

# 空白空间 WHITE SPACE

LI Shurui | Something Comes from Nothing

5.17-7.12, 2025

White Space is pleased to present “Something Comes from Nothing,” an exhibition of new paintings by Li Shurui, open from May 17 to July 12, 2025. This is Li’s fourth solo show with the gallery.

The exhibition takes inspiration from a verse by the Tang Dynasty poet Zhang Jiuling: “Tall bamboos steeped in the serenity of morning light, the splendid pond cradles sky’s mirrored blue.” The title of the exhibition, “Something Comes from Nothing” is adapted from the word *bixu* in the original poem. Referring to the reflection of sky in water, the word literally translates to “azure void,” which forms the philosophical core of the show. In this new body of paintings, Li explores water as a “divine presence,” extending into meditations on life, energy, and the nature of reality and illusion. A crystallized expression of Li’s artistic development following her relocation to the Erhai Lake region, the exhibition marks a new direction in her practice, as she moves beyond the conceptual threads of “light” and “abstraction” and toward a multidimensional perception of the world.

Three years ago, Li moved her home and studio to the shores of Erhai Lake in Dali. This vast body of water has since seeped into her practice as a central motif. The titular work of the show, *Something Comes from Nothing*, portrays a shimmering expanse of green water on a 1.8-meter-wide square canvas. Through an interplay of form and void, her brushwork portrays the complex emotional connection the artist has with water—both a physical matter and a vessel for transcendental energy. Li refuses to simply “feminize” water: “The primordial power of water transcends gender and civilization; *Ta* is divine.” Here, the artist uses the Chinese character “祂” (*Ta*), which is traditionally adopted as a pronoun for deities, to refer to water. The deliberate choice of word subverts conventional symbolism and expresses reverence for the power of nature.

The works in the exhibition emerged from the artist’s embodied experience of motherhood, as her own bodily rhythm found unexpected echoes with the tidal cycles of Erhai Lake. Collectively, the “white streams” flown during breastfeeding, the overwhelming tears of pregnancy, and the shimmering light reflected on the surface of Erhai sound “a resonance between the internal and external water systems, bodily fluid and natural hydrology.” As the artist candidly expresses, this experience has forced her to look at water at “a reclined vantage.” As she negotiates between the fragility of body and the permanence of nature, new understandings of life’s coalescence and dissipation arise.

In both Eastern and Western traditions of paintings, water has often served as a contrast or backdrop to other subjects. Li attempts to step out of this framework and capture the “kinetic energy” and “unruly nature” of water as a subject in its own right. For example, in *Mommy Be Brave* (2025), flecks of light visualize the vibration of energy on a taut string, piercing through water vapor to become iridescent clouds ascending, before condensing into raindrops that return to earth—an endless cycle.

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Although often deemed an abstract painter, Li questions the dichotomy between abstraction and representation. The exhibition's conceptual substrate stems from Li's cross-disciplinary exploration of physics and Buddhist philosophy. String theory's discovery that particles are essentially vibrations finds unexpected cross-pollination with the teaching of *Heart Sutra*—that “all five aggregates are empty”: if all matter is fundamentally energy in oscillation, then “the boundary between abstract and figurative is but a human-imposed confinement.” This understanding has directly informed Li's methodology. If her early work *Deep White* (2017) represents the order of reason by simulating light through dot matrices, *Night Surge* (2025) blends a “lightness out of control” into the intermingling fields of color. In this new work, dots and lines remain the signature of Li's compositional vocabulary. Viewed from a distance, misty water breaks free from gravity and rises toward the sky as stars, while a closer inspection shows cascading liquids dancing with light. Such “order within disorder” serves both as the artist's response to the current condition of her own life as well as a meditation on existence itself: “We are all vibrations in the void, condensing into ‘self’ before dissolving into emptiness.”

## About the Artist

Li Shurui (b. 1981, Chongqing) received her BFA at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute (SFAI) in 2004. Li was granted 2016 New York Fellowship Program of Asian Cultural Council (ACC). Recent solo exhibitions include *Something Comes from Nothing*, WHITE SPACE, Beijing, China (2025); *Artificial Emotions*, Carl Kostyál, London, UK (2024); *High Light: Splendor Worn Thin in the Recesses of Time*, Long Museum, Shanghai, China (2021); *Somewhere Between Abstract and Concrete*, Carl Kostyál, Milan, Italy (2020); *LSR-Tenderest Affection*, New Galerie, Paris, France (2018); *Light Extracts*, Salt Project, Beijing, China (2018); *LSR-Deep White*, WHITE SPACE, Beijing, China (2017). Recent group exhibitions include *Plato's ladder*, Soul Art, Beijing, China (2024); *A Theatre of Waiting*, The Cloud Collection, Nanjing, China (2023); *Multiple Sights—The Tenth Anniversary of the Long Museum*, Shanghai, China (2022); *Good Pictures*, Jeffrey Deitch, New York, USA (2020); *Restons Unis: You'll Never Walk Alone*, PERROTIN, Paris, France (2020); *Li Shurui - Zevs*, New Galeries, Paris, France (2019); *Only Connect!*, Braverman Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel (2019); *Nine Journeys Through Time*, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China (2019); *Spiritual Origin*, Long Museum, Shanghai, China (2019); *A White Space Odyssey*, WHITE SPACE, Beijing, China (2019); *Who Cares*, New Galerie, Paris, France (2019); *Nine Journeys Through Time*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy (2018); *A World in a Grain of Sand : Mapping Shapes and Sites for Social Deometries*, Atlantis, Sanya, China (2018); *Constellation*, Georgian National Museum Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery, Tbilisi, Georgia (2017); *No Man's Land: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C., USA (2016); *Turning Point: Contemporary Art in China Since 2000*, Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2016); *No Longer / Not Yet*, Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2015). Her publications include: Vitamin P2, PHAIDON 2011; Younger than Jesus Artist Directory: PHAIDON 2008. Li Shurui currently lives and works in Beijing and Dali.