

# MARC STRAUS

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**Elaine Reichek and Jeanne Silverthorne to explore invisibility in a new collaborative project**



Jeanne Silverthorne, Installation of 10 Rubber Cardboard Boxes, 2015–17, platinum silicone rubber with silver metallic or phosphorescent or fluorescent pigment, archival invisible ink on acid-free paper, each: 9 x 13 x 17 in., courtesy of the artist and Marc Straus Gallery, New York.

ANDOVER, MASS.- This fall at the Addison Gallery of American Art, located on the campus of Phillips Academy in Andover, MA, artists Elaine Reichek and Jeanne Silverthorne will team up to present *Invisible Citings*, an installation exploring their shared interest in text and notions of invisibility. As the so-called Gutenberg age gives way to glowing screens, *Invisible Citings* celebrates writing as material and medium and looks to the printed page to consider invisibility. Weaving Reichek's embroidery and Silverthorne's sculpture together with classic and contemporary literature, the exhibition, on view September 1–December 31, 2017, addresses themes such as the legible and the obscured, word and image, illumination and luminescence, archiving and discarding. In conjunction with the exhibition, Reichek and Silverthorne will be the Addison's Edward E. Elson Artists-in-Residence.

Invisibility is not a new topic for these artists. Reichek has long combined image and text in provocative hand stitchings that rethink the role of craft in the fine arts and investigate narratives and languages generally excluded from mainstream histories and the art historical canon. Silverthorne's quirky and poignant cast rubber sculptures—sometimes paired with text—evoke things unnoticed and unseen: outmoded, dilapidated objects, things lost to deep storage, and obsolete traditions. Compiling and reading diverse texts and then painstakingly translating them into compelling works of art, Reichek and Silverthorne marry their signature styles with passages from writings as diverse as: "O May I Join the Choir Invisible" by George Eliot, *The Invisible Man* by H. G. Wells, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *The Albertine Workout* by Anne Carson, *Republic* by Plato,

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Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino, “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an article by Elena Ferrante, and a Rolling Stone interview with musician Brian Wilson.

Among the objects Silverthorne presents in this installation are numerous cast rubber “cardboard” filing boxes, each containing a stack of one thousand apparently blank letter-sized pages. On some of the sheets, however, Silverthorne has painstakingly copied in invisible ink, in her own handwriting, a text on some aspect of invisibility. Depending on the length of the text that Silverthorne chose to copy, the number of inscribed sheets of paper in a box ranges from 30 to 700. An important element of this work involves the viewer’s faith in Silverthorne’s claim that the pages do, in fact, contain writing. While some of these paper-filled boxes will be open and illuminated with ultraviolet light so that viewers may investigate for themselves whether or not the pages are blank, the majority remain closed and their contents inaccessible. Instead, we are left to imagine the artist’s invisible handwriting, the hidden texts, and the unseen hours spent manually copying them.

Translating handwriting on paper into sewn thread on linen, Reichek, like Silverthorne, uses script derived from the old-fashioned Palmer method of cursive writing that was drilled into schoolchildren across the nation from the 1880s to around 1950, and is now practically obsolete. Often modeled on the handwriting of either Silverthorne or Reichek herself, the embroidered scripts render texts legible and materialize invisible thoughts; each stitch also makes visible the labor and hours spent creating the work. As revelatory as they are by comparison with the sealed storage boxes, the embroideries also contain secrets. Many of them employ a glow-in-the-dark thread, a parallel to Silverthorne’s invisible ink and compromised legibility. The phosphorescent thread only becomes fully visible in the dark or under ultraviolet light, just as Silverthorne’s ink remains invisible without the aid of the ultraviolet spectrum.

Together and in their respective contributions, Silverthorne and Reichek play with how invisible thought becomes materialized, and complicate the ancient, simple, yet laboriously learned skill of writing by hand. In privileging pre-modern forms of appropriation and compilation far slower than the instantaneity promised by today’s digital and photographic technologies, both artists aspire in Invisible Citings to create a transitional space for looking, reading, and contemplation.

“As the range of texts and associated ideas presented in this exhibition attest, invisibility is all around us,” states Allison Kemmerer, the Addison’s Curator of Art After 1950. “Despite our efforts to see and know everything, there will always be phenomena too sophisticated or elusive for our humble eyes or cutting-edge technology. In this space we are able to see what is not readily apparent. And in pondering the unseen, we actually see quite a bit about ourselves.”

As Edward E. Elson Artists-in-Residence, Reichek and Silverthorne first visited Phillips Academy this spring, hosting an open house for students and teachers, discussing inspiration for their project and demonstrating writing in invisible ink. The artists will return to campus in September to work with students in English and art classes, both from the Academy and from area public schools. Through exploration of Invisible Citings and conversations with the artists, the students will connect themes in the exhibition with their coursework.