

Michaela Melián

Ludlow 38

*38 Ludlow Street, at Hester Street,
Lower East Side*

Through Feb. 22

The main event in the memorable American debut of Michaela Melián, a German artist and musician, is "Speicher," a mesmerizing black-and-white video that layers spoken word and electronic music. The camera is limited to shots of streaming snow seen through the windshield of a moving car at night, and wandering close-ups of expanses of paper whose flowing lines of machine-sewn stitches and knots suggest a topographical map.

Motion is all. Mixed with the lulling music are sounds of a woman giving driving directions and detailing the migrations of different bird species, and of men reminiscing about crossing borders illegally in search of work. Snippets of poetry float through. Certain phrases repeat, like "A walking tour of the Harz Mountains with a map of London."

Speicher is a German word for computer memory, attic and reservoir, according to the news release. The release also explains that the show's point of departure is a lost multimedia work made decades ago at the School of Design in Ulm, Germany, a short-lived attempt (from 1952 to 1968) to resurrect the Bauhaus. Titled "VariaVision — Unendlich Fahr" (or "Endless Journey"), it was created by a group of composers and engineers in the school's electronic studio, which was provided by Siemens and was one of the first in West Germany.

Along with other works — a large wall drawing, three machine-sewn newspaper collages and a raised floor that resembles a stepped bridge — "Speicher"

attempts to retrieve "VariaVision" and the history of the Siemens studio. If all this sounds a bit obscure, it is, but it is well worth teasing out. Ms. Melián has been exhibiting in Europe since 1985. Her work and her use of both real and metaphorical space is spare yet encompassing, assured and quite moving.

ROBERTA SMITH