



Naomi Kawanishi Reis

Strange Light

October 10 – November 9, 2024

Reception: Thursday October 10, 6-8pm

Morgan Lehman Gallery is pleased to present *Strange Light*, a solo exhibition of new work by Naomi Kawanishi Reis. Through layers of color pencil, pigment prints, acrylic-washed washi cutouts, and semi-precious stones, Reis finds reprieve in the quiet moments of everyday life. The series particularly works through grief, an empty cavern left by loss, with the meditative repetition of manual labor. Drawn from photographs taken on her phone over the past decade, the works search for answers about unseen and unknowable worlds beyond the physical plane, imbuing the landscape with an intensified, animistic presence. The exhibition captures in shadows and glowing refracted light what Reis describes as “unheroic moments” – scenes that take shape in a reflection in a window or a passing glance at a roadside garden at dusk. These fleeting private observations become profound, almost supernatural evocations that are difficult to remember or even describe, as we shuttle between the destinations of our overly scheduled lives.

To will these ephemeral observations to stand still, Reis employs an intuitive process of working with simple tools such as blades, paper and brushes – materials that connect to folk traditions. Mirroring her own transcultural experience of adapting to different cultures and languages back and forth between Japan and the U.S., her method in the studio is similarly adaptive, following where the material leads through the repetition of cutting, painting, drawing and layering. Over time, from this self-taught method informed by dual lineages, an image emerges: a visual manifestation of the alchemy it takes to hold layered paradoxes of time, language, geography, culture and meaning within oneself. When a disquieting state of perpetual processing is the norm, everyday reality becomes the constant required to maintain equilibrium. This approach also reflects her past work as a Japanese-to-English translator, where successful synthesis between languages requires holding meaning in a shadowy wordless state, a kind of precognitive suspension before being expressed.

In learning to find one’s way through the disruption, heartache and chaos of evolution and adaptation, the spirit of *Strange Light* is rebellious, making a case for meandering through an expansive, mysterious, and ever-shifting space between destinations.

Naomi Kawanishi Reis (b. Shiga, Japan) is a transcultural Japanese/American artist who works with acrylic and mylar cutouts to explore the idea of the garden as a place of healing. Materialized as rebellious tendrils and witchy, prickly desires, this metaphor furrows pathways to navigate through oppressive systems and transmute them into things of beauty and creative resistance.

A Brooklyn resident since 2001, Reis’s work is included in The Brooklyn Artists Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, on view from October 4, 2024–January 26, 2025. She has exhibited at Praise Shadows, Brookline, MA; @KCUA, Kyoto, Japan; Transmitter, Brooklyn, NY; Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo, Japan; Mixed Greens, New York, NY; and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, NY, among others. In 2018, she received a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, and in 2015 was a NYFA Finalist in Painting; she has been supported by multiple residencies including Yaddo, Willapa Bay AIR, Wave Hill, the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, and the Lower East Side Printshop. Reis received an MFA from the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania, and a BA in Transcultural Identity at Hamilton College.