For immediate release

Chandler Gallery is pleased to present *Grounding,*
a solo exhibition by Chicago-based artist Aya Nakamura
at the gallery's new space at 1111 Geary Boulevard in San Francisco.

Exhibition Dates: 14 November – 18 December 2026
Exhibition Location: 1111 Geary Boulevard, San Francisco, CA 94109
Opening Reception: Saturday, November 14th from 5 to 7pm







Aya Nakamura's colored pencil drawings, drawn on handmade paper that she creates in her studio, are built slowly through layered applications. Nakamura describes her aesthetic sensibility as "magpie," an attraction to disparate things that compel attention through their distinctiveness or evocative power, and has embraced the Midwestern terrain as a direct source for her papermaking. Nakamura's engagement with sourcing plant materials to make paper and then creating gracefully executed drawings embodies the idea of *toriawase,* a Japanese term referring to the bringing together of varied elements to create a resonant whole.

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Nakamura started her career in painting, but became increasingly aware of the dissonance between her images and the surfaces she was painting on. She found papermaking as a solution to her goal of forging a more deliberate relationship between the surface and the mark, and how they constrain and abet one another. As she learned more about the practice, aided by residencies and time spent in Japan, she gravitated toward natural acid-free fibers, including cotton, paper mulberry, abaca, and fibers sourced from native Illinois plants. Since then, she has cofounded Switch Grass Paper, a papermaking studio born out of concerns about papermaking, prairie, land-immersion and art.

Nakamura's practice starts outside, in her garden, in forest preserves, and in areas of restored prairie within the city of Chicago. These spaces offer both the encounters and, occasionally, the materials that are the armature of this body of work. *Small Landscape* and *Building* are drawn on paper Nakamura made from cup plant, a native prairie species, during Chop Wood, Carry Water, a 2023 residency. Months or even years can pass between making a sheet and drawing on it, and the fibers she gathered this past summer will go into a future project.

The other works in the exhibition are drawn on paper made from a mix of cotton, abaca, hemp and paper mulberry or kozo. The cotton, abaca and hemp come from Carriage House Paper in New York as linters: short fibers left over from textile manufacturing and pressed into dry sheets, ready to be broken back down into pulp. Paper mulberry is far more demanding. It arrives as strips of bark peeled from the shrub's woody core and dried, and it must be processed by hand; her most recent batch took about two months. Once the fibers are reduced to pulp, she shapes and presses the paper in custom molds that act as the bounds to each sheet. Each fiber brings its own properties. *Light Cells* takes advantage of the translucency of washi, the Japanese paper made from mulberry. For *Soil*, Nakamura combined hemp, cotton and abaca to create a neutral, slightly darker ground that shifts the colors laid on top of it. She often plays with shape of the paper she creates as well, moving away from the standard rectangle so that each sheet's irregular edges become part of the composition before a single mark is made.

When discussing her work, Nakamura separates her works into two groups: the work that is inspired by the micro, and the work that is inspired by the macro. When working on the latter, she studies her local landscapes like these prairie reserves or her own garden, and also looks at landscape architecture. The planes in these works read almost as aerial views, with garden beds, paths and borders translated into adjoining fields of color. The work that stems from the micro often looks at specific plants or fungi, and enlarges their inner structures, such as gills, veins and root systems, into intricate, almost cellular compositions.

Variegated lines move across, alongside and into fields of color, and these assemble into amorphous compositions that appear to simultaneously build and dissolve. She thinks of each element in the drawing as a consciousness that engages directly with its neighbors and aggregates into a larger entity, like an anthill. She approaches color in this relational manner, as these small fields of color accumulate piece by piece and the layers of colored pencil within each field generate a subtle depth within the surface. The resulting map-like suggestions of meditative space form the architectural core of Nakamura's work, and recall early abstraction's spiritualist tradition pioneered by artists like Kandinsky, Malevich and af Klint. These artists similarly used comparatively simple abstract forms as potent vehicles for expressing the immaterial, aiming to capture elusive truths that lie beyond tactile perception.

Aya Nakamura was born in Japan and educated in France and the United States, holding a BA in Fine Arts and Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania, and an MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In Chicago, she has had solo and two-person shows at Western Exhibitions, 4th Ward Project Space and Rainbo Club, and has been included in group shows at Circle Contemporary, Secrist Beach, The Research House for Asian Art, and Heaven Gallery. Outside Chicago she has shown at The Hangar and Dawawine in Beirut, Lebanon; Supa Salon in Istanbul, Turkey; Mana Decentralized in Jersey City, NJ; and MPSTN in Fox River Grove, IL. She is the recipient of the Denbo Fellowship from Pyramid Atlantic Art Center, the George and Ann Siegel Fellowship from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Individual Artists Program grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE). Nakamura lives and works in Chicago.

Images (from left to right):

Aya Nakamura, *Web,* 2026, colored pencil on handmade paper, 35 ½ x 19 inches

Aya Nakamura, *Soil,* 2025, colored pencil on handmade paper, 53 ¼ x 40 ½ inches

Aya Nakamura, *Mosaic,* 2026, colored pencil on handmade paper, 19 ½ x 16 ¼ inches

For more information or to request further press images, please contact the gallery at info@chandler-gallery.com.