

Susan Mastrangelo  
Safe At Home

"To begin each piece is to compose with the line of cord." Susan Mastrangelo's description of the process with which she initiates her current work puts me in mind of how many poets begin their poems with a single line that predicates an evolution. "The wave or spiral of the cord moves to an inner beat," she continues, and again the connection to the composition of verse deepens. As breath can serve as the foundation for poetic lineation, Mastrangelo's "inner beat," her tactile engagement with the materiality of the upholstery rope she employs, functions in much the same way, determining the cord's stops and starts, the sweeping curves and elegant loops. The free-flowing cord interacts with netting that stretches across the surface like connective tissue, binding disparate shapes and complicating the rich colors beneath. These pieces partake of and suggest the physical action of tying, untying, tightening, and loosening-the rhythm of work (Mastrangelo cites her connection to knitting)-and thus there is an abiding sense of bodily flex. Their dimensionality is kinetic, corporeal.

The spaces created by these swirling and contracting materials are enriched by vivid geometric patterning that seems to pulse within the confines of the loops. If the regularity of the patterns de-harmonizes the fluidity of cord and net, it does so to intensify our sense of movement against and in concord with the resistant world. Bodies bend into the wind, blood beats in unison with the heart's contraction. Mastrangelo enacts an anatomical choreography, one in which tension is experienced as a kind of calm-the paradoxical feeling of invigoration and fatigue that follows exertion. These paintings invite active engagement: their dance is familiar and lives within us.

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