On the Works of Karen Shiozawa

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Karen Shiozawa is a rising artist attracting attention in the contemporary art scene. Born in 1998, she has already held multiple solo exhibitions both in Japan and internationally. Her works have received high acclaim: in 2017, she was awarded the Special Excellence Award at the "Five University Art Exchange Exhibition 2017" (Musashino Art University); in 2018, she received the Best Artistic Award at the "Asian Creative Art Exhibition 2018" (The National Art Center, Tokyo); in 2021, she was awarded the Encouragement Award at the "47th Art Festival - Tokyo Exhibition" (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum); and in 2022, she was awarded the Excellence Award at the 48th edition of the same exhibition.

Regarding her solo exhibitions, Shiozawa establishes new themes and concepts for each show, enriching the content of her work. Recently, her solo exhibition in Beijing, *Once Upon a Time - Tales of Moon -* (Whitestone Gallery Beijing, November 22, 2025 - January 4, 2026), has garnered considerable attention. In this exhibition, the artist herself curated the video, lighting, and sound to complement the display, creating an experience engages not only vision but all five senses. According to Shiozawa, "the entire exhibition space becomes a device for rediscovering the relationship between human memory and life, where the light dwelling within the works intersects with each viewer's emotions and nostalgic memories that cannot be translated into words, meeting on a single track." This statement embodies the essence of Shiozawa's work: "memory," "the light dwelling within the works," and "emotions and nostalgic memories that cannot be translated into words." All of these connect to the landscapes of the Netherlands, which lie at the origin of her memories and serve as her primal landscape. Having spent her childhood there, the Netherlands is where her self-awareness first awakened, and it remains a place to which she constantly returns.

The exhibition, *Once Upon a Time - Tales of Moon -* is thematically based on Kenji Miyazawa's *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, an unfinished masterpiece widely known in Japan. It is a fantastical story in which the protagonist, Giovanni, journeys through the stars of the Milky Way. It is a grand narrative imbued with numerous allegories and symbolism, interpreted in various ways by scholars. Themes of life and death, this world and the afterlife, consciousness and unconsciousness, past, present, and future, as well as reality and the world of dreams, meld together and move freely in an extremely unique worldview. Through this, a

four-dimensional vision emerges. This resonates with what has been consistent in Shiozawa's works from her early period. Using "the light dwelling within the works" as a guide, she moves between past "memories" and "emotions or nostalgia," summoning them into the present.

First, let us examine "the light dwelling within the works." The light expressed in Shiozawa's works is not a natural phenomenon accompanied by light and shadow; rather it is an "intrinsic light," imbued with suggestion and symbolism. She places great emphasis on this light. She notes that the yellow and green that characterize her works are born from the flickering of light. She also states, "When I paint light, I naturally leave the sensation of its flickering and changing colors in my final brushstrokes." Furthermore, she remarks, "I feel that yellow resembles the color of Dutch light." The phrase "Dutch light" seems to contain a special nuance, as the unique quality of light in the Netherlands is often considered a major factor behind the masterpieces of painters such as Vermeer and Rembrandt. In the 19th century, the notion of "Dutch light" was spread worldwide through works such as Fromentin's *The Masters of Past Time*. In Japan, the 2004 film of the same title by Pieter-Rim de Kroon also attracted attention. Shiozawa, who spent her childhood enveloped in this Dutch light, must have unconsciously internalized the mysterious light unique to the Netherlands. From this light, the distinctive colors characteristic of Shiozawa's works were born.

There is little need for extensive commentary regarding "memory" and "emotions or nostalgia." Shiozawa's works frequently feature European elements such as wooden windmills, classical arches, and church spires - important motifs of the Dutch landscape deeply imprinted in her memory during childhood. She has developed a unique method for expressing these remembered landscapes. First, she creates a base layer with acrylic materials, then overlays it with resin paints, expanding images of hazy spaces, color, and atmosphere. She then completely covers the finished base with oil paints, an act she describes as "putting a lid on the landscape of memory." From there, she gradually scratches away the surface, to reveal the image she wishes to express. Unlike direct painting, this method allows unexpected images to emerge, revealing landscapes stored deep within the unconscious. The act of scratching also connects to the excavation of past memories. Shiozawa's works possess a strange sense of reality, different from mere fantasy painting, because the origins of the imagery themselves carry a deep sense of necessity.

When a painter creates landscapes, it is prompted by the inevitability of internal landscapes —there is no need to invoke Cézanne or Gauguin to recognize this. For example, Edward Hopper explained his repeated use of motifs such as railways and sunsets as a way "to integrate his internal experiences." Such primal landscapes are simultaneously known and unknown to the artist, becoming the source of creative discovery uncovered by the mind itself. For Shiozawa, who spent her childhood in the Netherlands, the Dutch landscape, so different from Japan, is a lost Arcadia and the origin of the internal landscape that drives her to create.

Guided by intrinsic light, her works carry light within them, manifesting "memory" and "emotions or nostalgia" stored in the depths of consciousness. To reiterate, what makes this possible is her distinctive expression of light as color. A fleeting light, neither predawn nor twilight, envelops the entire work, giving viewers a strange sense of déjà vu. It is a dreamlike time that is neither day nor night, where the momentary and the eternal intersect. Through the emergence of this extraordinary space-time, the landscapes she depicts are freed from the constraints of reality, taking on an extremely internal and dreamlike character.

Finally, let me conclude with Shiozawa's own words, in which she speaks of the primal landscape born from deep mental processes and the unique parallel-world vision created from it:

"The truly real world. It may be a memory of a world that once might have existed, or it may be a vision of a future yet unseen. Those who encounter my works can recognize the countless possible worlds, and, while feeling longing and nostalgia for the dazzling and immeasurable expanse glimpsed through the gaps of those worlds, they can open many doors of imagination. I hope to create works that act as bridges between people's consciousness and perception, while capturing the inner voices that often go unnoticed in the real world."