

# **NINO MIER GALLERY**

LOS ANGELES | BRUSSELS | NEW YORK | MARFA

**ETHAN COOK**

# CONTENTS

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**BIOGRAPHY 1**

**SAMPLE WORKS 3**

**SELECTED PROJECTS AND EXHIBITIONS 15**

**SELECTED PRESS 34**

**CURRICULUM VITAE 51**

# BIOGRAPHY

# ETHAN COOK

**b. 1983, Tyler, Texas, US**

**Lives and works in New York, NY, US**



New York-based artist Ethan Cook engages with materialism and minimalism through his two primary media, woven canvas and handmade paper. Cook's paintings are composed of colored fabric panels that have been hand woven on a four-harness loom, stitched together, and stretched on bars. Foregoing the notion that in order to paint one must apply pigment to canvas in some way – be it by brush, by knife, or by hand – Cook instead uses a loom to weave large swaths of colored fabric that make up his surfaces. For Cook, the performance of artmaking 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.

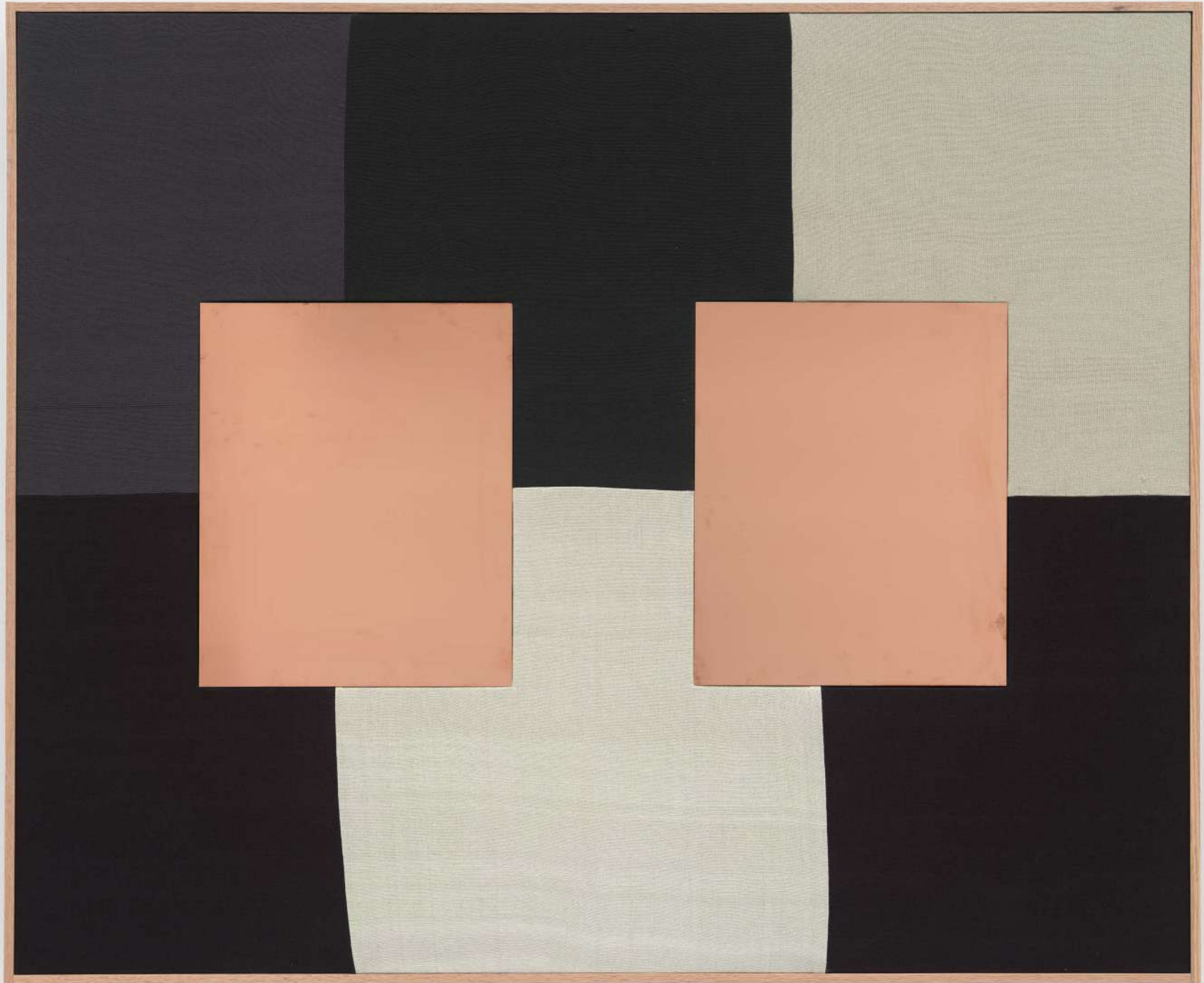
*Ethan Cook (b. 1983, Tyler, Texas, US; lives and works in New York, NY, US) has had solo shows at Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, Brussels, and Marfa; Half Gallery, New York; Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen; Galerie Philipp Zollinger, Zurich; T293, Rome; Loyal Gallery, Stockholm; Anat Ebgı, Los Angeles; Noire Chapel, Torino; Bill Brady, Miami; Sunday-S Gallery, Copenhagen; American Contemporary, New York; Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris; Rod Barton, London; Patrick de Brock Gallery, Knokke; and Gana Art Hannam, Seoul. His work has been covered in the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, the Brooklyn Rail, Interview Magazine, Architectural Digest, among other publications.*

# SAMPLE WORKS

*\*sample selection does not reflect current availability*



*Switch*, 2020, handwoven cotton and linen in artist's frame, 64 x 80 in (framed), 162.6 x 203.2 cm (framed), (ECO20.037)

