

The background of the image is a dense, textured pattern of torn, light beige paper. The edges of the paper pieces are irregular and jagged, creating a marbled effect. Thin, golden-brown veins are scattered throughout the paper, adding a touch of elegance and contrast. The overall appearance is that of a high-quality, artistic paper design.

RAKUKO NAITO

RAKUKO NAITO

5 April – 26 May 2023

THE MAYOR GALLERY / BorzoGallery

CONTENTS

p. 7	<i>Rakuko Naito: Creating the Only One That Exists on Earth</i> by Midori Yamamura
p. 15	Plates
p. 30	List of works
p. 32	Biography
p. 32	List of solo exhibitions



Rakuko Naito:

Creating the Only One That Exists on Earth

by Midori Yamamura
Associate Professor of Art History
The City University of New York, Kingsborough

Arriving in New York City in 1958, immediately after graduating from the Tokyo National University of Art - the best art school in Japan - , Rakuko Naito left what seemed like a promising career for a riskier future. Her co-graduates included Tetsumi Kudo, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, and Jiro Takamatsu, among others; all became a significant part of Japan's post-World War II avant-garde movement. But for Naito, growing up under a militaristic totalitarian regime, when citizens were coerced into the authoritarian state and the arts were complicit with the nationalistic venture, it was more important to sever the ties with the past and with tradition by leaving the country. In this respect, she belongs to a group of postwar Japanese diaspora artists, including Yoko Ono, On Kawara, Yayoi Kusama, and Tadaaki Kuwayama. All urged "freedom" from the fettering past and created stunningly original art.

In order to invent the new, Naito first divorces her artwork from nature, narrative, and artistic tradition. For example, in one of the material-based series that she began around 1995 instead of relying on the basic painterly elements of line, colour, and composition, she contrives a base unit for her work by tearing, rolling, and folding a piece of paper. The particular work is composed of about 169 soft, corn-shaped objects colonising an 11 3/4-inch square. Here, Naito used a square format and routinely pasted a cell-like unit, row by row. Consequently, the work has on top and bottom, with manual labour replacing formal composition. Since the paper is achromatic white, there is no colour involved, and the play of light and shadow replaces drawing in this work.

If Naito ever introduces line and colour, she does so in unconventional ways. She prefers natural colours and phenomena, because the artificial “touches of brush and lines”, as Naito sees it, “are weaker than natural forms”¹

Because her works are neither paintings nor drawings, Naito wittily entitled her 2001 Denise Cadé Gallery exhibition as *Works of, and with, but not on, Paper*. This does not prevent her from creating works on paper. She still does that in strikingly original ways. For example, a series of works on paper that Naito produced during her residency at Josef and Ani Albers Foundation in Connecticut. The ragged pattern in that work was not fashioned by drawing, but by a piece of coarse gauze soaked in *sumi* ink. After placing it on paper, she applied wax and removed the gauze before wax got hardened, and the remaining pigment configured the netting pattern in this work.

Some of Naito’s works, with the soft cone-shaped elements incorporate the convex and concave by reversing each cone at midpoint, recalling the yin and yang symbolism. However, unlike Yayoi Kusama’s *Accumulation* series where the artist was unambiguous about its phallic association, Naito removes any narrative association from her work; hence, all Naito’s works are *Untitled*. Still, she gives alphanumeric identification code to each work. In case for RN3 113/44-14, her initials (RN) are followed by the order of her work made in the specific year represented by the last two digits (3rd work made in 2014), and the size (11 3/4-inch square, 4-inch depth). The numeric section of the identification code indicates her being in specific time, which brings Naito’s practice closer to On Kawara’s *Today* series (1966-). It is no coincidence that both artists grappled with existential questions after the war.

