

## NEW YORK

## Elaine Reichek Hoffman Donahue

If you had to explain the art of the 1970s with just one example, Elaine Reichek would be the perfect choice. Her cleverly titled exhibition at Hoffman Donahue, “Back Stitch,” focused almost exclusively on her work of that decade. It showed her to have been an extraordinarily canny observer of the period’s dominant tendencies—post-Minimalism, Conceptualism, Pattern and Decoration, studio craft, appropriation—all of which she wove together into a single, flexible fabric.

Before graduating from Yale University in 1964 with a BFA, Reichek studied painting with Ad Reinhardt at Brooklyn College. Even while raising a family, she continued to make art. The earliest works shown here were paintings, delicately executed using masking tape and pencil, with obvious parallels to Agnes Martin and Robert Ryman. They incorporated one element that those artists would never have contemplated, however: thread sewn in by hand. Reichek has said that she initially did this to achieve a strong visual line but immediately realized that it was verboten, according to the prevailing doctrines of the time. Needlework was too crafty, too feminine, and it literally “pierced the ‘hieratic’ surface of the Greenbergian picture plane,” as stated in the exhibition’s press release.



Elaine Reichek, *Black and White Beds*, 1978, hand-quilted fabric in wood frames, 68½ × 60”.

As Reichek considered this supposedly wrong move, it came to seem exactly right. The feminist art movement was just getting under way, and she was at the heart of it as a member of A.I.R. Gallery, founded in SoHo in 1972. By the latter half of the decade, she had moved on to gently polemical works such as *Black and White Beds*, 1978, an arrangement of thirty-four tiny framed quilts (miniaturization is a common tactic in her work, implying the close examination of historical evidence). This grid of grids underlines the affinity between traditional quilting and systems-based abstraction.

A compositionally related mixed-media piece, *The Life & Times of Art*, 1979, was comprised of nine identically sized frames, each calling to mind a particular reference from art history (Impressionism, De Stijl, Jasper Johns) or domesticity (curtains, wallpaper, plywood), all placed on a level playing field. Such a complex, allusive work could have become a merely academic exercise, no more than the sum of its citations. Reichek has consistently taken such risks with her art, not only during the ’70s but ever since, as she has traversed a vast compendium of quotations, from classical mythology to Michelangelo, from American samplers to the Bloomsbury Group. She has always managed to transcend her source material, though, partly by virtue of her elegant craftsmanship, partly thanks to her wry sense of humor. The central panel of *The Life & Times of Art*, for example, features a text that Reinhardt himself might have written, but didn’t. Reichek composed it as a tribute-*cum*-send-up honoring her former teacher: ART IS LIFE LIFE IS ART SENTENCE ABOUT ART ART IS A SENTENCE FRAMED AND SENTENCED SENTENCED TO BE FRAMED FRAMED FOR LIFE. . . .

This quasi-repetitive, self-referential incantation took on additional meaning in the context of “Back Stitch.” The exhibition included three older works that Reichek had revisited and adapted. In one of them, *Parallelograms (Gray, Turquoise, Pink, Yellow)*, 1977–2024, she extended a composition that she had originally made in translucent black with three new colors. *Ovals*, 2025, was like a set of stepping stones between the ’70s and the present day. It featured overlapping ellipses of translucent organdy, a dress-making material fashionable during Reichek’s teenage years. That autobiographical association, along with the composition’s rhythmic pulse and its evident similarity to the earlier pieces in the gallery, made the work a declaration of vital continuity. It’s a rare thing to see an artist reflecting on her own oeuvre at a distance of half a century; it’s rarer still when her past self, with equal clarity, seems to look right back.

—Glenn Adamson

## Ali Cherri Almine Rech

Ali Cherri’s exhibition “Last Watch Before Dawn” unfolded as a meditation on time and war. Shifting the focus from combat (itself notably absent from his sculptures, watercolors, neons, installation, and film on display at Almine Rech), Cherri turned instead to the states that surround conflict: anticipation, vigilance, exhaustion, and aftermath. In this expanded sense, war emerged less as an event than as an enduring temporal condition.

Installed near the gallery’s entrance was *Who Holds the Gaze*, 2026, a small sculpture of white hands grasping two archaic-looking eyes that appeared to have been plucked from ancient statuary. Their disembodied gaze called to mind Surrealist imagery associated with the irrational and the unconscious, which emerged as an artistic strategy in the traumatic fallout of World War I. Yet the vitrine in which the work was displayed also invoked the norming apparatus of museology. Caught in the grasp of the Greco-Roman sculptural tradition, these Assyrian eyes recalled the long history of imperialism still violently shaping the region today.

Farther into the gallery, a monumental grouping of sculptures was staged before a theatrical backdrop painted in the vivid hues of a fiery sunset (or was it an explosion?). *Wake Up Soldier, Open Your Eyes*, 2026, comprised a trio of figures: two fighters and a dog fashioned from mud, a material whose relationship to time is itself cyclical. Clay can soften and harden repeatedly, yet once fired it may endure for centuries, building civilizations. Cherri constructs these subjects with striking sen-