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Chicago, IL, September 18, 2020 – **ANDREW RAFACZ** is pleased to announce *Prairie Dive*, a solo exhibition of new stretched textile works and installation by Melissa Leandro in Galleries One and Two. The exhibition continues through Saturday, October 31, 2020. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Melissa Leandro's practice has always extended beyond the studio and her loom. Her vibrantly detailed and richly layered textile works created from an amalgam of processes including Jacquard weaving, embroidery, dip dyeing, stitching and cyanotype, record her own experiences, documenting the personal passage of time and referencing the places she has been. In the past, they have often functioned as documents of her travels to new locations. They weave together the external landscapes she observes and her own interior reflections on those experiences. She absorbs the energy and movement in the environment she occupies, layering her textiles to evoke the dynamics of that specific place. It is never a direct pictorial representation but rather an image-rich abstraction, marking time and those observed moments, while suggesting the fragments of a larger narrative.

During the last six months in quarantine, Leandro's practice has continued to evolve, while shifting within her new reality. Not traveling as she had in the past, the artist has spent more time in her studio and the West Side neighborhood she resides in.

'I was inspired by the many walks I took each day around my neighborhood. Always taking the same general path with small variations each day, I got to know every house, every brightly colored lawn flamingo, every imperfection on the sidewalk... I was able to downshift and mirror this slowness in my practice with more methodical stitching in certain areas, accenting the wear and tear of the textile. The pieces in *Prairie Dive* are over dyed, patched, mended, heavily embellished with plastic, and painted over with bleach. The textiles are imperfect and show their distress like the homes I saw on my daily walks. They are weather-beaten, sun damaged and covered in overgrown foliage with plastic toys and lawn ornaments littering their front yards.' (ML)

The dense layering on the surface of her new works speaks to this accumulation of days, weeks, and months and her continued self-reflection throughout. Evident in several of the works in the exhibition, Leandro employs a freeform hand stitch in almost rhythm-like fashion capturing this newfound sense of ritual and iteration in her daily life.

Over the last few years, Leandro has been opening up her practice to new techniques, and she continues to do so with this exhibition. She has further developed her use of cyanotype and silkscreened monoprints on fabric, here cutting them into tiles and quilting them. The artist has also added fish lures and safety pins to the surface of the work, as well as appliquéd flowers cut from decorative plastic table clothes found at a neighborhood Mexican and Puerto Rican flea market. Finally, Leandro also includes a new installation in this exhibition, comprised of dried plants and flowers, collected on plinths in Gallery One and suspended on the wall in Gallery Two, referencing her own cultivation of and coexistence with many plants during her first months in quarantine, and giving further context to the title of the exhibition.

Leandro's work has decidedly taken on new dimensions during these tumultuous times. Finding herself more often alone in the studio and reflecting, she has encountered a new sense of hope in the act of stitching, giving her the opportunity to problem solve during this socially and politically hectic period of time.

'There is something productive that happens when I can manipulate a piece of cloth through my needle and thread or through dyeing and cutting. For me, stitching has become a mixture of documenting seasonal and daily observations in my environment, and activating my body to respond to them through mark making. I record images, snapshots, textures, and colors sourced from my evening walks around the neighborhood in Humboldt Park, whether I'm staring out my window repeatedly while being homebound, or exploring small nearby towns in the Midwest.' (ML)

MELISSA LEANDRO (American, b. 1989) lives and works in Chicago, IL. She received an MFA in 2017 and a BFA in 2012, both from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has had recent solo exhibitions at The University Club of Chicago (Chicago, IL), Union League Club of Chicago (Chicago, IL), Rockford University (Rockford, IL) and the Wright Museum of Art (Beloit, WI). Recent group exhibitions include DePaul Art Museum (Chicago, IL) and The Arts Club of Chicago (Chicago, IL). In May 2020 Leandro presented a solo project with the gallery at Frieze Viewing Room, the inaugural online edition of Frieze New York. Her work is included in numerous public and private collections. This is her first exhibition with the gallery.