



Helga Philipp, *Kinetisches Objekt*, 1966–68, foil on plexiglass and silkscreen on fiberboard, wood, 45 x 45 x 5".

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Helga Philipp

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While they might initially evoke Op art, the works of Helga Philipp (1939–2002) quickly reveal a complexity beyond that style's slick optical effects. *Kinetic Object*, 1966–68, for instance, dizzies with its Op-like play of red and blue patterns, until one becomes aware of its sculptural materiality—the blue pattern is foil on Plexiglas, and the red behind it is silk screen on fiberboard. Fine drawings on the fiberboard, indicating the positions of the overlapping blue shapes, are also visible. The intentionality with which Philipp left these preparatory marks—disrupting the smooth exterior to reveal the piece's process—is indicative of her interest in the physical construction of artworks beyond their surface.

Untitled (1975–1976) is a series of seven sheets of white paper on which vertical white lines are embossed, a gesture so reduced that one has to look carefully to notice that the paper is not merely blank. The space between each line gradually expands from one sheet to another, creating a quiet sense of progression. One is compelled to look simultaneously at the pattern

and the delicate tactility of the papers, their grain and degree of whiteness. Optical effect and materiality are distinct artistic interests sometimes seen as oppositional; in Philipp's practice, they enhance each other. Prefiguring the conceptual reevaluation of modernist geometric abstraction that has become prominent since the 1990s—as in the works of Heimo Zobernig or Florian Pumhösl, for example—Philipp synthesizes the abstract ideas defined in optics theory with material reality. Instead of privileging one over the other, Philipp located the collision itself as a fertile site for exploration.

— Yuki Higashino