Karen Shiozawa: Flowing Memories, Endless Light

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Shiozawa's approach to her work is humble; she characterises the world of *Twilight Planet* as "a small, simple wish." This is reflected in her creative philosophy: "I am searching for moments when I notice things that I would normally be unaware of in everyday life, or when I can feel a connection between myself and the world."

These paintings are time capsules that intertwine childhood dreamlands, quiet introspection, roots, memory, yearning and mindfulness of the present. Shiozawa's work evokes the spiritual atmosphere that hangs just before something begins. Here, miniature figures serve as human-scale entry points. Resting on a boat, perched on an arch bridge, or standing in solitude, these figurines bridge her playful and academically rigorous sensibilities. The figures raise a child's gaze to the vastness of the world, capturing the delicate balance between a small, delicate form and an immense landscape. In doing so, they emphasise a sense of innocence, vulnerability, and the enduring wonder of exploring boundless horizons.

Since her formative student days, Shiozawa's creative journey has been shaped by a diverse group of visionaries: Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978), Saul Leiter (1923–2013), Luis Barragán (1902–1988), and Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967). In particular, the spiritual sensibility of picture-book artist Yoh Shomei (b. 1946) has left a lasting impression. His influence continues to resonate in her expressions of time, perception, and spirituality. This is beautifully reflected in Shiozawa's recent, intimately scaled works, such as *The Café Terrace with a View of the Aurora*, which capture simple, everyday scenes with humour, delightful relaxation, and a sense of hope and grace.

Light remains a central theme that Shiozawa continues to develop, serving as a medium to explore perception, consciousness, and introspection. There are various atmospheric sources to be appreciated in Shiozawa's work: the explosive brilliance of fireworks, the shimmering reflection of canals, sunlight filtering through the foliage, the dancing neon of a vibrant city, the aurora, and the silent glow of the stars. For Shiozawa, what matters is to create the light seen through her own eyes—and the radiant energy glowing from within. These light studies aim, in the young artist's own words, "to capture inner light and the light that can be seen," as well as "beyond what is seen".

Shiozawa's works typically begin with a yellow-toned base, reminiscent of the light encountered in the Netherlands, or a bluish hue for nocturnal scenes. From this foundation, she layers multiple colours before applying dark oil paint over the surface. Small works are finished on a table, while larger pieces are executed on a wall. Through careful scraping away of paint layers and the addition of rays of light, she repeatedly builds and reshapes evolving compositions with intricate surface textures. The artist explains:

When I paint, I first fill the canvas with many different colours, then cover it with darker oil paint, and gradually scrape back into it to reveal the colours underneath. This process feels like first enclosing scattered memories of light, and then searching for the light again from within them. This technique is similar to the crayon scratch technique children often play with, but when I paint, I still feel as though I am drawing—almost as an extension of drawing.

Shiozawa positions her practice as a critical counterweight to technological acceleration, suggesting that the capacity for human perception increases in value as information and efficiency proliferate. Central to this philosophy is the retrieval of "overlooked sensations" buried by daily routine and the passage of time—a process the artist identifies as the underlying mechanism that renders nostalgia meaningful.

Rather than instructing the viewer, she employs multi-layered manual creation to intentionally slow down time and foster quiet contemplation. The resulting artwork serves as a wordless catalyst, designed to revive the viewer's own dormant memories and sensations.

Shiozawa views the universe and forests as interconnected spaces that mirror one's inner exploration. While she continues to create work that traces, conceptualises and gently nurtures personal growth, her recent focus extends outward to investigate the boundaries of the cosmos.

On Shiozawa's canvas, boundaries are blurred and fluid. Everything is connected as the space between lush forests and the universe quietly dissolves. Through delicate layers of translucency and radiant light, figures of birds emerge as symbols of freedom, soaring through fields of colours that mirror the depths and union of our inner world and the cosmos, alongside multiple surfaces of time. *The Hidden Grove* depicts a wavy stream navigating through the deep, lush green forests. As light dances through the foliage, the atmosphere displays a vivid, shimmering, and clear quality that reminds one of a relaxing sojourn into the woods.

Josef Albers (1888–1976) famously proposed that colour is the most relative medium in the visual arts, constantly shifting in relation to its surroundings. In space, colours connect to one another like stars forming constellations. Because they can be viewed from different angles and speeds, they invite repeated observation, demonstrating that colour relationships are dynamic rather than fixed. Albers frequently compared tone relationships to music, noting that both can be measured by wavelength. [1] Just as musical notes produce harmony or dissonance, Shiozawa orchestrates hues and saturations into a visual melody. Through the interplay of light and palette, her panels transcend mere representation, establishing a rhythmic, emotional resonance that vibrates at its own wavelengths.

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[1] Josef Albers, *Interaction of Colour: Unabridged text and selected plates* (revised edition 1975) 1963, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 39-40

While Blue Hour radiates lightness, brightness, and a quiet sense of profound serenity, The Atelier of Stars evokes a calm, mysterious atmosphere through its nocturnal canal scene. In the latter, the deep blue canvas is striking, filled with glowing window lights, slender boats, and a gentle patch of soft powdery pink hanging quietly in the upper left corner. In both works, time simply fades away.

Neon presents a child's internal gaze of a metropolitan cityscape bathed in the bright sunlight. Here, vibrant shades of lemonade, creamy yellow, and orange yield a striking lucidity, while a rich violet ground echoes a fresh, green-tinted sky to radiate clarity. The skyscape beautifully captures the distinct, enveloping warmth of a Hong Kong sky. Neon lights are among the various urban illuminations studied by Shiozawa. Serving as a significant piece and central theme of her Hong Kong exhibition, this motif was thoughtfully selected. The iconic neon signs and light boxes represent a distinct cultural heritage unique to Hong Kong's identity.

As embedded in Shiozawa's chosen titles for this exhibition and her artworks, there is a philosophical transition from 'neon' to 'twilight', and perhaps from then on, to 'eternal landscape'. It foresees a shift from human-centric adaptations to a quiet perception of the natural order, and an ultimate, full surrender to it. Twilight does not need to conquer or perform for the night; rather, as it lands softly and peacefully, a vast, meditative space unfolds. It reminds us of our own smallness before the rhythm of the cosmos. It is an invitation to stay open to the abundant joy and hope inherent in the present moment.

Over time, Shiozawa distils compositions into concise, eloquent moments that feel simple and meaningful. This year, she further reduces forms by employing expansive patches of colours, transforming the panels into vibrant fields of pure light and pigments. A sense of lightness pervades this series as the artist employs a flatter surface. While layering is a defining characteristic of oil painting, allowing her to work with impastos that capture and reflect light, choosing to reduce is a conscious act of letting go—a departure from the need to continually add and build.

Such a shift results from the artist's fascination with the material essence of her medium rather than its capacity for representation. As Shiozawa reflects:

> *For me, paint is more than just a way of adding colour. I'm very interested in the physical qualities of the materials—the size of the pigment particles, their transparency, the way they reflect light, and the unexpected things that happen when different layers come together. All of these things become part of the work. But I wasn't necessarily trying to give them a specific meaning. Rather, I think I was simply drawn to the traces that are left when the pigment meets the light. It flows, overlaps, catches the light, and changes.*

Ultimately, Shiozawa's art is essentially an exploration of time. It echoes the teachings of Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253). A star does not shine simply because evening recurs and its time has come. Rather, the nocturnal landscape itself manifests through the collective brilliance of the constellations, the deep blue sky, and other interconnected phenomena. Within this understanding of time, though we are bound by impermanence, honestly facing our contingency and the finitude of our lifespan naturally evaporates the gap between awakening and timelessness.