

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Kenjiro Okazaki****TOPICA PICTUS / La Cienega****Blum & Poe, Los Angeles****July 17 – August 14, 2021**

June 25, 2021, Los Angeles—Blum & Poe is pleased to present Tokyo-based artist Kenjiro Okazaki's *TOPICA PICTUS / La Cienega*, a suite of twenty abstract paintings, each paired with a short essay and reference image(s), which function as key components to provide multi-layered experiences to audiences. This is Okazaki's fourth presentation with the gallery and follows the recent announcement of his representation.

In an ongoing series that now comprises over 150 works since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the works on view were made in response to the unprecedented condition of isolated co-existence, the suspension of time and space, and the perceived loss of tactile or concrete experience, which has significantly impacted our social reality. For the artist, this condition has provided the “possibility of going everywhere because we cannot go anywhere,” an opportunity to go on a solitary journey. In the process of making these paintings, Okazaki finds that the multitude of issues that historically face painting is akin to the discovery of a place. Namely, each painting confronts a unique issue and allows for a unique *topos* (place) to emerge. The term *topica* in *TOPICA PICTUS* is derived from Aristotle's *Ars Topica* (The Topics) on the art of the dialectic, and is associated with *topos*, which indicates a place. In the course of his work, Okazaki recalled not only art historical objects such as African masks, decorative and colored manuscripts, Kamakura-era picture scrolls, Momoyama-era Japanese paintings, Renaissance, Impressionist, and Modernist art, but also medieval maps, images of Dumbo, Pearl Harbor, and Google Earth. We, the viewers = readers, will read the unexpected network of sensibility and thought that spreads among various literary and artistic works, transcending time, space, and cultural differences. Okazaki likens this process to the three-body problem in celestial mechanics: “when there are three or more stars with mass enough to influence each other's gravity, the motion of these stars becomes almost unpredictable. . . Multiple activities work and intertwine, and the whole thing moves.” The paintings do not function as formal correlations to the reference work but as creative cues that encode Okazaki's distinct visual and literary narratives that continue to circumnavigate a *topos*.

In his quadriptych— *Antaninaomby / Ataokoloinona (Water a Strange Thing) 水のヘンテコなもの*; *Kilimanjaro / Wakonyingo (Bring negative spirits) カラッポのたましいを運ぶ*; *Asase Ya / 河を産めば畑をうるおす*; *Nyame / 空はなんでもみている* (2020), his references span mathematical symmetry, African mythology, Bedu plank masks, Francesco di Giorgio

Martini's human proportion drawings, anthropomorphic seventeenth century maps, and David Smith sculptures.

*Hina-phases of the moon, Tunaroa-the father of eels* / 月日の満ち欠け (2020) brings together a constellation of narratives. In his text, we learn how the “lake in the sea” shape of Tongareva (Penrhyn atoll of the Cook Islands) resembles the Google Earth view of the island in the center: a wholly oceanic earth outlined by a thin atmospheric layer. Okazaki recounts the legend of Hina, a Polynesian goddess associated with the moon and responsible for the creation of coconuts, which are said to have grown from the burial site of the decapitated head of her lover, Tuna, god of the eels, after a heavy rain. Okazaki links the split form of the inner white coconut flesh, *te roro o te Tuna* (Tuna's brains), to the shape of Tongareva. There is an implicit reference to *Weeping Coconuts* (1951) by Frida Kahlo (notably in LACMA's collection), where tears fall from the (Tuna's) eyes of a coconut. The undulating dark, purple curve in the top left corner of Okazaki's painting ties the narratives together—Tongareva's shape, the moon, Kahlo—perhaps a forewarning of Earth's water crisis in the post-Anthropocene era.

In another work, the clear-cut split down the top and bottom of the wooden frame of *Open Sea, Stormy Weather* / 潮水の波、真水の瀧 (2020) articulates the vertical break between the horizontal purple and black strokes on the left and the foamy blue cascade on the right. While there are clear formal cues of the fierce perpendicular movement of crossing wind and rain in John Constable's *Rainstorm over the Sea* (c. 1824–1828), or the visceral texture of the rolling waves in Claude Monet's *At Sea, Stormy Weather* (1880), Okazaki also captures the sensation of immersion and rebirth, embodied in Kaihō Yushō's *Dragon and Clouds* (1599), depicting a powerful dragon emerging out of a spiraling cloud. In this way, *TOPICA PICTUS* involves a multiplicity of places (a set of issues) generated from the artist's creative thought processes. A compilation of essays accompanying each work in *TOPICA PICTUS* will be published by Iwanami Shoten this fall.

**Kenjiro Okazaki** (b. 1955, Tokyo, Japan) lives and works in Tokyo. His work was featured in independent curator Mika Yoshitake's 2019 two-part exhibition at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s*. His work has been exhibited in institutional solo exhibitions including at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan (2020); Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Toyota, Japan (2020 and 2019); Kaze-no-sawa Museum, Kurihara, Japan (2016); BankArt29, Yokohama, Japan (2014); Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan (2009); Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Karuizawa, Japan (2002); and Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Agén, Agén, France (1994). His work is represented in the permanent collections of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan; Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan; Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan; Rachofsky Collection, Dallas TX; among many other museums. Okazaki's publications include *Abstract Art As Impact: Analysis of Modern Art* (Aki Shobō, 2018), which was awarded the 2019 Ministry of Education Award in Fine Arts, and *Renaissance: Condition*

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*of Experience* (Chikuma Shobō, 2001/Bungeishunjū Gakugei Library, 2014). A revered professor, he founded and directed the Yotsuya Art Studium in 2004. He is a recipient of the 2014 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. He is currently a visiting professor at Musashino Art University and University of Tokyo.

## 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) 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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