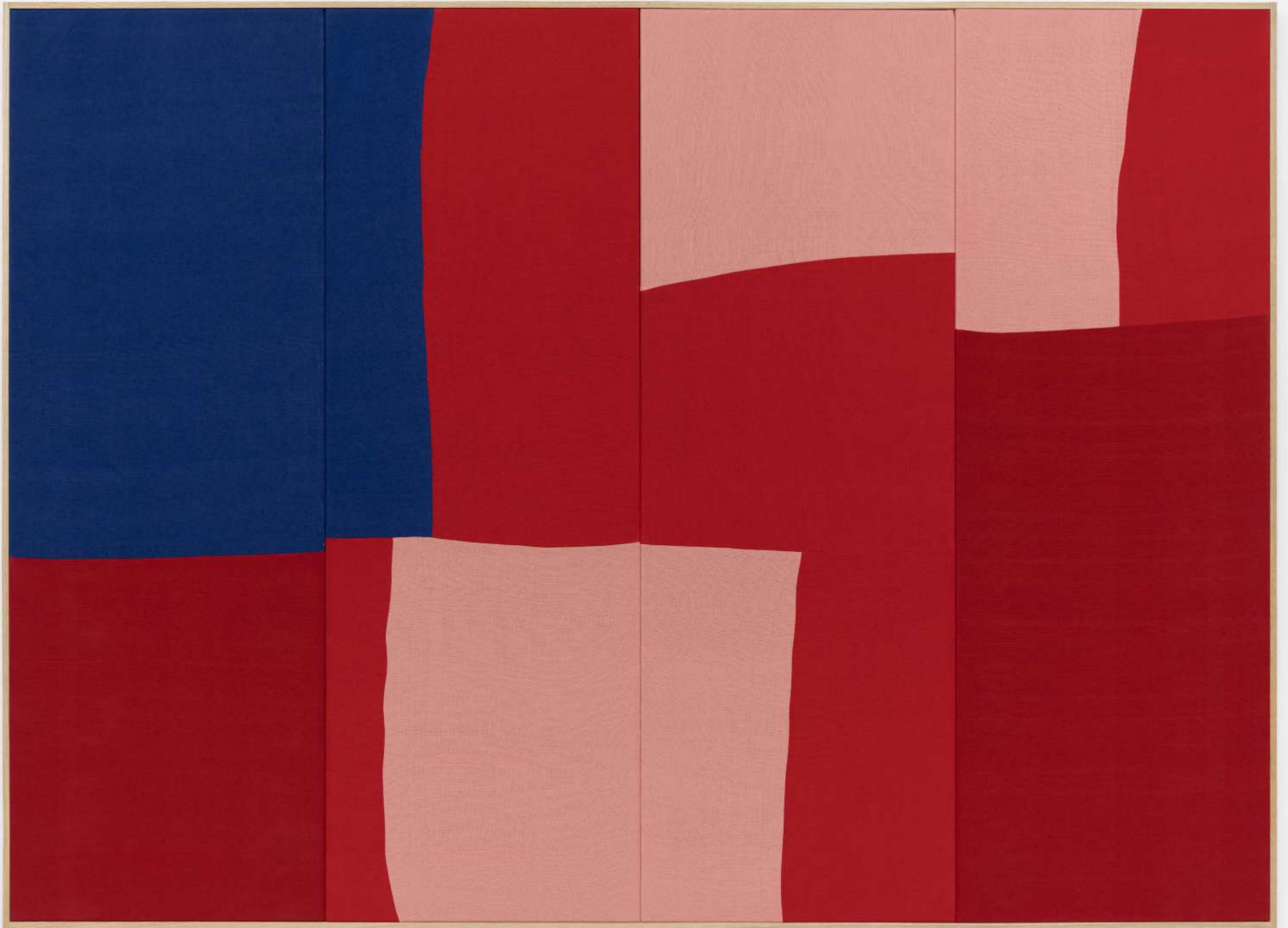


*Mirror in the Sky What is Love?*, 2023, hand woven cotton and copper, 50 x 60 in, 127 x 152.4 cm, (ECO23.033)

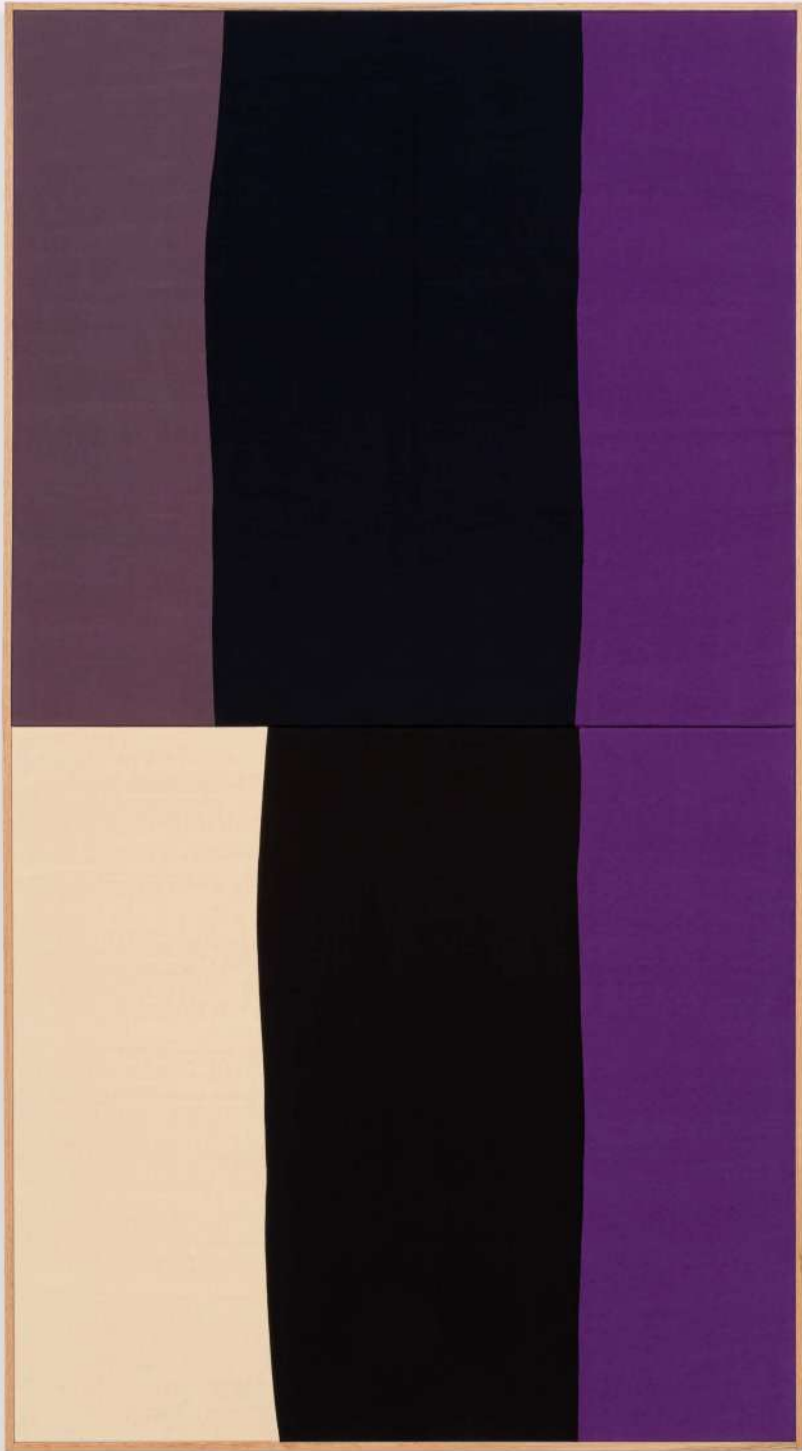


*Five greens, an alabaster, 2020*  
Handmade pigmented paper  
19 3/4 x 19 1/2 in (framed)  
50.2 x 49.5 cm (framed)  
(ECO20.052)