Represented by the Japanese materialist philosopher, Umemoto Katsumi’s *shutaisei* ronso (subjectivity discourse), after 1945, artists and intellectuals in Japan began questioning the “loss of subjectivity” during the absolutism of the war.² Major aspects of *shutaisei*, as noted by its authority, J. Victor Koschman, include ‘behaviour unmediated by reflection’; “human beings’ active dimension” directed “not only to adapt to their environment but to act upon and seek to change it”; and “inner freedom.”³ If Kawara’s *Date* paintings were his objective observation of time unmediated by reflection, then

Naito seeks her inner freedom by contriving forms and shapes that never existed before. She explains: “There is no duplicate in my work.”⁴ If she selects the same paper for two different works, then the shape of the unit, or its arrangement, is different, with aesthetics paramount in her practice. Correspondingly, “dazzling beauty” is how the curator, J. Frederick Cain portrayed Naito’s earlier *Spring Flower Series* (1981).⁵ More recently, Elisabeth Claus observed a “strong aural emanation” in her material series.⁶

Through aligning her breath-taking works Naito establishes a unique environment. This brings her practice closest to her long-time artistic partner, Tadaaki Kuwayama’s ethereal environment, composed of object-units made of industrial materials. But unlike Kuwayama, who is not reluctant to employ a mechanized process, manual work is essential in Naito’s practice. This is the reason why her largest square is 36-inch wide, determined by the utmost reach of her arms, which puts her in the same camp as Ad Reinhardt and Agnes Martin - Reinhardt’s square paintings were 35 inches on each side and Martin’s 36 inches. The human body sets the limit for these artists.

Witnessing the grand-scale catastrophe of “techno-rationalism” that underscored the programs of complete annihilation in Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and especially after the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, it seems that only apocalypse exists in the world, is how French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy judged the world today in *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes* (2012).⁷ On the other hand, Naito poetically intervenes in the world. Her works impart a humanistic face, based on the most fundamental individual activities of thinking, enjoying, and enduring the creative process, so we may start comprehending the world differently.

Endnotes

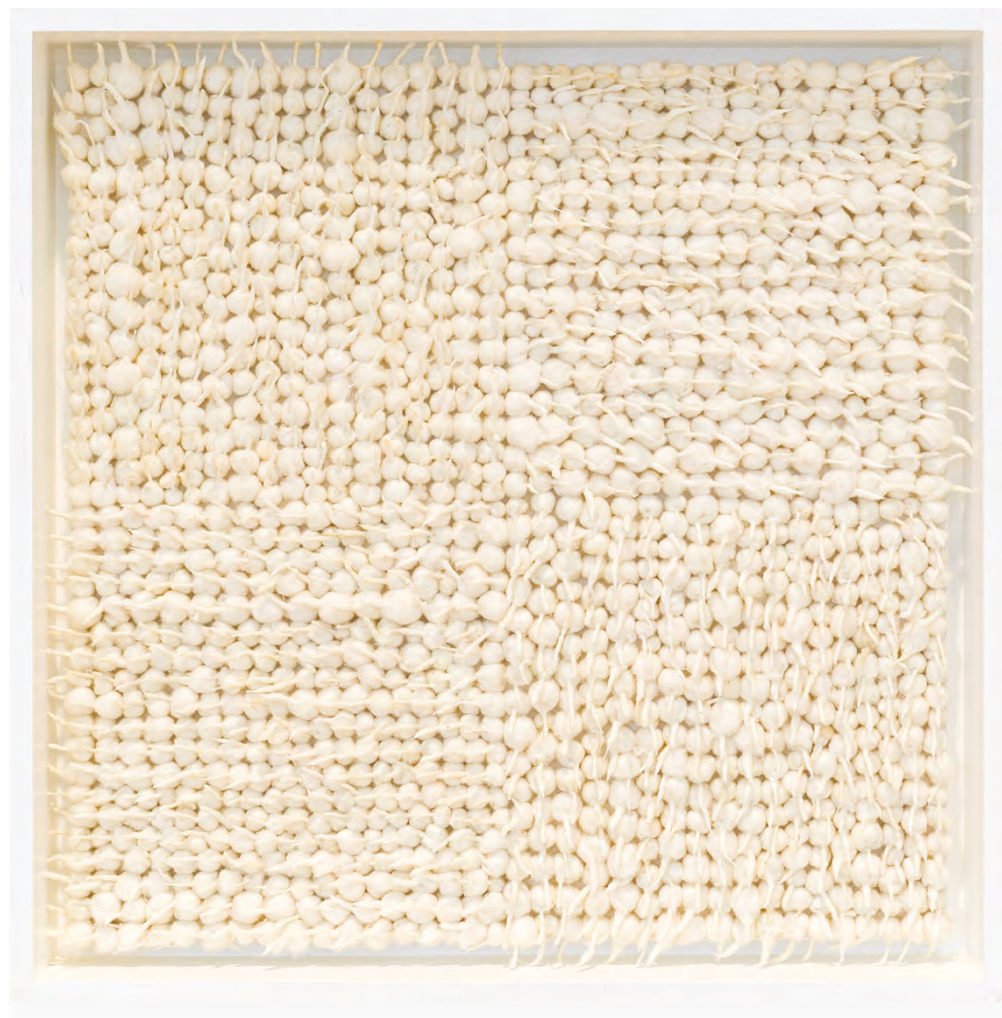
- 1 Rakuko Naito, interviewed by author, New York, 7 July 2016.
- 2 Umemato Katsumi, *Jitsuzon tsuikyū no ba* [A place of search for existence] in Takauwa Sumio, ed., *Jiga to jitsuzen* [Subjectivity and existence] (Tokyo: Hakuyo-sha, 1948), 121.
- 3 J. Victor Kaschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Post-war Japan* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.
- 4 Naito, interview by author, 7 July 2016.
- 5 J. Frederick Cain, *Rakuko Naito*, in *Rakuko Naito*, exh. cat. | Nagoya, Jopon: Akira Iedo Gallery, 1981), n.p.
- 6 Elisabeth Claus, *Approaches to the Work of Rakuko Naito*, in *Rakuko Naito*, exh. cat. (Munich: Galerie Renate Bender, 2007), 7.
- 7 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Fukushima no Alode: Hakyoku, Gijutsu, Minshushugi* [After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Calostrophes], trans. Tonaki Yotetsu (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2012), 32-33, 44.



