

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kazumi Nakamura

Blum & Poe, Tokyo
June 5 – August 7, 2021

April 23, 2021, Tokyo—Blum & Poe is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Tokyo-based painter Kazumi Nakamura. This is Nakamura's third solo show with the gallery and the first to focus on his works on paper, an aspect of his practice that he has rarely exhibited.

This exhibition puts Nakamura's paintings on paper in dialogue with corresponding works on canvas, drawn from several ongoing series made since the 1980s. These juxtapositions reveal the sequential, iterative manner in which Nakamura paints, producing innumerable variations within a consistent compositional structure. Many of the paintings on paper are dated to the day they were made, offering an almost diaristic insight into the artist's state of mind while at work. Nakamura has termed the variations and discrepancies that emerge between several works in a series as "differential images." His method of painting a predetermined motif repeatedly over time emerged amid the "New Painting" milieu in Japan, which developed in parallel with Neo-Expressionism in the United States and Europe. His practice consists of several distinct but interrelated bodies of work that reinterpret East Asian motifs and depictions of pictorial space by filtering them through the visual language of American Modernism. Simultaneously, Nakamura counters the dominant discourse of Euro-American painting by localizing it in a Japanese vernacular.

This exhibition includes rare early examples of the Y-shape and Diagonal Grid series, which originated in the 1980s. The Y-shape refers to the symbol used to denote mulberry fields in Japanese cartography. For Nakamura, this formalistic interpretation of natural topography is loaded with profound personal and sociopolitical meanings, both evoking the trees that surrounded his family home and the historical decline of sericulture—an industry that his mother's family had been engaged in until the 1960s. On the other hand, the geometric abstraction of the Diagonal Grid paintings is a reinterpretation of the diagonal perspectives seen in ancient Japanese scroll paintings. In contrast with the frontal, vertical-horizontal grids that characterize Western Modernism's emphasis on the artwork as a self-contained autonomous object, Nakamura's diagonal grids generate meaning by diverting the viewer's gaze toward the outside of the composition.

Avian forms are a recurring motif in two series featured prominently in this exhibition: Shokusocho 織桑鳥 (Phoenix) and A Bird in its Existence, both begun in the 2000s. In these thickly textured paintings, Nakamura shifts from the logical grid to emotional abstraction, employing the semiotic outline of abstract birds to indicate the unstable ambiguity of existence. Nakamura coined the neologism "shokusocho" (織桑鳥) by combining the Japanese characters for "weave," "mulberry," and "bird" as a personalized interpretation of the phoenix. Different mythologies of this otherworldly bird can be found in both ancient Egyptian and Chinese history. Since the 19th century, the myth of the Egyptian phoenix has filtered into Japanese culture, and is often discussed in parallel with the Chinese Phoenix, which carries auspicious meaning. For Nakamura, these birds' capacity to regenerate itself after death has a strong emotional resonance with his lived history, echoing the decline of sericulture and symbolizing his wish for all things that have decayed to achieve rebirth. Similarly, Nakamura was inspired to make the A Bird in its Existence paintings while climbing a mountain and seeing a bird swoop down from its peak, prompting the artist to contemplate the potential of flight as a means for humankind and all other beings to overcome malevolent and tragic conditions. The compositions of these paintings feature a recurring Y—referring to the symbolism of his earlier work—

based primarily on five core matrices (which he also refers to as “mother types”) drawn from prototypical bird images. These images, found in Korean folk painting, Archaeopteryx fossils, or in Chinese characters that incorporate bird radicals allow Nakamura to “create paintings of unlimited differentiation,” as the artist writes.

Kazumi Nakamura (b. 1956, Chiba, Japan) currently lives and works in Hidaka City, near Tokyo. He entered the Tokyo University of the Arts with the intention to study art theory but soon found himself studying under Mono-ha artist Kōji Enokura, a mentor who encouraged him to focus on creating art. During the past four decades, he has exhibited throughout Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, with solo museum exhibitions including a large-scale retrospective at the National Art Center, Tokyo, Japan (2014); Iwaki City Art Museum, Iwaki City, Japan (2002); and Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Nagano, Japan (1999).

Previously, Nakamura was featured in *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s*, a two-part survey exhibition curated by Mika Yoshitake and held at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, in 2019. He has also participated in numerous other distinguished group exhibitions including *57th October Salon: The Marvellous Cacophony*, 57th October Salon, Belgrade, Serbia (2018); *Imago Mundi*, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY (2016); *Re: Quest—Japanese Contemporary Art since the 1970s*, Museum of Art, Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea (2013); *Japan Today*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (1995); *Allegory of Seeing*, Sezon Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan (1995); *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan (1994); and *JAPAN '89*, Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent, Belgium (1989). His work is featured in numerous institutional collections, including Busan Museum of Art, Busan, South Korea; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan; National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan; Rachofsky Collection, Dallas, TX; Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland; Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Nagano, Japan; Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Toyota, Japan; and the Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan.

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.

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

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) 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.

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