

Exhibition 4 September – 31 October, 2010

Opening: Saturday, 4 September, 2010, 4 – 7 p.m.

Shan Fan: *HOMELAND Painting the Moment – Painting Slowness*

For three decades, bamboo painting has been part of the everyday life of artist Shan Fan (b. 1959 in Hangzhou). He first became familiar with the techniques of traditional Chinese painting as a student in China, but when he moved to Hamburg, Germany, in the mid-1980s, his study of abstract western art altered the way he viewed his own traditions. Whether in ink on rice paper, in oil on canvas, in copying a traditional classic, or in the medium of performance, Shan Fan's work reflects upon and transforms the medium of bamboo painting, which already has potentially abstract characteristics. For him, lines become planes, seconds become hours, entropy becomes a physical experience. His exhibition, *HOMELAND Painting the Moment – Painting Slowness*, traces this development, while at the same time marking a kind of phase in Shan Fan's continuous work-in-progress project.

During his early years in Hamburg, Shan Fan continued to work with traditional ink painting techniques. *Painting the Moment* is represented by the stalks and grasses painted on rice paper in hues ranging from dense black to an almost transparent wisp of color. In comparison to the works of his classical role models, the viewer immediately notices that he is entering new compositional territory. Instead of bushy bamboo formations, Shan Fan's paintings will simply depict a single stalk. The center itself, however, remains empty. The next step to emancipation is the broken bamboo stalk. Bending in various directions, the works, the images, seem to take on an almost painful dimension. "Breaking the bamboo," says Shan Fan, "is not so much an act of aggression; rather, I've realized that I have to break with tradition to a certain degree, in order to be able to keep it alive."

To this day, Shan Fan is persistently continuing his work on his *Alphabet of Bamboo Painting*. Parallel to this, he has been working since 2008 on transferring twelve selected bamboo paintings to large canvases, using oils and the finest brushes. Gradually, they are building the foundation for a series of pictures whose details make them seem almost like film close-ups. "Since I keep transferring increasingly smaller sections of a piece of bamboo onto the same size canvas, I eventually reach a point where it is no longer possible to recognize them as bamboo." (Shan Fan) In accordance with the aesthetics of the artist's material and production methods, he uses concentrated, rapid brush strokes, slowly panning the ink, as it were, across the surface, creating planes millimeter-by-millimeter. In deciding to use a circular brush movement, Shan Fan gives his images a vortex-like effect. The final result of this development is a black or—in the case of the white-on-white paintings—a white plane. *Painting the Moment* becomes *Painting Slowness*.

Shan Fan's critical reflections upon Chinese classics are visually expressed in pictures such as *Filling Emptiness (Leere Füllen)*. It took him 280 hours of meditative painting to fill in the empty spaces in a reproduction of a classic bamboo painting by Wen Yuke, an artist of the Song dynasty. "For one, this makes it possible to perceive a void as potentially full," says Shan Fan, "for another, this violation of a taboo cancels out the Chinese tradition of emptiness, in a way that is similar to deconstruction. This means that a void is simultaneously labeled as "the lack of something." From then on, the goal of bamboo painting is no longer to lose oneself in the brief moment of painting, but rather, to have a contemplative experience of the self. For this reason, Shan Fan extends the act of copying a piece of Chinese calligraphy, by the Qing dynasty painter Fu Shan, to a length of 210 hours, in his *Kalligraphing Slowness (Kalligrafie der Langsamkeit) 2009*. An overridingly important statement in Shan Fan's oeuvre is his performance piece, *Entropy (2006)*, which has been captured on film and in photographs. Black ink pours down over the white robe worn by the artist. Clear water follows, turning the black into a light gray. Yet no matter how much water is poured on, the traces of the black ink remain. The meaning of the title is visually represented: every occurrence is ultimately irreversible—everything affects the outcome of the future.

Ulrike Münter

Translation: Allison Plath-Moseley

In conjunction with the exhibition, a catalogue containing images of all the works on display will be published by the Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, 2010.