

Martha Friedman

NYU INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS | GREAT HALL

1 E 78th St

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High above Martha Friedman's three-piece exhibition "Some Hags" is a seventeenth-century Flemish tapestry that depicts the moment after Circe used her magic to turn Odysseus's men into swine. Freaked out and pissed off, Odysseus looms like a hulk behind the sorceress, sword in hand, as she sits before a large book. It is one likely source of her power, a tome of spells that Friedman renders as the sculptural *Circe's Book* (all works 2016), an enormous, odd, and interactive collection of elastic pages on a table below, its sticky-smooth rubber sheaths requiring some strength to turn. The work riffs off different sections of the tapestry, from the brandished weapon to the pattern of the weaving itself.

Opposite a nineteenth-century plaster bust of a woman is *Magician's Assistant*, made from three blocks of spiky and smooth steel pipes—tactile yet rather uninviting. Barbed protrusions extend from both outward-facing sides of the object, while hollow cylinders act as insertion points for rubber tubing. This thing of primitive circuitry sits on a red rubber sheet, the draping of which echoes the cloth where Circe's volume rests in the tapestry.

There are some variations in how Odysseus's crew were returned to human form: One is that Circe was threatened by the warrior; another, that in exchange for an enchanted antidote, she requested that the Trojan War hero be her lover. Either way, he stayed on willingly for a year, even after the spell was broken. Friedman has long focused on the female body—here, we're given a rich tableau of people and objects that remind us of feminine allure's mesmerizing power.



Martha Friedman, *Magician's Assistant*, 2016, steel, rubber, wood, 15 x 4 x 4".