



## Through the Eye of the Needle



An installation image of "Threading the Needle," an exhibition at The Church in Sag Harbor through Sept. 18.

Gary Mamay

By Jennifer Landes

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It is becoming difficult to decide if The Church simply offers superior exhibitions or if anything at all that is placed there just looks great. Let's go with the former, since the nontraditional space in Sag Harbor, with its tall windows, mezzanines, and nooks and crannies, likely presents many challenges for those looking to install art.

"Threading the Needle," its second and final show of the high season, is another winner, particularly given a subject that feels overly familiar. Yet, just as in the spring's "Empire of Water," the curators, Sara Cochran and Eric Fischl, have found new life in what could otherwise be a tired tour through the fiber arts. Instead, viewers should leave enlivened, inspired, and even ecstatic that so much creativity can be had within the subject's confines of contemporary craft techniques focused on weaving and fabric.

The show offers an artistic mix of art world superstars and local favorites who may not be as recognized in the international blending of commercial and institutional spaces and fairs. It's beautiful in its nondidactic quietude, the simple inclusion speaking for itself. All viewers need to do is experience the less familiar artists mixing seamlessly with the household names to draw their own conclusions.

And while each work stands on its own and plays well with those around it, it's not the easiest show to get your arms around. It helps that smaller areas are well defined, because the show looks best when you contemplate its parts away from the whole.

The first-floor main room opens with what might be more expected, actual woven pieces by Enrico David and Christina Forrer, but with



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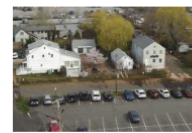
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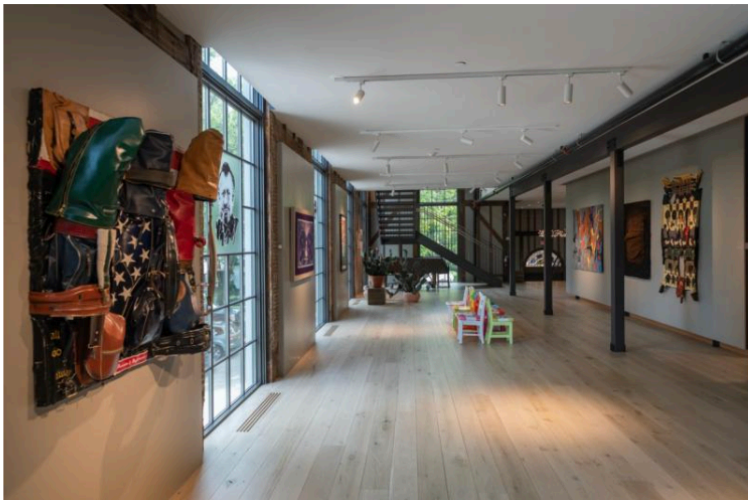
nontraditional subject matter, leading into less conventional territory with the sewn and beaded canvas of Alan Shields and Diedrick Brackens's broadside against complacency in the face of the inequities faced by communities of color, particularly those who are both queer and Black. His "fire makes some dragons," from 2020, depicts a perilous scene amidst a background of implied comfort, employing both woven and embroidered elements.

It then blows apart with Maria Nepomuceno's "Little Delilah," in which braided rope spirals into disks and then coils into lines that wind down from the wall to the floor and other elements in ceramic, fiberglass, and resin. On the floor in the center of the room is the gossamer "Zinc Cloud" by Alan Saret, a piece initially crafted in 1967 and remade in 1990 of the same material, chicken wire. It doesn't sound like it meets the exhibition's aims at first pass, but the curators' reach is broader, as one will see in delving deeper into the show. Mr. Saret's work can be seen as relevant to the "fiber practices" they are also considering here. His networks of wire are formed in ways similar to fabric and achieve a lightness not usually associated with metal.

Making a similar but more expansive network is Sheila Pepe, a resident artist of The Church whose "Atmospheric Conditions" floats high above the room in the rafters. The mixed-media site-specific installation is formed from hanging knitted and gauzy blocks and sleeves, chains of fiber, and tangled industrial cord and rope. Climate change, social politics, issues of gender, and religion inform her work.

There is so much material here, it's tempting to name drop the boldface names, like Louise Bourgeois, James Lee Byers, Judy Chicago, Faith Ringgold, Nick Cave, James Rosenquist, and so on. It's also exciting to see how local heroes like Toni Ross, Bastienne Schmidt, and Alice Hope (also on view together in a Guild Hall exhibition this summer) fit into this larger sphere.

Laurie Lambrecht, who has been concerned with sewing and knitting in her work in recent years, is premiering a series she started in 2016. Printing famous works of art on linen, she cuts them into strips and weaves them into different patterns that sometimes reveal their source and sometimes veer entirely away from it.



Installation view of "Threading the Needle" with Christa Maiwald's chairs on the floor. *Gary Mamay*

Christa Maiwald is represented by one of her most powerful series, a group of child-sized chairs with embroidered seat cushions comprising a rogue's gallery of financial miscreants who played

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significant roles in the 2008 economic collapse. Completed in 2009, it reminds us that those who wanted to profit from their positions had to be much less blatant and more creative back then.

A couple of attention-grabbing showstoppers are Hank Willis Thomas's bold and playful "Champion" and the visually assaulting and brilliant "Seer Bonnet" by Angela Ellsworth.

Mr. Thomas, who is also a curator of an exhibition of his art at the Parrish Art Museum, has recreated a Stuart Davis composition, "Little Giant Still Life (The Champion)," in sport jerseys and other fabric. The jerseys with their numbers and sponsor names add visual interest and a critical look at commercialism and commodification in sports, from the teams to the players.

Like a macabre twist on Meret Oppenheim's fur-wrapped teacup, Ms. Ellsworth's bonnet is made from fabric and corsage pins. With its faux pearl exterior, the hat looks like a part of a Vegas-inspired pioneer woman costume. In the lining, where it would sit on the head, are all of the long pin points, which turn it into a torture device. Part of a series inspired by the early history of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, the work comes from an artist descended from one of the church's past presidents.

Although this is merely a core sampling of what's on view, it might be best to finish with a focus on one perfect room, the library, which draws viewers in from the get-go with a Mike Kelley "Arena" piece, from his series of assemblages composed of castoffs the artist found in regular prowls of swap meets and thrift stores. The works are ironic, trenchant, humorous, and unsettling. The blankets form charged spaces on the floor populated by small groups of stuffed animals placed around them, and sometimes centrally. They emit a strong sense of opposition -- not being able to enter the piece or being welcomed to play. The objects' visual back story of ultimate rejection imbues them with a roughness that belies any former cuddliness.

Other works placed around it on the walls reflect similar dislocations, double meanings, and unexpected juxtapositions: a Kiki Smith tapestry, Ann Morton's "Proof-Reading" embroidered handkerchief, Charles LeDray's diminutive "Catcher's Vest," Rosemarie Trockel's acrylic on wool "Studie zum Fleckenbild," and Lucy Winton's "Rabbit Moon," a painted and embroidered found tapestry. Ms. Winton is another artist with a South Fork base whose work mingles perfectly with the rest of the room.

"Threading the Needle" will remain on view through Sept. 18. Louise Eastman and Ms. Lambrecht will speak at The Church on Sunday at 10:30 a.m. on their work in the show. On the closing weekend, an artist round table with Helena Hernmarck, Ms. Ross, and Julianne Swartz will take place Sept. 17 at noon. Tickets are \$15 for each event.

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