

Noriko Ambe

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Noriko Ambe was born in Saitama, Japan; she currently works in New York and Tokyo. In "Flat Globe," her second one-person show in New York, Ambe exhibited wall pieces, cut-out books, and industrial metal cabinets with drawers, which serve as semi-architectural spaces to contain her cut-paper sculptures. Using an X-Acto knife to cut through many layers of a synthetic Japanese paper called Yupo, Ambe laboriously brings her projects to their final state, which tends to resemble a finely featured topography. The sheets of paper appear as narrow-ridged hills and valleys, and because Yupo's transparency and organic touch give it the quality of skin, there is also a reference to the human body. The overall experience of Ambe's work is, paradoxically, both delicate and tough: the processes of gouging and cut-ting lend themselves to a more violent interpretation of the works' subtle energies.

The subtitle of the show, "Linear-Actions Cutting Project 2006," refers to the process of cutting itself. Ambe's three-dimensional topographies are made with hundreds of sheets of paper, with each cut minimally modifying the surface of the piece. A complex interaction with positive and negative space results, as the layers of paper build by accretion, requiring a slow but sure hand in their development. In the beautiful *Crack II* (2006), Ambe has made random cuts into the Yupo, resulting in a surface that recalls the cut canvases of the Italian artist Lucio Fontana. The combination of delicacy and violence creates a remarkable tension within this low relief. Cuts on the lower left side of the work deliberately scar the whitepaper, whose translucent beauty is exquisite in its subtlety. The incisions and rough parts of the piece, however, argue for a very contemporary reading of Ambe's efforts, which silently acknowledge a certain level of aggression.

In the large *Sculpaper* (2006), made of cut paper and wood, Ambe builds islands or mountains on top of a flat rectangle of a pedestal. The individually cut sheets of paper are piled on top of each other; the artist gives them rounded edges, enforcing the feeling that she is describing a natural topography rather than an abstract form. Another aesthetic, different from the one energizing *Crack II*, plays out in *Sculpaper*: here is a tension between the organic nature of the built-up forms and the industrialized, rational feeling of the rectangular platform; the luminescent artificiality of the paper also adds complexity. Ambe's technical skill straddles two kinds of environments—the natural world and the world of the cultivated, or civilized, motif.

Ambe, not content with the relative simplicity of the cut paper by itself, has recently been inserting her environments into flat-file shelves, where they conflict with the steel drawers of the metal cabinets. In *Flat File Globe 3A* (2006), she has filled seven drawers with cut Yupo paper, whose intuitive arrangement contrasts beautifully with the square confines. With the drawers pulled out to different lengths, one can look into each individual environment. Not only is there a fine sensibility at work here, there is also the unexpectedly humorous implication of shelves containing what look like natural tableaux—valleys and mountains without end, rock strata worn down by water. This recent work signals a further development in Ambe's art, which contrives an inspired merger between various categories, not least natural materials and industrial design.