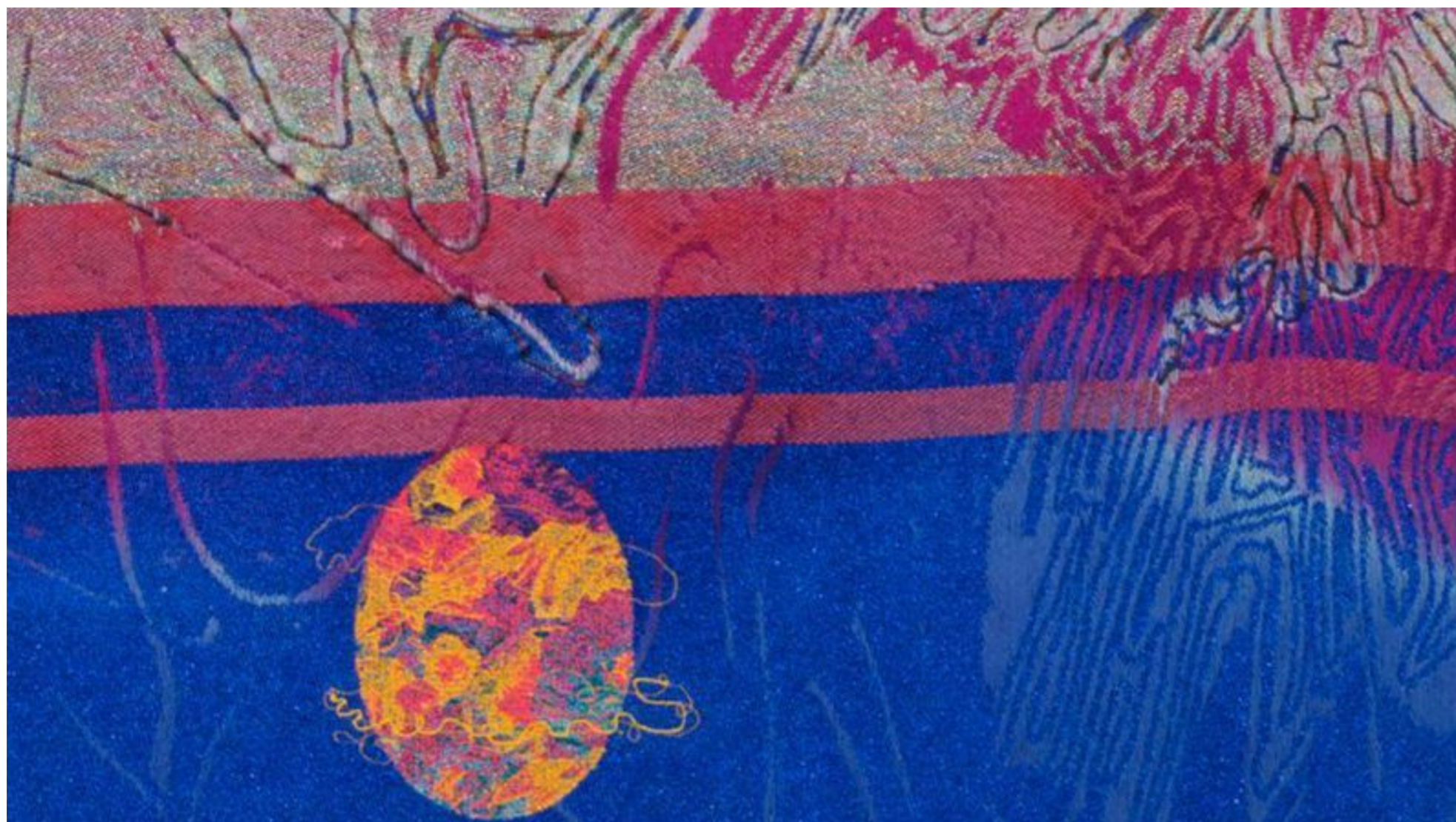


ENTERTAINMENT

'Trop-i-cal' weaves together narrative of family, dislocation

By KT HAWBAKER

CHICAGO TRIBUNE | FEB 01, 2018 AT 11:10 AM



A close-up of "Lo que me perdi" reveals the ordered, layered chaos that results in Melissa Leandro's punchy, homesick hues. (Craig Dupuis)

Welcome to Melissa Leandro's Miami

Miami is a city teeming with paradoxes: For every reality show, there's an art fair; for every bloated tycoon, there's a bilingual drag queen. It's no surprise that this tense, vibrant mesh of histories churns out artists like Melissa Leandro, whose neon palettes draw upon a childhood spent there. With "Trop-i-cal," her show at Efrain Lopez Gallery, Leandro reaches back and forms a bridge between her youth and her family's heritage.

Handwoven textile forms the base of her artwork, but the ritual involved is more blithe than behaved. Leandro "Frankensteins" her weavings with patches of others, stitching them up with an electric sense of embroidery, ribbons of gradient stitching and cyanotypes — or "sun prints" — creating a sunset's scattered shifts of color.

But don't let the shimmering light fool you, warns the gallery: "The works' sunny hues belie the melancholic sense of dislocation and removal that informs them." Leandro's aesthetic and motifs have as much to do with familial memory and dislocation as they do with an exuberant present. For example, before they become an integral part of her textile patterns, Leandro's cyanotypes are produced on request by her parents and are made from the shapes of their care-package contents — speaking to "the heartfelt and often unspoken connections among time, memory and family histories."

Leandro perceives her practice as an extension of herself and also uses her work to explore her identity as a first-generation American. In previous interviews, she has discussed the layering and quilting present in her work as a visual representation of Spanglish.

"I've found that I often parallel the disparity of English and Spanish by intuitively overlaying contrasting materials to find unlikely combinations of process," she told F Newsmagazine. "Through the process of weaving, elements of the original materials are hidden, exposed and thus fragmented."

For Leandro, telling these stories is an actual matter of spinning a yarn.

Through March 4, Efrain Lopez Gallery, 908 N. Ashland Ave.;
www.efrainlopezgallery.com