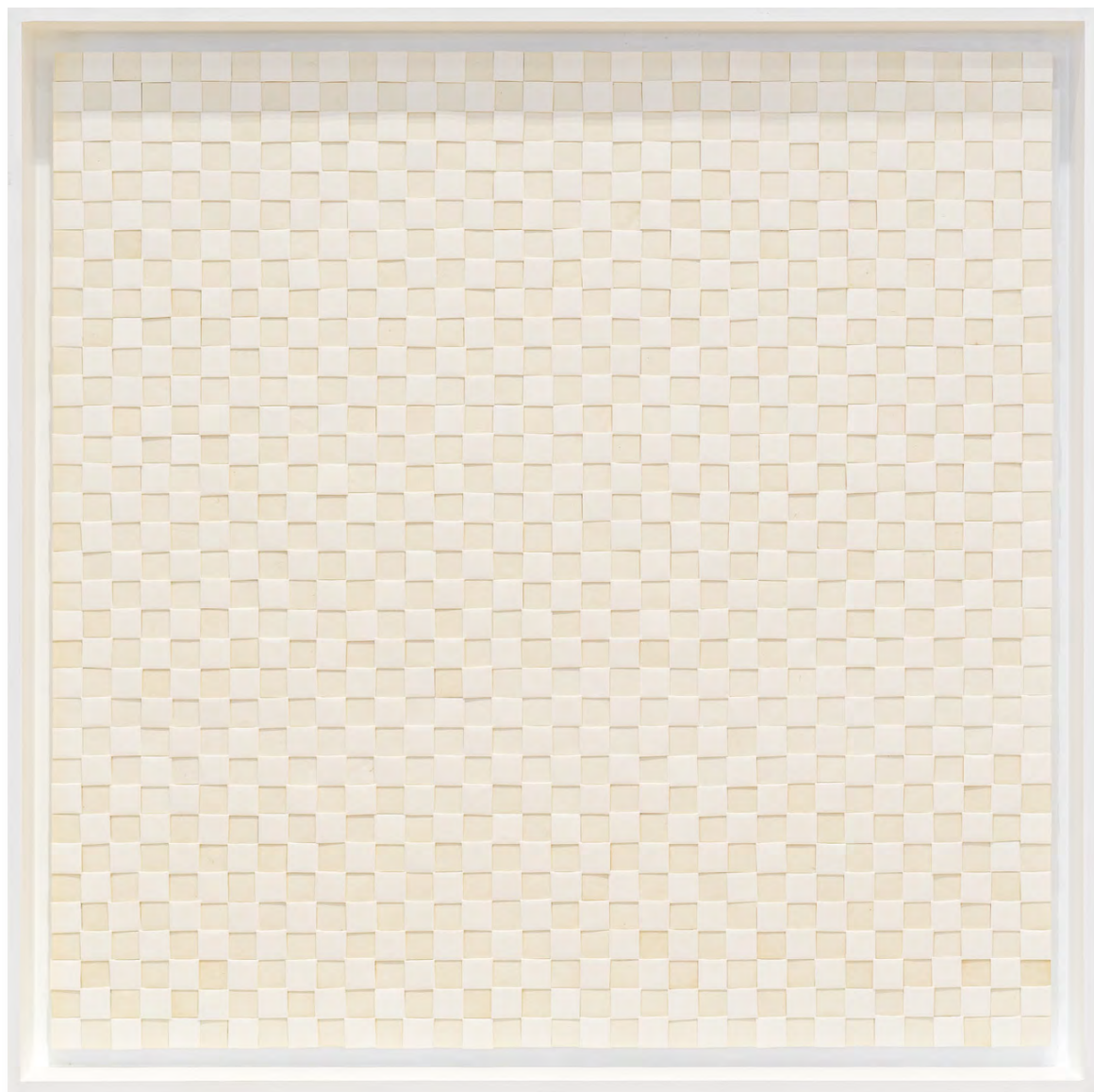
Rakuko Naito portrait by Thomas Haar, 1971

