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Chicago, IL, February 26, 2022 – ANDREW RAFACZ is pleased to announce *Paradiso*, a solo exhibition of new works from Melissa Leandro in Gallery Two. The exhibition opens Saturday, February 26th and continues through Saturday, April 9th, 2022. This is the artist's second exhibition with the gallery.

With *Paradiso*, Melissa Leandro presents a series of new hybrid textiles that combine weaving, dyeing, needlework, screen & sun printing, foiling and other fabric manipulations. These new works are elaborate physical embodiments of her imaginary oasis and address how that refuge is both suspended in reality and disillusion.

Leandro's woven and collaged textiles evoke lush, flourishing natural landscapes, depicting representations of grasslands, forests, and flowering plants. The varied forms of flora extend the parameters of the frame and convey an environment that holds no horizon line, perspective or end point. The background of each woven piece is blurred through the use of hyper saturated dye painting, batik wax and repeated over-dyeing. There is often no singular focal point in the many recurring motifs that take root in the imagery. These works are an amalgam of an imagined biodiversity and an artificial and fabricated relationship with the natural world, particularly manifested in her use of appliqued flowers. Clearly synthetic, they are made of plastic and wood and often found in flea markets and dollar stores, which were always a household staple throughout the artist's childhood. These artificial flower forms are thoughtfully composed and expressively stitched onto the surface of the artist's textiles in a way that imitates their delicate existence in the natural world.

Leandro has also continued to employ the acts of dyeing, printing, cutting and repairing in her elaborately layered textiles to evoke further depth. This disruption of a seamless woven structure is central to her practice. She writes, 'I see this intuitive and gestural action of purposely cutting holes in my weavings--- only to then immediately after, slowly suture and mend them--- as a way to assuage the fragmentation I feel in my own life. My relationship to nature has been interrupted and it is often filled with observations and frustrations caused by trash filled streets, and neglected and systemically underfunded neighborhoods.'

Lately, Leandro's interests have led her to spend more time researching and investigating herpetology, entomology and horticulture. She is interested in the practice of creating bioactive ecosystems that can thrive or just as quickly decay- simply by neglect or diligence in their maintenance and preservation. Leandro explains, 'I think the act of creating, maintaining and sometimes unintentionally damaging these ecosystems helps me focus, and get control over external situations I can't affect in a similar manner or with the same level of impact.'

With the new works in *Paradiso*, Leandro responds to the suspension of growth, change and deterioration in her own life, art and home. This body of work is an accumulation of dyed and printed residue, sewn and patched textures that represent idyllic spaces, lush and thriving, a fictional paradise where both the artist and the viewer can find sanctuary.

MELISSA LEANDRO (American, b. 1989) lives and works in Chicago, IL. Leandro received her MFA in 2017 and her BFA in 2012, both from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has participated in residencies, including The Vermont Studio Center, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, The Ragdale Foundation, The Jacquard Center, and The Weaving Mill. She is the recipient of The Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation Artadia Award for 2021. Recent solo exhibitions include ANDREW RAFACZ (Chicago, IL), The University Club of Chicago (Chicago, IL), and the Union League Club of Chicago (Chicago, IL). Recent group exhibitions include University of Nebraska (Omaha, NE), DePaul Art Museum (Chicago, IL), and MCC Art Gallery (Mesa, AZ). She has exhibited at art fairs in solo and group presentations, including Frieze (New York, NY), Untitled. (Miami, FL), and Intersect (Palm Springs, CA). Her work is included in numerous public and private collections. This is her second solo exhibition with the gallery.