

## For Barrow Parke, Systems Are the Medium

As with the composition of our world, each element is built one strand at a time before being interwoven into a cohesive whole.



Rachel Harris-Huffman 19 hours ago



Barrow Parke, "Shapes in Time" (2022), acrylic and embroidery on hand-loomed linen, 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 inches (image courtesy the artists and JDJ, New York and Garrison)

ALBANY — For artist duo Mark Barrow and Sarah Parke, weaving is a framework for thinking about systems. Together, as Barrow Parke, they combine craft and fine art to create textile paintings with subject matter drawn from myth, folklore, science, and technology. Their works explore the intellectual and material structures humans formulate to understand and impose order upon the natural world.

Currently on view at the University Art Museum at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany, *Barrow Parke: Systems and Mythologies* functions as an early career retrospective. The exhibition illuminates the 15-year evolution of the pair's collaboration, from the geometric compositions Barrow meticulously painted on individual threads of Parke's hand-loomed twills in the 2010s to the pair's current maximalist mixed-media pieces.

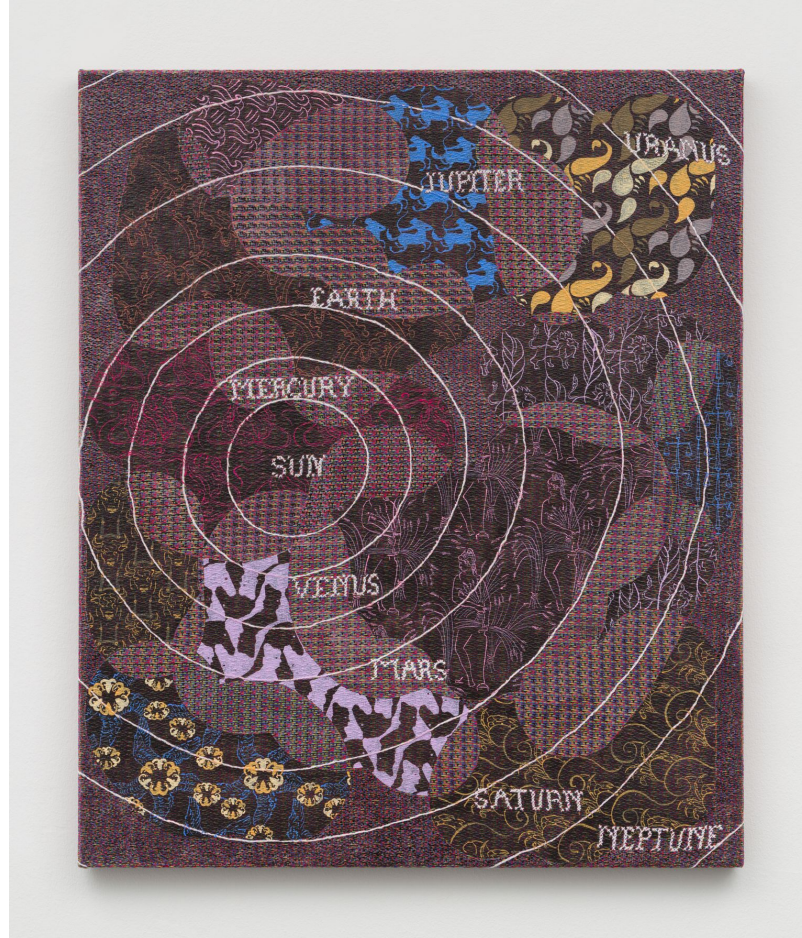


Barrow Parke, "GRB5" (2023), 1/2 inch vinyl squares on windows, dimensions variable (photo by Jesse Alsdorf, courtesy the artists and JDJ, New York and Garrison)

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer immediately encounters a site-specific, floor-to-ceiling, translucent vinyl window installation, "GRB5" (2023). It is simultaneously reminiscent of a church's stained-glass window, a cross-stitch pattern sampler, and the classic arcade game Space Invaders — a combination of sacred, domestic, and technological image production that recurs throughout the pair's work. The title references the **RGB color space** of computer monitors. This recent work represents a development of a long-running interest: Many of the duo's abstract textile paintings from 2010 to 2015, hung around the outside edge of the gallery, use the same color system or the related **CMYK system** of commercial printers to create curvy, moire-patterned shapes.

Front and center in the show are Barrow Parke's visually and conceptually complex works from the last two years. Custom wallpapers inspired by Bagobo and Ainu creation stories from the Philippines and Japan, respectively, contrast with the surrounding white gallery walls.





Barrow Parke, "Eccoci" (2022), acrylic and embroidery on hand-loomed linen, 35 1/2 x 29 5/8 inches (image courtesy University Art Museum at SUNY Albany)

Pieces in this area incorporate the “mythologies” and “systems” referenced by the exhibition title. A series of 12 gouache-on-paper paintings place illustrations of Zodiac signs into repeating grid patterns. These symbols peek through the textile painting “Eccoci” (2022), Italian for “here we are,” which is overlaid with a chart of the Copernican solar system. “Fire of the Jaguar” (2023) is based on the Amazonian Kayapo tribe’s legend of humans acquiring fire from jaguars. Its crawling feline figure is embellished with painted and embroidered patterns derived from diagrams by anthropologist Terrence Turner. “The Universe” (2023) and “Shapes in Time” (2022) are complex compositions that require close inspection to appreciate: The former combines many of the aforementioned patterns with numeric codes, while the latter references root directories in computer science as well as the numbered shafts and pedals of an eight-harness floor loom.

The quality that unites the painting and weaving practices of Barrow Parke is their meticulous attention to detail. A vitrine containing preliminary sketches, notes, and textile samples offers a deeper understanding of the mathematical precision and careful planning behind their work. This process-focused display illustrates the analogy between the creative systems undergirding their work and the larger systems they’re in conversation with: As with the composition of our world, each element is built one strand at a time before being interwoven into a cohesive whole.



Barrow Parke, "The Universe" (2023), acrylic and embroidery on hand-loomed linen, 33 3/8 x 35 3/8 inches (image courtesy the artists and JDJ, New York and Garrison)







Barrow Parke, "Graft" (2008), acrylic on hand-loomed linen, 14 x 12 inches (image courtesy the artists)

**Barrow Parke: Systems and Mythologies** continues at the University Art Museum at the University at Albany, State University of New York (1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York), through April 3.