



Minami Kobayashi: *A Park at Lunar Surface*  
January 13 - February 23, 2019

## A Park at Lunar Surface

by Elizabeth Lalley

*A park at lunar surface.* Imagine this for a moment. When I do, I picture it as if from above, where it feels like I'm floating. Everything sounds like it's underwater. Earthly scenes and creatures move in and out of focus—tangled plants, people and animals, insects, the moon. Colors don't appear the way I expect them to, shifting suddenly, kaleidoscopically. I won't say much more about what I see when I try to conjure this strange and impossible place. Partly because the more I try to pin it down, the more it changes. Your version, I'm sure, looks very different from mine.

We could spend a long time thinking through the title of this exhibition alone. Though comprised of familiar words, the phrase "a park at lunar surface" suggests a place we haven't yet become acquainted with—perhaps some sort of projected space whose contours reveal more about the subjectivity of the reader who encounters it than it does about any sort of identifiable locale. Just as the title functions in an associative way by pulling together two different forms of landscape—outer space, pastoral idyll—upon which humans have long gazed, Minami Kobayashi's luminous paintings depict people, places, and things that we might feel we have seen before but can't quite place. The acts of staring at the moon and of people watching in a park both require similar kinds of still, fixed attention. Kobayashi's paintings work in this way, too: images seem to emerge slowly from their surfaces, manifesting themselves over time as if through a thick mist or fog. The longer we gaze, the more that is revealed.

In a world where images are produced and circulated at dizzying speed, Kobayashi's use of egg tempera as a primary medium is both unexpected and strangely fitting. It's a material that embodies transience and requires slowness, because it dries extremely quickly and must be applied in thin, densely layered coats to achieve a depth and dimension of color and form. The used since ancient times in papyrus scrolls, Byzantine altarpieces, and illuminated manuscripts. Oils, which blend more readily and can be applied thickly, began to grow in popularity during the Renaissance because they enabled painters to achieve a more



Minami Kobayashi, *Breakfast meeting*, 2018, Egg tempera on panel, 36 x 24 inches

realistic, three-dimensional rendering of form and depth. For Kobayashi, however, the gauzy materiality of egg tempera captures not reality at its surface but the ethereal quality of time's

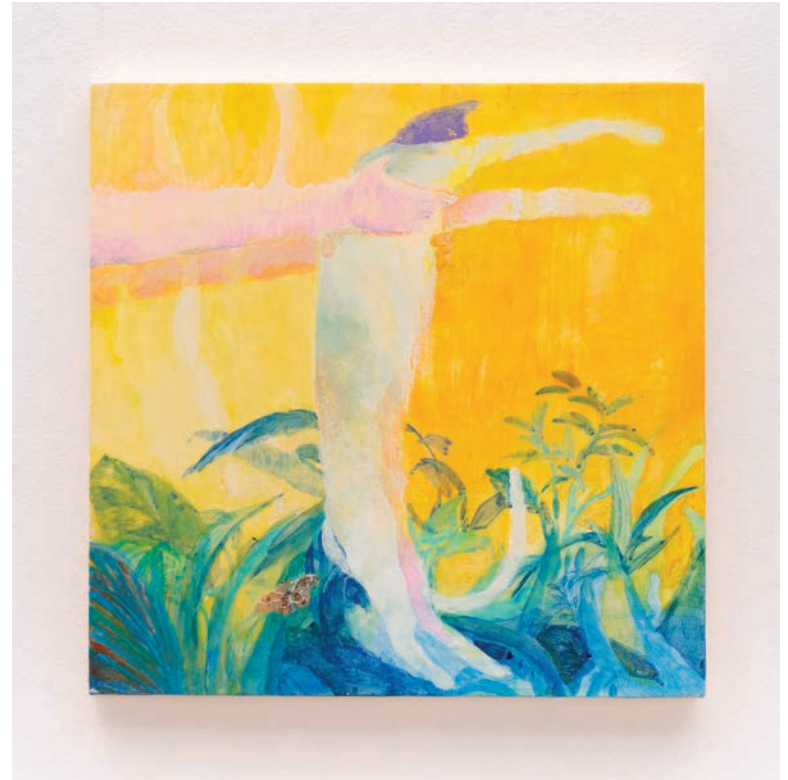


passage. This comes through in the smallest of details—take *Two leopards and a fly*, for example, in which the fly’s shimmering wings seem poised to take flight from a swaying blade of grass, or *Breakfast meeting* with its spare table spread of some lettuce leaves and a browning banana, held in limbo between ripeness and decay.

Each painting is a site of surreal and ambiguous interaction, requiring patience as we attempt to make visual sense of the compositions before us. In many ways, the paintings suggest that they are slices of larger stories, like a page from a graphic novel or an epic poem. The smooth sheen of their surfaces belies the restlessness of the figures beneath. Unlike early iconography rendered in the same medium, like Botticelli’s *La Primavera* or Fra Angelico’s depictions of the Annunciation, Kobayashi’s paintings do not use animals, plants, or landscapes in a symbolic fashion. The figures within each narrative scene appear preoccupied with interactions that are left undefined and a little strange, as



Minami Kobayashi, *Blue light on two faces*, 2018, egg tempera on panel, 36 x 26 inches



Minami Kobayashi, *A white cat in a garden*, 2018, Egg tempera on panel, 12 x 12 inches

Kobayashi creates space, through paint, where we can feel comfortable with not knowing—a feeling less readily embraced in the day-to-day world.

Veiled in mystery, Kobayashi’s subjects often look away from us, their eyes cast beyond the frame of the painting. Familiar, domestic objects are alluded to, but they exist as peripheral details or as objects that are only indirectly recognizable. The blue light of a television or computer screen, for example, illuminates different faces in many of Kobayashi’s works, but our attention is always focused on the person, not at whatever onscreen subject matter has captured their attention. Kobayashi’s gentle redirection of our gaze, and her careful examination of her subjects—both human and animal—is ultimately a deeply empathetic gesture, encouraging us to look at intimate moments between living things, from a loving glance between two people to an insect on a leaf, as intently as we might stare at the moon.



Minami Kobayashi, *Two leopards and a fly* (Detail) , 2018, Egg tempera on panel, 36 x 48 inches

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\*Front Cover: Minami Kobayashi, *At a back alley*, 2018, Egg tempera on panel, 36 x 36 inches

**Exhibition Dates:**  
January 13 - February 23, 2019

*Design by Nicole Gardner*