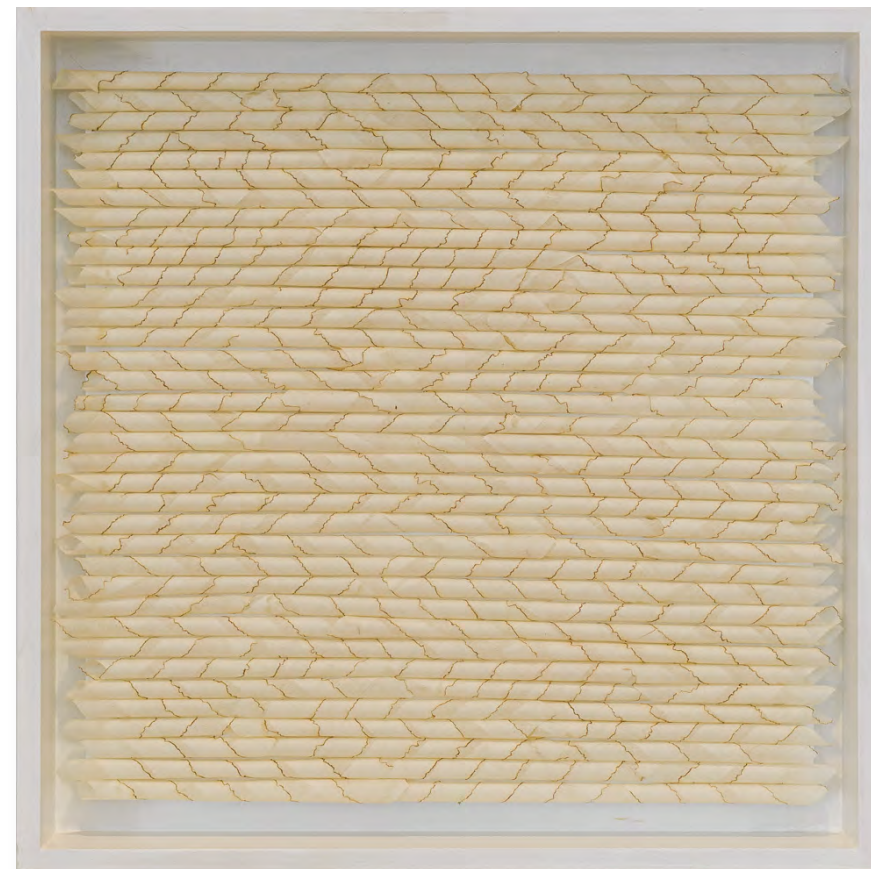
PLATES

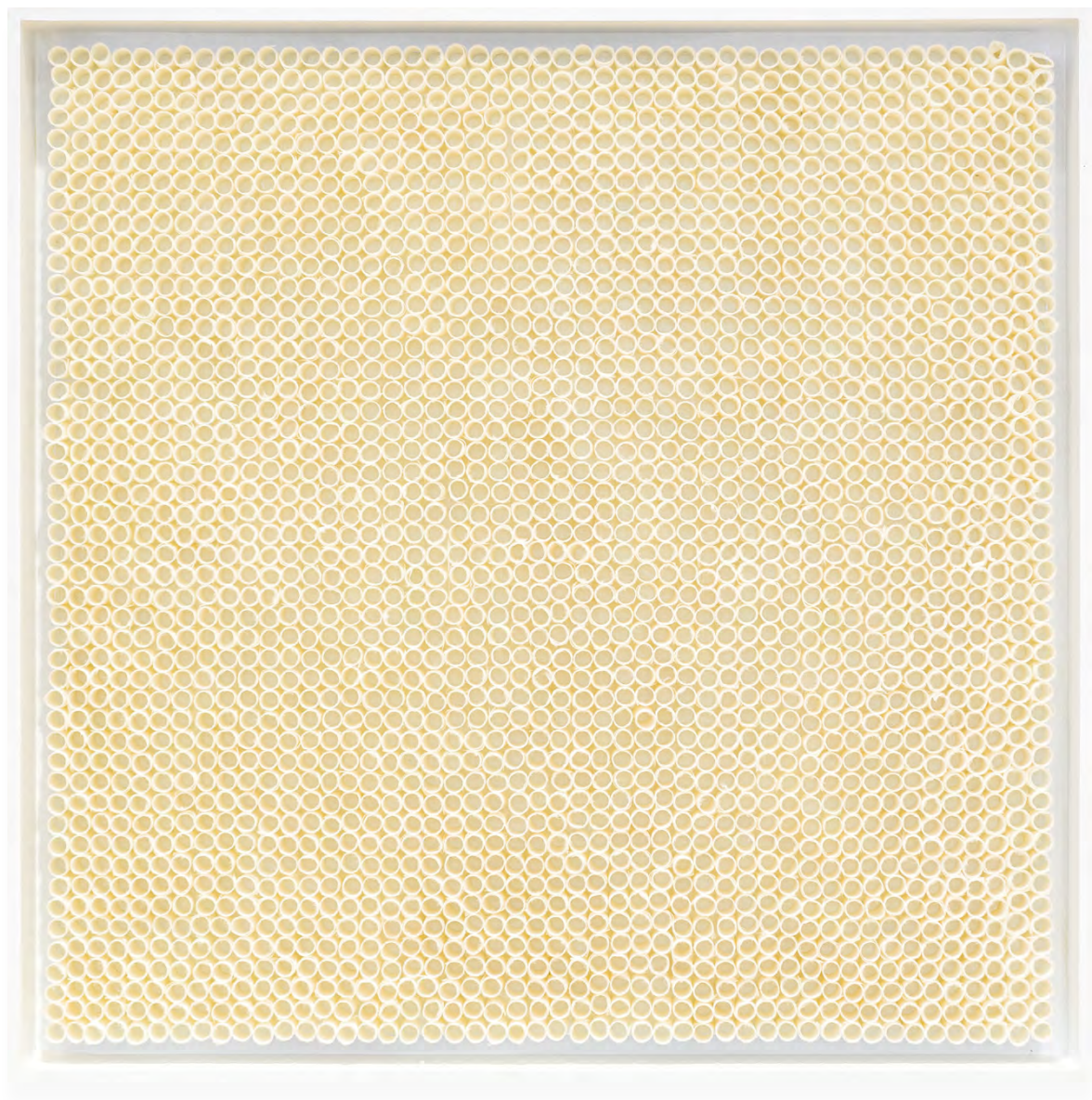
















LIST OF WORKS

RAKUKO NAITO

p. 15 *RN1212-4 1/2-07*
2007
Crinkled paper
30.5 x 30.5 x 11.4 cm
12 x 12 x 4 1/2 inches

p. 16 *RN1624-5-07*
2007
Indian cotton balls
61 x 61 x 12.7 cm
24 x 24 x 5 inches

p. 17 *RN636-2 3/4-10*
2010
Japanese paper on board (all over zig-zag)
91.4 x 91.4 x 7 cm
36 x 36 x 2 3/4 inches

