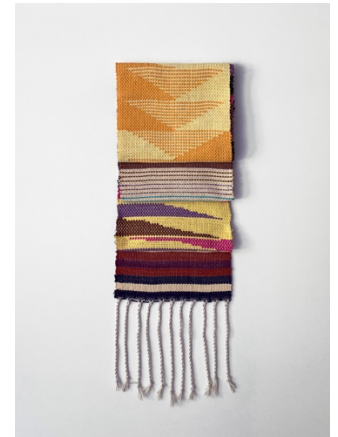


Paolo Arao *Loom Songs*

October 12 – November 11, 2023



Morgan Lehman is pleased to announce the opening of “Loom Songs,” an exhibition of new wall-based textile works by Paolo Arao. This marks Arao’s second solo exhibition with the gallery.

Paolo Arao comes from a background in music. As a classically trained concert pianist, he originally pursued a degree in music performance and composition before pivoting to a visual arts undergraduate program, ultimately earning his degree in painting and printmaking. Music has remained a steady influence in shaping his aesthetic thinking in the studio. To produce these latest works, the artist works on a floor loom, which in many ways resembles an upright piano. Both devices are creative instruments that serve as natural extensions of the human body. Using the loom, Arao weaves colored cotton threads to produce polychromatic patterns in the form of textiles. The physical action of weaving is a profoundly somatic experience with its repetitive motion and rhythms. Arao explains, “When I am weaving, it feels like I am visualizing music, making threads sing.”

The works on display represent three distinct series. The “Anthems” are large-scale, strip woven wall hangings that bring together numerous individual panels into a singular, imposing composition. The effect on the viewer is almost kaleidoscopic, with a dizzying array of colored stripes and rectilinear patterns abutting and pushing off of each other in space. Meanwhile, the “Polyrhythmic Studies” are a group of primarily monochromatic collages of handwoven cotton on stretched canvas that exist more in the aesthetic world of painting. Each piece is comprised of multiple pattern swatches (or rhythms), composed within a consistent nine-patch grid structure. In these works, the negative space (or silence) of raw canvas has just as much visual weight as the syncopated textile motifs that surround it. Finally, Arao’s “Wave Forms” series consists of individual handwoven textile strips that tuck in on themselves in repeated and layered folds. These pieces utilize improvisation and the element of chance in their compositions, which lends them a sense of spontaneity.

In addition to the loom’s affinity to music, weaving is also a way for the artist to honor his ancestral Filipino heritage. Arao is interested in the indigenous textile traditions of the Philippines, where it is believed that a textile’s colors and patterns are imbued with powers simultaneously spiritual, healing, and/or protective. A textile’s intensity of color or the dizzying quality of its pattern might correlate with the amount of protection it offers to the wearer in warding off evil spirits. Geometric patterns, and specifically stripes of colored bands, have been a visual motif which Arao has employed over the past few years. The artist likes to think of these elements as chords that establish the tonal key of each artwork, but sees them as serving a more rhythmic purpose in the works included in “Loom Songs”. As viewers, we are invited to follow the beat, nod along, and draw nearer.

Paolo Arao is a Filipino-American artist working with textiles. He received his BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Arao has shown his work widely and has presented solo exhibitions at David B. Smith Gallery (Denver), Western Exhibitions (Chicago), and Jeff Bailey Gallery (NYC) amongst others. Residencies include MacDowell, Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, The Museum of Arts and Design (NYC), Millay Arts, the Studios at MASS MoCA, Vermont Studio Center, Lower East Side Printshop Keyholder Residency, NARS Foundation, Wassaic Project, BRIC Workspace, Atlantic Center for the Arts, and the Fire Island Artist Residency. Paolo Arao is a 2021 NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellow in Painting from The New York Foundation for the Arts. His work has been published in *New American Paintings*, *Maake Magazine*, *ArtMaze*, *Esopus*, and *Dovetail*. He lives and works in West Shokan, NY.