

ART SHOW

Wedge
2008

MARK BARROW

Painting on canvases custom woven by his wife, this New York artist erases the boundaries between the digital and the handmade. **BY HILARIE SHEETS**

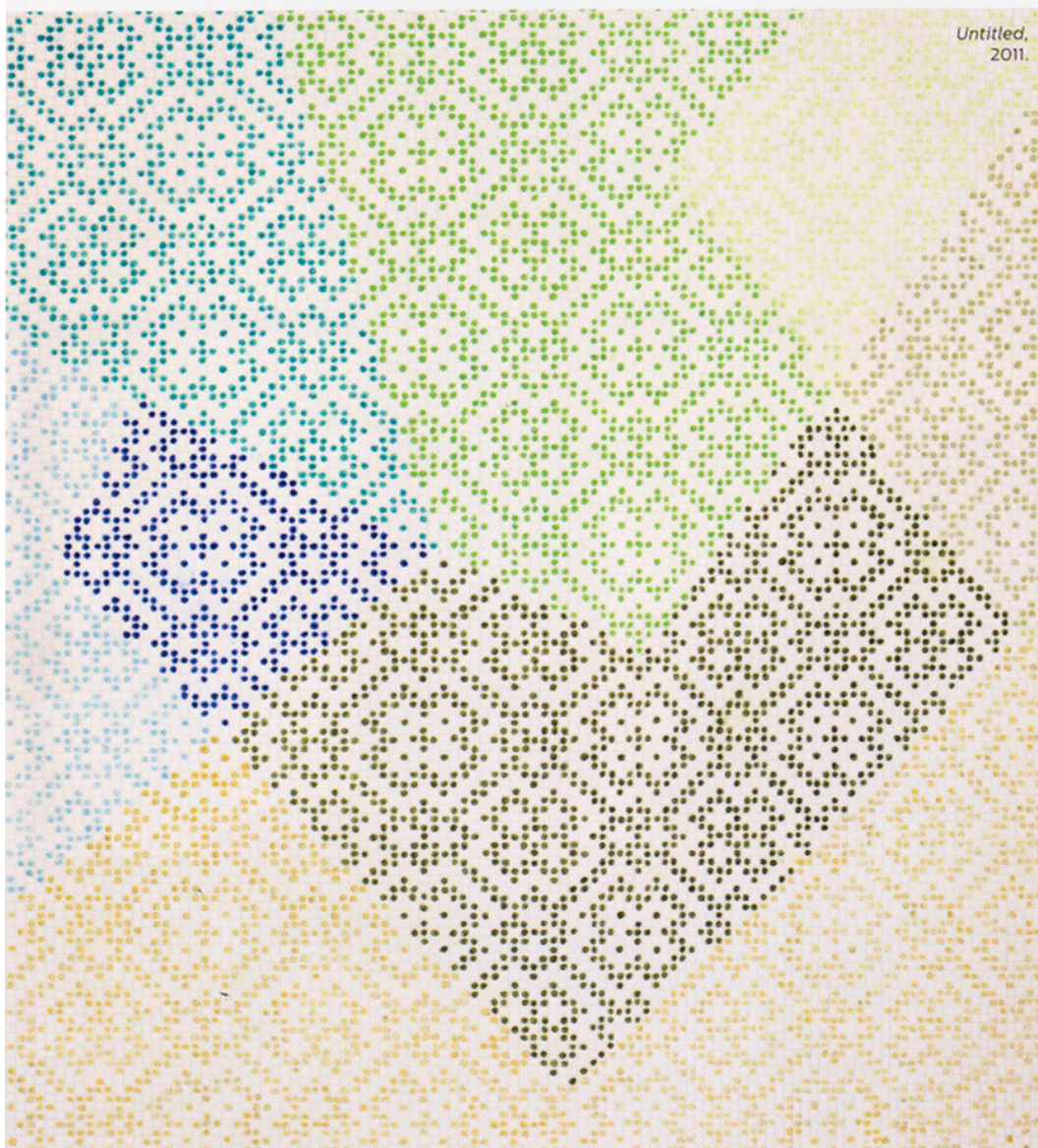
Mark Barrow's elegant abstract paintings on handwoven textiles almost demand that you get up close to figure out how they're made. From afar, they read as subtle compositions of geometric shapes, with each angular form marking a slight shift in ethereal color. But move in, and the serene surfaces appear to vibrate and break apart into dizzying patterns of painted dots and woven threads.

The fabrics are made by the artist's wife and collaborator, Sarah Parke, on two looms nearly the size of pianos that crowd the would-be living room of their apartment/studio in Queens, New York. Parke weaves elaborate herringbone, checkerboard, and other all-over designs using cyan, magenta, yellow, and black threads (the primary

printing colors), or red, green, and blue threads (the colors composing screen images). "All the images we see in our culture are based on either the CMYK color model or the RGB color model," says Barrow. "I'm taking the logic of the loom and conflating that grid with the mathematical models that approximate how we perceive color."

He does this by first mixing together paints of the same colors and in the same ratios as were used in a given textile, which results in varying shades of gray. On top of the vibrant, nubby fabrics that he washes with a thin scrim of primer, Barrow then paints meticulous patterns of tiny pale dots, following a digital sketch of geometric forms that he's made using his iPad and computer. He might impose a triangular ▸

ART SHOW

Untitled,
2011.

Graft, 2008.



HUF, 2011.

shape by covering all the red threads in that area with gray dots, allowing only the green and blue threads to show through. Or he might dot out more of the red and green threads in an adjacent quadrilateral, shifting the color toward blue. Pull back, and these complex matrices resolve again into shapes of continuous tone, just the way that pixels on a screen or a printed page coalesce into images.

"The work focuses on these small elements—whether pixels or threads or dots of paint—that make up various things," says Barrow. "I'm interested in their equivalency and contradictions." Within his systematic framework are injected the inevitable inconsistencies of the hand, Parke's and his own, resulting in the creation of aesthetically seductive objects that have both tactile warmth and cerebral cool.

"In the conversation between Sarah's almost medieval form of weaving and Mark's process of making a kind of digital map with the painting, they've created a very original form," says Matthew Higgs, director and chief curator of White Columns, the New York gallery where Barrow held his first solo exhibition in 2008.

Barrow and Parke, both 31, met as undergraduates at the Rhode Island School of Design—he was studying figurative painting; she

studied textile design. In graduate school at Yale, he worked as the teaching assistant for the professor of color theory, and first got inspired to experiment with grids by an Agnes Martin painting. After graduating in 2006, he developed his painstaking process working on coarse, store-bought linen while Parke designed woven patterns for the textile industry. "We realized we were doing the same thing," says Parke. Their first hybrid piece was included in the White Columns show. "As an independent artist, Mark was already building his language, but it really took the collaboration with Sarah to open up the whole thing and reveal its potential," says Higgs.

Barrow is now represented by Elizabeth Dee in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, where he has had solo exhibitions in 2010 and 2012. At this year's Frieze New York art fair, he presented *Redaction*, his artist's book, as well as a special table he designed to display it. By juxtaposing wide-ranging images (such as the design of a computer chip and a pixelated Cézanne) and texts drawn from various sources, *Redaction* poetically teases out where the languages of the loom, the computer, and painting overlap. Says Barrow: "There's something really beautiful in how these systems logically work together." ■