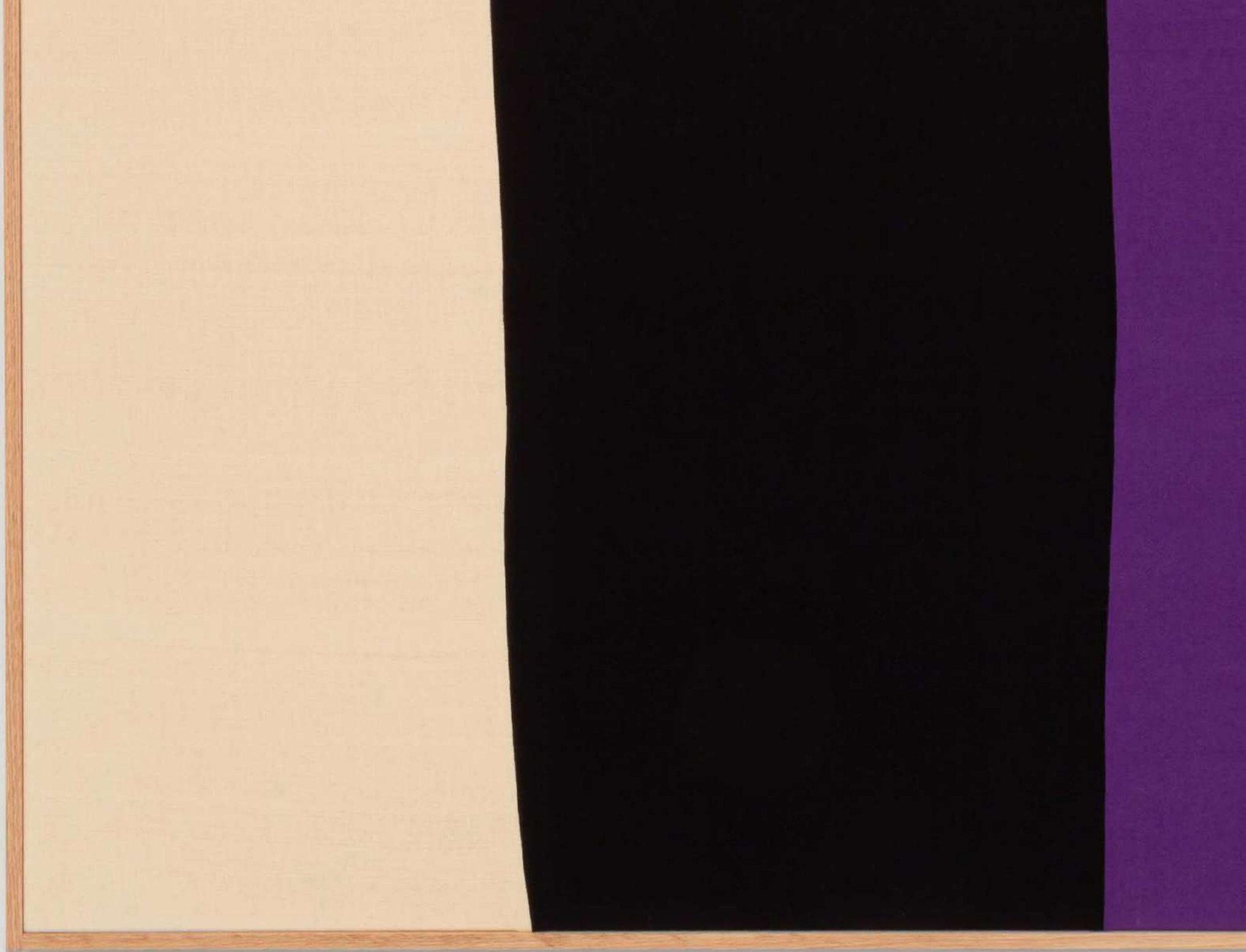




*Schadenfreude*, 2020, handwoven cotton and linen in artist's frame, 70 x 96 in (framed), 177.8 x 243.8 cm (framed), (ECO20.036)



*Nocturne*, 2020  
Handwoven cotton and linen in artist's frame  
47 x 86 in (framed)  
119.4 x 218.4 cm (framed)  
(ECO20.028)



*Ice*, 2020

Handwoven cotton, linen, and acrylic on aluminum in artist's frame

60 x 80 in (framed)

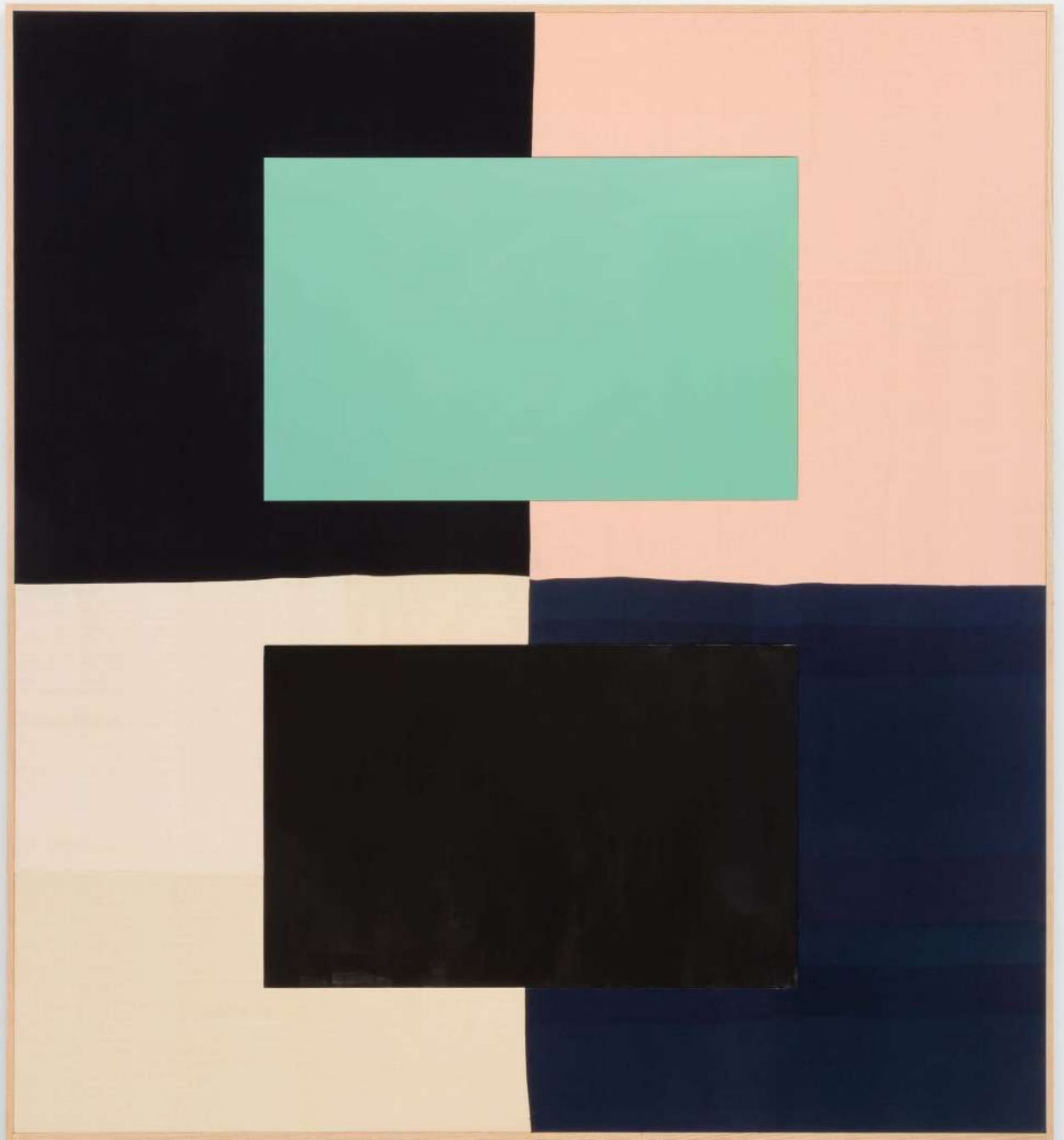
152.4 x 203.2 cm (framed)

(ECO20.035)





*Look at What the Light  
Did Now, 2023*  
Hand woven cotton and copper  
56 x 60 in  
142.2 x 152.4 cm  
(ECO23.031)



*Untitled (Puvis), 2019*

Handwoven cotton, oil on aluminum, and acrylic  
on aluminum (in three parts) in artist's frame  
71 1/2 x 77 1/2 in (framed)  
181.6 x 196.8 cm (framed)  
(ECO19.010)



Untitled, 2019  
Handwoven cotton and linen  
in artist's frame  
76 x 82 in (framed)  
193 x 208.3 cm (framed)  
(ECO19.003)







*Title*, Year  
Medium  
17 7/8 x 14 3/4 x 1 5/8  
45.5 x 37.5 x 4 cm  
(JS22.011)

**SELECTED EXHIBITONS  
AND PROJECTS**

# SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

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## ***ENTITIES***

2023

NINO MIER GALLERY  
BRUSSELS, BE

## ***LANDSCAPES***

2021

NINO MIER GALLERY  
MARFA, TX, US

## ***ARENAS***

2020

NINO MIER GALLERY  
LOS ANGELES, CA, US



## **ENTITIES**

**2023**  
**NINO MIER GALLERY**  
**BRUSSELS, BE**

In *Entities*, Cook develops the rigorously structured approach to artmaking that has come to define his paintings, sculptures, and works of paper over the last decade. The works feature new materials and surface qualities while experimenting with logics of geometric proportion and color.

