

New York Exhibition

ZHI DING

SHORT STORIES

March 10 – April 22, 2023



Zhi Ding, *Untitled XII* (2022), Oil on linen,
10 x 8 in.

Arsenal Contemporary Art New York is pleased to present Zhi Ding: Short Stories. The paintings included in Short Stories function as a suite of vignettes interwoven to create a loose and speculative narrative. Ding is interested in depicting moments of vulnerability. While a number of pieces include sorrowful scenes and crying figures, Ding doesn't see her work as necessarily melancholic. Crying is a visible and genuine representation of an emotional state, whether it be happiness or sadness. For her, these works offer an opportunity for connection, a prompt for an empathetic disposition. This is also the motivation behind her decision to exclusively paint small formats. Ding's work requires physical proximity to the viewer and creates a viewing experience that simulates the relationship one might have to keepsake photographs carried in a wallet or in a locket.

Some recurring elements connect this suite of paintings. Among them, the TV appears particularly relevant. In Ding's work, the TV speaks to a human desire for escapism, a yearning to connect with people and places beyond one's immediate surroundings. It creates in her work a *mise-en-abyme*, that is an outlined portal within an already framed picture. While the TV and other depicted motifs are working towards opening up the symbolic plane outwardly, Ding also relies on mirrors and shadows as spaces of introspection. Both mirrors and shadows offer an exterior image of the self. They are tools for the mind to situate our bodies in the world, in relation to others and within our immediate environment. Short Stories is thus engrossed in an incessant push and pull that testifies to Ding's conflicted desire to obscure and expose, to be here, but also be there. This is reinforced by the apposition of glossy and matt surfaces as a strategy to mark different spaces and distinctive planes within a singular pictorial field. This allows the artist to imply contrasting surfaces, temperatures, moods. In fact, Ding would argue that in this way, her work is subtly playful.

The challenge that the artist sets herself is to address complex human emotions through the simplest of compositions. By deliberately remaining vague and unspecific, Ding is committed to exploring and representing a common ground, a shared human condition. This group paintings addresses the

complex world in which we live, one fragmented into a multitude of mental, physical and virtual spaces.

Zhi Ding (b. 1992 in Jiujiang, China and works in New York, NY). Ding has been named as a finalist to the New American Painting prize in 2022. She is completing an MFA at the Chicago Art Institute (2023).

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