



WEAVING SHADOWS

Developed over the last two years, Patricia Perez Eustaquio's textiles have become a vehicle to mirror social, historical, and temporal ruminations.

BY ELIZABETH RUTH DEYRO

Where does one draw the line between what is widely referred to as “cultural appropriation” and the appreciation of culture? The debate fuels present-day discourse on social media, spilling over other venues for intellectual tugs-of-war. Such is the realm of art, as evidenced by Patricia Perez Eustaquio's undertakings on the matter.

The artist, best known for her work with textile, has long taken interest in investigating ways of defining and pushing the bounds of “appropriation.” Pio Abad calls the “problematic histories” surrounding Juan Luna and his journey towards creating the masterpiece “Death of Cleopatra” (1881) as a “catalyst for Eustaquio's line of inquiry.” While Luna reached his prime long before the rise of social media and the longstanding debate

on appropriating cultures, Eustaquio found the master artist's story – as a 19th century Filipino artist trained in Western perspectives of fine art, who crafted an artwork about an Egyptian historical figure – to be a perfect example.

“Luna's ‘Death of Cleopatra’ mirrored the complexities of the questions swirling in my head, with regards to ownership and authenticity, identity, and the much debated idea of cultural appropriation that I thought a translation of it would be interesting,” Eustaquio shares in a note from 2018.

What resulted from this “translation” was a digitally woven tapestry titled “Conversation Among Ruins” in the same year, followed by five more crafted afterwards. These tapestries – the first few of a long series Eustaquio plans to undertake – now grace the (physical and digital) walls of Silverlens Galleries as part of Eustaquio's most recent exhibition. In *Hoarding Fossils*

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in *Blankets*, the artist weaves a fascinatingly inventive collection of shadows—an apt descriptor for how she transformed the masterpieces into silhouettes of their former selves, simultaneously piquing the spectator’s intrigue and familiarity. The exhibition marks her sixth solo show with the gallery and features an assortment of work from two other series, *Boom* and the new *Endless Summer*, alongside the tapestries.

The Feminization of Art

Through digital weaving, a painting was transformed into tapestry, rid of color and fine lines, reconstructed as a heavily textured, conceptual rendition through a

manner that mimics the way archeologists put fossils together in order to visually connect back to history. Only in Eustaquio’s eyes, the intent is to create the duality of distance and familiarity, how a space can evolve into something else entirely different, but not apart from its initial self.

The artist puts this best in the context of gendering media in art: how the process essentially feminizes the painting, whose language is typically deemed as male and singular, as it is transformed into tapestry, viewed as a “female” medium that is traditionally made possible by collaboration between a community of women. This pursuit is made all the more compelling as Eustaquio went on to translate more work:



(AT LEFT) “An Unraveling (Conversation Among Ruins, After Amorsolo)”, 2019, 114.17 x 91.34 inches, digitally woven tapestry in cotton and wool, edition of 3. (OPPOSITE PAGE) Installation view of the exhibition.



(TOP) "After *La Vendedora de Lanzones*", 2020, 92.13 x 54.33 inches, digitally woven tapestry in cotton and wool, edition of 3. (OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) "Boom V", 2019, 86.50 x 56.25 inches, acrylic on aluminum, tapestries; "Boom VI", 2019, 89.50 x 56 inches, acrylic on aluminum, tapestries; *Endless Summer* series.

iconic paintings by Filipino master artists, all expectedly male, that all – save for a portrait by Fernando Amorsolo – feature females as central figures. These translated paintings include "*La Vendedora de Lanzones*" (1875) by Félix Resurrección Hidalgo and "History of Philippine Medicine" (1953) by Carlos "Botong" Francisco, which highlights the *babaylan*.

"I really wanted this series of tapestries to open up a discussion of men and

women's places and roles in history, underlining how such tapestries were made by a community of women as opposed to the solo genius in his studio," Eustaquio shares in a statement on "An Unraveling," her digitally woven tapestry after Francisco.

Here, Eustaquio expounds on the question of appropriation. The manner of "translating" the works was not limited to their reimagined forms, but rather extends to how they carry meanings anew, having



been reinterpreted by a woman artist. The original paintings were inevitably by-products of the male gaze, its female central subjects designed from a male perspective. By transforming the paintings into tapestry, Eustaquio sets out to do a layered act of deconstruction and reconstruction, be it a consciously accepted burden or not, piercing through the male gaze to put forth a new thread of authenticity altogether.

“There are many things lost in translation, but I think many could be gained, too,” she explains in her artist’s note for her newest exhibition. “Each subsequent translation lends to a deterioration of the original context, a kind of entropy as one form becomes another, but the muddling of information could provide a perspective that is unique, if not interesting.”

The Small Things

Not to be missed at *Hoarding Fossils in Blankets*, Eustaquio’s other creations also play a crucial role in the presentation of her tapestries. With her most recent series *Endless Summer*, soft sculptures conceived

during the long stretch of community quarantine, are a play on textures and form. Eustaquio pieced together different fabrics to form shadow impressions of houseplants, “a dose of nature” she missed throughout months under quarantine. The

selection of pieces from the *Boom* series, whose earlier renditions have previously been exhibited in Seoul, South Korea, brings the show full circle as it takes the form of both painting and tapestry: a conversation between the two forms, and





(FROM TOP) Installation view of the exhibition; "History is a Jungle", 2018, UV print on ceramic tiles, 1 set of 72 pcs.

a display of Eustaquio's understanding of her own craft and philosophy.

With each narrative interwoven into one another, a thread shared by the works takes the form of their monochromatic scheme. When asked why they were deliberately done in black and white, Eustaquio gives an easy, and perhaps the most logical, explanation: "There's something about paring them down to black and white that allows us to see more information or add more information to the work."

As a creator specializing in the visual quality of texture, form, and space, Eustaquio's craft emphasizes overlooked details. In an interview with *Cartellino*, she shares: "Now, more than ever, we realize how connected we are: that the world is a tangled mass/mess hurtling through history. We ignore the little parts, the small things, but we can see quite clearly at this point in time how every small thing matters, or can matter."

She continues, "The only problem is we're still blind to those 'small' things, to those things that have been marginalized for a long time. I have mentioned that art, among many things, is about perception. As an artist, my work proposes a loose equation of things that I believe have been ignored." And this she successfully does. In this collection, Eustaquio does not limit herself to deconstructing history and hoarding whatever remains to plaster across cloth; rather, the artistry is in the act of delving into history to uncover fossils laid beneath the paint, putting them in full view and demanding closer inspection. 