The exhibition's greater emphasis on varied brushwork and surface texture points to a new direction in Cook's work. Paintings such as *Hello Newman*, 2023 feature painted segments marked by evident, repetitious brushwork. Other paintings such as *And the Color Red*, 2023 incorporate, for the first time, copper panels. For years, Cook has produced his hand-woven paintings on a four-harness loom, foregoing traditional oil or acrylic paints for textile. Here, the laborious and handmade feel of the woven sections come into contrast with the industrial sleekness of copper and aluminum. Given the reflective qualities of copper and aluminum, the works transform depending on lighting and environmental conditions, introducing a sense of chance within Cook's otherwise precise command over color.

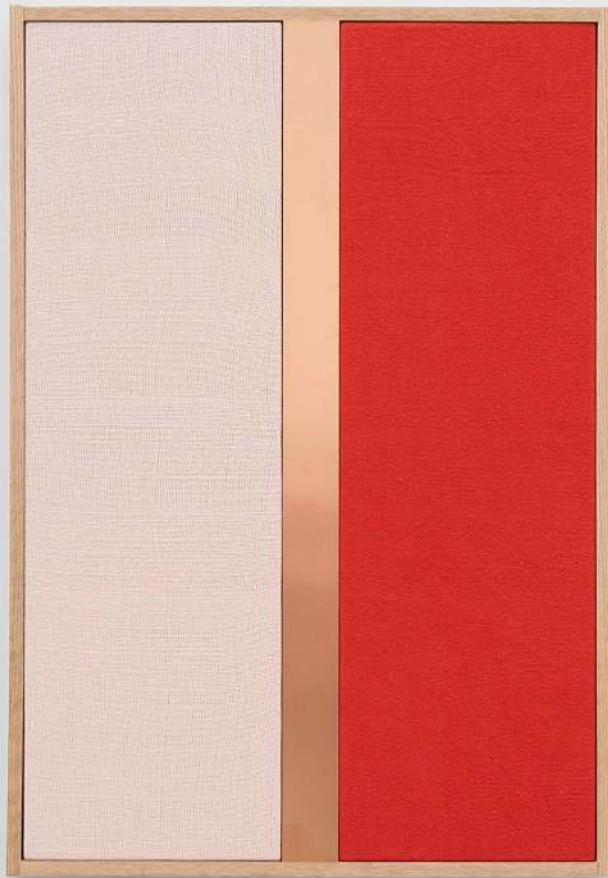
In two works, *Small Red Flower*, 2022 and *Small Pink Flower*, 2022, Cook abandons the rectangular constraint in favor of more organic, fluctuating forms. Each dichromatic shaped canvases resembles a flower, with their radial arrangement of petal-like semi-circles emanating from an aluminum center painted with acrylic. Cook initially conceived the work as an experiment with the form in *The Blue Acrobat*, 1929 by Pablo Picasso. Further abstracting the moving figure's curved limbs and head, the artist began dialoguing with the rich history of shaped canvases from László Peri to Ellsworth Kelly, Elizabeth Murray, and Frank Stella.

Cook also incorporates copper and aluminum panels within his grid-like works on handmade paper. To produce the works, Cook first mixes raw pigment with abaca, cotton, and water; afterward, he presses and dries the mixture. Like his canvas works, the works of paper emphasize the experiential effects of color and form, process, and chance. The solidity of metal juxtaposed with the mutability of paper imbues the works with a sense of imperfection and impermanence.

For *Entities*, Cook turned special attention to representations of geometry and their effects on viewers. Like Barnett Newman's "zips," the artist employs compositional devices such as long vertical lines or repeating rectangles to distill the essential qualities of each composition. Cook's abiding interest in phenomenology—in how our conception of the external world is shaped through our bodily engagements with it—adjoins an invigorated attention to geometry in the exhibition. "Geometry is a way of processing all of the chaotic, abstract data of the world and organizing it," Cook explains, "thereby allowing us to understand how we are a part of or a function of that data. It both describes and shapes our bodily immersion within and experience of the world."

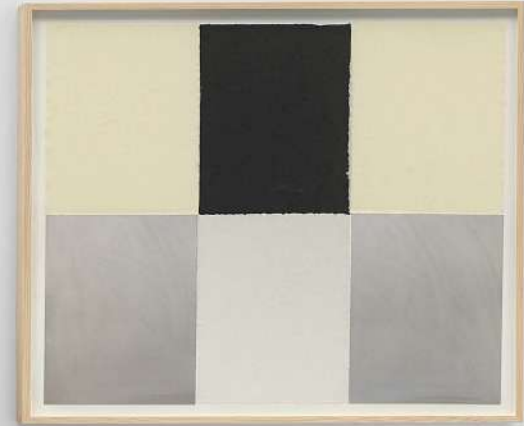
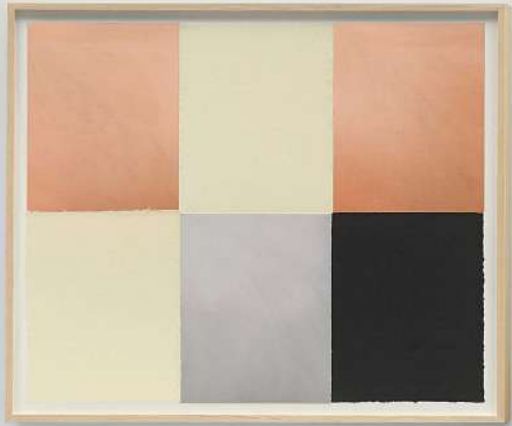












# LANDSCAPES

2021

NINO MIER GALLERY  
MARFA, TX, US

Landscapes expands on the artist's ongoing conceptual and visual interests in medium, material, and minimalism featuring twelve new paintings and one sculptural installation. Landscapes is titled not after the content, quality, or orientation of the works on view in the show, but rather after Cook's responsiveness to the atmosphere of the west Texan desert. The artist lived in Texas for most of his life, including a year-long stint in Terlingua, a town close to Marfa, in 2008. This exhibition offered him an opportunity to reacquaint himself with the elemental forces that shape this unique landscape. The new suite of paintings departs from Cook's earlier work, which sutured two-dimensional planes of color next to one another, using the canvas' natural boundaries. Instead, they now evoke a figure-ground dynamic, wherein imperfect, curved shapes of color cut from canvas emerge before a muted, sand-colored backdrop that—when viewed consecutively—feel as vast as the desert

floor. The curved, irregular rectangular shapes seem to multiply and drift upwards on the canvas, as though they were heat waves radiating off an overheated earth. Cook's color palette has also shifted in this body of work, away from dark blues and blacks and vibrant secondary colors, and towards more softened, neutral hues like lavender and butter yellow, and the jewel tones of night like deep purple and blood red.

Cook's paintings are composed of colored fabric panels that have been hand woven on a four-harness loom, stitched together, and stretched on bars. Foregoing the notion that in order to paint one must apply pigment to canvas in some way – be it by brush, by knife, or by hand – Cook instead uses a loom to weave large swaths of colored fabric that make up his surfaces. He devises his compositions by laying colors on a flat stretcher, walking around the stretcher to regard them from all angles, then shifting and re-shifting until their balance is satisfactory. "I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body," writes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose work influences Cook's thought and method. The body is an interface between the virtual and the actual. For Cook, it is the birthplace of his aesthetic constructions. His works therefore do not so much represent desert landscapes, but rather point to what it might feel like to inhabit them in a mode attuned to the all-sensing body.







BINDER





BINDB

# ARENAS

2020

NINO MIER GALLERY  
LOS ANGELES, CA, US

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.

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.

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."

















