

Emily Kiacz *Shape of Light*

January 28, 2021 – March 6, 2021



Morgan Lehman is pleased to present “Shape of Light”, Emily Kiacz’s first exhibition with the gallery and her debut solo show in New York City.

Kiacz began the body of work on display during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent citywide lockdown. While under enforced isolation and no longer able to spend regular time outdoors (where she often looks for inspiration and makes small studies that serve as raw material for her canvases), the artist found herself rethinking her studio process from the ground up. Kiacz, rather than looking outwards towards the landscape, began looking inwards towards personal memories and her imagination for clues as to how to move forward with her paintings. The artist also began looking upwards towards the sky, which was visible through her studio window, and where in dramatic sunsets she recognized a range of emotions including serenity, hope, wonder, foreboding, and the anxiety of the moment.

Kiacz’s latest color palette is gem-like and deeply luminous, and makes use of the complex secondary color characteristics that emerge through layering multiple glazes of translucent acrylic paint one on top of the other. Color deployed through these means mixes optically (through filmic overlap) rather than materially (through the literal comingling of pigments in wet paint). The effect is that light seems to originate from the back of the painting and proceed forward towards our eyes, much like looking at a back-lit display. Dramatic color atmospheres recall the liquid washes of watercolor paint techniques, as well as the sense of temporality inherent in natural phenomena such as vapor, rainbows, sunsets, mist, and fog.

Though many new concepts and process shifts have entered into Kiacz’s practice recently, several elements have remained consistent. These include the artist’s insistence on the objecthood of a painting, an idea that she emphasizes through her use of shaped panels. These custom-built supports reflect forms that have interested Kiacz over the years (the cruciform of *Screaming Heart*, for instance), as well as new visual motifs like the 90’s-style daisy that featured heavily in the artist’s teenage years, which appears in *Forgotten Realms*, *Cosmic Journey* and *Apparition*. The paintings are also a continuation of Kiacz’s pursuit of a purely nonobjective abstract iconography, with titles serving as subtle hints towards the inspiration behind each work or other references that might help guide a viewer’s experience. In all these works, Kiacz continues to explore the possibilities of systematic, choreographed gesture as a means of creating emotive color environments and the illusion of space.

Emily Kiacz received her MFA in painting from Boston University in 2011 and her BFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2009. She has been awarded fellowships at The Corporation of Yaddo, Tilleard Projects Residency, The Edward F. Albee Foundation, and Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, among others. Over the last nine years she has participated in numerous exhibitions including at Cuevas Tilleard Projects, Morgan Lehman Gallery and White Columns. Her work is included in the collections of New York Presbyterian Hospital and Smith College. Kiacz lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.