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Noriko Ambe: Artist Books, Linear-Actions Cutting Project
Lora Reynolds Gallery
Through Dec. 31

The flesh of books, cut with a cunning scalpel, revealing aspects of the subjects of those books that the books alone and uncut could never display: Noriko Ambe has been at work.

The starkly elegant Lora Reynolds Gallery near the intersection of Nueces and Third presents "Artist Books, Linear-Actions Cutting Project" by New York-based artist Ambe. This show is the culmination of a 20-work series instigated by curator Glenn Fuhrman. It's a spare and stunning display of art books that have undergone transformations via Ambe's precise blade to become both less and more than what they started out as. Not just any art books, mind you, but elegant volumes covering the careers or phases of Damien Hirst, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Takashi Murakami, and the like: super - for good reason - stars.

Ambe works page by page, the exhibition's catalogue tells us, her subtractions unbalancing the equations of book-bound beauty and forcing them toward figures of greater fascination. Miniature caverns often extend inches deep and seemingly organically into the sweet thick sheets; graceful excisions do not deface but, instead, serve to eerily reveal the deeper faces locked beneath the glossy surface. With each work, the artist matches method to subject, turning the Lichtenstein book, for instance, into a multileveled pop collage complete with Ben-Day Dots punched through the many pages; rendering the smooth innards of a Tom Friedman retrospective as a series of thought balloons issuing from eviscerated covers to ascend an entire gallery wall; deconstructing books on the work of Hirst and Alberto Giacometti in ways that speak not only to the tropes and triumphs of those artists but also to Ambe's own earlier explorations of structure and its limits.

So many of these radically sculpted objects are explosive with color, it's a genius move - a small thing, but a genius thing - to begin the show's slow waltz through aesthetic biblioectomy with Blank-Chaos, Ambe's earliest work here, a topographical marvel cut from a completely white book. How to end the show yourself is another problem entirely. These creations will stay with you, unholed in memory's pages, long after you've returned to the imprecise grit and clamor beyond the gallery's front door.