**SELECTED PRESS**

# SELECTED PRESS

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**SIGHT UNSEEN**

JUNE 2023

BY DEBORAH SHAPERO

**ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST**

DECEMBER 2022

BY RACHEL DAVIES

**INTERIOR DESIGN**

AUGUST 2022

BY GEORGINA MCWHIRTER

**ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST**

MAY 2022

BY GAY GASSMANN

**LOS ANGELES TIMES**

JULY 2018

BY LEAH OLLMAN

**T MAGAZINE**

OCTOBER 2015

BY ISABEL WILKINSON

**INTERVIEW**

MARCH 2014

BY ADAM O'REILLY

**BROOKLYN RAIL**

MARCH 2014

BY ALEX BACON

# Sight Unseen

JUNE 2023

## A Controversial Seinfeld Character Inspired One of Ethan Cook's New Paintings

By Deborah Shapero



6.14.23

Courtesy of Nino Mier Gallery

The depth of color in Ethan Cook's work is entrancing: It draws you in and then proceeds to work its spell, stirring up meaning and feeling. Cook is known for his abstract "woven paintings" in which color isn't applied at all but is part of the canvas itself. He uses a four-harness loom to hand weave fabric, which is then stitched together and stretched on bars. But recently, Cook has been exploring additional materials and techniques, evident in his latest exhibition *Entities*, at the Brussels location of Nino Mier. (It's the Texas-born, New York-based artist's fourth solo show with the gallery.) There's long been a meditative quality to both his process and his output and now there's a reflective aspect as well — figuratively but also literally, with copper and aluminum panels incorporated into the textile pieces alongside those he produces with paper. Cook handmakes paper using raw pigment mixed with cotton, abaca, and water, resulting in super-saturated surfaces that paradoxically contain an inherent depth.

He's also added brushwork into pieces like *Hello Newman*, which combines hand-woven cotton with acrylic on aluminum and copper. Not to read too much into a title, but the repetitive brushwork on one side, thick and dark green, does kind of echo the ongoing sitcom rhythms of *Seinfeld* and the recurring appearance of Jerry's postal-worker nemesis; though Newman also visually refers, of course, to Barnett Newman and his "zip"

paintings with their vertical bands cutting through fields of color.

Relational geometric planes — whose edges are often softened and imperfect — play against more organic forms. In some instances, Cook lets go entirely of the rectangular strictures of the typical canvas, embracing floral shapes with acrylic-painted aluminum centers. From a distance, they may look like simple, flat representations of flowers, but up close, the shift in material and color evokes movement from one state to another — and all the emotion of change and transition. *Entities* is on view through July 20.



# AD

DECEMBER 2022

## 5 Funky Houses and Apartments That'll Inspire You To Get A Little Weird

Unique artwork, paint colors, and textiles  
make these spaces ultra-interesting

By Rachel Davies



Here at Clever, we're always on the lookout for funky houses and apartments that embolden us to indulge in our zaniest home design desires. A space doesn't have to be stuffed to the gills with unusual finds to be sufficiently inspiring—sometimes even the sparest of spaces can inspire just with their surprising layouts, color choices, and art collections. Below we share five of our favorite funky houses that have been featured on Clever.

### Loud colors in a SoHo loft

Over the past few years, changes have been afoot for artist Ethan Cook. Though he still has a studio in Greenpoint and commutes there everyday, Ethan traded his Clinton Hill perch for a SoHo loft. "I really wanted something different when I moved [back] into Manhattan, and this was the first place I saw when I started looking," says Ethan, who had previously lived in Chinatown for over a decade. "I was happy to move and get a change of pace."

The new apartment is a fifth floor walk-up in a six-story building. "It's a pre-skyscraper building with cast iron columns," Ethan adds. "It was first a factory and then became an artists' building. It has a history of making, even if [it now] consists of families and retail."

Although one might be fooled by the color-block floors, Ethan didn't do any renovating. "I just brought my furniture!" He exclaims. "The people before me had redone the floors, which I first thought was weird, but now I really like what they did and it suits my aesthetic." As it happens, Ethan is known for his color-block paintings of solid tones.

A full-floor loft of approximately 2,000 square feet was a huge change, especially compared to his previous, much smaller space in Brooklyn. The choice was deliberate for the artist and collector, as more square footage allowed for more collecting. (Ethan often trades work with other artists and friends.) He also created a large site-specific piece to hang on one of the walls, which is 135 inches long.

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

AUGUST 2022

## Ethan Cook Applies His Minimalist, Abstract Style to Rugs for Hay

By Georgina McWhirter



Photo by Jeremy Liebman

Ethan Cook is an artist who weaves his own canvases, working colored cotton on a floor loom in his Brooklyn, New York, studio until it becomes fabric. He then cuts the handwoven textile into blocks that he pieces together into compositions: minimalist abstract “paintings” as taut and precise as, say, any Ellsworth Kelly or other modern-art master. For Danish brand Hay, Cook transplants his ideas exploring the flatness and physicality of canvases to rugs fabricated in a blend of New Zealand wool and organic cotton. “I’ve never made anything with utility before,” Cook notes of the rugs, dubbed Flat Works, which come in multiple colors and sizes, including runners.

## Enter this dynamic, colour-happy home in New York

Artist Ethan Cook's Brooklyn, New York apartment, which he shares with wife Wray Serna, is packed with colour and whimsical design

By Gay Gassmann



A large, colourful work by artist Ethan Cook hangs in the Brooklyn home he shares with wife Wray Serna. Below are two chairs by architect Frank Gehry and a Kartell plexiglass table topped by a vase by Wray's stepfather, Jamie Templeton. Flowers by Jade Gehringer

Throughout the Brooklyn, New York neighbourhood of Clinton Hill, there are pockets of wonderful 19th-century American architecture. Artist Ethan Cook and designer Wray Serna live on one such block in an 1892 building recently renovated by D+DS Architects. "They did a really good job with the renovations," says Ethan. "We liked the high ceilings, the mouldings, and all of the original touches." D+DS used passive house techniques throughout the building in order to reduce each apartment's carbon footprint.

### Interesting Finds

Moving into this blank-slate apartment provided Ethan and Wray the opportunity to fill it with their collection of art, design, and family heirlooms. Ethan started collecting art a few years ago and now has many pieces from friends or from trades with other artists. "I love having art and I love living with art," he says. Other people's art, that is. There are only two of his pieces in the front room—a bronze hawk sculpture and a large-scale handwoven canvas—at the request of Serna, who often hangs out there.

### Weaving Magic

Ethan is known for what have been described as "woven paintings," and his work is abstract and full of unexpected colour combinations. "I wanted to take the painting out of painting and put the colour into the fabric, which led me to making the canvas," he explains. "My work is about exploring the flatness and physicality of the canvas."



In the dining area, an Eero Saarinen Tulip Table is surrounded by a set of Hans Wegner chairs, and is topped by a Gaetano Pesce vase found in Rome. Missing no opportunity to display art, the couple opted for a Samsung Frame TV, where they have projected a work by Richard Prince. Above that hangs a painting by French artist Bernard Piffaretti from Galerie Frank Elbaz in Paris



Ethan and Wray inherited the neutral-toned sofa from the architects, and it is joined by a wooden armchair by the Campana Brothers (right). A large vase by Brooklyn-based artist/designer Katie Stout sits atop a vintage table

### Prized Possessions

In addition to works of art, there are also notable design pieces scattered around the home. “The design is just fun stuff,” says Ethan. “I don’t take it too seriously.” Regarding their array of contemporary and modernist designs, Wray adds: “We wanted to bring some colour into the home and I wanted the Faye Toogood chair.”

### Thinking Alike

Though they are very comfortable in their new apartment, both Ethan and Wray commute to Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where they have studios. Ethan is beginning to incorporate painting back into his artwork (“which I haven’t done in 10 years!”), and Wray owns an eponymous clothing line where she uses vibrant artist-based prints. The two creatives have a strong sense of colour, which is clear in both their work and in the design of their personal space.

When they’re not in Brooklyn, Ethan and Wray are working on their other home in the Catskills, which they chose because of its complete silence. “No internet, no noise, no cars,” Ethan explains, who adds that because he is from a small town in Texas, he loves “robust silence.”



