

Needlepointedly

In the latest offering from Providence's Po Gallery, one of the world's most understated art forms — needlepoint — gets a cutting-edge makeover, courtesy of Spanish-born fiber artist Pilar Coover.

Coover, who's married to award-winning novelist and longtime Brown professor Robert Coover, started doing needlepoint while living in London in the 1970s. Since then, she's developed a dense, swirling, image-packed style that draws on everything from classical music (Mozart seems to be a particular favorite) to Surrealism to the fantastic panoramas of visionary artists such as William Blake and Hieronymus Bosch.

A series of works inspired by Mozart's "The Magic Flute" offers a good example of Coover's whimsically inventive approach. One shows the opera's villain, the treacherous Queen of the Night, wrapped in a shimmering cloud and appropriately crowned by a spider's web. Another panel turns one of the opera's most famous scenes — the moment when the hero, Tamino, is presented with a magic flute — into a flowing, dreamlike tableau that almost looks as if it's taking place underwater.

Other works range from the fanciful (a tree whose limbs and branches are composed of various animals) to the macabre (a work called *Fossils*, in which one of Coover's densely packed scenes is populated entirely by skeletons). Needless to say, this isn't your grandmother's needlepoint.

"Pilar Coover: A Retrospective" continues through Oct. 28 at the Po Gallery, 10 Dorrance St. in Providence. Hours: Wed.-Fri. noon-5 and Sat. noon-4. Phone: (401) 273-9144.