

VIENNA

Elaine Reichek

SECESSION

The protagonists of Elaine Reichek's first exhibition in Austria, "Now If I Had Been Writing This Story," were four mythological women from ancient Crete: Ariadne, Europa, Pasiphaë, and Phaedra. While they may be of divine descent, these women are not in command of their own fates. Their destinies are determined by gods, kings, husbands, and lovers, driven by lust, betrayals, vendettas, and duplicity. They are kidnapped, abandoned, ransomed, glorified, or punished, always at the mercy of events beyond their control. They are free only to experience frenzied and often destructive passions, schemes, and lies. Their voices

are but prolonged laments, and they are never allowed to assert any desire other than those prescribed by patriarchal power. There is no female redemption in the fixity of these myths.

What else connects these women? Reichek gives an answer in the embroidered genealogical chart *Minoan Family Tree*, 2014, where a handful of male figures, including Minos, Zeus, the Cretan bull, and the Minotaur himself link these mothers, daughters, and sisters. A symbol of the male principle of tireless fecundity and unrestrained violence, the bull is linked to rain, hurricanes, and the moon, while the Minoan girls are descendants of the sun. Poseidon causes

Pasiphaë to lust after the bull, and the ominous coupling that ensues conjoins the irreconcilable extremes of water and fire, generating monsters (the Minotaur, half bull, half man, was the fruit of their union) and calamitous events. The tree, with its tangled branches tracing these relationships, is a direct homage to Gustav Klimt's *Tree of Life*, 1905–1909. Indeed, Reichek's work is very much in keeping with the Vienna Secessionists' desire for a broader definition of art, one that includes design and craft as well as painting and sculpture. Her preferred medium is embroidery, where the nuances of repeated handmade stitches convey a distinct tension, a unique tempo.

Reichek's retelling of myth privileges the heroines, and her work travels the centuries with its feminist politics intact. With sources in Hellenistic sculpture and Surrealist painting, in theatrical and musical works as well as poetry and art, these tragic female figures traverse time as icons forever branded by their subjugated state. Reichek juxtaposes the interpretations of their stories created by various artists and writers, often superimposing images and literary texts, demonstrating how the fates of these women have been used to support the beliefs of various authors at different times. But now it is Reichek who is telling their stories, giving them another chance, offering another point of view that includes the possibility of happiness. Her empathy is palpable. Sourced from paintings and sculptures spanning two millennia, the twenty-four depictions of the show's protagonists in *Toutes les filles*, 2016–17, are embroidered on a neutral ground, each one surrounded by a void,

anchored only to her own solitude. In this case Reichek does not use an accompanying text; the figures' poses and their repetition express the feelings or passions that animate them. Digging deeply into the wounds of generations of women reduced to silence, this powerful work gives the four heroines back their individuality.

The hand-printed wallpaper covering the surface on which *Toutes les filles* hung was an American neoclassical motif of Greek urns, based on one found in the Jonathan Hamilton House in South Berwick, Maine, dating from the 1780s. Significantly, the pattern was printed here in a pink variation. Over the centuries, neoclassical motifs have served to legitimize ruling ideologies and patriarchal social structures, but by changing the color scheme, Reichek subtly reclaimed the historical narrative. She always translates and rewrites the accepted stories to suit her own assertive female voice.

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

MILAN

"Post Zang Tumb Tuuum"

FONDAZIONE PRADA

Curator Germano Celant called it "showing the showing." "Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918–1943" was a gigantic show focusing on art exhibitions in interwar Italy. Although this may sound like a hyperspecialized initiative intended exclusively for exhibition-history nerds like me, the organizers succeeded in making it a sexy, widely admired, and massively attended event. To do so, Celant, in collaboration with New York design studio 2x4, employed two main curatorial devices. First, he scaled up original photographs of Venice Biennales, other major shows, and private apartments and artists' studios from the period, turning these archival images into life-size, three-dimensional environments into which he inserted some of the actual works of art. Visitors could step onto photographic reproductions of original hardwood floors and see actual paintings, sculptures, and furniture against backdrops of slightly blurry black-and-white installation views. Second, he used his exhibition's catalogue, website, and ubiquitous ads to disseminate Photoshopped images of original photographs, reproducing the works that were exhibited at the Fondazione

View of "Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia, 1918–1943," 2018. Photo: Delfino Sisto Legnani and Marco Cappelletti.



Elaine Reichek, *Minoan Family Tree*, 2014, hand embroidery on linen, 24 × 22 1/4".