Even the kitchen is packed with art by Jean-Baptiste Bernadet (painting), Imi Knoebel (wall sculpture), and Loup Sarion (nose sculpture)

# Los Angeles Times

JULY 2018

## **Review: Ethan Cook's paintings are not paintings. Or are they?**

By Leah Ollman

Can a painting be made without paint? Ethan Cook's beautiful, ticklish show at the Los Angeles gallery Anat Ebgi would suggest that the answer is yes.

Cook's works read, at least from a distance, in that familiar way: as arrangements of color on a flat surface, within a frame. But step closer and it becomes evident that the color is integral to the threads of the canvas rather than brushed atop them.

Using commercially available dyed cotton, Cook weaves lengths of fabric that he cuts into rectangular pieces and uses as the basis of his compositions. He stitches the colored panels together in asymmetrical patterns like offset flags, then stretches each sewn piece taut over a wood support, in the manner of a canvas being prepared for painting.

The seams lean and warp, pulled out of orderly alignment. The junctures avoid right angles. That irregularity is echoed in slight deviations in the weave itself — slim rivulets of open space and unexpected densities. Colors too are refreshingly off: anodyne beige abuts assertive cherry; mustard and brown neighbor royal blue and pallid pink.

The works, all untitled, measure upward of 6 feet per side and look like enlarged details of Gee's Bend quilts, those rural Alabama treasures that caught the attention of art scholars because they so resonated with geometric abstraction in painting.

Cook, based in New York, calls his show *Propositions*, and the title couldn't be more apt. At once true and false, the works issue one conceptual prompt and prod after another, and generate myriad art historical rhymes — with stain paintings, minimalist grids, post-minimalist process-driven art and the feminist-activated resurgence of textiles. Canvas hangs onto its conventional functions as surface and vehicle while assuming the additional role of image.

Like Frances Trombly and Mary Little, Cook adopts a sculptural and not just painterly stance toward canvas as he explores how the material can perform simultaneously as star and supporting cast. However many categories Cook's work slots into, and however many media and genres can claim it, what matters is the impression it leaves — that of intellectual exuberance and sensual vitality.

OCTOBER 2018

## Turning Tchotchkes Into Fine Art

By Isabel Wilkinson



The artist Ethan Cook in his studio in Greenpoint. In his work, Cook makes everyday objects like teddy bears into large-scale reliefs. Credit...Dustin Aksland

Three years ago, the artist Ethan Cook began making large-scale woven works — muted and elegant monochrome pieces punctuated with blocks of color. Parts of each canvas were crafted by a machine, while others were made by a hand loom — a dichotomy the artist found fascinating. “You can see all of the mistakes as well as perfections,” he says. Those works served the basis for his 2014 show at American Contemporary in New York, “Problem In Chair Not In Computer,” named after a computing term for user error.

The woven pieces were a commercial hit, earning Cook a new stable of collectors; a few pieces fetched more than \$50,000 in auction. But — as seems to happen with Cook, 32, when he feels he has exhausted a certain technique — he had had enough. “I had done those woven pieces for about two years, and by the end of it I had fully explored what I had set out to do,” he says now. “I didn’t need to keep on exploring this idea that, in my mind, I had fully completed.”

Now, Cook has taken what may seem like a sharp left turn: into the world of everyday devotional objects. For the last several months, he has fabricated large-scale fiberglass reliefs in the shapes of teddy bears, the Virgin Mary, cherubs, angels — even Precious Moments figurines. He says that, with the series, he is “investigating overarching cultural identities through these little tchotchkes.” A selection of this new work — three 35-pound reliefs which he packed in a suitcase — opened recently in a group show, “Archeologia E Architettura,” at the Fondazione 107 in Turin, Italy. Next, he prepares for a solo show in the same space next November, for which he says he will focus more on sculpture and free-standing objects.

The inspiration for the new work came from an unlikely place: his aunt’s house in Gladewater, Tex., which is



overflowing with bric-a-brac. Others came from a trip to Shoreditch in London, where he rented an Airbnb and became fascinated by the owner's small, personal objects. He photographed those objects, and the pictures served as the basis for the reliefs. "Through these mass-produced icons, you get an idea of the culture as a whole through a minisection of someone's home or personal taste," he says, explaining that he was fascinated by "the things we choose to produce and the things we choose to keep."

Similar to his woven works, Cook's reliefs — which are simultaneously austere and, plastered with puppy-dog faces, endearing — demonstrate a fascination with process. He makes silicon or rubber molds in his Greenpoint studio and then ships them to a Brooklyn foundry where they are cast, sanded, bonded and painted. The result is a hard-surfaced mixture of fiberglass and polyester. But, unlike his earlier pieces — which were intentionally created to show human error — the reliefs are perfectly fabricated.

Cook says his decision to cast trinkets as larger-than-life devotional objects comes from an interest in the way people place importance on the quotidian. "The more popular a thing or an image is, the closer you get to an icon," he says. "And I think it's really interesting that people collect Mary, and a little boy, and a parrot, the same way — so everything is reduced to this eight-inch piece of garbage, almost. They're all kind of reduced to nothingness, no matter how grandiose the original idea."



Cook preparing a mold, left; at right, he works on a sculpture of a swan. The artist will pursue more free-standing sculpture in the coming year. Credit...Dustin Akstland

# Interview

MARCH 2014

## Ethan Cook Spins a Yarn

By Adam O'Reilly



Ethan Cook

Ethan Cook is a painter, but he doesn't have any paint in his studio. His new exhibition, "Problem in Chair Not in Computer," up now at American Contemporary, presents a strong body of work made up of hand-woven canvas pieces that he makes on a wooden loom in his Greenpoint studio—but he is not a weaver. Between the three "failed chair" sculptures in the show and the hand-woven canvases, Cook's work presents failure as the ultimate artistic gesture.

But failure is relative. Alongside machine-made material, Cook's hand-woven canvas pieces expose the human touch in the weave, the inconsistencies, the inability to make canvas in the same manner as the machine. We caught up with Cook last week.

*ADAM O'REILLY: When I met you a few years ago, you were making dyed canvas pieces, these new works at American Contemporary have evolved from a similar exploration of materials. Tell me about how this body of work came about?*

**ETHAN COOK:** I was making the dyed pieces up until a couple years ago—they were dyed and bleached pieces of canvas that were then stretched. I was changing what the canvas was as a material, the fiber of the canvas, instead of painting or marking on the canvas. In those I was changing what the canvas actually was, this led me to the next logical step, which is how canvas is made. It made me want to explore weaving—so I

took a weaving class and learned to make canvas.

*O'REILLY: And tell me about the decision to present the hand-woven canvas you make alongside the machine-made canvas.*

COOK: I now see the loom as a canvas printer—as with a printer, there is error involved, those errors in the canvas become the gestures and the artist's hand and mark making. I present the pieces I make on the loom sewn together with store bought canvas to highlight these tiny gestures that come out of the weaving process.

*O'REILLY: In early iterations of this body of work, some of the hand-woven panels were made of different-colored canvas. Why the decision to leave color out of this exhibition?*

COOK: I wanted the canvas that I make for these to be as close to store-bought canvas as possible; I've taken away the color, I use only cotton and linen, only plain weave on the loom, which is how canvas is traditionally made. You know, a lot of people like the blue pieces I was making from a year ago, which made me want to do them less. [laughs] But it's really about trying to stick to my original concept for this work.

*O'REILLY: Explain the title of the show and how it relates to the show, and maybe more literally, to the upside-down chair sculptures in the show.*

COOK: "Problem in Chair Not in Computer," or "PICNIC," is a term used mainly by people who answer phones at tech call centers. It's a polite acronym for "This person does not know what they are doing; it's their problem not ours." So it relates to the idea of the loom as a printer, the weaver as the user. But the title tied literarily in with the sculpture pieces, which are "failed chair" pieces. I had all of this studio plywood that I was using for tables that had become too warped to use. I couldn't get rid of them in my studio building; they won't take trash that big. So it was sort of a matter of finding something to do with it, something useful. When Donald Judd moved to Marfa, he needed furniture for all of his spaces, and the only material he could get out there was four-by-eight-foot sheets of plywood—and that's why all that furniture was made of plywood. So in a similar way, it was out of necessity to get rid of this wood: but unfortunately, they didn't really function well as chairs.

