

## ETHAN COOK

### ARENAS

October 24–November 21, 2020

Nino Mier Gallery is pleased to present *Arenas*, the inaugural exhibition of woven and paper works by Brooklyn-based artist Ethan Cook. In the tradition of the mid-century Color Field painters, Cook's "paintings" are made up of swathes of woven color that exist to give color structure. These various structure systems achieve one goal for the artist: to create a specific space for color to perform within myriad of arenas. Arenas, for Cook, are both personal and historical and allow Cook to create a new language of abstraction through textiles.

American critic Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978) first coined the term "arenas" in relation to painting and wrote criticism that defined the age of abstraction during the 1940's and 50's when a group of avant-garde artists of New York supplanted those of Europe and Abstract Expressionism was born. Rosenberg believed the canvas was a spontaneous, intuitive, and existential arena in which the artist acted, letting the composition evolve unpredictably, naturally, dangerously. In 1952, Rosenberg coined the term "Action Painting" to define this new movement of abstract painters that had broken away from the earlier European abstractionists and stated that these artists used the canvas as "an arena in which to act" rather than as a place to produce an object. "What was to go on the canvas," he wrote, "was not a picture but an event."

While for the past decade Ethan Cook predominantly has used a loom rather than a brush, the physical and taxing action of weaving defines the arenas in which Cook creates. For Cook, the performance of making is at once meditative and intensely rhythmic. The grandness of the loom, with its thousands of moving processes and parts, generates a symphony of action that is both quick and unpredictable, developing a variety of idiosyncrasies like a pulled thread or skipped knot, producing a variety of textures that reveal that the works are indeed, handmade.

In 2019, Cook began incorporating aluminum panels into his woven works, disrupting his strict adherence to textile as the sole medium in his practice. The aluminum provides a break in the texture allowing the eye to clearly see the difference between the painted panel and the hand woven cotton. In *Ice*, a blue painted aluminum circle sits within a field of raw canvas that is juxtaposed by an adjacent, but uniform field of blue. The physical juxtaposition of the two colors is an illustration of how opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.

Unique to Cook's current series is the composition of multi-paneled works. For example, in both, *Düsseldorf* and *Sun with Red Horse*, the two woven panels are adjoined to produce various planes within a singular work. By breaking the plane and making a straight line without mark making, Cook delineates the fields of color whereby enhancing the deeply psychological and spiritual experience through which basic human emotions can be communicated. Through this division, Cook encourages a conversation between the two panels. Some panels repeat the same composition like in *Train Landscape*, whereas in others like *Green Square Lovers*, a color is introduced in one panel that differentiates it from its adjoined partner.

Included in the exhibition are a large number of paper works which the artist makes by dipping a mold into a vat of pigmented pulp which is then pulled out, pressed, and dried. The deckled edges of these handmade sheets are as revealing of the process of their production as the stray threads in Cook's woven works. For Cook, paper is a way of making a color field with pigment, earth material and water.

Both acts, paper making and producing the actual canvas by weaving, are a way for the artist to subvert painting and abstraction and a way to do something radical within the confines of art making. For Ethan, these acts further his interest in material existentialism, "*The work is existential in that the existence of the matter precedes it's essence. The existence of the material itself is the work. The matter, or material, is an armature for color. The compositions are determined by the need to fill the space, to bring a plane into existence, to create a work. Various structure systems are used all toward one goal: to create a specific space. This can be achieved in myriad arenas.*"