

# CRAFT REVIVAL AT LAISUN KEANE

## MICHAEL C. THORPE'S PROFOUNDLY HONEST DREAM QUILTS

Michael C. Thorpe is a working artist. Unlike many of his young age and position, he doesn't have a second job to buoy his passion; he doesn't teach. His artistic output is his vocation. He has a studio, a dedication and affability, a work in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's collection and now, his solo exhibition "Meandering Thoughts," running at LaiSun Keane Gallery in Boston's SoWA district through May 29.

In Thorpe's opinion, he's living the dream.

Textiles are Thorpe's medium. His quilting began after his mother procured a quilting machine – and helped teach him its uses – in late 2017. Until then, he had been experimenting in other forms, trying to

find which best allowed him to express himself. Quilting stuck, and with good timing.

There is currently a revival of craft in the art world, a revival that has brought about a renewed appreciation for the artist's diligent execution – a respect for the effort poured into the work placed before us. The labor itself is as ruminated over as its byproduct.

Thorpe is a clear upcomer in this resurgence. His elaborate works are intellectually rounded; they make a whole world that he controls unerringly, with dexterity, hilarity and pathos. They are museful, but quick, ranging from days to a week to create. That they feel so American and contemporary is just one facet of their construction.

As such, the works in "Meandering Thoughts" are, at their core, profoundly honest. This is what grabs one most, besides Thorpe's vision and craft. They feel as if they are touching the same live wire as fellow up-and-coming artist, painter Salman Toor. Equal parts documentary and illusionary, what we see in the exhibition are dreams – those of his past, present and future – shot through the reality of common spaces, portraiture, sporting events and, at times, text.

"Graham" depicts Thorpe's young nephew decked out in matching octopi patterned hat and sweater, the azure of his eyes jumping out from the monochromatic blue background, which is partitioned almost as waves. Thorpe has placed the portrait close to the ground, so as to allow the subject himself to take in the work, eye-to-eye.

Accessibility is important to the artist; the low hung position

### REVIEW

#### MICHAEL C. THORPE MEANDERING THOUGHTS

#### LAISUN KEANE GALLERY

460C HARRISON  
AVENUE

BOSTON,  
MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH MAY 29



*Graham*, 2021, fabric, quilting cotton and thread, 27" x 20 3/4".



*Living Room*, 2021, fabric, quilting  
cotton and thread, 45.25" x 65.5".

of "Graham" reflects this. He relayed that one aspect of "Meandering Thoughts" he wanted to focus on was the fostering of an environment where a viewer can make both a fluid run-through of all the works, or meditatively receive a solitary piece at length. The quilting is vibrant and touching, no matter what mood the visitor brings when they cross the gallery's threshold.

In "Living Room," we see Thorpe's first Brooklyn apartment, with some decorative wishes, such as a mounted moose head, added. The base palette is neutral, offset by the particular, expressive hues that make up the pattern of a rug, the spectators watching a game from the bleachers on the flat-screen television, even the buildings out the windows, across the street. Thorpe manages to craft the leaves on his house plants to appear as verdant clouds, rippling with precise stitching or like quirky silhouettes, each just as individual as the next. One of his great skills lies not just in details, but the perspective depths in which he places them; despite the perceived limitations of its medium, a piece like "Living Room" feels three-dimensional, as if one could reside within each dizzying stitch.

The duality found on-view in "Meandering Thoughts" – between dream-like invention and meticulous rendering – helps make Thorpe's work something special and genuine in a culture that relies on conformity and seemingly endless didacticism. Neither Thorpe nor his work are commodities to be co-opted. Rather, he is candid, and his works unguarded and multi-faceted: one discovers in every corner of his dream-quilts a new stitch that makes one reevaluate the whole; they cannot be quantified.

J.M. Belmont



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