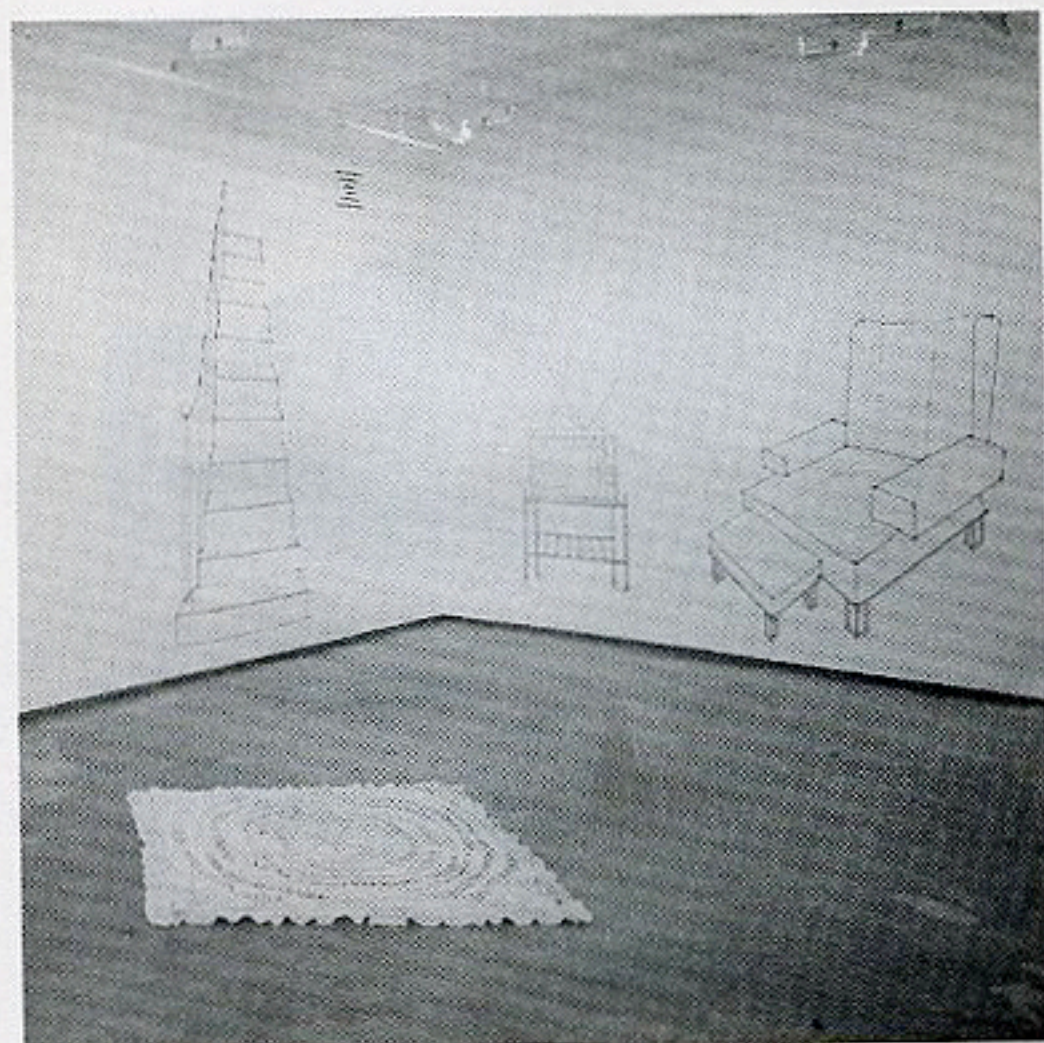


ARTFORUM

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Foreground: Robin Kahn, *Family Tree II*, 1995, quilt, 46 x 40".
Background, left to right: Mimi Smith, *Stairs, TV, and Easy Chair*, all 1974, thread and tape measure. Installation view. From "Thread."

"THREAD"

CRISTINEROSE GALLERY

Group shows that bring together artists working with the same materials are prone to homogenize their contents: in a room full of works made out of lead, everything, including the ideas that gave rise to the art, appears leaden. But "Thread," curated by Tom Moody and the gallery's proprietor, Mariacristina Paravacini, manages to avoid this pitfall, in part by presenting the material in such a diversity of forms, and with an intellectual premise that makes the selection of works more than a self-evident process of finding fiber in art.

In Brigitte Nahon's installation, *Icholi Haupeyre L (10), (21) c*, 1997, sewing threads are stretched taut across a corner and flayed of their outer fabric, leaving trails of black fuzz suspended on disembodied lines. Nearby on the floor, Jim Isermann's untitled sculpture of 1997, a great turd-shaped mass of multicolored cotton hand-braided like the rug in Grandmother's kitchen, was a Minimalist monument gone cozy. In between the ethereally frantic Nahon and the hugely ridiculous Isermann, between the wire and the rag, threads are shown to refer to craft (Ann Hamilton's untitled collar of hair with an alphabet cross-stitched inside it), science (Bill Davenport's needle-pointed image of cells), the body (Annette Messenger's stuffed fabric organs), drawing (Ghada Amer's sewing machine sketches of female erotica), and art history (Robin Kahn's quilt embroidered with a family tree of women artists). Collectively, Moody's selection

demonstrates how, at its best, the materials show, considered as a curatorial genre, can be a dialectical form in which the synthesis of the parts gives rise to a radical new significance.

The ulterior motives (or motifs) of "Thread" have to do with issues of the *informe*, a notion borrowed from Georges Bataille comprising paradigms antithetical to structure and form. To answer its own need for form, the curatorial essay is structured around four characteristics observed by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois in the exhibition "*L'informe: mode d'emploi*," which they curated at the Pompidou in 1996. Thus Beverly Semmes' *Ballerina*, 1997, falls under the "Horizontality" heading for its suggestive spew of pillows on the floor. These seem to invite the viewer to loll and bask beneath the sculpture's radiant wall element: a big turquoise bodice with a pink flounce. Ava Gerber's *Dowery II*, 1997, a patchworked curtain of fabric, lace, embroidery, and yarn becomes a bricolage of "Base Materialism"; Nahon's disintegrating cornerpiece exemplifies "Entropy." Obviously, and perhaps appropriately, these assignments are slippery. But some feel just tacked on, such as the notion of "Pulse" as it might apply to the domestic downtime captured in Mimi Smith's 1974 wall-drawings of furniture made out of measuring tapes and knotted threads. Nevertheless, it's to the exhibition's credit that it creates a context larger than the already-familiar "feminine" and "craft" readings for these works. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, the word "text" comes from "tissue"; the possibilities of thread provide rich material for unraveling, and occasionally rending, the whole cloth of modernism.

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