

LI SHURUI

One of the youngest Chinese painters to enjoy an international career, Li Shurui has her airbrush firmly on the aura of the current zeitgeist in her country; her expansive canvases are to the nation's twenty-first-century, boom-and-bust, design-accoutred and technology-rich culture what psychedelia was to pockets of Western art that flourished in the 1960s. Made in a style signifying a generation set on determining its own identity and independent existence, and that springs from immediate visual/emotive stimuli, her compositions speak of intoxication, illusion and a form of delirious escapism.

Li is obsessed with light in its most elementary visual forms, whether electric bulb, neon strip or light-emitting diode. A first series of photographs, *Untitled No.1*, produced in 2004 saw her pointing a camera lens at the most potent of all light sources, the sun, as it danced on an urban horizon, bursting out from behind buildings, only to be extinguished again behind others. The brilliance of such explosions was first transposed to canvas in a series titled *Explosive* in 2005. As literal recreations of big bangs and fissions of light in painted form, this series laid the groundwork for her future field of exploration.

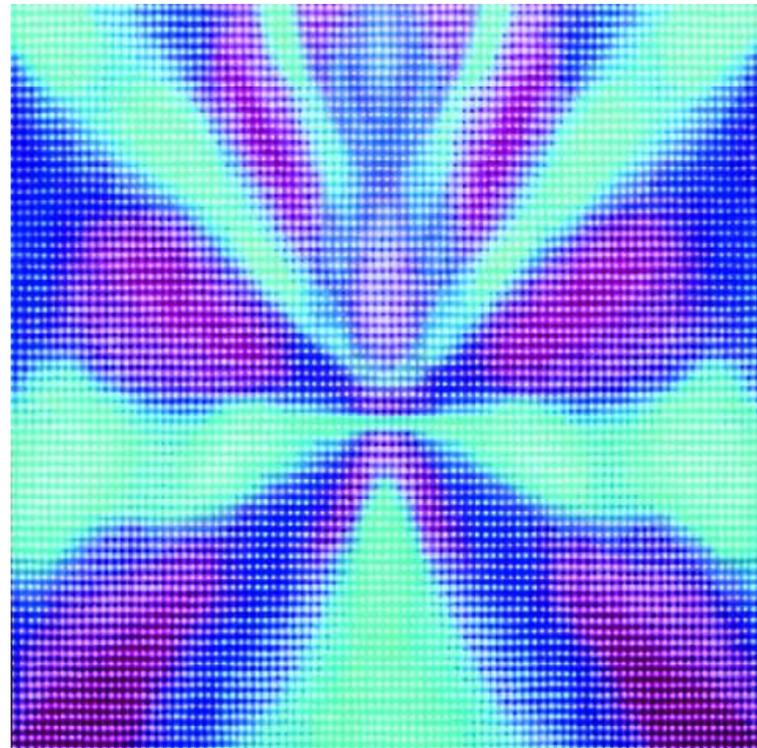
From that point on, Li's style evolved with the same mesmerising qualities as a lava lamp, but with a richer, more generous palette of hues. Simply entitled *Lights*, her next expansive series, on-going since 2006, bends a skilfully wielded airbrush around the colour spectrum in circular pools of pigment arranged on canvas with an almost automated precision. Through successive transitions between areas of light and dark and varying degrees of saturation and diffusion the finished product achieves a seductive yet pure visual experience. At its best, the style is intoxicating, going beyond an apparent delight in flirting with surface decoration. Yet, as Li would have it, one person's vacuous image is another's mind-bending experience, and whilst her work is less about painting per se than image-making, she works on a scale that ensures the canvases have a commanding and striking presence. Where the picture plane extends beyond the field of vision, an encounter with her work becomes all-engulfing, like standing in a room full of Dan Flavin's works observed through half-closed eyes.

As a young artist, Li brings the tireless energy of youth to her experiments, which also, on occasion, take the act of painting beyond the two-dimensional picture plane. In three-dimensions, the painted structures have a more definite optical-illusory feel: less lava lamp and more Bridget Riley, although in working with light Li always begins from life rather than from invented optical illusion: visual fantasy is the result of her work and not its modus operandi. And whilst making reference to obvious counterparts in Western art history, Li's work remains attuned to the visual nuances of art within her own specific cultural framework, in particular, immediate influences such as the 'plastic realism' of painter Chen Wenbo (in whose studio Li began her career), and his fascination with the explosion of night culture in China, the dazzling underworld of clubs and chemically enhanced evenings. Thus it was in becoming conscious of darkness that Li Shurui found the light. - Karen Smith

1. *Lights No. 100*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
210 x 210cm

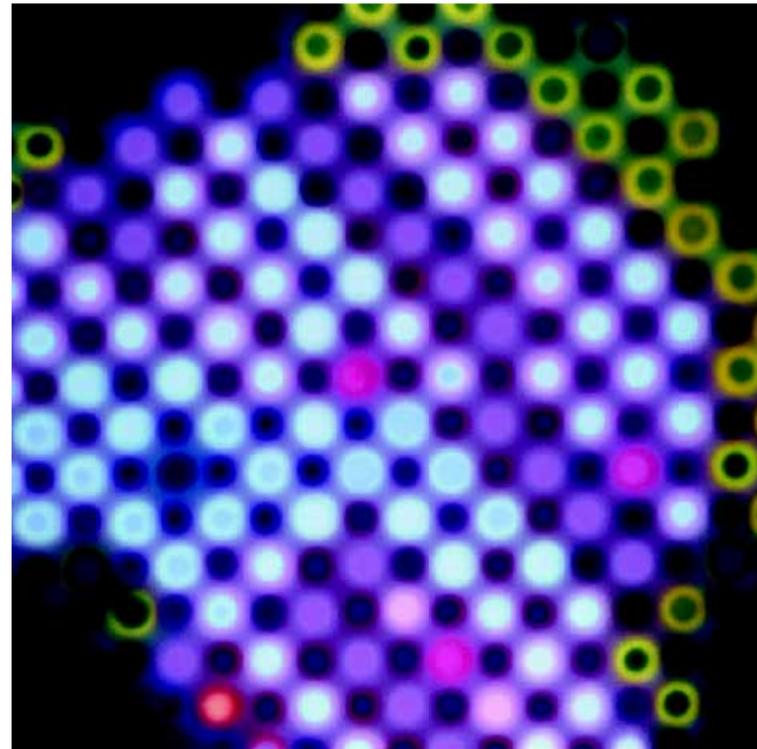
2. *Lights No. 78*, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 140cm

3. *Lights No. 95*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
210 x 210cm



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