

Inés Raiteri and Laura Marsh: A Labyrinth of Thread

Curator: Saul Ostrow

In recent years, the traditional divide between craft and fine art has gradually dissolved, as contemporary artists increasingly incorporate techniques, practices, and materials historically associated with craft into their work. This shift reflects a growing recognition of craft's potential to challenge aesthetic hierarchies and critique the culture of mass production and replication. This transformation in critical boundaries is particularly evident in the works of Laura Marsh and Inés Raiteri, who reimagine practices traditionally linked to craft as a medium capable of conveying complex conceptual and aesthetic narratives

Born in 1982, Laura Marsh hails from Binghamton, NY and is known for her textile works and installations, which address themes of family history, personal memory, and rural middle-class America. Inés Raiteri was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1963, and is known for her installations, textiles, paintings, and social practice projects, which explore such diverse themes as urban design, architecture, community interactions, body-space relationships, memory, and intimacy. Behind their use of embroidery as a common medium there lurk complex matters and histories. Subsequently, the juxtaposition of the works of these two women of differing generations and cultural backgrounds generates a lively dialogue that guides us on a mythic journey through the labyrinth of identity and the human experience.

Though both artists use thread, needle, and fabric in their work, they approach textile art from distinctly non-traditional — post-modern perspectives. They disrupt expectations by using embroidery not merely as a decorative medium but as a tool for engaging audiences in social commentary and self-reflection. Marsh's work examines the flamboyant nature of middle-America's pageantry, while Raiteri's art, rooted in communal rituals, explores the expressive and spiritual dimensions of modernist geometry. While both artists are women, their aesthetic approaches reflect contrasting engagements with gendered cultural narratives. Raiteri's work, with its delicate forms and textures, evokes intimate, traditionally feminine moments, while Marsh's narratives are drawn from the culture of public display and social rituals often associated with masculinity. This juxtaposition underscores how their works uniquely engages with and subverts the gender associations tied to textiles as a medium.

To fully grasp the significance of Marsh and Raiteri's varied practices, it is essential to reflect on embroidery's shifting cultural and historical role, from a domestic pastime to a medium of artistic and social critique. At present, embroidery tends to be nostalgically associated with craft or a tedious pastime that grandmothers sought to teach to granddaughters in the era before-social media. This loss of stature begins with the advent of mechanical reproduction in the 19th century, when embroidery carried contradictory connotations: as a symbol of wealth, a leisurely hobby, or a form of folk art. However, these modern perceptions obscure the deeper historical and cultural significance that Raiteri and Marsh tap into.

Across centuries and continents, embroidery has been far more than mere decoration or handicraft—it has served as a bridge connecting cultures, generations, and personal histories. Peoples from various diasporas and colonized communities have relied on embroidery to preserve their national identity, using it as a medium to sustain cultural

heritage and resist erasure. Whether crafted by artisans, passed down through families, or used as embellishment, embroidery has embodied stories of identity and continuity. Therefore, the current reductive view of skills like embroidery distorts their rich histories and profound meanings.

This rich history finds contemporary expression in the works of Marsh and Raiteri. Their various projects demonstrate how embroidery can serve as a platform for individual expression and collective creativity. The contrast in their approaches to their medium converge in their collaborative projects, which exemplify how embroidery can transcend individual narratives to create shared meaning. At the heart of this exhibition are three tapestries that highlight the dynamic interplay between Marsh and Raiteri's distinct perspectives. The first is a community project initiated by Raiteri during an adult workshop and later incorporated into Marsh's adult embroidery and materials class. The result is a large-scale embroidery sampler that reflects collective effort and shared creativity. The other two tapestries were co-created by Marsh and Raiteri, further emphasizing their collaborative synergy.

One piece, begun by Marsh and completed by Raiteri, features imagery that forms a symbolic "highway of life," divided into north and south motifs. This work represents a conceptual journey through time and space, blending Marsh's interest in storytelling with Raiteri's focus on communal rituals. In contrast, the second piece—a densely embroidered geometric work—was started by Raiteri and handed off to Marsh for completion, showcasing their mutual exploration of textiles as a medium. These collaborative works not only highlight the artists' unique approaches but also underscore how their partnership transforms embroidery into a powerful tool for shared artistic dialogue. Meanwhile also included in the exhibitions are examples of each artists own distinctive works

So, while both these artists use embroidery to embody a spirit of connection and perseverance, their viewpoints diverge. Raiteri's use of embroidery can be seen as an anthropological exploration—weaving together personal and collective histories to create narratives that probe the complexities of community, identity, and place. In contrast, Marsh's approach functions as an archaeological endeavor, focusing on the use and appropriation of heraldic symbolism and its public display to uncover and reinterpret the fading cultural practices and rituals of the rural working classes. Much like Ariadne's thread guiding Theseus through the labyrinth, Raiteri and Marsh use their works to navigate the complexities of identity and history. Together they unravel stories that might otherwise be lost while offering pathways to meaning within the intricate narratives of our shared experience.