

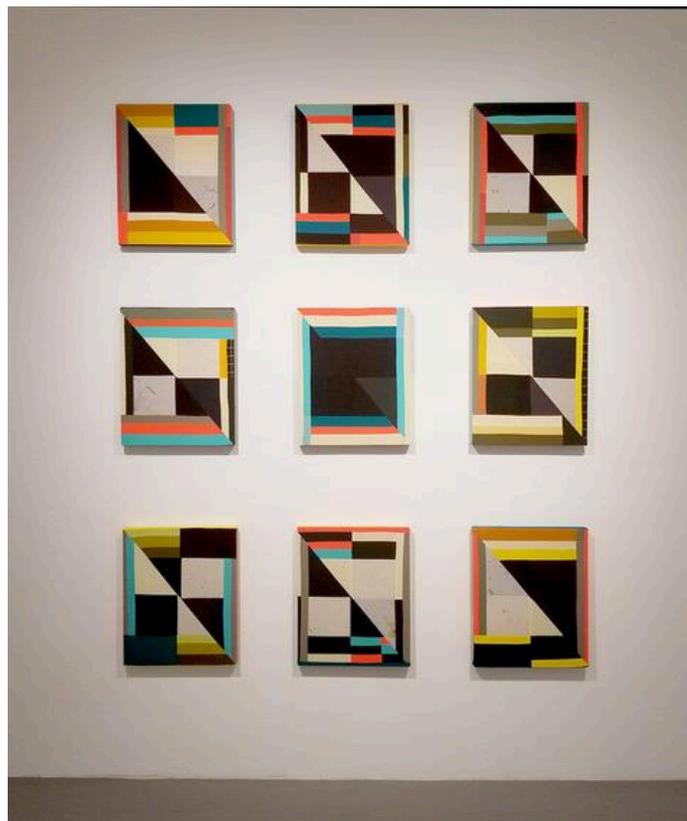
# Two Coats of Paint

An award-winning NYC blogazine, primarily about painting

## Gallery shows

## Legacy of the hand: Paolo Arao's textile paintings

May 11, 2019 6:10 pm



*Paolo Arao, Of Color, 2019*

Contributed by Julia Couzens / Paolo Arao's exuberant textile paintings radiate a bracing freshness, like nautical flags snapping brightly in a cracking breeze. From a distance clear color and crisp geometry flip space backward and forward, causing the eye to toggle in and out of the paintings' nuanced,

irregularly faceted grids. Seen up close, quavering, irregular seams of sewn fabric argue against the lacquered, bulletproof stance and historical superiority of the painted surface.



*Paolo Arao*



*Paolo Arao, Everyone, 2019*

Arao's small-scale but energetic paintings slyly use the cultural significance of textiles and the grid, arguably the warp and woof of modernity, to signal inclusivity and the emergence of expanding art historical lineages. Historically textiles, particularly quilting practices, have been viewed as mainstays of craft and design — products to enrich our material lives, as opposed to “higher” fine art practices that aspire to the abstract realm of metaphor. Deploying scraps of fabric, some hand-dyed or cut from studio drop cloths, Arao constructs geometric abstractions using asymmetrical balance, flat areas of bold color, or color so subtle it's no more than a haze. The strength and clarity of Arao's compositions, their rich tactility and architectonic space, bridge the uneasy gulf between the decorative heritage of textiles and the intellectual rigor of abstract painting.



*Paolo Arao*



*Paolo Arao*



*Paolo Arao*

The gridded modules of nine and fifteen paintings, composing *Everyone* and *Of Color* respectively, are animated by syncopated variations on Arao's block patterns. Like the acclaimed quilts of **Gee's Bend**, the resourceful intelligence of these works is to be found in their supple structure and relationships of color and scale. *Everyone* is organized around the central binary of black and white intersecting squares and triangles, bracketed and upheld by surrounding planks and strips of rust, purples, oranges, and pinks. *Of Color* uses rectangles and squares of black, white and gray supported and defined by a scaffolding of primarily turquoise, olive greens, yellow ocher, orange, and taupe. Exposed seams, random paint spatters, frayed edges, and the odd piece of checked cloth or polka dot subtly intervene to give the work its texture and nuanced tactility. This is the heritage of the handmade and handed-down, the fragile yet binding thread of touch.

**Paolo Arao** at Patricia Sweetow Gallery, 315 Potrero Avenue, San Francisco, CA. Through May 18, 2019. Also on view: Zina Al-Shukri, and Anthony Sonnenberg.

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