p. 18 *RN1624-3 1/2-12*
2012
Burnt edges folded squares
61 x 61 x 8.9 cm
24 x 24 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 19 *RN1412-4 1/2-14*
2014
V fold with burnt edges
30.5 x 30.5 x 11.4 cm
12 x 12 x 4 1/2 inches

p. 20 *RN2336-3 1/2-15*
2015
Japanese paper on board (small checker board)
91.4 x 91.4 x 8.9 cm
36 x 36 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 21 *RN2412-3 1/2-16*
2016
Small soft cubes
30.5 x 30.5 x 8.9 cm
12 x 12 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 22 *RN2112-3 1/2-16*
2016
Japanese paper on board (small cones)
30.5 x 30.5 x 8.9 cm
12 x 12 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 23 *RN1518 1/2-3 1/2-18*
2018
Japanese paper on board (rolled paper with burnt edges)
47 x 47 x 8.9 cm
18 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 24 *RN2436-3 1/2-18*
2018
Japanese paper on board (soft edge rolls)
91.4 x 91.4 x 8.9 cm
36 x 36 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 25 *RN618 1/2-3 1/2-18*
2018
Japanese paper on board (irregular strips)
47 x 47 x 8.9 cm
18 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 26 *RN1212-3 1/2-19*
2019
Japanese paper on board (soft edge free form)
30.5 x 30.5 x 8.9 cm
12 x 12 x 3 1/2 inches

p. 27 *RN1417 1/2-2 1/2-21*
2021
Japanese paper on board (folded burnt edges)
44.5 x 44.5 x 6.3 cm
17 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches

p. 28 *RN1317 1/2-2 1/2-21*
2021
Japanese paper on board (burnt edge stripes)
44.5 x 44.5 x 6.3 cm
17 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches

p. 29 *RN518-5-22*
2022
Japanese paper on board (folded paper checker-board)
45.7 x 45.7 x 12.7 cm
18 x 18 x 5 inches

BIOGRAPHY

1937 Born in Nagoya, Tokyo, Japan
1958 BFA, Tokyo National University of Art, Tokyo, Japan
1958 Moved to United States
Currently lives and works in New York

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1965 World House Gallery, New York City, NY, USA
1965 North Truro Art Gallery, Massachusetts, USA
1972 Henri Gallery, Washington D.C., USA
1978 Charleston Art Museum of Sunrise, West Virginia
1981 Akira Ikeda Gallery, Nagoya, Japan
1982 Gimpel+Hanover & Andre Emmerich Galerien, Zurich, Germany
1992 Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan
2001 *Works of and with but not on, Paper*, Denise Cade Gallery, New York, NY
2003 Tamada Project, Tokyo, Japan
2003 Galerie Renate Bender, Munich, Germany
2004 *Art Paris*, Denise Cade Gallery, Paris, France
2007 Galerie Renate Bender, Munich, Germany
2009 *Permutation-Variant-Structure*, Maiden Lane Exhibition Space, New York City, NY, USA (curated by Elisabeth Akkerman)
2009 *Thoughts in Circles & Squares*, Noma Gallery, San Francisco, CA. USA
2012 *Nature Constructed*, Tayloe Piggott Gallery, Jackson, WY, USA (curated by Michael Klein)
2013 Weber Fine Art, Greenwich, CT, USA
2016 Karuizawa New Art Museum, Karuizawa, Japan
2016 Whitestone Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
2017 Barbara Mathes Gallery, New York City, NY, USA (with Tadaaki Kuwayama)
2017 *Tearing Rolling Folding*, Tayloe Piggott Gallery, Jackson, WY, USA

2018 *Inventing the New*, Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI, USA, (with Tadaaki Kuwayama)
2018 BorzoGallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (with Tadaaki Kuwayama)
2019 Adrian Rosenfeld, San Francisco, CA, USA (with Tadaaki Kuwayama)
2019 Whitestone Gallery, Tapei, Taiwan
2021 *Rakuko Naito*, Shoshana Wayne, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2021 Alison Bradley Projects, New York City, NY, USA (curated by Gabriela Rangel)
2022 *Rakuko Naito, Rhythms of White*, Tayloe Piggott Gallery, Jackson, WY, USA
2022 *In Your Arms I’m Radiant*, Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA (with Tadaaki Kuwayama)

