work, the "Dwellings" series of 1985, consisted of blown-up and hand-tinted photographs of tents and thatched huts, mostly from East Africa and the South Seas, each accompanied by an architectonically exact but deflated double, made of yarn and sundries, hung on a peg alongside. In other words, each picture came with an empty knitted bag of itself. It also came with another, invisible bag of suddenly skewed perceptions. Here, for instance, was the whole idea of exoticism—of Kipling—turned inside out, with a trip to the library and an afternoon's browsing in Manhattan's notions district in lieu of some farflung colonial mission or jungle safari.

Over the last few years, in metaphorically mixed collages as well as in full-scale installations ("Revenge of the Cocoanuts," "Desert Song"), Reichek has turned her quizzical eye on such amusing, if easy, targets as Tarzan epics, Victorian lady adventurers, American Express-style harem fantasies, leopard-spotted vinyl raincoats, Gauguin-mania, and chimps in drag. She has also taken to knitting men-in particular, the images of now vanished Tierra del Fuego tribesmen-and these new conceptual photographic-cum-craft works are on view at Lamagna through April 22nd. The yarn figures seem far more real, more embodied than those in the pictures, and while Reichek doesn't literally breathe new life into her longgone subjects, her highly calculated, labor-intensive approach does suggest an absurdist, counter-colonial new erotics.