



NORIKO AMBE







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DRAWING OUT A MICRO-UNIVERSE OF TIME AND SPACE — Noriko Ambe's Landscape of Physical and Emotional Geography

Shinya Watanabe

At first glance, it is an ordinary red cabinet. Is this an artwork? Yes. Please pull out a drawer—this action draws out a micro-universe. Noriko Ambe has transformed this industrial cabinet: while maintaining its aspect, it has become a magic box that reveals time and space.

Ambe spent an enormous amount of time cutting sheets of paper with circular forms, and layering them. This evokes the eons it takes the universe to create a limestone cave: the time of Ambe's art-making is synchronous to the larger passing of time. Once inside the cabinet, the cut paper assumes a great physical depth and becomes a cross-section of the earth's strata. The cabinet, no longer empty, is now filled with the order of the universe: the circular forms evoke the planetary revolutions as well as the paths of subatomic particles.

Ambe also considers this process of cutting paper to be similar to the formation of the self. Cutting circular forms into a sheet of paper, and then accumulating these cut papers, is an attempt by Ambe to embody the self in the cabinet—a metaphor for the body.

Ambe developed her unique method of paper cutting over the course of a decade. Prior to that she was painting enormous landscapes in an effort to express something sublime.

Once, while on an airplane, Ambe saw endless clouds suspended over the blue sky. She felt as if she were melting into nature, and this feeling became the basis of her fascination with infinite spaces, the endlessly large or endlessly small. She began by focusing on elements of nature such as the tree rings that mark the passing of the years, or tiny wood chips. Soon she started drawing small circles, and eventually she moved on to cutting paper as a way to make three-dimensional works.

“Linear-Actions Project Cutting/Drawing” is the name she gave to the first group of works in this series. These works evoke tree rings or a topographical map, but are simply created by the traces of the actions performed by Ambe’s hand.

Ambe allows the natural action of her hand to awaken unconscious memories, and so creates a physical and emotional geography.

To appreciate Ambe’s art-making, it is important to be familiar with the concepts she experienced while growing up in Japan of time and space as they relate to art.

The Japanese word *ma*, literally meaning “the space between,” describes a concept that includes both time and space. In Buddhism, emptiness is said to occupy the entire universe, and according to architect Arata Isozaki, in ancient Japanese thought not only is the space empty, but any object contains emptiness within itself. There are moments when *chi* (soul), or *kami* (god), temporarily fills this empty space, and capturing these moments is the aim of art in Japan. This happens through the artist’s action, and only at a given space and time.

In addition, in traditional Japanese architecture, there are not walls that divide the space: what is deemed crucial is to maintain one’s field of vision through the accumulation of layers, such as a single layer Shoji screen, or multilayer Fusuma partition.

Recently, neuroscience has begun to prove that our body-motions are the result of unconscious processes, and our consciousness organizes these actions into episodic memory. Ambe’s way of working led her to awaken her unconscious memories, and to listen to the undercurrents of the inner water, which tell the history of the earth, from where we come.

Ambe says: “Through creative action, certain forms of truth emerge—and it is this truth that I want to pursue.” What she creates is a micro-universe, a revelation of a hidden truth of nature.



Noriko Ambe

Flat File Globe 3A Red Version, 2007

Yupo, foam board, metal cabinet

37 x 13³/₄ x 18¹/₈ inches

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