



Moon Crystal

1736–95

China

(Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911;
Qianlong Period, 1736–1795)

*Rock crystal (quartz) with incised
decoration; wood stand*

Height 10 ⁷/₈ inches (27.6 cm)

This large crystal represents the moon delicately balancing on a base of wispy clouds, among which hides a rabbit, his soft ears lying gently on his head. More clouds drift across the face of the moon, pointing to the left bottom corner of the base, where the rabbit resides. A poem by Xie Zhuang (shee-eh jua-ang, 421–466) is incised on the surface, setting to verse several Chinese myths and stories about the moon. One tells of an ancient ruler who, parted from his beloved, found solace in gazing at the moon, knowing that she was doing the same. Another tells of the divine rabbit who stole the **elixir** of immortality and fled to the moon, where he mixes it daily.

The famous eighteenth-century **calligrapher**, seal carver, and painter Zhao Pingchong (gee-aw ping-chong) incised the poem on the crystal moon. A hard stone, rock crystal is a transparent form of the mineral quartz. Early Chinese writings refer to it as “water essence” for its resemblance to ice, and ancient Chinese recipes commonly used it as an ingredient in magical potions. This association made the substance an ideal material for portraying the imagery of the divine, elixir-pounding rabbit. The carver dated this piece to 1795, the last year of the reign of Emperor Qianlong (chee-en long), who was probably the original owner. Qianlong, a successful military leader who presided over a huge expansion in the territory controlled by the Qing (ching) dynasty, was a great patron of the arts.

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