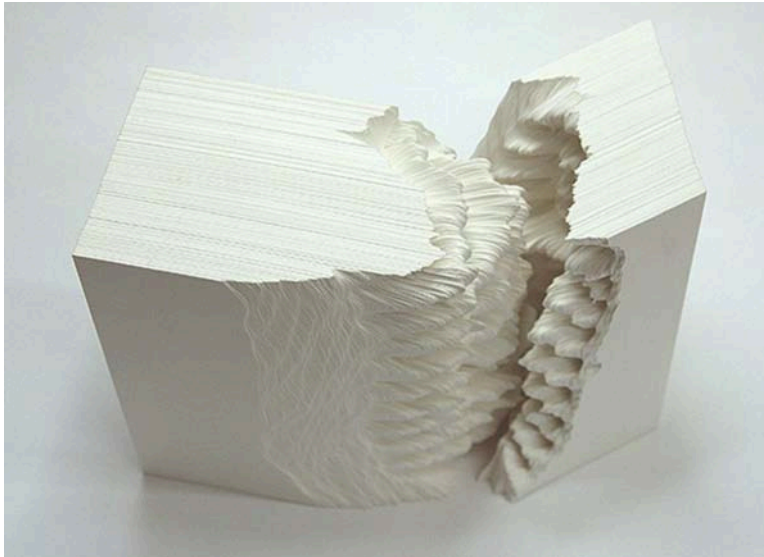


# Moderneast

A Talk with Artist Noriko Ambe  
by Mahaut Le Lagadec  
March 7, 2016



Born in Saitama in 1967, Japanese artist Noriko Ambe, now living in NYC, is mainly working through a process of cutting which is particularly spectacular. Her works are currently exhibited at The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (Jan. 31 – May 29, 2016) and at the Everhart Museum (Feb. 5 – June 6, 2016). Let's meet her and learn more about her project.

Moderneast Magazine: What would you like to say to people who don't know your work and see your pieces, installations and cuttings for the first time?

Noriko Ambe: Actually, for those who see my work for the first time, I am not going to guide them how to see it. I'm more interested in what they feel, imagine, or think through my work, and I hope they won't just focus on the technique of cutting.

MM: How do you consider the process of cutting? What is the intellectual, or artistic, path that guides your work?

NA: Through my cuttings, I'm thinking about, what is time? Time is essential to my work. Because over time I add more and more paper to a sculpture, the work itself ends up embodying the time it takes to create it.

The process is as important as the finished product and the simple act of making art every day is important to my practice. The action of cutting is quite simple, yet the subtle natural distortions convey the nuances of human emotions, habits or biorhythms. Because of this, I insist on making all the work by hand.

As blood runs through my body, rivers run along the Earth. And as I draw on paper, the river draws on the Earth. When I am drawing-cutting lines and circles, I am interested in observing the power of a changing and growing shape. This dynamic shape becomes an entity in itself, it becomes another geography. The work consists of positive or negative shapes. Through this process, I am trying to embody relationships among

humans, and between time and nature. In the topographies that I cut into paper, human life merges with nature and all boundaries are dissolved.

Before drawing lines, I was painting huge landscapes, trying to reach something sublime. I was fascinated with infinite space, and I wanted to express that image somehow. But, you know, I felt really small. The more [the size of] the canvas was getting bigger, the more depressed I became, because I couldn't get back to the real scale, my real scale. Also, images originally came from my memories or from movies or something I had seen before. I began to doubt, and so then I tried to discover myself. I had to ask, "What is original for me? What is my original picture, my original landscape?"

Once, when I was in an airplane, I saw a beautiful sea of clouds below me that made me want to melt into the natural world. Then, instinctively, I realized what I wanted to express through the art. My existence would disappear, but it isn't a negative meaning. On the contrary, it's something really rich. I felt that would be the nature of making art.

The metal cabinets with drawers, called "Flat File Globe" series, are like a metaphor for the human body and also the point where continues time and the present. There meet pieces give visual expression to intangibles within the body, such as the "soul" and "life".



Noriko Ambe "flat globe "minimalism" (detail), 2006 (Copyright: Adagp, Paris 2016)

MM: Some of your works, especially those from the "Linear-Actions Cutting Project", seem so delicate and meticulously done. How much time do you spend, on average, for the creation of that type of piece?

NA: It depends. Some take a couple of weeks, sometimes months, or longer. The longest time it took me to complete a piece so far is a year and a half. Anyway, when I started these cutting works, I decided I should keep doing it for at least ten years, like the annual rings of a tree. Now, it's been fifteen years. It would become my life project, a sort of journey.

MM: For this specific project, you used a synthetic paper made from polypropylene, called Yupo. How do

you choose your materials? Do you pay attention to the material's ability to convey a message or a sensation?

NA: Initially, in 1999, I started drawing lines and etching. Eventually, I began stacking paper and working in three-dimensions. At first, when I found a thick white paper sketchbook, I got a new idea: cutting directly into it. When I showed my first white cutting-book piece in Japan, people said, "Is this some kind of paper craft?" I said, "No, this is art!". Then, coincidentally, I discovered Yupo, a synthetic, translucent white paper. It has an organic quality that makes it feel like skin.

Cutting books is like collaboration for me, as their surfaces are already marked with maps or text and messages. And the structure of the book itself is halfway between two and three-dimensions.

By cutting the pre-existing patterns and information that are contained in books so as to alter them, I am expressing a new concept. That is why it is important to carefully choose the materials: printed materials convey a message automatically.

MM: I've read on Artsy that you want "to attain something sublime". What does it mean? What is your relationship to beauty?

NA: Beauty is one of the results of creating art, it is not the purpose. I think this is what makes the difference between design, or craft, and art.

I have been trying to use the potential of art to transcend everyday experiences toward a heightened state of consciousness, with an emphasis on the spiritually sublime. For me it is a way to awaken unconscious memories.

MM: What would you advise to young artists, from Asia or elsewhere, who aspire to break into the international scene, to get their artworks out of their native land?

NA: When I started working in the US, I definitely felt I had an "Asian sensibility" that was different from a Western one. I would like to encourage young artists to get out of their native lands at least once, to understand the gap between Western and Asian sensibilities, then try to somehow render them permeable one another.

MM: What are your next projects, exhibitions?

NA: I have two solo shows scheduled, at Maho Kubota Gallery in Tokyo in June, and my second solo show at Castelli Gallery, in New York, next winter.



*Noriko Ambe – A Thousand of Self (Copyright: Adagp, Paris, 2016)*