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Autumn Ahn's studio in North Adams is all lines and planes. There are the lines of filamental steel that she welds into hulking diagrams, like enlargements of her teaching assignments at Bard. And there are the planes of vibrant hanji papers, tiled into grids and suspended like curtains, or the hefty printmaking papers she has pinned to the wall. To these lines and planes, Ahn has recently added points: Grommets pierce some of the papers, allowing them to be suspended from blackened steel hooks, an improbably elegant connection.

A waxy celadon sheet, wall-hooked, catches my eye; its deckled edge, backlit from the studio windows, seems to glow. I reach out to touch it and find that it is, in fact, wet, as Ahn bathed it in mineral oil—a fluid that refuses to oxidize, polymerize, and dry. This 300-weight Rives BFK paper is thick as building material and its oiliness holds light like an encaustic painting. The categorial status of Ahn's quasi-sculptural object is interesting, but its materiality, as such, is immediately compelling.

Eliciting touch is something Ahn's work performed in a recent installation for the Summit Show, a group exhibition on Mt. Holyoke. In a historic structure at the peak, mounted to the eaves over the veranda, she hung a sheet of paper punctured by two grommets, spaced to plausibly suggest eyeholes (compositionally, the effect is minimal, possibly nautical, and cheeky—a mouthless face). To accept the object's invitation, as a viewing device to take in the vista, however, one needed to grasp the sheet, tethered only at the top and invariably billowing in the wind, and pull it in.

Ahn's works can be scores or prompts and I am reminded, in her studio, of her background in performance: Describing her next show, she bent at the waist, nearly sweeping the floor with her hands, as if miming a river's flow. Her monumental, site-responsive installation, for Anthony Greaney, engages the height of the ceiling, the placement of the doors, and the light source of the windows. This environment, with board-mounted, tiled paper surfaces spanning floor and walls, is an abstracted landscape in which one's place, and that of the horizon, such as it is, must constantly be negotiated.

cont.

The central material, as in many of Ahn's work, is hanji, also known as Korean paper or, erroneously, rice paper, used here in a standard size (conceivably that of a windowpane) and a panoply of colors (each conditioned by natural dyes and cultural associations). From what little I know, hanji is handmade from the inner bark of mulberry trees and has been made in the same way for over 1,500 years. It is exceptionally strong and durable thanks to its long fibers and multidirectional structure; unlike Western papers, it is neither "laid," on a grid of wires, nor "wove," on a fine mesh screen; orthogonal regularity does not define it. In his classic text, *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), Jun'ichiro Tanizaki writes: "Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree."

This soft surface covered floors and walls, ceilings and doors, in ancient and medieval East Asia, where it also formed windows—translucent membranes between inside and out. Ahn's show, titled *No Sun*, implies a perplexing refusal; not the shadows, or indirect and fading light of Tanizaki's text, but a negation, apt to the darkness of our times. Still, there is light within this material, as in the leaves of trees. Ahn's installations sensitize us to our movements, but also to those of her materials, however subtle. The intelligence and performance of these papers—their pliancy and strength, their multivalent structure and application, their receptivity to light or air or touch—all exhibit other ways of being, available to the eye and the body and the hand.

Robert Wiesenberger