

# BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Mountains Carrying Suns

#### South South Veza OVR

Preview day: February 23, 2021

Public days: February 24-March 7, 2021

#### Blum & Poe, Tokyo

Feb 20-March 19, 2021

\*By appointment. Please check our website for further details and to confirm current opening hours and dates.

February 3, 2021, Tokyo—Blum & Poe is pleased to present a group exhibition entitled *Mountains Carrying Suns*, a selection of work by eleven artists from China, Japan, and Korea, including Kōji Enokura, Yuki Ishikawa, Kwon Young-woo, Kazumi Nakamura, and Nobuo Sekine, on the occasion of South South Veza OVR. The exhibition title refers to the eponymous painting by Zhu Jinshi, which serves as a starting point for understanding the vital cross-cultural relationships in East Asian art history that lie at the heart of Blum & Poe's program.

Zhu's industrious, sculptural application of oil paint on canvas is rooted in his experiences as a factory worker in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Although Zhu is primarily known as a painter, his early years saw him experiment with sculptural installations that were influenced by his interest in Mono-ha, a group of Japanese artists who created ephemeral, site-specific installations of natural and industrial materials during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Among these artists, Nobuo Sekine explored topological notions of the deformation of matter and space by amassing giant quantities of earth and oilclay in outdoor and indoor locations, which subsequently led him to develop the Progetto series of proposals for monumental outdoor sculptures. Sekine's works also inspired artist-theorist Lee Ufan to conceive new theories of phenomenology in a contemporary Japanese context, which provided a contextual framework for other artists, such as Kōji Enokura. Initially using oil and grease to discolor the floors and walls of galleries and outdoor spaces, Enokura later embarked on the Intervention series of stained cotton fabrics and wood panels. Meanwhile, Kishio Suga created assemblages that combine branches, stones, rope, glass, and plastic into infinite arrays of spatial and material relationships—describing them as the “activation of existence.” By contrast, Susumu Koshimizu produces modular wood-panel reliefs characterized by geometrical incisions and fields of Japanese pigment that reflect his decades-long search for a distinctly Japanese vernacular in contemporary sculpture.

Not only was Lee Ufan a pivotal figure in the formation of Mono-ha, but he was also highly influential among his peers in his native Korea. These artists sought an alternative to the ink painting traditions that dominated the peninsula in the 1960s through sustained iterative actions applied to paper and canvas—a movement that later came to be known as Dansaekhwa, or “monochrome painting.” Kwon Young-woo abandoned the use of ink and scratched the surface of the delicate, multilayered *hanji* paper with his fingernails. In his ongoing Conjunction series, Ha Chong-hyun pushes viscous oil paint from the back of the canvas to its surface, manipulating it with a brush or palette knife. Thanks to introductions made by Lee, the Dansaekhwa artists regularly exhibited in Tokyo, where they engaged in intellectual exchanges with Mono-ha artists and other contemporaries of the Japanese avant-garde.

The generation of Japanese artists that emerged after Mono-ha in the 1980s and 1990s were alternately influenced by or critical of their predecessors, as they sought their own methods of expression in response to a new era. Approaching painting through a socially conscious lens, the practices of Yuki Ishikawa and Kazumi Nakamura emerged in the context of the Japanese New Painting movement, which developed in

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parallel to American and European Neo-Expressionism. The compositions in Ishikawa's early works originate from the forms she extracts from magazine and newspaper advertisements, which she enlarges, projects, and traces onto her canvases—paintings that can be interpreted as subtle critiques of consumer culture during the bubble economy. Nakamura sought to imbue his abstractions with references that extend beyond the autonomy of the canvas, from allusions to his childhood and his mother's passing to social conditions caused by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995. Kenjirō Okazaki, the interdisciplinary artist and critic known for his award-winning publication *Abstract Art as Impact*, works in multiple genres including painting, reliefs, sculpture, architecture, and drawings made in collaboration with robots. During the pandemic lockdown of 2020, Okazaki expanded his Topica Pictus series of small abstract paintings, inviting viewers to travel around different places over time. Finally, through a diverse array of media, Yukinori Yanagi interrogates the politics of nationalism and institutional borders. In his series of ant farms that emulate national flags, ants burrow through the "nations" that house them. In the work on view in this exhibition, the ants have tunneled through Japan's *hinomaru* flag, disturbing this powerful symbol of the rising sun.

Blum & Poe's exhibition program is deeply committed to supporting contemporary art from East Asia. The gallery has been at the forefront of presenting artists from Japan since its founding in 1994, following Tim Blum's early years as an art dealer and curator spent in Tokyo in the early '90s. Originating in various museum-level historical survey exhibitions curated by leading figures within their fields, Blum & Poe has fostered relationships with artists ranging from the Korean postwar movement of Dansaekhwa, to pioneers of the Japanese postwar group Mono-ha, to those who carried forward artistic experimentation in Japan in the 1980s and '90s, and today. Blum & Poe opened in Tokyo in 2014 with a desire to further support its Asia-based artists, who represent a third of the gallery's roster. Six years later on the occasion of South South Veza's OVR, this presentation showcases a diversity in practices with works by eleven artists.

Additionally, Blum & Poe will participate in a collaborative exhibition with Taka Ishii Gallery, Take Ninagawa, and MUJIN-TO Production. As part of this initiative, the works of Shinro Ohtake and Sachiko Kazama will be on view at Blum & Poe, Tokyo between the dates of February 26-March 19, 2021.

## About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Timothy Blum and Jeffrey Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles, together resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-six-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices, and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since held museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Joan Kee, Mika Yoshitake, Sofia Gotti, and Alison M. Gingeras.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in tandem with an expansive program of exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP)

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green art gallery and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. Blum & Poe's own publishing division focuses on sharing aspects of its program via original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, and artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

## Press Inquiries

Naz Cuguoğlu  
Communications and Media Editor, Los Angeles  
[naz@blumandpoe.com](mailto:naz@blumandpoe.com)

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