*O'REILLY: Repetition has become a motif in the work. Three of the four canvas works are, from a distance, seemingly identical, and there are three chairs presented in a row.*

COOK: In the show, there are three that are the same composition and the same colors. They each have two panels of the hand-woven canvas on them. By presenting two hand-woven pieces in each work, it's the easiest way to present likeness and contrasts. It's not about forms interacting in space, it more about presenting these materials as they are, seeing the natural contrast between. You can see it from piece to piece, but also within each piece.

*O'REILLY: In this exhibition, you are also presenting the hand-woven pieces more indexically; in the past, the works had more dynamic compositions.*

COOK: All of the hand-woven pieces stay the original width they are on the loom—so I see that work as an indexical presentation of their own creation. You can see each line over line, how the piece was made. Actually, the big piece in the back room in the show is not only the original width, but also, the original length of the hand-woven canvas. That is first time I have been able to do that. The other pieces are cut-down fragments.

*O'REILLY: At that point it feels more like conceptual completion—very ideal.*

COOK: Exactly, I want to move that direction in the next year, and I have some opportunities and bigger spaces to present the work. The loom can make canvas 48 inches by 10 yards long. That's its max, but also one of my goals.

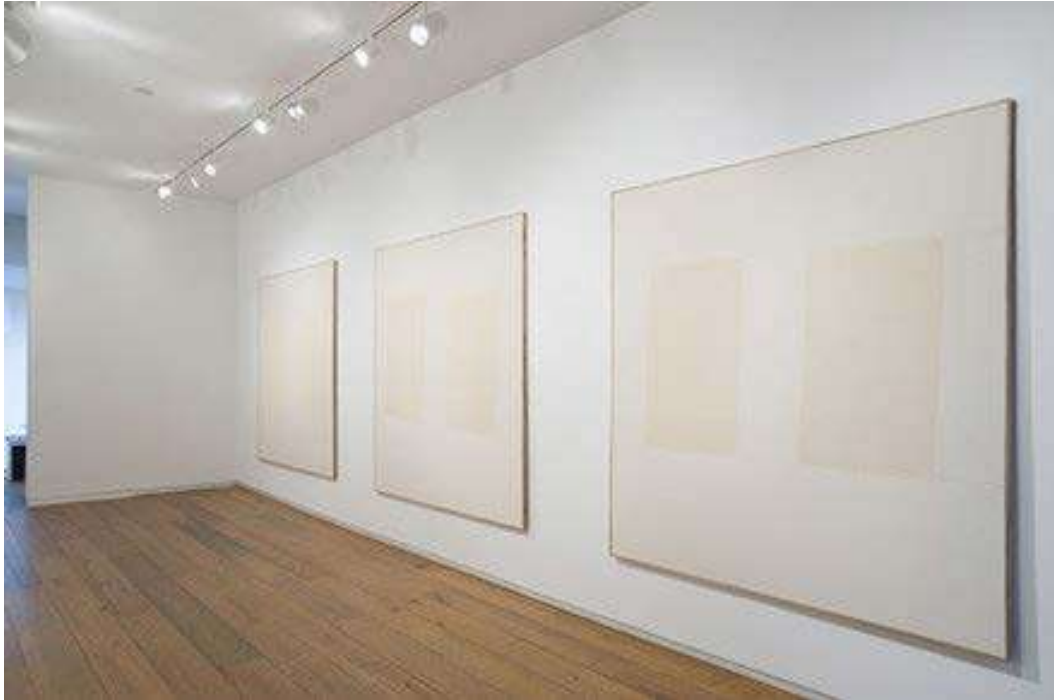
*O'REILLY: What's your relationship with the craft of weaving, and using a loom? Is it important to you?*

COOK: For me, weaving is a means to an end—I started out painting, not weaving. I am not making woven structures or reference to the history of weaving. Earlier, when I said I see the loom as a printer, I literally just see it as a process to make canvas. A 3-D, canvas printer. [laughs]

MARCH 2104

## **ETHAN COOK: Problem In Chair Not In Computer**

By Alex Bacon



Ethan Cook, installation view, 2014. Courtesy of American Contemporary.

When looking at Ethan Cook's work, you need to be able to both stand back to take in the entirety of the field and lean in to observe every detail from up close. Anything in your line of sight will disrupt your ability to properly experience the work. So, if you can, find a time to see *Problem In Chair Not In Computer*, Cook's excellent show at American Contemporary, when few people are likely to be in the gallery.

In the front room is a group of three works that share the same composition: two centralized, upright rectangular panels of hand-woven canvas that are a slightly different off-white or tan color from that of the unmarked canvas that surrounds them. The marginal differences between each reside in the ways that every woven form is somewhat distorted in the act of stretching. In the back room Cook has installed a large work that is of similar dimensions to the wall on which it is hung, and in which two parallel panels of woven fabric run along its upper and lower edges. Alongside it, and rounding out the show, sits a sculptural assemblage made up of plywood panels taken from failed tables in the artist's studio that resembles (in the best way) a set of Ikea-does-Judd chairs that have been salvaged from a scrap heap.

When seen from afar, a given canvas work envelops the viewer in an absorptive field of muted color, while up close one sees the hand-made quality of the colored fabric panels that Cook has woven himself, in the process leaving in any errors or idiosyncrasies. Working solely in a large scale in this exhibition, the artist demonstrates that as scale increases the experiential registers of tactile intimacy and absorptive expansion take on a greater intensity. The field is both easier to get lost in, optically, and engages the viewer's body more directly and emphatically, while the material "flaws" increase and diversify as Cook asks more of his loom.

Each work is produced in the same way: Cook weaves panels of colored cotton and sews them into store bought canvas. Cook's process of arriving at the placement of the woven panels entails taking lengths of the colored fabrics he has woven, laying them out, and moving them around to determine what number, size, and shape (rectangle or square) will be introduced into the picture plane, similar to how Matisse made his cut-outs. Once he has finalized the composition, the woven pieces are sewn into the commercial canvas such that everything is sutured into a single flat surface that is then stretched and framed.

Cook recognizes that for many years the innovations of post-war abstraction divested painting of the sense of immediacy and intimacy it once held. However, by processing and responding to this important period in art history he is able to update the aesthetic goals of an earlier generation. Like the work of Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt and, perhaps especially, Agnes Martin, Cook's works encourage the kind of prolonged contemplation that leads to a personal engagement that is both intimate and expansive. As with Martin's wavering penciled grids, intimacy is solicited by the "errors" Cook makes as he weaves the canvas. These are the sole marks of his hand, and can only be seen up close. But it is only in taking a few steps back and viewing the work from afar that the beholder is immersed in a quiet field of subdued form and color.

This insistently somatic and visual address sets Cook apart from other artists who have used fabrics and sewing in their paintings such as, historically, Blinky Palermo, Rosemarie Trockel, Alighiero Boetti, and, more recently, Sergej Jensen, Ayan Farah, Lauren Luloff, Sam Moyer, and Frances Trombly. While there is variation amongst these artists, they all utilize familiar, even pedestrian, materials, drawing on our acquaintance with such materials to lend their work a particular kind of physical presence. For Cook, however, his materials are ultimately a vehicle to an aesthetic experience that transcends them, in much the same way that for Rothko or Reinhardt what kind of paint they used was important, but solely as a means to an aesthetic end.

