

Anna Furman, "Critics' Picks—Eric-Paul Riege," *Artforum.com*, October 2022.

ARTFORUM



Los Angeles is a city of incongruities: One block from the chaotic Hollywood Walk of Fame is a serene and contemplative installation about Indigenous traditions from a promising artist based in New Mexico. Eric-Paul Riege is a member of the matrilineal Navajo clan *Naaneesht'ezhi Tachii'nii*, Charcoal Streaked Division of Tachii'nii; his mother's great-grandmother was a master weaver. Drawing on familial traditions of weaving, knitting, and jewelry making, Riege creates totemic fiber sculptures that transform into costumes for durational performances—what the artist refers to as “weaving dances.”

The artist's intuitive process involves dyeing, stitching, beading, winding, coiling, and disassembling malleable materials. In his first solo show in LA, eight ceiling-suspended works divide the gallery into narrow rows that encourage careful, meditative exploration. Plush-animal works in the shape of sheep and twelve-foot-tall monochromatic looms hang from soft, bone-white armatures. There is also a transparent, blanket-stitched plastic sheet, which was once used as a packing material to ship Riege's art; fingerprints left by gallery assistants and handlers are still visible on its surface. The effect is subtle, enigmatic—perhaps an expression of the Diné concept of *Hózhó*, a form of consciousness that engenders harmony and peace.

Riege's most successful mobile sculptures—such as *(my god, YE'ii [1-2]) (jaatloh4Ye'iitsoh [1-6]) (a loom between Me+U, dah 'iist'ó)*, 2016–21—are “totems of memory,” as he calls them, which feature room-size necklaces wrapped in human hair and columns of pillowed disks that resemble stacked vertebrae. Organic materials (including sheep's wool, muslin, and shells) converge with more artificial items (plastic, faux fur, synthetic hair) in these semi-symmetrical works, which reference adornment, the haptic, and ceremony.

During the Great Depression, the US government sold and slaughtered sheep on Navajo reservations. Much of Riege's practice invokes this painful history, which decimated livelihoods and severed access to vital weaving materials. His interest in juxtaposing handcrafted traditions with mass-produced objects, especially in the form of plush sheep, is ripe for deeper exploration. One has the sense that Riege, a young and ambitious artist, is just getting started.