



WARP *and* WEFT

Informed by his heritage,
Oakland artist Miguel Arzabe crafts
colorful woven works.

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Artist Miguel Arzabe's process involves creating paintings (left) that will be cut into strips that he then weaves (below) into new artworks, like *La Cara Rayada IV*, 2023 (opposite). *Todos Bienvenidos*, 2023 (bottom) is a piece commissioned for Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport.



Miguel Arzabe never planned to be an artist. Graduating with a master's in engineering, the intention was to follow in the footsteps of his parents, Bolivian immigrants who had careers in engineering and chemistry. "Growing up in the Midwest, there weren't too many role models in the field of art," Arzabe recalls. "But I've been making art since I was a kid—painting, drawing and using my imagination." Continuing his painting practice on the side even after starting an engineering job in Oakland, Arzabe eventually decided to take the leap and pursue art full time. "A lot of it had to do with moving to the Bay Area and really feeling a connection to the land here," he says of his decision. "I was hiking in my free time and making drawings on my maps. I felt like that was feeding my soul in a way the numbers and spreadsheets just weren't."

After completing a Master of Fine Arts at the University of California, Berkeley, Arzabe attended a series of artist residencies to deepen his commitment to his work. Eventually, while at the Santa Fe Art Institute, Arzabe came across the technique and tradition that has since come to define his practice: weaving. "I was noticing Diné [Navajo] weavings all over Santa Fe, and it reminded me of seeing Bolivian textiles in the streets whenever I'd go there to visit my family," the artist reflects. At the same time, Arzabe had been collecting print ephemera from local thrift shops. "I thought maybe I could cut the posters into strips and put them together into a textile. As I was making it, I had the sense that it was going to totally take over my life. It just felt right." Now, Arzabe continues drawing on his Andean heritage to reweave past and present, crafting cloth-like paintings that merge European modernist aesthetics and Indigenous symbols. The artist first creates a pair of acrylic paintings,

often using bright colors to animate his semiabstract imagery and bold, geometric shapes. Then he works with an industrial manufacturing fabricator to have the canvases cut into strips before weaving the two together. The result is visually enthralling and hard to categorize. "I see my work as a way of exploring the multitudes of my own identity," Arzabe explains. And not just the Euro-American art he learned about in school and the Andean traditions that define his personal history but the engineer in him, too. "Your fingers and your mind have to do this internal math all the time when weaving," he says. "It's about finding rhythms and patterns." As Arzabe looks ahead this year to public art commissions in New York and Houston as well as gallery shows in San Francisco and Denver, he is keen to discover how different publics respond to his work. "Having these multiple layers of meaning, some personal and some more generalized, hopefully gives the viewer agency to form their own narrative." ■

