

## **Crystal Liu** *moon side up*



April 4 – May 11, 2024

Morgan Lehman is pleased to announce the opening of “moon side up,” an exhibition of new works on paper by Crystal Liu. This marks the artist’s third exhibition with the gallery. The pieces on display are part of two distinct but related recent bodies of work: “the rock garden” series and the “moon side up” series.

Composed primarily of watercolor, ink, gouache, collaged marbled paper, and gold leaf on paper, “the rock garden” series builds upon Liu’s established and expansive visual universe. These works are inspired by a diverse range of influences including floral arrangements, the tradition of Western still life painting, as well as Chinese rockery. In creating this series, Liu considered the theme of what it is to be loved unconditionally by someone, and how that person shapes the individual whom they love. This deeply personal investigation is expressed in recognizable, universal forms: rocks, flowers, moons, and stars set the stage for psychological charge and drama in each work. “the rock garden, “you gave me everything” is an artwork that serves as the starting point for the series and is an encapsulation of how the artist experienced unconditional love. She sees the rock as a humble vessel that contains all life. When the rock is split open, as with a geode, it reveals to the viewer an entirely new world of sparkling, shifting planes of light. In each composition, the rocks change shape and morph from vessels to leaves and flowers, reflecting limitless possibilities of form.

Extending from the “rock garden” series, “moon side up” focuses on imagery of a starry garden cosmos. In Liu’s view, this is a visual arena in which to live out a more playful spontaneity, a space in which to create freely and dream under the magnificence of light coming down from the moon and stars. Here, the artist muses on the human qualities of strength, energy, and beauty, as well as the hopefulness required to buoy oneself through challenging times. The series title, “moon side up,” is a play on the expression “sunny side up” and its optimistic playfulness, but instead of conjuring a sun-soaked tableau, Liu’s series depicts dreamscapes at night. In each dazzling dreamscape, the borders between the real and the imagined are blurred: stems emerge from star-filled mounds of earth, shimmering moons set behind large rocks resting on black puddle-like voids, and flowers of a range of species with symbolic power bloom into bounded starfield blossoms. In each scene, there is a sense that different moments in time are colliding or disparate zones of space are overlapping, as in the idea of a multiverse. Any consistent scale in the images is eschewed in favor of a comingling of forms across the picture plane. Like a prism that scatters rays of light, Liu’s uncanny worlds are interconnected and unending; they contain multitudes.

**Crystal Liu** was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1980 to Chinese immigrants. Liu majored in photography at Ontario College of Art & Design and received an MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2005. She has shown her work in solo exhibitions at Morgan Lehman (New York, NY); Galerie Du Monde (Hong Kong); Hosfelt Gallery (San Francisco, CA); and Leo Kamen Gallery (Toronto, Canada). Liu’s work is included in prestigious collections such as The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (California); The US Embassy Beijing Art Collection (Beijing, China); The City of San Francisco (San Francisco, California); The Progressive Art Collection (Mayfield Village, Ohio); and The Fidelity Art Collection (Boston, Massachusetts); among others. The artist lives and works in California.