

## Q & A: Shi Zhiying's "Infinite Lawn"

By Christopher Moore



Shi Zhiying, "The Infinite Lawn," oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 2012

**"Shi Zhiying: The Infinite Lawn,"** solo exhibition by Shi Zhiying.

**James Cohan Gallery** (1/F, Building 1, No. 1 Lane 170 Yueyang Lu, Shanghai). **May 26–July 26, 2012.**

*Shi Zhiying* (b.1979; lives and works in Shanghai) is a painter known for her stark black-and-white paintings of rather uniform vistas — the wide, open sea, Zen sand gardens, blades of grass that occupy the viewer's horizons. In her latest series, she takes inspiration from Italo Calvino's Mr. Palomar; these watercolors, along with large, meditative oil paintings, are being shown in her first solo show at James Cohan Shanghai.

*Shi Zhiying has participated in group shows at various venues, including Art+Shanghai and White Rabbit, Sydney, while her solo shows include "From the Pacific Ocean to the high Seas" at UCCA, Beijing (2009), and "Paradise on Earth" at White Space Beijing (2010).*

*For her latest exhibition at James Cohan Gallery, Shi Zhiying talks to randian about her artistic process.*

**randian: Which artists and art works have influenced the development of your formal and intellectual style?**

**Shi Zhiying:** Yan Peiming, Sugimoto Hiroshi, Ma Yuan (Song dynasty "realist" painter), Piña Bausch and many others and many traditional paintings from China.

**randian: What is the relationship between your work and literature, particularly Italo Calvino?**

**Shi Zhiying:** Italo Calvino is also a popular writer in China, because his *Invisible Cities* have some connection to China. As for choosing Palomar, it's because that in the book, *Mr. Palomar*, Calvino talked about a Palomar experience, which could be Calvino, or could also be me, or else could be everyone and anyone. The world he experiences includes nature, urban living, the material basis demanded by life, and the reflection on the self. If we look from the macroscopic scale of a universe, then every person on earth is basically the same. This experience, for me, is also a common experience of humanity, and this question interests me a lot.

**randian: What role does time play in your works?**

**Shi Zhiying:** I am fascinated by the "eternal." Some things haven't changed from the distant past all the way to the present and the future. They are something which everyone possesses.

**randian: You've expanded the personal scale of a small drawing into large tableaux, how would you describe the change in the substance of the image?**

**Shi Zhiying:** Size was not something I organized in a conscious way. It was something I arranged according to the content of the painting.

**randian: Why do you work only in black and white?**

**Shi Zhiying:** 1. Sometimes, black and white allows for greater imaginative space.

2. It is said that infants see the world in black and white until the age of three months old. So which in fact is more real?

3. In traditional Chinese ink painting there is an idea that "ink can create the five colors." When ink is manipulated in the right way, it can be quite rich.



Shi Zhiying, "Palomar—The Sand Garden," watercolor and ink on paper, 31 x 41 cm, 2012.



Shi Zhiying, "Palomar—Reading a Wave," watercolor and ink on paper, 31 x 41 cm, 2012.



Shi Zhiying, "Palomar—Forward I," watercolor and ink on paper, 31 x 41 cm, 2012.



Shi Zhiying, "Palomar—Observatory," watercolor and ink on paper, 31 x 41 cm, 2012.





Shi Zhiying, "Mani Stone," oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm, 2012.



Installation view, James Cohan Gallery, Shanghai, 2012.



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