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Systemic Paper

Kwon Young-woo, Rakuko Naito, and Dorothea Rockburne

Blum & Poe, Tokyo

April 15 – June 17, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, April 15, 2017, 6 – 8pm

Blum & Poe is pleased to present *Systemic Paper*, an exhibition of Kwon Young-woo, Rakuko Naito, and Dorothea Rockburne—three artists who have methodically explored the material properties of paper.

Kwon, Naito, and Rockburne began their careers in the 1960s when minimalist and systemic practices in all media were at their height. In 1966, the influential critic Laurence Alloway organized *Systemic Painting*, a landmark survey of geometric abstraction, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. While the exhibited artworks were simple, methodical explorations of repetition and pattern, Alloway's definition of "systemic" practice was expansive—encompassing shaped canvases, Color Field and Hard Edge. Nevertheless, the term was rooted in the medium of painting, and in an American context. Few contemporary artists have prioritized paper not merely as a ground for painting or drawing but as an active material in its own right; fewer still have approached it from a systemic, modular, or mathematical perspective.

Kwon Young-woo was one of the founding figures of Dansaekhwa, the Korean monochrome painting movement of the 1970s. Schooled in ink-painting traditions, Kwon forged a new direction in the 1960s by abandoning the use of ink and scratching the surface of the delicate, multilayered *hanji* paper with his fingernails. Leaving his works untitled or assigning them ordinal numbers that referred to their order of creation within a given year, Kwon quietly persisted with an iterative, serial practice. *Systemic Paper* features work from the 1980s, in which the artist created a diverse array of compositions made from rips, slices, and perforations. These unique works are a compelling interplay of order, precision, and disintegration.

Rakuko Naito studied *nihonga*—traditional Japanese painting—at the Tokyo National University of Art. After graduating in 1958 she moved to New York, where she currently lives and works. Her early acrylic paintings were geometric and Op compositions that emphasized flatness and avoided any trace of the artist's hand. Her interest in geometry carried over into paper: she sees the natural forms and textures of the material as having a reality that transcends the limits of painting and drawing. Since the 1990s she has explored the texture, pliability, and strength of Japanese *kozo washi*. This exhibition features varied examples of these sequentially-titled assemblages, which are composed of folded, layered, and rolled strips of paper that build up into grids, stacks, and swirls. Many of Naito's works are made in a square format for modular display; in addition to those that are hung vertically on the wall, one is mounted horizontally on a plinth, adding a sculptural dimension to the exhibition.

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Dorothea Rockburne studied at the renowned Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina, from 1950 to 1952. There she was deeply influenced by the teachings of German mathematician Max Dehn, who introduced her to topology, the ubiquity of geometry in nature, and the concepts of harmonic intervals. Since the beginning of her career, Rockburne's work has reflected a profound interest in the intersection of art, mathematics, science, and philosophy—in particular the Golden Mean, set theory, astronomy, cosmology, and the Egyptian use of proportion and light. She has produced various series of monochromatic works that reveal the processes by which they were made; she cuts, marks, and folds her materials, which include carbon paper, metal, canvas, and chipboard. This exhibition features *Locus I–VI* (1972), a suite of six sheets of paper that Rockburne folded and ran through a printing press to create embossed lines, subsequently printing aquatint onto the topmost portions of the folded paper. The intersecting creases rotate 180 degrees clockwise across the six sheets.

Kwon Young-woo (1926-2013) has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including at Blum & Poe, New York (2016). The Seoul Museum of Art held a major retrospective in 2007. Previously Kwon was featured in the survey *From All Sides: Tansaekhwa on Abstraction* held at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles in 2014, and the traveling exhibition *Dansaekhwa and Minimalism*, held at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles and New York in 2016—the first overview of Korean monochromatic painting with American Minimalism. He has been featured in important surveys such as *When Process Becomes Form: Dansaekhwa and Korean Abstraction*, Villa Empain - Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, Belgium (2016); *Dansaekhwa*, Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice, Italy (2015); *Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon (2012); and *Korean Contemporary Art of the 1970s*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, which traveled to Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Osaka, Japan; Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Sapporo, Japan; and Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (1983). Kwon was one of the five artists featured in the landmark show *Five Kinds of White*, held at Tokyo Gallery in 1975. Prior to that, his work was included in the São Paulo Art Biennial (1973), and the Tokyo Biennale (1965). Public collections of his work include the British Museum, London; M+, Hong Kong; Museum of Contemporary Art, Gwacheon, Korea; and Samsung Museum Leeum, Seoul.

Rakuko Naito (born 1937) held her first solo exhibition at the World House Gallery in New York in 1965. Since then, she has exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. Most recently, Naito held a solo exhibition at the Karuizawa New Art Museum, Karuizawa, Japan, in 2016. She was included in group exhibitions such as the International Women Artists' Biennale, Incheon, Korea (2009); *Optic Nerve: Perceptual Art of the 1960s*, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio (2007); *Optical Edge*, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York (2007); *A Moment Becomes Eternity*, Bergen Museum, New Jersey (1993); Tokyo International Biennale (1974); *Black & White*, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut (1966); and *Motion and Movement*, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio (1964). Naito's work is held in the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut; the Miami-Dade Community College, Miami, Florida; the Kemper Art Collection, Chicago; State University at Potsdam, New York; the Wellesley College Davis Museum, Wellesley, Massachusetts; and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Buenos Aires.

Dorothea Rockburne (born 1932) lives and works in New York. Selected solo museum exhibitions include *A Gift of Knowing: The Art of Dorothea Rockburne*, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine (2015); *Drawing Which Makes Itself*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); *In My Mind's Eye*, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York (2011); *Dorothea Rockburne*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts (1989); and *Locus*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (1981). She has been featured in important surveys such as *On Line: Drawing Through the 20th Century*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2010-11); *The Women of Black Mountain College*, Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, Asheville, North Carolina (2008-2009); *High Times, Hard Times*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina (2006); *Eight Contemporary Artists*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (1974). Her work is included in the collections of the Auckland City Art Museum, Auckland, New Zealand; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.