The role of craft in Cook's work is tempered and mediated by his limited use of such fabrics, which he employs sparingly and simply, and only in the dimensions his loom is capable of producing. He uses an elementary weave—the same basic cross-stitch utilized to make traditional canvas—and he employs the resulting fabric only in places where other artists would introduce pigment, as, for example, with the central off-white planes in the works in the front room. Cook's very particular use of materials demonstrates something as conceptually profound as his fields of color are affecting: that in an age where we increasingly experience everything as mediated through an ever-proliferating number of devices that act as prostheses for our various senses, certain materials take on new meaning and significance. In the 1960s it would have been impossible to see works incorporating no paint as paintings. Today works like Cook's, that are made up only of sewn patches of fabric, not only read as paintings, but as ones that draw equally on the medium's modernist and deconstructive traditions.

In 1967, Michael Fried amended Clement Greenberg's 1962 statement that a "stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture" with the caveat that "it is not conceivably one" because, even if "future circumstances might be such as to make it a successful painting...for that to happen, the enterprise of painting would have to change so drastically that nothing more than the name would remain."<sup>1</sup> The fact that Cook's works succeed by the very terms established by Fried for painterly success—"being convinced that a particular work can stand comparison with the painting of the past whose quality is not in doubt"—reveals that, even if such a change has come to pass, in the hands of a select few artists, like Cook, it has reinvigorated rather than impoverished painting. In a digital age the medium has been given renewed potential to pose, as Cook's works do, modalities of connectivity and empathy.



# **CURRICULUM VITAE**

## ETHAN COOK

b. 1983, Tyler, TX, US  
Lives and works in New York, NY, US

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 How the World Becomes World, Nino Mier Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2023 *Entities*, Nino Mier Gallery, Brussels, BE
- 2022 *The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over the Lazy Dog*, Nino Mier Gallery Glassell Park, Los Angeles, CA, US  
*Family Tree*, Loyal Gallery, Stockholm, SE  
*Chimera*, T293, Rome, IT
- 2021 *Landscapes*, Nino Mier Gallery, Marfa, TX, US  
*The Made Body*, Gana Art, Seoul, KR  
*Figures*, Patrick de Brock Gallery, Knokke, BE  
*A Rainbow In Curved Air*, Loyal Gallery, Stockholm, SE  
*Associated Bodies*, HALF Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2020 *Arenas*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US (catalogue)  
*Papers*, T293, Rome, IT
- 2019 *Fields*, Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen, DK  
*Sets*, Galerie Philipp Zollinger, Zurich, CH  
*Bands*, T293, Rome, IT
- 2018 *The Neutral*, Patrick de Brock Gallery, Knokke, BE  
*Propositions*, Anat Ebgi Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US (catalogue)  
*Ethan Cook*, Gana Art Hannam, Seoul, KR (catalogue)  
*Mysticism and Logic*, Noire Chapel, Torino, IT
- 2017 *Less Than Zero*, Sunday-S Gallery, Copenhagen, DK  
*Decoy*, Bill Brady, Miami, FL, US
- 2016 *Shakespeare*, Anat Ebgi Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2015 *De Beauvoir Crescent*, T293, Rome, IT
- 2014 *Problem In Chair Not In Computer*, American Contemporary, New York, NY, US  
*Ethan Cook*, Bill Brady KC, Kansas City, MO, US
- 2013 *Felman*, Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris, FR  
*lobster*, Rod Barton, London, UK

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Ceramics Club*, White Columns, New York, NY, US
- 2021 *Juan Carlos Maldonado Art Collection*, Miami, FL, US  
*Shapes*, Alexander Berggruen, New York, US  
*Inaugural Exhibition*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2020 *Echo Chords*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US  
*Under Glass*, Half Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Paper (and one on wood)*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US

- Summer Group Show*, Patrick De Brock, Knokke, BE
- 2018 *Moondog*, East Hampton Shed, East Hampton, NY, US  
*Winter Show*, Koki Arts, Tokyo, JP
- 2017 *Sagra ARTDATE*, The Blank Contemporary, Bergamo, IT
- 2016 *Miranda*, Anat Ebgi Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US
- 2015 *Arcitectura e Archeologio*, Fondazione 107, Torino, IT  
*The Politics of Surface*, Berthold Pott, Cologne, DE
- 2014 *Ethan Cook, Sam Falls, Emanuel Rohss & Tris Vonna-Michell*, T293 in-residence at Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK  
*The Go-Between*, National Museum of Capodimonte, Naples, IT  
*173 E 94th St / Chaussee de Waterloo 550*, Paul Kasmin at Middlemarch, Brussels, BE  
*Infinitude*, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, CA, US  
*Picture/Painting/Object*, Gallery Albert Baronian, Brussels, BE  
*Difference and Repetition*, Luce Gallery, Turin, IT  
*Stitched Up*, S2, London, UK
- 2013 *Space Whole Karaoke*, Middlemarch, Brussels, BE  
*Equilibrium*, Ritter/Zamet, London, UK  
*Xtraction*, The Hole, New York, NY, US  
*This is the story of America*, Brand New Gallery, Milan, IT  
*Imago Mundi*, Curated by Diego Cortez, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, IT  
*Pattern Recognition*, Ana Cristea Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Shake Shack Guggenheim*, V1 Gallery, Copenhagen, DK
- 2012 *Dreamtigers*, Ed. Varie Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*MADE WITH MUSTARD*, East Hampton Shed, East Hampton, NY, US  
*Floor Routine*, Bodega, Philadelphia, PA, US  
*MATTERDADDY*, Angstrom Gallery, Dallas, TX, US  
*Black Foliage*, Nudashank, Baltimore, MD, US  
*Slowed & Thowed*, Chinatown Arcade, New York, NY, US  
*Tik Drty*, Amstel 41 Gallery, Amsterdam, NL  
*The Big Stink Moves Like a Moth Towards the Light*, Hungryman Gallery, Chicago, IL, US  
*Rooms Within Rooms*, Apache Projects, Anafi Island, GR  
*Brucennial 2012*, BHQF, New York, NY, US  
*Alchemy*, Harvester Gallery, Hudson, NY, US  
*FFA*, Space Gallery, Portland, OR, US
- 2011 *What Brings The Dust Together*, New Gallery London, London, UK  
*Nom de Guerre*, Youth Group Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Refractions*, Place Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*All the Tired Horses in the Sun, How am I Supposed to Get Any Riding Done?*, EOC Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*Issue Project Room*, Industria Superstudio, New York, NY, US  
*NurtureArt*, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, NY, US
- 2010 *Black, White and Read All Over*, Envoy Gallery, New York, NY, US  
*It Is What It Is*, Envoy Gallery, New York, NY, US
- 2009 *Works*, Do Right Gallery, Marfa, TX, US

## **PUBLICATIONS**

- 2022 *Landscapes*, Nino Mier Gallery



- 2020 *ETHAN COOK*, Nino Mier Gallery
- 2019 *Bands/Marks*, catalogue, Patrick De Brock
- 2018 *Ethan Cook*, catalogue, Gana Art Seoul  
*Ethan Cook*, monograph, Anat Ebgi Press
- 2013 *Felman*, monograph, Galerie Jeanroch Dard
- 2012 *Rawest Destiny*, monograph, Bodega Books  
*Video Babe*, monograph, self-published  
*DRTY TLK*, Amstel 41 Gallery, p. 10-16

### **PUBLIC COLLECTIONS**

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR, US  
Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, NL  
Phelan Foundation, Marfa, TX, US

### **RESEDECENCIES**

Josef and Anni Albers Foundation Residency, Bethany, CT, US

# NINO MIER GALLERY

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## **LOS ANGELES**

info@miergallery.com  
+1 323 498 5957

## **BRUSSELS**

brussels@miergallery.com  
+32 2 414 86 00

## **NEW YORK**

newyork@miergallery.com  
SoHo | +1 212 343 4317  
TriBeCA | +1 212 268 9055

## **MARFA**

marfa@miergallery.com